

## Women at Cal Poly: The Fear of Sexual Integration

### Introduction

In September of 1956 women were granted the ability to attend California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.<sup>1</sup> The Cal Poly administration approached this change in part by preparing regulations on campus that demonstrated how apprehensive many campuses were during this period of time concerning women and men living and pursuing their education while coexisting within the same college campus. The book, *Cues for Coeds*, indicated a set of certain mandatory regulations and rules by which women were required to act in accordance. The rules also showed how the faculty at Cal Poly believed women would require greater supervision than men, and that campus authorities would have to exert extra efforts to maintain a productive and healthy “coed” environment.

Throughout the 1950s in America, countless gender prejudices filtered into education and negatively effected multiple aspects of women students’ and faculty members’ lives.<sup>2</sup> Regulations at Cal Poly were manifested upon 1950s conservative ideals such as education for women provides the opportunity for a her to become the professional as well as the homemaker, which essentially were linked together.<sup>3</sup> The Cal Poly pamphlet *Cues for Coeds* displayed unequal gender-wise regulations, which exhibited ideas parallel to conventional conservative ethics during this time period. This provided many distinct differences between the men and women on campus, ultimately leading to a division between the rights of each gender.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (SLO: California Polytechnic College, 1957), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Miller, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 160.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Gidney, "Dating and Gating: The Moral Regulation of Men and Women at Victoria and University Colleges, University of Toronto, 1920-60." *Journal Of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 145

A 1955 letter between Cal Poly President Julian A. McPhee and Dean of Students Everett M. Chandler discussed how an obvious complication within the admission process would be the aspect of supervision in the dormitories.<sup>4</sup> Chandler worried, “ I believe that we will find the parents of the young women attending Cal Poly far more solicitous over the care of their children than the parents of our young men. Today’s society expects college women to be closely supervised.”<sup>5</sup> He categorized women as a different group than men, explaining the idea of how their parents genuinely expect more supervision for their female children than they would for their male children. Chandler’s concept that women needed to be more closely supervised than men is in association with the highly paternalistic viewpoints that dominated American culture in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup>

Male faculty members’ fear of how women must be strictly regulated to maintain a healthy college environment led to the creation of the pamphlet *Cues for Coeds* for young women entering into Cal Poly. Women received this handbook, which stated several guiding outlines of different regulations that encouraged women to obey certain rules.<sup>7</sup> If they did not, they would receive strict penalties. The book orders women to “keep in step” with the specific regulations the administration enforced; this would lead to a “happy college campus.”<sup>8</sup> However, men during this time period did not receive a booklet with codes of conduct. Nevertheless this corresponded with other University ethics of this time. Minimum amounts of regulation was acquired and expected from men.<sup>9</sup> This directly links the concept of how women were treated distinctly different than their male counterparts of their college. Cal Poly administrators

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<sup>4</sup> Everett M. Chandler to Julian A. McPhee, June 8, 1955, Women’s Dormitory Supervision, UA-200, Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Everett to McPhee, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, *The Fifties*, 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 6-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Gidney, “Dating and Gating,” 145

exercised their position as supervisors over the students with overly apprehensive measures and additionally regulated women with extreme caution because they feared sexual integration.

### **Historiography**

At the start to more than halfway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historians of education determined that women's residencies had regulations stressing virtually all aspects of women's lives. Educators as well as parents essentially determined that women's morals and manners must be mentored and protected according to respectable middle-class conservative norms.<sup>10</sup> As a result women's residences generally endeavored to recreate the milieu of the idealized middle-class American home.<sup>11</sup>

The structure of student residences reflected this aim described in Catherine Gidney's article "Dating and Gating: The Moral Regulation of Men and Women at Victoria and University Colleges, University of Toronto, 1920-60." She illustrated dormitory living constructed in a manner to mirror domestic style both in external appearance and internal structure. She also emphasized the social structure among students and deans of women resembled that of the normative family unit. Cal Poly's social structure resembled parallel organization with multiple residence rules that reflected and reinforced social expectations of male and female behavior. Behavior, however, the administration enforced considerably stricter regulations regarding women. Furthermore she accounted that men did not obtain the same amount of regulations, which were even incomparable to the regulations women tolerated. It was noted at University

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<sup>10</sup> Catherine Gidney, "Dating and Gating," 140.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Gidney, "Dating and Gating," 141.

