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**Student Life at Kalamazoo College:  
A Decline in Formalism**

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## Preface

In this paper, I have attempted to explain the decline of formalism in student life through the years at Kalamazoo College. I used many local history sources such as school handbooks and pamphlets. In addition, I interviewed alumni and was able to utilize some of their stories as documentation.

As I was questioning alumni, I realized many possible biases in using oral history. Because I had neither the time nor the money to travel, the interviewees were chosen from Kalamazoo alumni, thus limiting the representative sample. In addition, those with whom I spoke tended to be "townies," meaning they did not live in residence halls when they attended, but at home. This might alter their view of "K". One other possible bias: as a result of my desire to interview the oldest remaining alumni, women were primarily my subjects because a high percentage of the men from this period have died. Thus, my paper uses information from women, but the examples are relevant to male and female experience.

In addition, as I participated in the production of oral documents, I realized there is much room for error. As I noted above, one cannot interview everyone and not questioning all possible people might cause inaccuracy. Further possibilities for misrepresentation stem from the undependable function of memory. Often people suppress bad memories through time, sometimes people simply cannot remember, sometimes they remember incorrectly, sometimes they do not want you to know the truth, and maybe they did not even know it--one is susceptible to their subjectivity.

Once I determined that I wished to compare the period of the late twenties and early thirties with my experience, I realized that there was an additional world of possible bias. There has been great change from then to now, but what I have chosen to write about may not be indicative of the changes at large. What I see as significant depends on my experience. In addition, in writing about the present, I often draw from my own experience rather than documenting with sources. This method was chosen because I was advised by my professor not to dwell on the present, only to note changes.

I believe I am quite qualified to write about present-day Kalamazoo College after participating in experiences here for four years. Beyond class work and social life, I have worked in Student Services, the Career Development Center, and as a Residence Assistant in the dormitories; these gave me insight into the structure of the school and how students behave, as did the many activities for which I have volunteered such as Yearbook and Film Society. In addition, I have learned about the external perspective on the school from being an Admissions Assistant.

For me, part of the attraction of this project was that there was no social history of Kalamazoo College, only the traditional chronologies of presidents and boards of trustees. I wanted to contribute to the righting of this wrong. As I worked, I believe I picked up a nostalgic attitude from the alumni. They often made comments about how they didn't think being a student now could be as enjoyable or as fulfilling. I have tried to keep this nostalgia to a minimum but, perhaps, with the decline in formalism, we really have lost the benefits and security which went with it. In addition, as my

work progressed, I was struck by the enormous responsibility placed on the author using oral history. One hopes s/he is truthful and uses good technique; otherwise misrepresentation of the past will result. I have tried to be honest and diligent. I hope I have succeeded.

## Introduction

Student life includes many aspects: social activities, spiritual growth, academics, relationships, recreation, and definition of values. These varied phases appear continuously through recent Kalamazoo College history. The period examined in this paper ranges from the late twenties to the early thirties, approximately 1926 to 1933. Student life in this period was quite different from that of today, primarily due to a great deal more formalism: i.e. strict adherence to prescribed or traditional forms. These forms might stem from rules, rituals, traditions, requirements, conventions, or trends of the times. Formalism occurred in three principle areas: administrative rules, student morals, and social life.

In the late twenties and early thirties, in each of these three areas, one finds strict adherence to forms such as those just mentioned; however, these areas of student life do not manifest as much formalism today. Through time, a progression of changes has occurred and transformed Kalamazoo College. There is much less emphasis on following rules and traditions and much more on each individual making sound judgements for his/her situation; thus formalism has declined through the years.

This paper will examine this decline in many aspects of student life. In the area of administrative formalism, dormitory rules, course guidelines, religious affiliation, and student disobedience will be shown. Under the heading of moral formalism, student dress, etiquette, dining hall standards, and student attitudes will be explored. In the area of social formalism, student activities, literary societies, and special events will be examined, as well as, male-female relations and relations between classes. Through the comparison of

these aspects of student life in 1926 to 1933 to those of 1987-1991, one will see a decline in formalism.

