Sinful Strides: The Dancing Ban at North Central College as an Example of Tension between Religion and War Culture in a Struggle for Adequate Student Social Life

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The mid-twentieth century, wrought with the complexities of war, seduces inquiring minds. Depictions of flag-yielding, stars and strife American masses flip like a picture book in flash-forward motion; American recollection romanticizes the effects of multiple world wars. Big band jazz, distant lovers penning the pangs of separation and star-spangled rally cries for war support pervade public perception of World War II. As historians comb through the intricacies of World War II, however, questions arise regarding the validity of such perceptions. How did World War II affect American masses? What can the effects of war tell historians about transformations in American culture? Answers to these questions demand in-depth, narrowed research. Microcosmic focus and historical analysis keep the pages of the flip-book from progressing too quickly, allowing for a more accurate understanding of the past.

North Central College, situated approximately thirty miles west-southwest of Chicago in Naperville, Illinois, stands today a quaint, quiet college subtly developing just as it has for the past century and a half. Founded as Plainfield College in 1861, North Central has witnessed the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War and all wars scattered in between or occurring thereafter. Because of North Central’s longstanding history, tracing trends and interpreting transformations at North Central provides the microcosmic example necessary to uncovering information about past events—information that, when coupled with other small independent research, indicates what typical or atypical behavior looks like. North Central’s reaction to World War II illustrates the possible effects of war on small liberal arts colleges and, when juxtaposed with similar colleges, suggests the level of behavioral commonality. Uncovering the complexities of questions like, “what was World War II’s impact on collegiate culture?” must be handled one issue at a time. The dancing ban at North Central College is one window through which to explore possible effects of World War II on small liberal arts colleges.
in America, specifically on the development and transformation of social provisions on campus.

Research firmly establishes that the post-World War II struggle for the removal of the pre-war dancing ban at North Central College exemplifies a battle within collegiate culture between traditional religious constraints on student social life and the newly introduced war culture brought with the return to campus of students who served. At North Central College, World War II seems to have had a generally liberal effect on on-campus student social life. Support for this assertion comes in several detailed subcategories that, together, comprise the argument. Consider first the religious affiliation of North Central College and a century of Evangelical affiliation--how did this translate to on-campus student affairs? Understand those influences exerted by the governing body at North Central and explore possible motivations for their behavioral codes and disciplinary action. Think about the logistics of the dancing ban; what concrete knowledge about the dancing ban at North Central stands unchallenged as fact? Contemplate World War II’s impact at North Central in terms of enrollment and student life. What social transformations were witnessed at North Central after World War I; what religious trends can be traced at North Central spanning its first century? *Explore* each element in search for the deepest understanding so, when the time comes to relate North Central’s experience to the larger picture, the essence of the matter isn’t lost in translation.

While exploration of the dancing ban and of social and religious trends at North Central inherently revolves around explanation of legislation, rules, regulations and sanctions, it is important to remember that this story is one primarily revolving around human experience. To detach the human element from this story would be to misrepresent the movement. Keep in mind that the dancing ban at North Central and the impact of war had very real, emotional influences on students. War is wrought with confusion, dissatisfaction, and question. Analyzing the impact
of war, therefore, is a complex task. An understanding of the impact of war cannot fully encompass or capture the emotional aspect of the matter or its effect on student behavior. Instead, conclusions are drawn from evidence which is often bureaucratic in nature. The following analysis attempts to understand student reaction to an inadequate student social life so, while the content of the paper is factual, the movement’s inherently emotional nature cannot be ignored.

In order to structure a fluent argument, the following subcategories, provided in chronological order, will act as the foundation of discussion:

Religion at North Central College, 1861-1960
Government at North Central College, 1861-1960
Social Life at North Central College, 1861-1945
World War II and Student Life at North Central College, 1941-1945
After World War II at North Central College: The Chapel Program, 1933-1960
After World War II at North Central College: The Dancing Ban, 1941-1945

Taken as separate pieces, these subcategories discuss only what their subheadings declare; taken together as a whole, these subcategories paint a comprehensive picture of a struggle for adequate student social life at North Central College and World War II’s catalytic role in that critical movement.

**Religion at North Central College, 1861-1960**

In order to constitute an argument regarding the religious movements of the College, it is imperative to first establish what church bodies were influential in college history. North Central College, while remaining an Evangelical institution for the periods concerning the dancing ban, was subject to many changes and mergers over the course of its first century. Clarification of these religious moves is clearly noted in Clarence Roberts’ *A Clear and Steady Light*:

It was noted that the College was founded by the Evangelical Association in 1861. In 1890 there came a division in the Association with the
Evangelical group winning control of the college. The opposition group became known as the United Evangelicals. Fortunately, this dispute was healed in 1927 with the organization of the Evangelical Church. In [1946] the Union between Evangelicals and United Brethren was consummated to form the Evangelical United Brethren church. North Central remained affiliated with this denomination until the merger with Methodists in 1968. From this date it became a United Methodist institution.1

While it is undoubtedly important to note the transformations in denominational devotion at North Central, for purposes of this discussion, it is only imperative to note that the institution had an historic relationship with the Evangelical denomination since its founding. Research involving the dancing ban at North Central spans only until 1960. Also, because debate about the impact of World War II and the dancing ban centers heavily on identifying religious beliefs, it is important to note: “the dispute [resulting in divisions within the Evangelical Church] seemed to be a conflict of personalities . . . rather than any deep-seated doctrinal differences.”2 Consistent theological beliefs based in the Evangelical faith were observed at North Central despite changes within the Evangelical Church itself. Throughout the early twentieth century, North Central College continued to consider itself primarily a religious institution: “While some private colleges relinquished religious bonds[,] North Central continued its traditional church relationships.”3 North Central operated on deep, foundational religious suppositions belonging to the Evangelical Church.

Students knew of the College’s religious affiliation in a very personal way. Many students chose North Central because of its strong “moral” character based on the Evangelical denomination. Each student’s day, at the founding of North Central (then “Plainfield College” and later “North-Western College” until the adoption of “North Central College” in 1926), was

designed to serve the provisions of Christian life as prescribed by the Evangelicals: “While source material on the daily routine of students is meager, sufficient information is available to demonstrate the fact that the life of the student was thoroughly supervised by a system of detailed by-laws and regulations. The absence of rules or even self-regulation would have opened the institution to severe criticism, not only by the church, but also by parents, local friends, and patrons.”