College in 1926 the dean of men was quoted saying, “hope that a minimum of regulation and prohibition would be needed for men.”<sup>12</sup>

Though men and women were seen both to follow certain mandatory regulations, their primary purpose focused on two distinctly different concerns. Women’s residency regulations were centered on self-regulation while men’s primary regulations were focused to keep men in order.<sup>13</sup> Cal Poly’s administration displays similar ideas once *Cues for Coeds* was introduced. Regulations suggested management of women’s lifestyle choice, such as rules regarding their selection of clothing. The administrations belief of keeping women align with appropriate actions, consequently would keep men in uniformity.

For many all-male colleges, the decision to allow women does not have a simple solution. The progression of male college campuses to coeducational campuses encountered equal amounts of resistance and acceptance.<sup>14</sup> However by the time the campus transitions to a coeducational facility, the campus allowed women but do not virtually accept women.<sup>15</sup> When women were eventually permitted admission to Cal Poly in 1957, the school’s conservative nature it took towards women was contemporaneous with the mindset during this period. Rules and regulations reflected societal expectations and also helped reinforce gender difference within the culture of college life, creating a divide within the campus environment.

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<sup>12</sup> Catherine Gidney, "Dating and Gating," 145

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Gidney, "Dating and Gating," 145.

<sup>14</sup> D. B. Turk, "Going Coed: Women's Experiences in Formerly Men's Colleges and Universities, 1950–2000 by Leslie Miller-Bernal and Susan L.Poulson." (eds.). *History of Education Quarterly*, 46: 466–468.

<sup>15</sup> D. B. Turk, "Going Coed," 466–468.

## **The Role of the Cal Poly Administration in the decision to become a Coeducational College in 1954-57**

Cal Poly was established in 1901 with the purpose “to furnish to young people of both sexes mental and manual training in the arts and sciences.”<sup>16</sup> Despite this intention, though the foundation of Cal Poly as a polytechnic college offered to both genders, in 1929 legislation was passed to limit the enrollment to boys.<sup>17</sup> The college commenced the establishment of an environment significantly revolving around only men. However, legislation repealed the prevailing rule of expelling women from the curriculum. An Education Code in 1947 reaffirmed legislation intent on the purpose of the school and changed the title of the institution of “Cal Poly School” to Cal State Poly College.” Additionally Cal Poly retained the original purpose of the institution’s obligation is to serve “young people of both sexes.”<sup>18</sup>

Cal Poly’s metamorphosis from an all-male college to a coeducational polytechnic institute begins with four women who attempted to enroll in Cal Poly. In response, the Admissions Office said that the State Department of Education did not give specific authorization to allow women students.<sup>19</sup> Protest from 100 women teachers of San Luis Obispo County then proceeded to call upon Cal Poly to allow women to be granted admission.<sup>20</sup> A petition was presented to California State Senator A. A. Erhart that stated women have been denied acceptance on the bases of their gender and that they believed this action was not only

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<sup>16</sup> Julian A. McPhee to A. A. Erhart. November 27, 1954, 031, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>17</sup> Julian A. McPhee to A. A. Erhart, 2.

<sup>18</sup> T.A. Westphal, Jr to Julian A. McPhee. October 28, 1954, 031, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>19</sup> A. A. Erhart to Julian A. McPhee, November 23, 1954. 031, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>20</sup> Roy E. Simpson to Martha D. Powers, December 10, 1954, 031, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

illegal, but also “unfair, unjust, and un-American.”<sup>21</sup> Although the college was technically authorized to accept women to the institution, President McPhee continuously argued that the college lacked appropriate and adequate housing facilities for women.<sup>22</sup> Regardless, the petition presented to A. A. Erhart described how there were significant teacher shortages and they requested immediate attention from Cal Poly. Erhart explained to McPhee that there was nothing legally preventing women from attending Cal Poly and it must be reconsidered.<sup>23</sup>