### Administrative Formalism

A need to adhere to many rules characterized students' behavior in residence halls in the twenties and thirties, whereas today these rules are either more lax or nonexistent. For example, men and women of the past were strictly segregated to separate residence halls,<sup>1</sup> but today one can find male and female residents in consecutive rooms on the same floor. In addition, curfews were enforced for female students in the early twentieth century. In the women's houses, students had to be in at eight o'clock.<sup>2</sup> However, in the present time, there are no curfews and a security keycard system allows twenty-four hour access to all halls.

Helen Coover, who was a student at Kalamazoo from 1929 to 1933, illustrates the strictness of the dorm rules with a story she remembers about a friend from Carmac. This woman went home for the weekend and was returned by her father on Sunday night at ten minutes after eight. The next day, the female student was called into the office of the Dean of Women and informed that she was "campused", that she could not return home the following weekend, because she was ten minutes late and "with a man." The woman said, "But that was my father!" That fact made no difference; he was

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<sup>1</sup>*Regulations of Women's Dormitories*, leaflet, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1924), photocopied; Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>2</sup>*Regulations of Women's Dormitories*, leaflet, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1924), photocopied; Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo..

a man and those were the rules.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, students of today have the freedom to come and go as they wish, with whom and when they desire.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the relaxation of the dormitory rules is the decline in course requirements. In connection with their courses, students of the late twenties and early thirties adhered to more administrative demands than do students of today. For example, through 1932, specific classes, such as Rhetoric I and II, were required for first year students.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Helen Coover states, "When you started, all took English, all took Botany or Biology, all took History . . . that was set." This structured courseload has changed to one with more freedom for students of the late eighties and early nineties. Now students need only fulfill distributional requirements from four general areas (Languages and Literature, Natural Science and Mathematics, Humanities, and Social Sciences), and need not take specific courses.<sup>6</sup>

Classes themselves contained more formalities in the late twenties and early thirties in that each class was seated in alphabetical order and roll was taken.<sup>7</sup> This contrasts with classroom situations today where professors take roll infrequently and students sit wherever they choose. In addition, back in the late twenties and early thirties, students' class schedules were more formally structured. "Every class start(ed) at eight a.m. Everybody had (a) nine o'clock

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<sup>3</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>4</sup>There are no rules to the contrary. *Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1990-1991]).

<sup>5</sup>*Kalamazoo College Catalog* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1931-1933]), 49-50.

<sup>6</sup>*Kalamazoo College Academic Catalog* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1985-1987]), 45.

<sup>7</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

class and then you had chapel."<sup>8</sup> Now students do not all have their first class at eight o'clock, nor are their other classes at the same time as those of every other student.

Religious affiliation shows a decline in guidelines analogous to the one for courses. First, through the period in question, Kalamazoo College had an official Baptist affiliation,<sup>9</sup> which no longer exists. In addition, the deterioration in religious formalism can be seen in the area of chapel services. Attendance at daily chapel service was required<sup>10</sup> in the late twenties and early thirties, and students were also required to hand in slips to prove Chapel attendance.<sup>11</sup> Now there is voluntary participation in nondenominational weekly chapel service. Furthermore, in the early twentieth century, chapel seating was arranged in class order with seniors in front, followed by juniors, sophomores and first year students in the rear. In the 1990's, a student can sit where s/he desires in Chapel services.

The objective of sending students into the ministry displayed ardent religious formalism in the late twenties and early thirties. A prominent goal in 1933, as it had been since the founding of the school, was "the proper preparation of ministers and missionaries."<sup>12</sup> However, this adherence to tradition has ceased. Now,

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<sup>8</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>9</sup>Ruth Chenery, "Reminiscences," *K: Magazine of Kalamazoo College* (April 1979): 15.

<sup>10</sup>Patty Hiemstra, "College is Common Ground for Generations," *Kalamazoo Gazette* 17 (April 1983): 29.

<sup>11</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Goodsell and Willis Dunbar, *Centennial History of Kalamazoo College: 1833-1933* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1933), 195.

(t)he mission of Kalamazoo College is to provide an intellectually stimulating undergraduate liberal arts and pre-professional education for a small and carefully selected student body.<sup>13</sup>

With the absence of any religious goal in the current mission statement of the college, one sees a decline in formalism in religious objectives.