Upon arrival at North Central, most students expected strict regulation and disciplinary codes. North Central was often sought out by those anticipating such stipulations. Many students who attended were actively religious, in fact, “the high percentage of Evangelicals contributed to a collective homogeneity lacking in later years [after the Rall Administration 1916-1946].”

As a result of the immediate post World War I economic boom in the U.S. with more individuals able to afford higher education, the College’s enrollment grew expanding beyond the traditional student religious affiliation and the number of Evangelical students waned. “Until 1923 the percentage of students affiliated with the Evangelical Church remained high, with some eighty-nine percent of the student-body representing the denomination.”

Even with a decline in Evangelical students, reported Evangelicals did not dip below forty-five percent until after World War II.

Conclusively, North Central College was an Evangelical institution that thoroughly embraced its role as such throughout almost its entire first century of livelihood which completely covers the expanse of time that the college enforced a dancing ban against social dancing on (and off) campus.

To paint a more vivid picture of the role of religion on campus at North Central, consider the weekly routine of students as outlined by the College Catalog of 1862-63: “The exercises of

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5 Ibid., 195.
6 Ibid.
each day begin with the reading of the Scripture and prayer, which exercise all are required to
attend. All students are required to attend public worship on the Sabbath, at such churches as
they may choose, or as their parent or guardians may direct.”8 The by-laws of the College
included in the 1862-63 catalog also clearly state, “punctual and regular attendance at Prayers in
the Chapel, at Church on the Sabbath, and at every recitation or other exercise enjoined by the
Faculty are requested of all students.”9 The College came down heavy-handed on habitual
absence often resulting in honor point deductions (a system that kept record of student conduct)
or through suspension.

As worship services became less frequent, a matter for later discussion, the College
instituted a service referred to as “chapel.” “The modern chapel exercises remained as the direct
descendent of the ‘prayers’ that were once observed daily on the campus. The chapel service
represented the entire college community at worship. Although extended prayers and lengthy
sermons were no longer the custom, the chapel program became the central core of spiritual
exercises.”10 Beginning around 1932, required worship known as “chapel,” would gradually shift
focus from religion to academics used primarily for guest speakers and lecturers until, officially,
authorities recognized its primary purpose as an exercise for intellectual expansion. It wasn’t
until 1932 that chapel services were first reduced from daily offerings to 4 days of devotion. The
gradual lessening of strict religious requirements slowly began to develop after this point. Again,
the general decline of religion’s role at North Central as it relates to the dancing ban and World
War II will find further discussion. Research firmly establishes, however, that North Central
College was deeply devoted to its Evangelical affiliation throughout the nineteenth century and

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7  Ibid.
8  1862-63 College Catalogue, 12. NCC Publications Collection. North Central College’s College
9  Ibid.
spanning well into the mid-twentieth century.

Government at North Central College, 1861-1960

After establishing North Central’s inherently Evangelical configuration, it is important to note the composition of the governing body and the motivations behind its asserted control. Through satisfying these two inquiries, the role of religion in government at North Central is further cemented.

Research suggests that two bodies, the Faculty and the Board of Trustees, were responsible for government and discipline at North Central during the nineteenth century, continuing until 1919 when a third party, the Student Council, was introduced. “The private and scholastic life of all students continued under the rigorous supervision of the faculty . . . The problem of discipline was one of the most important issues before the faculty . . . The enforcement of all rules was the principal responsibility of the faculty, but occasionally the Board of Trustees passed decrees concerning student morals and discipline.”11 Until 1919, these two bodies worked in tandem to provide students with the government and discipline outlined in the College Catalogs and Student Handbooks. It wasn’t until 1919, directly following World War I, that the Student Council was formed to provide North Central’s students with a form of self-government. In the 1919-20 College Catalog, the administration introduced a Student Council as a student-run form of government: “The College believes in student self-government. It has accorded to the student-body the largest measure of student-government compatible with the Faculty’s responsibility for the administration of the college and the capacity of the students for such self-government. A thoroughly representative Student Council has been created to co-

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11 Ibid., 75.
operate with the Faculty.””\textsuperscript{12} This system of self-governance continued for the remaining period of exploration, through 1960 and beyond. That is not to say that the Board of Trustees and Faculty did not hold the primary position of power in matters of government and discipline. Even in 1957, the Student Council acknowledged the Board of Trustees as the authority on the issue of social dancing: “In answer to many questions voiced by students on the specific problems of dancing, smoking, and drinking and gambling on campus, the following statements have been compiled to clarify the official stand of the college . . . The board of trustees is the ruling body on this matter of dancing.””\textsuperscript{13} However, student opinion began to take a heftier role in matters of discipline beginning in 1919 with the creation of the Student Council.

In addition to identifying the Board of Trustees and Faculty as the governing bodies of North Central College, it is important to note that both bodies were religious in nature, which, in turn, emphasized religious standards of conduct at the College. As the Reverend George St. Angelo, first Chaplain at North Central, stated in an oral history recorded July 20, 2004: “I think the college served the role of the Chaplain through their faculty. When I was a student here--see, I was a student here ‘39-‘43--a lot of them had theological training.””\textsuperscript{14} Richard Eastman, a former professor at North Central College, echoed this belief, “when I arrived in 1946, we pretty much had a church-related faculty. That is, the faculty went to the Evangelical church and they often spoke at chapel. They were committed really to a church campus.””\textsuperscript{15} The Board of Trustees

\textsuperscript{12} 1919-20 College Catalog, 33.
membership was also based on religious affiliation. The 1862-63 College Catalog shows that the Board of Trustees, comprised of 24 members, explicitly name 18 as clergy and the remainder as laity designated by specific religious Conferences. The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, responsible for important decisions in between board meetings, had six members, five of which explicitly stated their religious affiliation or position. This Board composition continued well into the mid-twentieth century.

Briefly stated, the goals of the Faculty and Board of Trustees were to instill not only intellectual growth among students, but also to foster moral growth. “In short, it is the aim of the faculty to make the government strictly parental.” Both governing bodies saw college education as a continuation of Christian teaching:

Encouragement and persuasion, so far as they shall prove efficient, will be used to induce studious habits, a judicious division of time and a proper course of conduct. Laudable motives are presented and enforced upon the mind of each student, to institute that government so eminently useful in after life.