In a letter between San Luis Obispo Superintendent Roy E. Simpson and Senator Erhart, Simpson explains how a system may be established to allow women for emergency or provisional credentials. Women who live around the area of the campus that desired to pursue an education specifically for teaching credentials would be the only granted admission.<sup>24</sup> The letter then continues with Simpson explaining how he has expressed concern to McPhee over policies that may change the polytechnic program that has developed over the years in which the campus has only accepted men.<sup>25</sup> He then states, “In other words, I would not like to see Cal Poly develop into another liberal arts college.”<sup>26</sup> His sexist attitude and fear towards women is blatantly described in this remark. Furthermore, his overall apprehensive tone throughout the entirety of the letter describes his fear of how women would destroy the environment established in the absence of women.

A handful of letters from McPhee described his concerns for the acceptance of women to Cal Poly, which demonstrated the extremely conservative complexion of the college that illegally prevented women from acceptance. The overall primary concern was the housing aspect

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<sup>21</sup> Erhart to McPhee, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Westphal Jr. to McPhee, 1.

<sup>23</sup> A.A. Erhart to Julian A. McPhee, October 10, 1954, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>24</sup> Roy E. Simpson to A. A. Erhart, December 28, 1954, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>25</sup> Simpson to Erhart, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Simpson to Erhart, 1.

of women. Dean of Students Everett Chandler discussed in an extremely sexist letter to McPhee that, “girls will spend much more time than men in their dormitories; they do not have the gym, rodeo grounds, etc., as recreational outlets. In addition, we would not want them just wandering around any old place, any old time.”<sup>27</sup> Additionally a comment was made in the Coed Housing Report written by Chandler that stated that there is a relationship between coed housing and the type of women who comes to college and that “unless there are at least a minimum of conveniences and a homelike atmosphere, the more desirable students will not come, leaving us with those who may become disciplinary problem.”<sup>28</sup> This quote can be interpreted as an excuse that the administration used to justify the prevention of accepting women to Cal Poly. Chandler’s belief that undesirable women students will be the only to wish for acceptance to Cal Poly shows the increasing frequency of apprehensiveness demonstrated by Cal Poly’s administration.

The Chief Assistance Attorney General T. A. Westphal stepped into the situation and sent a letter to McPhee explaining his view over the subject. He distinctly makes it clear that the ban on women is unconstitutional.<sup>29</sup> He calls to the fact that the original intention of the school was to serve both sexes in education. Westphal clarifies that he understands if there were no adequate housing facilities on the campus or in the surrounding area of the school, there would be ample reason to deny admission.<sup>30</sup> However, he reminds McPhee that McPhee even stated there are sufficient housing facilities off campus for women.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately there is no qualifying reason to reject McPhee to continue to deny women from admission to Cal Poly and Westphal explicitly explained that McPhee would be forced by court if needed. Ultimately Westphal and Erhart

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<sup>27</sup> Everett M. Chandler to Julian A. McPhee, October 11 1954, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>28</sup> Everett M. Chandler, *Coed Housing Report*. June 23, 1954, Box 11, Co-education 1954, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>29</sup> Westphal Jr. to McPhee, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Westphal Jr. to McPhee, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Westphal Jr. to McPhee, 2.

determined that Cal Poly's ban of women was unconstitutional. Women were finally admitted once again to Cal Poly in 1956.<sup>32</sup>

### **Women Return to Cal Poly: *Cues for Coeds***

In today's culture we currently deem the noun "coed" as a sexist expression; however, women were constantly being titled as coed by Cal Poly faculty and students when they were originally readmitted to Cal Poly in the 1950s. When women finally were welcomed to the campus, this gender difference and exclusion is apparent with the title of a handbook received by women in the 1950s-1968; *Cues for Coeds*.<sup>33</sup> The handbook begins with discussing how women must do well in school stating, "The most important reason for coming to college is of course, learning."<sup>34</sup> The pamphlet reiterates how college is a place of learning, which indicates the writers of this handbook believed women need this fact embedded into their brains. Additionally, it highlighted the idea that women may come to college for different reasons. The administrators looked at the male counterpart with more confidence, believing these men are disciplined enough not to be told what college stands for.