The decline in emphasis on student Christian service is another aspect which indicates that there has been a decline in religious guidelines. In the late twenties and early thirties, Christian service work was executed and emphasized a great deal. In fact, it was said that there was "support by the entire student body of the Christian organizations."<sup>14</sup> On the campus of the past, there were a number of organizations emphasizing Christian service. Before 1929, there were student chapters of the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) and the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.). The latter sponsored "discussions on problems that were vital to student life,"<sup>15</sup> the annual Hare and Hounds Chase mixer, and a banquet in honor of the sister school in China, Gingling College.<sup>16</sup> There was another group, the Student Volunteer, an organization which emphasized missionary work and efforts towards world brotherhood.<sup>17</sup> Then in 1929, the Women's League replaced the Y.W.C.A. Members continued the Hare and Hound Chase and added

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<sup>13</sup>*Kalamazoo College Academic Catalog* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1985-1987]), 43.

<sup>14</sup>*Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1927-1928]), 8.

<sup>15</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 92.

<sup>16</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 92.

<sup>17</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 73.

more activities by sponsoring a Big Sister program, the support of a Chinese girl at Gingling College, and "welfare work during the Lenten season".<sup>18</sup>

This flurry of Christian activity contrasts sharply with what is found on campus today. Now there is only one Christian organization, the Inter-varsity Christian Fellowship, the purpose of which is not service, but

to provide mutual encouragement among Christians and to demonstrate Christian truth in all areas of life. The activities include regular Bible study groups, prayer groups, a Christian book table, and retreats.<sup>19</sup>

Some students in the late twentieth century do participate in volunteer service work; however this is on an individual basis, not required by a particular student organization, and not religiously affiliated. Due to the decrease in number of Christian organizations to one and to the decline in its emphasis on Christian service, one can say that, for students, there has been a decline in religious guidelines.

Students also show a decline in formalism through their disobedience. By comprehending what constituted the breaking of a rule in the past, one can see how highly formal the rules were. The first example of a popular way to break the rules in the late twenties and early thirties was men throwing bags of water from Williams Hall (near present day Hoben Hall),<sup>20</sup> the popularity of which is indicated by the following cartoon included in the 1926 yearbook.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Charles Goodsell and Willis Dunbar, *Centennial History of Kalamazoo College: 1833-1933* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1933), 192.

<sup>19</sup>*Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1990-1991]), 14.

<sup>20</sup>Barbara Bitney, excerpt from *Class Reunion Memory Books*, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Alumni Relations Office, Kalamazoo College, 1991), photocopied; Mike Gallagher, "K-College Memories: Old Times and Friends," *Kalamazoo Gazette* 17 (April 1983): 38.

<sup>21</sup>The cartoon was slightly crooked in the original yearbook too. Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 133.



Yearbook cartoon showing popularity of throwing water from Williams Hall. From Ledlie DeBow, ed., *The Bolling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 133.

Other disobedient acts involved creating distractions. Ms. Coover remembers boys planting alarm clocks during chapel so that every two to three minutes one would go off and interrupt the speaker.<sup>22</sup> Another noise related rebellion is described by a student who graduated in 1933, Barbara Fischer Bitney:

. . . The boys in the dorm rigged up a steam shovel down below the hill (behind present day Hoben Hall) so they could pull a cord and operate a steam whistle (at night) from their room!<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, the students of today would find these activities very safe. Disobedience today often takes the form of alcohol and drug abuse, accompanied by vandalism. Streaking, which is punishable by law, also is popular with some students.<sup>24</sup> To understand better how the campus of the

<sup>22</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>23</sup>Barbara Bitney, excerpt from *Class Reunion Memory Books*, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Alumni Relations Office, Kalamazoo College, 1991), photocopied.

<sup>24</sup>Scott Jerome, "When Hit by A Brick, Streak," *The Index* 15 (May 1991): 6.

past compares to that of today, keep in mind that drinking was strictly forbidden on campus in the late twenties and early thirties<sup>25</sup> and drug abuse was unheard of.