There was no hidden motivation. The Board of Trustees and the Faculty were interested in producing upstanding, morally-sound graduates based on standards prescribed by the Evangelical faith and both entities used government and discipline as the means to that end.

Social Life at North Central College, 1861-1945
Thus far it has been established that North Central College was undoubtedly committed to Evangelical ideals; the role of religion was foundational to education at North Central College; the governing bodies at North Central College, extending through the duration of the dancing ban, were the Board of Trustees and the Faculty, followed by the Student Council after 1919; and the governing bodies at North Central were inherently dedicated to a religious agenda that was

16 1862-63 College Catalog, 2.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 12.
aimed at forming morally sound graduates. Now, a general recount of social transformations at North Central before World War II helps to further synchronize these discoveries for the purposes of tracing social trends at North Central College after World War II. In order to show the exceptional nature of the impact of World War II on North Central student life, a map of social trends needs to discuss social movements before and after World War II.

Before the introduction of a social program at North Central characterized by recreation and specialized interests, the predominant form of extra-curricular activities are summarized by the two predominant organizations on campus prior to the birth of the Student Council in 1919. The Y.M.C.A. (Young Men’s Christian Association) and the Y.W.C.A. (Young Women’s Christian Association, earlier called the Young Ladies’ Christian Association), and the literary societies on campus marked a time when extra-curriculars were focused on service and gentility. “Two organizations, the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.L.C.A., dating from the 1870s, reflected the Christian character of the institution, its leaders and students.”20 The Christian Associations on campus engaged a majority of the student body in Christian commitment to service:

The work of the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.L.C.A. received special praise and commendation from the faculty reports of the Board of Trustees which indicated that more than one-half of the students were members of these Christian organizations. The Associations must have been responsible in part for teaching and demonstrating to fellow students the principles of Christian living and service in the environment of a college campus.21

The Y.M- and Y.W.C.A. were predominant forms of extra-curricular commitment at North Central College among the student body from the mid-1870s until the mid-twentieth century, and even after their influence waned, each continued to contribute to the College as a traditional organization.

19 Ibid.
20 Roberts, A Century of Liberal Education, 80.
21 Ibid., 82.
From 1866-1930, literary societies were one of the largest outlets for extra-curricular activity on campus but were an example of genteel culture—a culture which began to diminish near the conclusion of World War I. For instance, refer to an October 6, 1899 meeting of one of the societies: “The society was called to order . . . And opened with a piano solo by Miss Rickert . . . The program was as follows: Heroes of the Arctic Expedition, Mr. Reik; Exercise; Peace Conference, Mr. J. Frauzke; Essay, Miss Waidelich; Orchestra Music; Intermission; Music by the Orchestra; Address.”

In 1920, one year after the Student Council’s formation, the Student Council meeting minutes note that the student body was aware of the decline of the literary societies and this distinct form of social outlet: “The question of whether or not the Literary Societies were filling a real need in students’ life was discussed. It was moved and seconded that the chair appoint a committee to investigate the society situation and report at the next meeting.”

The predominance of these two forms of organizations, the Y.M- and Y.W.C.A. and literary societies, mark a time in the social history of North Central that was pre-occupied with academic extra-curricular, directly contrasted with the athletic and recreational extra-curricular focus of the decades following the decline of the Literary Societies.

The clear turning point for the social program, or lack thereof, at North Central College came with the creation of the Student Council in 1919: “The system of individual or collective responsibility of students discussed by the president was to bear fruit in the creation of a system of student government in 1919. A representative student council was originated.” It was at this point that student autonomy became a driving force for social change on campus. Students were given the tools necessary to affect their social program at North Central. The Student Council

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23 Feb. 22, 1920, Student Council meeting minutes.
still fell under the jurisdiction of the Board of Trustees and administration, but students were consulted regarding college policies: “Standards of conduct for students and faculty were drawn up by a joint committee of faculty members and students in 1924. These standards were approved by the Board of Trustees and were printed in the college catalog for many years.”25 Student input was viewed as an asset. This system of student self-government authorized and looked-after by the Board of Trustees and Faculty continued for the next several decades.

Student life was influenced by a blend of student opinion and administrative desires.

**World War II and Student Life at North Central College, 1941-1945**

World War II affected North Central College in multiple ways. The war permeated most levels of the atmosphere on campus. “Discussion was held concerning the moving up of Christmas vacation to aid the war effort,”26 “the possibility of a living memorial for North Central students killed in World War II was discussed,”27 “Several ideas for a chapel program were discussed in which we would honor the North Central men killed in World War II,”28 the Student Council even developed a War Council charged with organizing memorials and tributes on campus.29 Just as in World War I, the College adopted a curriculum that allowed for training units to operate within the College to provide basic instruction for students comparable to an ROTC program. “The college along with many similar institutions throughout the nation was assigned an Army Specialized Training Unit . . . The authorities entered in contract with the war department to provide instruction, subsistence, housing and medical services for the men . . . Kaufman and Bolton halls [sic] and Merner Field House were approved as barracks for the

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25 Ibid.
26 Oct. 22, 1942, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
27 Sept. 19, 1946, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
28 Nov. 7, 1946, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
29 March 4, 1943, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
trainees.”

Even for those students who did not enlist in the military, the war became an ever-present issue on campus.

While the war years themselves greatly changed the student experience at North Central, perhaps most importantly, the passage of the G.I. Bill of Rights (a law which provided an entitlement to free or reduced-cost higher education to all veterans) sent an enormous number of veterans onto college campuses after the war. “The passage of the G.I. Bill of Rights providing for the educations of the ex-serviceman brought an unprecedented expansion in college enrollments in the immediate post-war period.”

As is noted by the *Chronicle*, the College Catalogs and the Board of Trustee meeting minutes, enrollment doubled between 1944 and 1946. Student enrollment was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1936 (year)</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1946</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>592 (students)</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
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Not only did the war cause a decline in student enrollment at North Central during the years of service, but it also caused a sharp increase in student enrollment at North Central after its conclusion as servicemen returned home to finish or start their degrees.