The pamphlet proceeds to discuss quiet hours in the dormitory, which are "for your benefit," and continues by explaining good ways to study, how to budget time, and to take clear notes.<sup>35</sup> This leads to the notion of women needing additional help in the aspect of concentration. However, this shows how the faculty at the school was extremely apprehensive with admitting women into their college and their participation in male-driven classrooms. Chandler describes

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<sup>32</sup> Sean McMinn, *Cal Poly's first female students reminisce*, Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Accessed March 10, 2016. <http://mustangnews.net/homecoming-first-women-at-cal-poly-after-wwii/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (SLO: California Polytechnic College, 1956), 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 2.



how, at the beginning of the coed program, there needs to be an increase of staffing who shall be full-time paid employees and housemothers that are essential to each dormitory. “It is my opinion that we cannot afford to gamble with less than full-time supervision for each dormitory.”<sup>36</sup> His desire to create the development of a higher level of supervision over women in dormitories, in respect to men, shows the significance of how the fear of women guides the administration to believe women required a supplemental advised living area. Housemothers were hired to overlook all regulations and must carry out specific penalties given to young women for breaking any codes of conduct.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover the administration’s endeavor to influence every aspect of women’s lives, including their selection of clothing limited women’s self-determination. *Cues for Coeds* highlights the proper way for women to dress while on campus stating, “casualness is the key to campus wear.”<sup>38</sup> The pamphlet emphasizes the importance of being properly dressed multiple times in different aspects of the book. Regarding that “neatness and good taste are your best bets for being well dressed.”<sup>39</sup> It even identifies a certain clothing chart that distinguishes different clothing articles permitted at varying social events.<sup>40</sup> The administration enforced this chart, saying that if a woman disobeyed they would receive a penalty.<sup>41</sup> This reveals the concern faculty had about women dressing improperly and perhaps influencing men with their creativity and style of clothing. Their focus on women distracting men shows the rising influence of women, which lead to the administration directly treating women differently so they would not

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<sup>36</sup> Everett to McPhee, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Everett to McPhee, 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 24.

distract their male counterparts. By keeping the female's dress strictly regulated, the administration believed it would regulate the men's desire for women.

The administration also enforced multiple different regulations on women living in the dormitories, which was their ultimate concern. Regulations regarding dress and other aspects of life ranged from dorm organization, overnight guests, and phone calls. Quiet hours and visiting hours were greatly forced onto women students who were compelled to obey in fear of punishments.<sup>42</sup> Penalties were given for all infractions; women would receive a point for every violation. If women received a certain amount of points, their punishment was to stay in the room on a Friday night with no phone privileges.<sup>43</sup> Women were also forced to sign in and out of the dormitory before each evening they left and were expected to be back before the end of closing hours.<sup>44</sup>

### **Women's Reactions to Cal Poly's Administration**

Cal Poly Women resisted the expansive range of regulations with a variety of techniques that were met with strict disciplinary action by the administration. Three "deviant" women were severely punished for their rebellious nature. *El Mustang* newspaper announced that three coeds were found attending an off-campus fraternity party on October 5, 1963; two of the students were involved in one incident while the third was involved in a separate incident.<sup>45</sup> These women's violations resulted in their suspension for the remainder of the Fall Quarter. In the student newspaper *Chandler* was reported to have said, "Three of the suspended coeds had

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<sup>42</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 10-22.

<sup>43</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 23.

<sup>44</sup> *Cues for Coeds* (California Polytechnic College, 1957), 18-19.

<sup>45</sup> "Coeds Suspended," *El Mustang*, 15 October, 1963, 2.

signed residence hall contracts which contained a clause that provides that single students should not enter the living quarters of the opposite sex.”<sup>46</sup>