Because students did not have to go very far to break the rules, the rules must have been quite strict; therefore the lack of severity of these pranks from the past shows the extreme formalism of the regulations in the late twenties and early thirties. The severity of the disobedient acts now indicates that students must go further in order to feel they are rebelling, implying that rules have become less formal. Therefore, through examining disobedience, one sees that administrative formalism has decreased since the period from 1926 to 1933. Recall also that administrative formalism declined in the areas of religious affiliation, course requirements, and dormitory rules.

### Moral Formalism

Dress in the late twenties and early thirties needed to conform to prescribed standards. Men were required to wear neckties and suits;<sup>26</sup> professors wore a topcoat, suit and tie;<sup>27</sup> it was compulsory for women to wear a sweater and skirt, or a dress, with stockings and felt hats.<sup>28</sup> If one was a female student, it was considered an offense to be seen downtown without

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<sup>25</sup>The reader might think that alcohol was present on campus illegally, but this was not the case very often. Students were reprimanded if alcohol was smelled on their breath; the students who still desired the experience, left to consume more safely off campus. Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>26</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>27</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>28</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

hat and gloves and one would be called into the Dean's office, if reported.<sup>29</sup> In addition, athletic clothing was formal; the gym outfits were made of wool. For women, there were black stockings and pleated bloomers, topped by a white wool shirt with a black tie.<sup>30</sup> Men wore sweatshirts and long sweatpants.<sup>31</sup> Both general and athletic garments can be seen as formal when contrasted with the informal garments one finds on campus today. Students may wear what they wish; there is no dress code. For athletic activities, one finds students sporting a variety of brightly colored T-shirts, shorts and lycra bodysuits; great portions of bodies are bared. This loss of prescribed standards in dress is one indication of the decline in moral formalism.

Corresponding to the decline in the standards of dress is the relaxation of strict standards of etiquette. For example, in the late twenties and early thirties, everyone was addressed by their last name. Professors would say, "What is your response to that, Mr. Landman?" And a student might respond, "I do not know Miss Quimby."<sup>32</sup> However, today students are almost always called by their first names and that is often the manner in which they address their professors too.

Another issue of etiquette for students of the late twenties and early thirties was that they must be in control of themselves at all times. For example, whistling on campus was an infraction of propriety which got one called into

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<sup>29</sup>Ms. Coover had just such an experience. Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>30</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 100 and Coover.

<sup>31</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 100.

<sup>32</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

the Dean's office.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, students of the present feel free to express themselves in many informal ways such as whistling, singing, shouting, and spontaneously doing somersaults on the Quadrangle.

In addition to the etiquette of proper address and expression, one was required always to be prompt to classes at the Kalamazoo College of the past. There was "no excuse for being late."<sup>34</sup> The student needed to be sure that nothing beyond his or her control interfered with class, even trains. Helen Coover remembers that there was a long freight train that crossed Academy just before eight a.m. Getting stuck on the wrong side of the tracks was not a valid excuse for tardiness to eight o'clock class; the train times were generally known and therefore it was the student's responsibility to adapt and be on time.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, the students of today feel no such strictness. Students often walk into class late and are not even required to offer an excuse. This lessening of importance placed on promptness, proper addressing, and correct expression, contributes to our understanding of the decline in standards of etiquette.

Dining hall standards also show the decline of moral formalism because students of the past adhered to more rules and traditions in the dining hall than do students of today. First of all, students in the early twentieth century dressed for dinner. Helen Coover remembers, "At 4:30, that was it (for class), then (one went) back, and (got) all prettied up for dinner."<sup>36</sup> Second, the evening meal

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<sup>33</sup>Again, Ms. Coover had just such an experience.Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>34</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>35</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>36</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

for all the residential students was served in the basement of Mary Trowbridge House (now Trowbridge Hall) by waiters. Third, certain procedures comprised the seating arrangements and table manners. Ms. Coover remembers:

Everybody ate at six o'clock and they were seated . . . twelve at a table. A young man was at the head as father and (a woman) as mother (at the other end) . . . (The dishes were served and passed around.) You did not get up until everybody got up and if you (had to leave), you asked to be excused by father and mother.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, every month the students switched tables, "mothers", and "fathers". This elaborate procedure functioned not only as a manner of seating and serving, but as a formal process in which students got acquainted.