The Board of Trustees acknowledged the issue of increased student enrollment in response to the Report of the President of the Student Body to the Board of Trustees which cited “insurmountable obstacles” such as student enrollment which “swelled to an extent never before approached” and the student body was described as “representing as heterogeneous a group as

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32 Ibid., 254.
ever assembled to receive instruction at one institution.”

The student body president noted, “practically a third of the group is composed of veterans, now familiar with parts of the world heretofore mentioned only in geographies, and almost one in six members of the student body has assumed family responsibilities in addition to those of procuring higher education.” World War II changed the actual composition of the student body through its involvement in the war. Student expectations of the College, and the College’s social program specifically, changed among the student population. “A very sensitive problem that confronted the college administration after 1946 was the task of providing a satisfactory social program to meet the demands of the entire student body. Changing social standards and convention seemed to render traditional activities obsolete . . . The close of World War II and the return of the G.I. again found the issue of a more adequate social program before the college authorities.” Not only the influx of student servicemen affected the College, but also the change in the overall personality of the student body. A March 10, 1967 *Chronicle* article reflecting on student experiences beyond the classroom noted: “Experience with the G.I.’s after World War II shows that after several years in the service, they returned to school more mature.” The author wrote that Dr. Richard Thurston, head of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at North Central in 1967, thought “that student [*sic*] romanticize the world outside of the classroom” and G.I.’s show maturity after having been exposed to the world for themselves.

An editorial in the *Chronicle* October 2, 1946 noted: “social life seemed so morally ideal and quiet at school. Roller skating, parlor dates, coke dates, sporting events, lectures, and concerts were the recreation highlights; and then the army! Some men seemed so unprepared for

33 “Report of the Student Body President to the Board of Trustees” April 16, 1947, 1.
34 Ibid.
the reality of boisterous recreation. Somehow it made college life appear a little too artificial.”38 This realization rests at the heart of the argument for it shows that students were changed by World War II: students were left dissatisfied with social life on campus upon return. Students experienced other parts of the world, rich in different customs and traditions but were forced to return to traditions that no longer matched their experiences as they settled back home. The same editorial published on October 2, 1946 also states, “Prayer leadership in chapel is changed in spirit. To pray for good grades, victory of our teams, help in our petty college problems does not have the weight and significance of prayers with death in your heart.”39 World War II inescapably changed the composition of the student body in which once accepted traditional provisions of the College became a cause of discontent.

The Student Council meeting minutes continuously indicated discussion of the social program on campus beginning in December of 1945 as the minutes state, “Vic Thornton read a letter which was received from Monmouth College, and also one received from Muskingum College concerning the introduction of dancing in the college social program. It was decided to give out a questionnaire to the students in Chapel, to get their views on the subject.”40 Later, right before the protest on campus in 1946, the Student Council decided to confront the Board of Trustees about the issue. “A report on the questionnaire concerning dancing was given by the chairman. It was decided to take a poll of the new students also. A letter, which is to be given to the trustees concerning the matter, was read.”41 The creation of the Student Council ultimately led to the student body’s ability to articulate the dissatisfaction with the College’s social program at the end of World War II.

37 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Dec. 13, 1945, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
Growing discontent with social programs on campus at North Central College continued to occupy the Student Council’s attention after the failure of the dancing ban protest in 1946. In 1951 the Student Council minutes show, “The planning committee of the conference asked for suggestions of Student Government problems: . . . social program control by students.”42 Students had been given the autonomy to enter war, but could not control their own social program at school: this fact was hard to reconcile. Richard Eastman, who started at the College in 1946, spoke to student autonomy and the control chapel sought to assert over the student body: “One of the dismal spectacles of the old required chapel was the sight of the proctors going up and down the aisles checking off attendance. You felt that this was more appropriate, perhaps, to a correctional institution. I think that with the increased stress on student rights, student autonomy, that became an unpopular concept, the required chapel.”43 Despite the dim outlook of ever reaching student and administrative contentment, 1957 saw a commitment on behalf of the Board of Trustees to reform the social program at North Central beginning with the lifting of the dancing ban on campus. By 1960, the Accreditation Team that visited campus witnessed an established social system at North Central that they referred to as an “extensive extra-curricular program.”44 Student demands had been satisfied.

After World War II at North Central College: The Chapel Program, 1933-1960

A component essential to the central argument of this discussion centers on the religious trends at North Central in comparison with World War II-inspired social patterns previously described. Research shows that as the social desires of students were met at North Central during the twentieth century, the emphasis placed on religious instruction and worship lessened. In the

41 March 14, 1946, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
42 Feb. 15, 1951, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
44 May 16, 1960, Student Council Meeting Minutes.
1870-71 College Catalog, the rules clearly stated, “All are required to attend prayers daily in the College chapel and public worship on the Sabbath at such churches as they may choose or their parents or guardians may direct.” And the 1889 College Catalog stated:

The superior Christian influence of this College is well known to its patrons, and is attracting general attention. A large number of students are professed Christians. This prevalence of religious principle and practice averts, to a great degree, that rowdyism which is exhibited in many of the educational institutions of the country. Daily prayer-meetings are sustained by the Young Men’s Association, and semi-weekly prayer-meetings by the Young Women’s Christian Association. All the students are required to attend worship, daily, in the College Chapel, and public worship and Sunday-school on the Sabbath, at such places as they, or their parents, or their guardians may select.

The College saw academics and religion as mutually inclusive at this point. From the College’s standpoint, one could not exist without the other. Historically, the College wanted to keep all students in a “moral” light: “The Faculty aims to exercise a parental and moral supervision over the conduct and character of the students.” By 1955, however, the Student Council had started to recognize the changing role of religion on campus: “A discussion of religious life on campus followed. A distinction was made between formal expressions of religion and personal religion. Some members of the council felt that there is a division on campus between those who take part in the religious services and those who do not.” Ironically, this statement was released the same year that the College Chaplaincy began. By 1955, though, there was a definite change in the role of religion at the College.