The disciplinary action taken against the three women students was inevitably questioned, consequently resulting in students protesting. The circulation of petitions across the campus became evident as well as the *El Mustang News* with an article regarding the suspensions as undue disciplinary actions, stating, “There is no reason to suspect any instance of immoral conduct or improper behavior on the part of said coeds... The college student should be allowed to use his own discretion in the matter of his personal extracurricular activities.”<sup>47</sup> The college in response created a student-faculty committee discussing the situation through the Associated Student Body Resolution Committee. The Committee challenged the administration and rigorously studied the regulations as well as other colleges. The Committee sent letters to 65 colleges that asked for information regarding policies in the area of regulations, which would serve as a guideline to modify their current regulations.<sup>48</sup> The letters distributed consisted of questions requesting information on the limits of students in living quarters and the involvement of the opposite sex, if the school recognized fraternities, if there were rules concerning women in fraternity houses with or without chaperons, rules on students over the age of twenty-one, the criteria for selecting chaperons and if they would share their handbooks with the committee.<sup>49</sup> These letters assisted the Resolution Committee Council to devise a resolution to be sent directly to the President of the College, Julian A. McPhee.<sup>50</sup> This marked the beginning of the

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<sup>46</sup> Nancy E. Loe, and Dan Howard-Greene. *Cal Poly: The First Hundred Years*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, 2001. 86-87

<sup>47</sup> “Coeds Suspensions: Resolution Proposed to SAC,” *El Mustang*, 18 October 1963, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Jean B. Walton to Roy Killgore, November 30, 1963, 144.0, Box 11, Coeducational Report of Coed Planning Committee K-V, 1950-60, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>49</sup> Roy E. Killgore to June E. Stuckley. November 12, 1963, 144.02, Box 11, Coeducational Report of Coed Planning Committee K-V, 1950-60, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>50</sup> “Council Passes Coed Resolution; Administration Approval Pending,” *El Mustang*, 31 January, 1964.

involvement of students proactively trying to discontinue the advantage the administration held over the students of Cal Poly.

About half of the schools responded to the letters outlining their regulations and some even offered suggestions to help change the existing regulations at Cal Poly. As a consequence of protest and resistance to the suspension, the Administration reviewed the existing policies and determined that the suspensions would be upheld. Additionally a set of interpretations was added to the section regarding women entering men's residence. "Women, unless accompanied by parents or college approved chaperones, may not visit men's residence or apartments at any time. This includes an Greek letter living groups." It was concluded that "at any time" would be removed, however adding a set of interpretations considering less strict regulations respecting women entering the residency of men. Though this was a stepping-stone for gender equity on Cal Poly's campus, the school over the course of several years began to slowly give acceptance to women.<sup>51</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Sexual discrimination was evident through letters within the administration, however this was not limited to San Luis Obispo's county's borders, but rather displayed on multiple college's campuses throughout the nation. Male prejudices within the era of President McPhee and his desire to keep college campuses a male-dominated atmosphere displayed his fear of sexual integration, especially pertaining to Cal Poly. Since women were granted the privilege of attending the college, the administration was determined, and able, to enforce any rule they chose to regulate. They justified their strict supervision by stating that their parents would want a mindful and structured management of their youth, even though it was not necessarily true. In

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<sup>51</sup> Loe and Greene, *Cal Poly: The First Hundred Years. San Luis Obispo*. 87.

the end, the all male administrators were responsible for imposing harsh rules onto the women students. These rules were not equal between genders, as the male students did not have any such regulations. This provided many distinct differences between the men and women on campus, ultimately leading to a division between the rights, education, and performance of each gender.

Although today on Cal Poly's campus we face almost no sexual discrimination in comparison to women in the late 1950s to early 1960s, this college's past of gender inequality must be acknowledged. The beginning of the college's transition to allow gender equality began when the group of women teachers petitioned for their right to be granted admission to Cal Poly, and escalated to a full on fight for female rights. This fight resulted in women petitioning for gender acceptance, and ultimately other students rose to protest the administration when 3 women were expelled for attending off campus parties. These protests highlighted the passionate yet justified unrest among students seen on Cal Poly's campus, as well as in the rest of the country.<sup>52</sup> Cal Poly's entire social culture and history of structured male dominance was in the midst of change. Even though this explicit sexual discrimination occurred mostly in the 1950s to 1960s, the community of Cal Poly students, no matter the gender, must acknowledge the past female emancipation without dissension to completely resolve the gender issue that has been ingrained in the student community.

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<sup>52</sup> Loe and Greene, *Cal Poly: The First Hundred Years. San Luis Obispo*. 87.

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