In contrast, students today eat at New Welles Cafeteria. Anytime during set meal hours, students get their own food from service lines and sit in any of six rooms. Emphasis is on getting in and out; table manners are lost in the interest of efficiency. One needs only be clothed, not dressed well, and one can leave when finished. With the loss of the seated meals and the procedures observed there, one sees the decline in formal dining standards.

Like those involving the dining halls, standards and formal expectations for moral behavior show a decline in the formalism of student attitude. Back in the late twenties and early thirties, the students felt strong loyalty to the school and believed they had obligations due to their student status. One first finds this attitude projected onto them in a welcome message in the student handbook, which was sent to all in-coming students. In the Foreword of the book, President Hoben writes, "You can help make the college more

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<sup>37</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

noteworthy for high scholarship, clean sportsmanship and noble character."<sup>38</sup> This attitude of obligation is reflected back by the students in the 1926 yearbook, *The Boiling Pot*, where one reads, "Our aim is to bring glory and honor to our Alma Mater."<sup>39</sup>

The formal student attitude of the past was also characterized by responsibility. For example, Article V in the "Constitution for the Student Body" declares, "The general policy of the Student Body shall be one of participation in self government."<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the students felt the duty to keep each other behaving properly. One example of this duty is when the upperclass students criticized the first year students in the student newspaper, *The Index*, for not following a rule: "When are the neophytes going to respect our hallowed tradition of "no smoking on the campus"?'<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the collegians were led to believe they were responsible for helping with the image of the institution. Students were asked in the handbooks to give their business to those establishments who purchased advertisements for the books:

Patronize these merchants whenever possible, not with the idea of retribution but rather of appreciation for in this manner we can increase their realization of the fact that the student body of this college is a valuable asset to the city . . .<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>*Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1926-1927]), 5.

<sup>39</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 40.

<sup>40</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 20.

<sup>41</sup>*Kalamazoo College Index* 11 (October 1929): 2.

<sup>42</sup>*Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1927-1928]), 5.

Thus, we see that part of what characterized the student attitude was an expectation of responsibility both to the college and to other students.

This student attitude of obligation and responsibility to the school is not similar to what we find today. Instead of wanting to bring glory and honor to the Alma Mater, students now are interested in what they will receive from the school. We find the President's welcome message geared to this desire. President Brenemen, in 1988, wrote in his salutation to the incoming students that they would have "diverse experiences" and gain "greater knowledge, skills, and independence" during their years at Kalamazoo College.<sup>43</sup> Along the same lines, in 1989, Acting President Timothy Light detailed the experience the new students would gain through their internship, foreign study, and senior project quarters.<sup>44</sup>

Instead of the responsibility to the school characteristic of the previous state of formalism, now we find apathy from students.<sup>45</sup> This is indicated by low participation in activities, low attendance at events not required, and in low voter turnout in Student Commission elections. Beyond apathy, students often have a self-serving attitude apparent in this kind of comment: "I pay sixteen thousand dollars a year to come here, I should get my way and (insert the particular demand) should be done for me." Student loyalty and obligation to the school seem to be things of the past. Thus, formal, tradition-based aspects in the student attitude have declined. This deterioration in student attitude contributes to the decline in moral formalism, as did the relaxation of etiquette, dress, and dining standards.

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<sup>43</sup>*Who's New at Kalamazoo* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1988), 2.

<sup>44</sup>*Who's New at Kalamazoo* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1989), 2.

<sup>45</sup>Maria Carlson, "Kudos to Student Initiative and Spring Fling," *Kalamazoo College Index* 1 (May 1991): 6.

## Social Formalism

Social life in the late twenties and early thirties was more greatly structured than it is today, one cause of which is the literary societies. The literary societies were somewhat akin to modern day fraternities and sororities, but they provided more than simply social life: "The twofold aim (of the societies was) to promote good fellowship and to create an appreciation for literature and art."<sup>46</sup> Formalism is found in the rules that required each girl in the school to belong to a society, to tutor,<sup>47</sup> and to chaperone younger women on outings.<sup>48</sup> In addition, there were formal events in which they must participate, such as the May Fête, where the society women had to perform the May Pole Dance.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, the students of today have no such groups. The societies no longer exist and fraternities and sororities are not permitted on campus. Furthermore, there are no groups which fulfill the social functions and follow the traditions as the societies did. There is no organization to which every girl belongs, nor is there one which supplies support in the form of tutoring its members.<sup>50</sup> Students find groups of friends, participate in events, and follow traditions on an individual basis.