The Revered George St. Angelo stated, “we had required Chapel, we called it. And that was in Pfeiffer Hall and that was, I think in those days, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays but it

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45  1870-71 College Catalog, 15.
46  1889 College Catalog, 27.
47  1893-94 College Catalog, 4.
was not just worship. They had lecturers come in and so on and so forth.” In the 1949-1950 Student Handbook, North Central seems to try to reaffirm the College’s commitment to Christian motives in response to shifting emphasis, “Student pledge to North Central . . . I will not disgrace the college from which I am receiving my education by an act of disloyalty or cowardice. I will fight for its highest ideals . . . I will not feel ashamed in the time of testing to stand unflinchingly true to Jesus Christ and His principles, and in doing so honor my institution . . . Every North Central Student LIVES this pledge.” Students were to sign at the bottom of the page that stated this commitment in the Student Handbook.

The College Catalogs from 1861 through 1955 demonstrate religious trends and outline chapel provisions. Between 1919 and the end of World War I through 1960, chapel was gradually reduced from daily, to four days a week (reduced in 1933-34), then to three days (reduced in 1937-38), and finally to two days (reduced in 1960-61). Along the way, the number of chapels a student was allowed to miss gradually increased as well: in 1948-49, each student was allowed eight excused absences each semester when previously it was three absences each half-semester for a total of six absences. The rules and regulations of the College became less strict. Richard Eastman commented in an interview that:

[T]he flood of veterans for one, meant that we had to expand the faculty. We were bringing in teachers who had other [religious] backgrounds. You might say we got more ecumenical or more secular, depends on your point of view. But there were around the 50s, we had a group of young faculty who really wanted to move the college to more academic directions and less churchy . . . From that time on, the religious character of a faculty candidate was not the most important thing.

After social dancing was allowed on campus, chapel became a focal point of discussion. During

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President Schilling’s term as President of North Central College, the Board of Trustees also became less focused on denominational heritage of members. General movements regarding religion and the College’s administrative preoccupation with upholding religious values diminished well into the 1950s, but especially after 1946 with the flood of students returning to North Central and with a changed character at the core of the student body.

**After World War II at North Central College: The Dancing Ban, 1941-1945**

Now that the essentials of North Central’s religious history, governmental history and social history have been uncovered in relation to the dancing ban, the crux of the issue, the dancing ban itself, can be examined. From 1861 until 1924, “social dancing” at North Central wasn’t explicitly forbidden but was instead forbidden by implication. At this time, social dancing would not have been considered acceptable by any Evangelical institution and, therefore, official legislation barring social dancing was not necessary. Distinctively, the College had been a coed institution since its founding--a policy atypical of American colleges and universities in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, despite the opportunity for social interactions presented by a coeducational student body, the issue of social dancing remained an unspoken, unchallenged guiding principle well into the twentieth century. The 1862-63 College Catalog addresses social life restrictions whereby the ban on social dancing is implied, but it is clear that the issue was not pressing. “Students are required to refrain entirely from the use of profane language, from the violation of the Sabbath, from card playing and other games of chance, and in general, to observe all the laws of common social morality.”

Social dancing would have clearly violated “laws of common social morality” according to the Evangelical faith. A student, Robert Ladley, in the May 15, 1946 issue of the *Chronicle*, summarizes the basic Evangelical concern with social

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52 1862-63 College Catalog, 15.
While dancing may not influence any one of us to go further into sin, under this principle it may be wrong if it should bring anyone into believing that it may be right, and from there continue on a downward path. Sin is a trend, a gradual lessening of resistance to temptation . . . That is the reason why the church fathers have decided that certain practices are evil, or sins.53

The first time that social dancing is expressly stated as a forbidden activity occurs in the 1924-25 College Catalog which reads, “Through long years of experience, North-Western has evolved the following standards of conduct for her students and faculty . . . The choice of wholesome and profitable recreation to the exclusion of objectionable and worthless pleasures, as social dancing, both public and private, excessive automobile, too frequent absences from town, etc.”54 Again, social dancing is referred to as a “worthless pleasure,” an evaluative conclusion drawn on the basis of religious assumptions regarding morals and ethical behavior.

From 1924-1933, the dancing ban was noted continuously, yet is only referred to through implication as unwholesome activity from 1934-1937, but returned explicitly under the “Social Life” section in the College Catalogs from 1937-1957.55 Consider again the main objection to the introduction of social dancing at North Central as expressed by student Marvin Pickering in a letter to the editor printed in the November 19, 1954 issue of the Chronicle:

It did not say that smoking, dancing and a ‘glass of wine’ were sins but that they were standards below the teaching of the Bible and our denomination . . . Altogether, what is wrong with the so called ‘ancient Puritanism?’ Do we not still have the same God, the same Bible, and the same human life to live? People have always revolted in order to secure their own interests. Must the loyal EUB’s leave this college to an affiliated group? If we are so low we cannot pay due respect to the denomination supporting the college, it is self evident that we are trying to take

54 1924-25 College Catalog, 23.
Reasons for the dancing ban at North Central College were understood as inherently religious, even by students of the time. Social dancing was often viewed as the gateway to sin, as innately immoral. “Another troublesome issue before the faculty was the question of school sociables. In 1876 news of some ‘noisy sociables’ reached the Board of Trustees, whereupon that body expressed its disapproval of all such gatherings ‘where dancing, or loose and un-Christian-like conduct is carried on.’ As at Plainfield, all college sociables were required to meet faculty consent and have faculty supervision.” The dancing ban was upheld at North Central College precisely for the religious concerns articulated.

