

Module 09: The 1960s: Who Won? Student Protest and the Politics of Campus Dissent

Evidence 22: Pam Wimmer, "'...to change the rules' Rally ends in sleep-in on drillfield," May 1971

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Introduction

Two days after the march and demonstration described in Evidence No. 21, students gathered again to protest the university's "open door" policy.

Questions to Consider

- How many students attended the rally? How do those numbers compare with attendance at the Kent State memorial described in the introduction to Evidence No. 21?
- What does attendance at both events reveal about student priorities as the sixties turned into the seventies?
- What does this article, along with the previous document, reveal about how student efforts at cultural rebellion absorbed the tactics of political dissent?

Document

"...to change the rules" Rally ends in sleep-in on drillfield

"We're here to find out how best to change the rules," explained former SGA [Student Government Association] president Sandy Hawthorne at Wednesday night's rally on the drillfield.

"We want the University Council and particularly the faculty members not to sit back and laugh at how the students have to live on this campus."

The rally, called by the SGA Senate Monday night, was attended by approximately 3000 students, faculty members, and administrators.

Beginning with 1500 students, the rally reached its maximum of 3000 students about 9 p.m. and ended in a sleep-in with about 500 participants.

The crowd, silent for the most part, punctuated Hawthorne's speech with

applause and shouts of approval while a helicopter circled overhead.

A generator and microphone were set-up to provide a sound system for the speakers.

Around 10:30 p.m., while the rally was in progress, Squires Student Center was evacuated because of a bomb threat. No bomb was located, but the building was not reopened that evening.

At the rally, Skip Schwab, SGA vice president, first urged students, "Any booze, any dope, anything you can get busted for, get rid of it."

He added several minutes later, "For those of you who are worried about protection, the state police are going to take care of us tonight."

Schwab explained the results of Monday's Senate meeting to the crowd and asked students to talk with faculty and administrators until the University Council meeting scheduled for Friday afternoon at 2. He explained, "What we have to do is give them one last chance to bring democracy to Virginia Tech."

Next on the agenda was a mock trial, charging the University Council with trying "to reach 1984 as soon as possible and for having a water bed."

Senator Herbert Bateman, author of the Bateman Resolution, was charged with being "a sexually deprived male and trying to return Virginia to the Victorian Age."

Last, [University] President T. Marshall Hahn was charged with establishing "a dictatorship in a democratic society."

Witnesses called to the stand included a group of "pregnant" girls, wearing signs boasting "Open house did it," and a dummy figure of Hahn.

The jury finally found all parties guilty as charged, and sentences were then handed down by the judge. It was decided to hang Hahn from "any object that can be found."

Senator Bateman was confined to a "whore house for six months," while the University Council was ordered "to open their doors six inches at all

times and to run eight laps around the drillfield bareassed."

After the laughter had subsided, Hawthorne took the microphone and announced that the campus has been blocked off by the police. He stated that no one was allowed on campus and ended with, "So here we are at Virginia Tech."

Hawthorne described the students' problem as one of in loco parentis. He remarked that most of the Faculty Senate members were present in the group "to see how many students want civilized rules."

Hawthorne urged the students not to take to the streets and "trash the town... The students themselves are going to have to behave like students, act like students...Our bitch is on this campus."

Having decided that there was no need for a dorm-in, since the dormitories "already belong to the students," Hawthorne asked students to "get some type of commitment out of every faculty member on this campus."

He urged students to "get them to say they don't have an interest in controlling students' lives."

He also told students that "the battle lies in the dormitories and with your RA's."

Students must demand autonomy, Hawthorne urged and if it is not granted, "the autonomy rests on the students, who will have to take it." Up until now, "the people haven't had the volition to make the changes on their own."

As a final suggestion to current SGA president Fred George, Hawthorne proposed a rally on the first night of the fall quarter, at which all copies of the university Policies for Student Life would be burned.

"Then students can run their lives the way they see fit," he explained.

Schwab then took the microphone again to explain recent University Council actions.

During his talk, George estimated the crowd at 4000 and warned the group,

"if we do anything tonight, it's going to kill us Friday."

He asked students to pick up papers available in the lobby of Squires Student Center, for faculty members and ask them to sign them and send them to Dr. Hahn. "Students should take no cop-out from the faculty," he admonished.

In a final attempt to urge student action, George announced a sleep-in on the drillfield, culminating in a walk to the Student Personnel Building Tuesday morning.

By each student's asking to be informed in writing of his rights, George explained, "You can bring student personnel to a complete halt...let's see how many student life policies we can break tonight."

George ended by telling students to "make your own party...We'll do it all night."

Music and films provided by the University Vietnam Committee were scheduled for the rest of the evening as students settled down with candles, blankets, guitars, Boone's Farm Apple Wine, and other assorted items.

Source:

Pam Wimmer, "'...to change the rules' Rally ends in sleep-in on drillfield," *The Collegiate Times* (28 May 1971), 1.