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<sup>46</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 73.

<sup>47</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>48</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>49</sup>Helen Coover, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, Kalamazoo, tape recording, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>50</sup>There are Teacher's Assistants available for students taking some courses, but no program where every woman has a "big sister" who is expected to help her, as was the case with the societies.

In addition, there is no student organization which handles campus events and entertainment, as the societies did. Individual special interest groups such as the Black Student Organization, the Women's Equity Coalition, and the International Student Organization may or may not hold events for the benefit of other students. Campus entertainment is provided for the students by an administrative office, Student Activities. This change displays the loss of the tradition of the student societies providing campus entertainment. Therefore, due to the disappearance of the literary societies, the structure they added to social life, and the lack of another group filling that role, one sees that adherence to prescribed social forms has declined.

Similarly, there has been a deterioration in guidelines for student activities. In the late twenties and early thirties, *The Index*, the student newspaper, was run by an elected board of editors.<sup>51</sup> However, today, *The Index* is produced and distributed by student volunteers. More amazing is the elaborate formal procedure used to elect the managing editor and the business manager in the early twentieth century:

- I. Announcement of position at close of first semester.
- II. Candidates try out under managing editor.<sup>52</sup>
- III. The Student Senate selects three and their names are published in the Index.
- IV. The Student Body and the Student Senate vote.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Charles Goodsell and Willis Dunbar, *Centennial History of Kalamazoo College: 1833-1933* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1933), 191-2.

<sup>52</sup>"Trying out" was not elaborated upon in the handbook.

<sup>53</sup>*Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1926-1927]), 18.

In addition, the news editor, circulation manager, and (between two and seven) reporters were appointed by the Student Senate.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to this formal procedure, students in the late twentieth century volunteer; the managing editor is chosen by an English professor and the other positions are the choice of the editor.

*The Boiling Pot* yearbook is another activity in which adherence to procedure has declined. The purpose of the yearbook in 1926 was to serve "as a connecting link between the students and the alumni of Kalamazoo College."<sup>55</sup> This tradition-based goal contrasts sharply with the 1990 yearbook goal of recording the present so that students may remember how it was in a few years.<sup>56</sup> In addition to the decline in formal purpose, a decline can be noticed in the way in which the activity was managed before 1933. Back then, due to tradition, the junior class published the annual.<sup>57</sup> Now, however, as is the case with the *Index*, work is done by whoever volunteers.

Beyond student activities, formal school occasions also show a decline in prescribed behavior. Homecoming is a good example. The following are excerpts from a list of remembrances of the 1932 Homecoming:

Big chapel service in the a.m.  
Swell pep meeting following  
Band in full uniform  
Everybody has the glad hand  
Glad to be a Kazooite

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<sup>54</sup>*Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1926-1927]), 19-20.

<sup>55</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 5.

<sup>56</sup>Ann Mees, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1990), 10.

<sup>57</sup>Charles Goodsell and Willis Dunbar, *Centennial History of Kalamazoo College: 1833-1933* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1933), 192.

Split up to go to dinners at noon  
 K-Club--Glee Club--Societies, etc.  
 Football game in the afternoon  
 Brik-a-ki-kax--Old Kazoo Spirit  
 Big Homecoming dinner  
 Old days and new days meet in the speeches  
 Adjourn to Bowen assembly for Boiling Pot dance  
 Waltzes--Fischer's band  
 Dreams of days gone by--of days to come  
 Homecoming--best day in the year--must make it every year.<sup>58</sup>

Here we see a chapel service, a pep meeting with marching band, cheers indicated, club lunches, football game with different cheers, dinner with students and alumni mingling, speeches, a dance, appreciation for the event, and a promise to come back.