Students increasingly sought social change on campus to allow social dancing as part of a newly refined social program at North Central. In a June 3, 1946 article, the Chronicle reads, “Pardon . . . FLASH--just came in! Bishop leaves North Central as dancing lurks around the corner--whoops! . . . Just when all those men are coming back.” Social dancing continuously gained greater attention among the student body until the student body president approached the issue in a report to the Board of Trustees which stated, “The most common recommendation voiced this year, as in the past years, is for a more extensive social program--one that will include dancing as an integral part of the program . . . a more complete and detailed report prepared by the Student Council will be placed in your hands.” In response to the Student Body’s call for change, the Board of Trustees released the following statement:

Be it Resolved: . . . That the matter of the future social program of North Central College, together with the documents above referred to are hereby

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57 Roberts, A Century of Liberal Education, 76.
58 “Class of 1946 Leaves All to Undergraduates” Chronicle, June 3, 1946, 1.
referred to a Committee of Eleven to be constituted as follows: a. Three members of the Board of Trustees to be appointed by the Board of Trustess [sic] b. Three members of the Faculty to be appointed by the Faculty c. And five representatives of the Student body to be appointed by the Student Council . . . That this Committee is charged with the responsibility of making a study looking toward the formulation of a social program that shall be conducive to the best interest of the Student Body, of North Central College, and its constituency . . . That this Committee shall explore the possibility of meeting the social needs of all the students of the college, within the framework of the present regulations governing the social program, [a phrase which upheld the ban of on-campus social dancing] until such time when such study of the total question shall have been completed and proper action taken.60

It should be noted that 1946 marked the merger of the Evangelical Church with the United Brethren Church, which may have caused a reaction within the Trustees that contributed to their persistence to traditional ideals. After the Board of Trustees upheld the dancing ban in 1946, the student body held its largest formal protest against the ban in April 1946 when even the Chicago Tribune was called to cover the event. Students danced on the lawn of Old Main to demonstrate their opinions about the lacking social program offered at North Central. The Chicago Tribune article reads, “the stately walls of Old Main Hall on the campus of North Central college [sic] at Naperville rocked to the tunes of jitterbug jive yesterday as 400 students sought to break an 85-year-old tradition and establish social dancing at the Evangelical school. Starting at 1p.m., the students left classes and held mass meetings on the lawn in front of Old Main, accompanied by the jive tunes of an instrumental trio to enforce their demand.”61 North Central administration dismissed the event and thought the demonstration to be lesser than the Chicago Tribune established. President Rall wrote in a letter on June 9, 1946, “About the picture of street dance &

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60 Board of Trustees Minutes Supplements, April 3, 4, 1946, 6. Community Involvement/Outreach Faculty Collection. North Central College’s Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1872-Present. North Central College Archives, North Central College, Naperville.

‘strike’ at NCC we’ll say reports were grossly exaggerated. Really no strike.”62 April 1946 marked the culmination of student protest on the issue of social dancing on campus, but the pressure for social change did not stop until the ban’s removal in 1957.

The desire for social dancing on campus was best articulated by the Student Council in an address to the Board of Trustees recorded in the Student Council meeting minutes of March 18, 1957:

1) We feel that it [social dancing] would be a definite improvement in the social program of the school, providing a means of social mixing which is not otherwise found to a large extent on campus. 2) At present, those who wish to dance are forced to go off campus; we feel that the campus atmosphere would prove a more wholesome setting, with the added advantage from the administrative standpoint of effective control through faculty chaperonage. 3) Actually, there are very few people on the campus who actively oppose the social dance, even students coming from conferences whose attitude toward social dance is extremely negative. 4) We feel that a definite stand on this problem taken by those in authority, would give a much-needed boost to student morale -- nothing can make a student more restless than indecision in the ranks of the leaders.63

Finally, after over a decade of explicit urging and many more years of oblique student desire for the implementation of social dancing on North Central’s campus, the Board of Trustees approved a new social program that no longer banned social dancing on campus. “The program went into operation in the fall of 1957. Because social dancing on campus was an innovation in the history of the college there was some fear that it might tend to overshadow all other student affairs. The College Activities Board (C.A.B.) was careful to emphasize that dancing was only one phase of the overall plan.”64 The first College Catalog to see the introduction of social dancing was the 1959-60 Catalog: “the Activities Board, conscious of the many fine cultural and social activities available in the metropolitan Chicago area, sponsors regular trips to musical, theatrical, and

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63  March 18, 1957, Student Council Meeting Minutes, 1.
sporting events in Chicago. On-campus activities include . . . receptions, teas, roller skating and swimming parties, and dances.”65 Impromptu dancing was still forbidden—“because there is such a fine line between informal and scheduled dancing, C.A.B. decided that they would still be opposed to impromptu dancing”66—but social dancing became a marketing tool for the College in future College Catalogs. In all, the spark that ignited vocalized student discontent with social provisions, World War II, saw a ten-year struggle that eventually ended with student victory; on-campus social dancing at North Central College was integrated into a new social program.

**Beyond North Central College, 1945-1960**

An exploration of several subcategories has worked to illustrate the underlying support for the major premise of this research. Research firmly establishes that the pre-World War II dancing ban at North Central College and the struggle for its removal directly following the end of the war exemplifies a battle within collegiate culture between traditional religious constraints on student social life and the newly introduced war culture brought with the return to campus of students who had served. At North Central College, World War II proves to have a generally liberal effect on student social life in comparison with its more traditional form. Support for this assertion came with several detailed subcategories that, together, comprise the argument. Integral subcategories include discussion of: the religious affiliation of North Central College, the composition of the governing body at North Central, the description of the dancing ban at North Central, World War II’s impact at North Central in terms of enrollment and student life, social trends at North Central that highlight World War II’s exceptional impact on campus, and religious trends at North Central spanning its first century as they map general decline in importance after World War II.

65 1959-60 College Catalog, 23.
Exploration of the North Central College dancing ban has illuminated deep and embedded ideological shifts in the College’s focus during its first century. Research has shown a direct relationship of war with social change on North Central’s campus as a small liberal arts college. World War II fostered the reconstruction of student life on campus at North Central. The dancing ban embodied this movement.

Was the behavior exhibited on North Central’s campus a typical response to World War II and the introduction of war culture to campus? Research suggests that, yes, North Central College’s experience was a typical, logical response to World War II and its impact on campus, although, many literature reviews about the effects of World War II on social transformations readily acknowledge, even beg for more research on the issue. The field is not ready to deliver many--some, but not many--blanket generalizations about the impact of war on higher education. The information that has been made available, however, observes several consistencies between North Central College and the “norm.” Exploration of these consistencies follow.

There is little to no doubt that the composition of student bodies across America was changing at the close of World War II. The G.I. Bill, as mentioned earlier, was a national political effort to encourage returning veterans to consider higher education, free of cost as repayment for service. The bill sent floods of veterans into colleges and universities across the country. Marcus Stanley wrote, “The midcentury GI Bills were the largest direct scholarship program for higher education in American history.”\(^\text{67}\) Naturally, the surge challenged the traditional composition of student bodies as veterans who had not considered higher education realized that the option existed. “[T]he combination of the Korean War and WWII GI bills probably increased total postsecondary attainment among all men born between 1921 and 1933

\(^{66}\) Jan. 13, 1958, Student Council Meeting Minutes.

\(^{67}\) Stanley, Marcus. “College Education and the Midcentury GI Bills.” The Quarterly Journal of
by about 15 to 20 percent, with smaller effects for surrounding cohorts.\textsuperscript{68} As experienced at North Central, veterans had been exposed to a world much different than those students who had not served: the experience often fostered restlessness with traditional social programs upon a return home. Soldiers returned having participated in a war culture starkly different than that of traditional college social culture.

Wars and their effects are a continuing, permanent part of the personal and political landscapes that paradoxically demand incorporation and defy ready integration into an acceptable world view. The warrior’s image, his wounds, and the world he comes home to are a story that has been retold in Western culture at least from the time of Homer. The lessons of the \textit{Odyssey} are the same as those of late-twentieth-century social science--wars may end, but they continue to reverberate in the lives of those who fought them and within the soldiers’ societies.\textsuperscript{69}

Higher education began a long process of change starting with the implementation of the G. I. Bill following World War II: an impact on student social life was inevitable with the shift in student body composition.

It was at this point, the time directly following World War II, that higher education also began to look beyond traditional constraints placed on student life. An argument exists that the 1950s witnessed a recall to religious purposes, a direct juxtaposition to social protests and verbalized dissatisfaction of the late-1940s. North Central College aligns with this argument. The college instituted the chaplaincy position in 1955, appointing the Reverend George St. Angelo as Chaplain, and supported the program with a monetary fund substantially greater than those given to other departments. Richard Eastman speculated:

\begin{quote}
Well, if I didn’t already say so, he [the Rev. George St. Angelo] came as our first chaplain, I think, around 1955. And he felt it was his duty to reclaim this rather secular campus for the church. I remember, one of his
\end{quote}

\textit{Economics} 118 (2003), 671.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
early Chapel speeches, he said ‘the church owns this college lock, stock and barrel,’ which sent shivers through a great many of us. We didn’t want to be owned lock, stock and barrel. He did his best, as I said before, in the crisis of 1958 in making chapel universally required as well as the religion courses. He eventually had to back, or recede from that position.\textsuperscript{70}

This is not to say that the Reverend George St. Angelo was opposed to social dancing on campus, but his position at the College seems to have been initialized as an effort to restore religious focus at the institution. Research suggests that the 1950s were a time of restrained student reaction to traditional social structures. Protests and verbalized dissatisfaction decreased as campuses settled; the disruption World War II posed started to pass. “At that time [1952-55] protest movements were absent from college campuses.”\textsuperscript{71} But student dissatisfaction couldn’t be silenced forever. “By the end of the 1950s identity diffusion seemed to exist on college campuses. It was at this time that Erik Erikson’s diagnosis of ‘identity crisis’ among youth (1959) had its greatest persuasiveness.”\textsuperscript{72} Not surprisingly, the dancing ban was lifted as a parallel to this identity change.

Changes in Christian conservatism have been analyzed to understand how Evangelism has changed over time. Interestingly, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed Protestant activism as “a reaction to the further disestablishment of so-called traditional Christian values in American society.”\textsuperscript{73} Roots of a changing Evangelical conduct code were not limited to the 1970s and 1980s at North Central College, however; these roots arguably existed just before World War II at North Central. A study was conducted on North Central’s campus in 1941 by sociology major and student body president, Gordon Streib. A randomized, controlled experiment showed 60% of

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{70} Richard Eastman Oral History, February 18, 1992.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
students claimed the regulation on social dancing had no effect on their decision to attend North Central and 53% of students who identified themselves as Evangelicals were interested in introducing social dancing on campus (88% of non-Evangelicals were interested). The study showed that, even though the student body had not yet reached boiling point on the issue, more than half of the Evangelical student body was ready to dispose of the negativity associated with social dancing—a definite change in religious ontology than expressed in early College Catalogs. World War II and the change in student body contributed to a further decline in Christian conservativism at the college.

Largely, North Central’s behavior and reaction to World War II aligns well with existing research. College campuses were forced to adapt to a shifting student body as less traditional students were introduced to campuses nationwide. The college student “identity” was forced to reform; the composition of the student body was more difficult to define, especially in ways comparable to those printed in early College Catalogs which loudly refer to the Christian nature of North Central students. Although the exact transition in college social life across the nation cannot yet be mapped, trends identify World War II as a liberating force. The North Central experience is indicative of many more universal phenomena such as increased enrollment, social protest during the 1940s, a recall to religious emphasis in the 1950s and a final realization that religion would not regain position as the ultimate authority on campuses during the late-1950s, early-1960s.

The significance of understanding movements on American college campuses and, perhaps, more importantly, understanding the effects of war on college social life rest on the inherent connection to the larger population. Hoge, Luna and Miller highlight the importance of

Sociologists gain some knowledge of social change in America, since college students are one of the population groups introducing much cultural change. Yankelovich (1974) argues that college students are a kind of forerunner group for innovation, and that the basic pattern of cultural change in America is diffusion from college students to other young people and then to the total population.\textsuperscript{75}

Understanding America’s young people and the motivations for their behavior can tell historians a lot about the population at large. “What is less readily apparent, perhaps, is how profoundly the war changed America--its society, its politics, and (as Archibald MacLeish hoped) its image of itself.”\textsuperscript{76} Curiosity about the ramifications of war transcends generations yet little conclusive research exists regarding the topic. Too many variables exist to concretely establish overarching generalizations but as small, independent research continues to contribute to an understanding of the issue, historians inch closer to understanding the whole picture. An analysis of North Central College’s dancing ban might seem interesting but unimportant at surface level. Extensive research, however, establishes a precedent demanding more research similar to that provided within this very analysis.

Research has firmly established that the pre-World War II dancing ban at North Central College and the struggle for its removal directly following the end of the war exemplifies a battle within collegiate culture between traditional religious constraints on student social life and the newly introduced war culture brought with the return to campus of students who served. Wider research confirms that North Central’s reaction to World War II is not an isolated experience and has occurred on other college campuses in America ultimately suggesting the potential of war to


foster a liberal social shift.