In contrast, Homecoming in the late twentieth century consists only of the Dunbar Sing (a variety show with skits by theater majors and songs by the band and the choir), a football game, and a dance,<sup>59</sup> all of which are not universally attended either by students or alumni. There is a decline in the amount of structured, scheduled, Homecoming activities and in adherence to what prescribed behavior still remains.

Another example of how social events have become less formal is parties. In 1926, class parties were held off campus at Gull Lake.<sup>60</sup> This tradition no longer exists.<sup>61</sup> Showing the decline in formalism even better is the fact that

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<sup>58</sup>Winifred Rowe and Stanley Calfas, editors, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1933), 44.

<sup>59</sup>Ann Mees, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1990), 98.

<sup>60</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 40.

<sup>61</sup>There are a few senior parties, but they are held on campus. The other three classes no longer adhere to this tradition, on or off campus.

these parties used to be highly structured: in the afternoon, there were tobogganing, ice-boating, and skating and in the evening, there were card-playing and dancing.<sup>62</sup> This list of activities contrasts with parties in the late eighties and early nineties where the drinking of alcohol is the prime activity and impromptu dancing sometimes occurs. Taking into consideration this lessening of structure in relation to parties, in addition to the decline in prescribed behavior at special events, one sees the decline in the formalism of social events.

At special events and in more general student relations, one finds that people from the two sexes behaved much more formally and adhered to more traditions than do couples of today. One can see an illustration by what was considered taboo. Ms. Shipley remembers that her boyfriend was able to have a car radio before anyone else because his father sold them. This young couple would drive to a dead-end street and dance around the car. They thought they were "hellions."<sup>63</sup> The decline in formalism in male-female relationships is obvious compared to students now; they are not considered "hellions" for such drastic acts as living together and engaging in premarital intercourse.

The way in which men and women met is another area in which one can see the decline in adherence to traditions regarding male-female relations. Back in the late twenties and early thirties, the literary society meetings were held in special rooms on the third floor of Bowen Hall (next to Williams Hall, at the eastern end of the present Hicks Center) on Tuesday nights. Part of the attraction of these meetings was that afterwards men and women would

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<sup>62</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 40.

<sup>63</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

meet and mingle in the hallway.<sup>64</sup> The students of today have no such prescribed time at which they might meet. Different groups and clubs meet at a variety of times, none have as large a percentage of attendance as the societies did, and they are thus unable to provide a similar type of opportunity for the opposite sexes to mingle. Students now meet individually at different times and places as a result of classes, jobs, or athletics.

In addition, one sees that formalism has declined for couples in their gift giving. Back in the late twenties and early thirties, a woman could not give a personal present. A pipe was appropriate for a boyfriend; men liked the air of sophistication it gave them in photographs.<sup>65</sup> Monogrammed handkerchiefs were another possibility, though if the couple broke up, the girl would have to pull out the stitches.<sup>66</sup> Gift-giving now is a striking contrast; males and females may give what they please to each other. There are no standard gifts and usually no worries about implications of marriage when personal gifts are given.

Marriage is the last way in which male-female relationships adhered to convention in the late twenties and early thirties. Men and women dated to find a life-long companion and then they married. Some young women even attended Kalamazoo College with the intent of finding a good husband. More indications of the emphasis on marriage are the many jokes about romance and young married couples in the humor pages of the 1926 yearbook,<sup>67</sup> as well as outright marriage announcements.<sup>68</sup> In contrast,

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<sup>64</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>65</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>66</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

<sup>67</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 130.

relationships do not emphasize marriage as much now. Couples may spend time together for many different reasons such as studying, going to see shows, romance, friendship, or sex. Relationships now are defined by what those individuals involved desire and do not adhere to the traditions centering on marriage like those relationships of the late twenties and early thirties. Therefore, through the decline in adherence to the conventions involved in gift-giving, fraternizing, and marriage, there has been a decrease in formalism in male-female relations.

Another set of relations shows a decline in tradition: the associations between the classes, particularly those between the first-year students and the sophomores. Back in the late twenties and early thirties, students followed many conventions in how they treated one another, the first of which is prescribed mistreatment towards the frosh.<sup>69</sup> "There were hazing, horse-play, and inter-class violence."<sup>70</sup> In 1926, there was an eight person sophomore committee on initiation.<sup>71</sup>

These initiations included frosh being made to march in the streets at night led by an impromptu band,<sup>72</sup> being made to provide stunts in the gym,<sup>73</sup> being taken out to the country and left to find a way back,<sup>74</sup> and being thrown

<sup>68</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 153.

<sup>69</sup>This word will be used instead of the sexist term "freshman".

<sup>70</sup>Charles Goodsell and Willis Dunbar, *Centennial History of Kalamazoo College: 1833-1933* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1933), 192.

<sup>71</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 61.

<sup>72</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 134.

<sup>73</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 39.

<sup>74</sup>Jean Shipley, Interview by author, 13 April 1991, Kalamazoo, notes, Archives, Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo.

in Mirror Lake<sup>75</sup> (which was where Physical Plant is now). In the present time, these traditional abuses no longer occur.

In addition to formalism involving initiation, there was some in the form of special rules for the first-year students. For example, tradition dictated that they must wear green beanies and sit in the rear in chapel.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, in the fall, twenty-one "Read 'em and Weep" rules were printed in *The Index*<sup>77</sup> and similar guidelines were published in the student handbook, examples of which follow:

Wear your little green cap outside at all times, but doff it just as soon as you enter a building.

Remember that a freshman does not have the right of way when passing through a doorway.

Remember that nature has blessed you with two eyes, two ears, and only one mouth. Please observe the one in five ratio.

There is no romance in courting disaster-- do as the sophomores say.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, the first-year students were subjected to rules designed to make them subordinate to the sophomores; they must wear the hat properly, give sophomores the right of way, keep quiet, and "do as the sophomores say." In contrast, frosh today are accepted as equal; they are not visibly marked by green caps, nor forced to defer to upperclassmen. On the contrary, frosh often are able to attain positions of power in campus groups, due to

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<sup>75</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 39.

<sup>76</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 39.

<sup>77</sup>Ledlie DeBow, editor, *The Boiling Pot* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, 1926), 134.

<sup>78</sup>From the special section in the rear of the book entitled "If you are a freshmen--be one," *Kalamazoo College Student Handbook* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo College, [1926-1927]), 35.

upperclass students being off campus doing internships, foreign study and senior projects. Thus, in the decline of the traditions surrounding the first-year students, one sees the decreasing formalism in class relations.

## Conclusion

Therefore, frosh-sophomore class relations have changed from formal initiations to the view that individual students are equal and male-female relations have shifted from structured courtship to emphasis on individual responsibility. Social events, such as Homecoming, have become less structured and fewer traditions are observed. Strict procedure for student administration of activities has transformed to student volunteerism. Structure in social life provided by literary societies has completely disappeared and now luck and individual initiative is trusted to form social alliances and plan events. These changes all contribute to the decline of social formalism at Kalamazoo College.

In addition, student attitude has declined from a sense of tradition-bound duty to self-interest. Standards surrounding student dining have changed from conventional, seated meals to cafeteria free-for-alls. Etiquette was formal, adhering to such guidelines as being prompt for class and addressing others by their last names, but has deteriorated to students often doing as they fancy. The dress of collegians according to prescribed rules has transformed to student freedom of self-expression. The increased ease of traditions and rules contribute to the lessening of formalism in moral-related areas of student life at Kalamazoo College.

Student rebellion has gone from harmless pranks, such as planting alarm clocks in Chapel, to the masochistic rebellion of alcohol and drug abuse. This

increasing severity in acts intended for disobedience, implies that rules have decreased in strictness. Religion has gone from required chapel services providing much structure for students, to an optional activity which few seek. Regarding courses, there has been a transformation from required classes and alphabetic seating to emphasis on student choice. Dormitory rules were quite strict with curfews for women and sex segregation, but have lessened so that now students are responsible for themselves. These decreased rules and guidelines contribute to the deterioration of administrative formalism.

Therefore, the decline of formalism exists in three areas: administration, morals, and social life. In many aspects of student life in the late twenties and early thirties, there was more structure for the students in the forms of rules, procedures, traditions, conventions, requirements, and expectations. This structure has given way to a mode of student life emphasizing individual choice and freedom.

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