**Postscript: Social Dancing and the Struggle for Adequate Student Social Life**

Social dancing at North Central College has, since its implementation, certainly played a role in an ever-developing social program at the college. But, despite the long-lasting effort of the student body to gain the privilege, on-campus social dancing has diminished at North Central over the past two decades. After perusing North Central’s yearbook, *The Spectrum*, and scanning the North Central *Chronicle*, the last fifty years show a general trend. The late 1950s and the 1960s show a steadily increasing upward trend of social dancing on-campus. The 1970s show a period of brief decline followed by a strong increase throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Social dancing seems to have epitomized on-campus in 1995; “The College Union Activities Board (CUAB) held its most successful homecoming dance ever on Saturday, Oct. 22 . . . With attendance at the dance at approximately 600 people, conditions were crowded.” The 1990 *Spectrum* explains, “CUAB sponsors three major dances. Homecoming, Winter Carnival, and Spring Formal.” The 1985 *Spectrum*, however, also includes a Halloween Dance and includes a subsection entitled “Dance Fever.” Clearly, social dancing was paramount to a healthy social program at North Central College throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Since the mid-1990s, it seems the appeal of hosting social dances at North Central has diminished. A *Chronicle* article of October 31, 1997 highlighted one of the major issues facing large group gatherings stating, “there was only a limited supply of 450 tickets available to students” because the cost of renting a larger venue was too great. Policy for the homecoming dance has remained strikingly similar to this “capped attendance” format. The homecoming

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78 *Spectrum*, 1990, 94.
dance still restricts ticket sales, although North Central’s 2009 homecoming dance was held on-campus at Merner Fieldhouse which could have possibly helped improve attendance.

In 2007, North Central’s Black Student Association hosted the Ebony and Ivory Ball and was proud to report “60 people in total attendance” but also remarked, “last year, we had almost 100 people.” The number seems meek in comparison with the 1995 homecoming dance attendance report. The article continues, “The dance is comparable to Homecoming, in a sense, since it is a winter semi-formal.” It seems most social dancing on North Central’s campus is now sponsored by organizations other than CUAB, the organization originally charged with providing on-campus entertainment. “The report approved by the faculty called for a permanent governing body for all social activities to be known as the College Activities Board. The planned events each week included at least one activity of a cultural, athletic, and social nature which would appeal to a large segment of the college population.” So why the sudden decrease in on-campus social dancing? Why does the college seem ill-equipped to host successful on-campus dancing when it holds such a rich and important history? And why is social dancing important to North Central College?

For one, social dancing was used as a gauge of overall student satisfaction with the social program at North Central in the past (specifically, in 1946 when the dancing ban and lacking social program were used almost interchangeably); could it still act as a predictor of student perception of student social life? As the level of social dancing on campus diminishes, could this be an indicator of a lacking social program? There is evidence of student dissatisfaction with on-campus social life; goals set by student groups increasingly include improving “involvement in

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80 Kevin Stahr, “Homecoming Sells Out for Second Year; Students Upset” *Chronicle*, 4.
82 Ibid.
campus activities” as expressed by the Student Governing Association as early as 2003.84 A Chronicle article written November 2, 2001 reflects student opinion of student life;

Over my past four years being involved on campus, the one problem I have seen more consistently than any other is the burn out. Granted North Central is no Swarthmore as far as stress-inducing educational environments are concerned, but it has the strange ability to deplete students of extracurricular energy. Many have had much greater falls than I did.85

Even the college’s wellness center acknowledges student difficulty with squeezing in social time--“Between school, athletics, jobs, clubs and trying to fit in a social life, numerous students have a difficult time knowing how to cope with issues that come their way.”86 Evidently, the social program still needs attention at North Central College.

The college has taken steps to alleviate student stress as each student works to balance academics and social life. A September 18, 2009 Chronicle article reads,

One of the problems we’ve had with past programs is that they never fully merged academics with the student life . . . The core of our program is based upon some of the problems in the past. The core is to provide coherence, connectivity and foundation for the college life . . . coherence is meant to provide a program that is a link between academic issues and between what students are talking about within their lives . . . There shouldn’t be two parallel tracks of student life and academics.87

As the college discusses improvements, perhaps the institution would fare well by considering the type of social life offered at North Central as well.

The key to a truly developed social program is community. Providing participatory events on campus, such as social dancing, foster a sense of community. “A sense of community happens when people of similar backgrounds . . . with similar interests . . . see each other . . .

Homecoming and similar events are special, not necessarily because of a special effort on the

85 Mike Martens, “Both Ends” Chronicle, 3.
86 Nicole Schuebel, “Dyson Wellness Center Provides Counseling Services” Chronicle, 9.
part of hard-working people, but because that’s just the way it is.”  

The reason social dancing becomes a good predictor of satisfactory student social life is because it allows a glimpse of the level of community offered at an institution. The whole purpose of events like Homecoming are to inspire spirit and a sense of commonality among participants. Enhancing community would see implementation of more opportunity on campus for social participatory events such as the homecoming dance.

If lack of student venue is the greatest hindrance standing between students and large student gatherings, the college need only look towards the original purpose of the activities center on campus which can accommodate several hundred students. The 1957 Spectrum reads (regarding the Student Union located in the basement of Old Main), “Confusion . . . familiar voices . . . popular tunes . . . snacks . . . ping pong and T.V. The knotty pine booths, where students talk over last week’s game, finish up the day’s assignments, make their dates for the coming weekend, and discuss activities, policies, and ideas with other student and profs over a cup of coffee, line the walls of the snack room.”  

The original Harold and Eva White Activities Center was, similarly, intended as a student retreat, a place students could call their own. For decades now, WAC has housed an on-campus dining facility, The Cage, the North Central Bookstore, and the upper level has been used, almost exclusively, by reservation for those events hosted on campus requiring catering, multimedia presentations, etc. The appeal to students as a place to comfortably lounge and informally socialize has been removed. Instead, on-campus socializing takes place at other, smaller, venues such as the Boilerhouse which quickly fills leaving only limited seating in the evenings. Weekends at North Central College are often quiet.

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89 Spectrum, 1957, 32.
and many students travel home instead of remaining on campus, most likely due to lack of activity. “Finance Committee continues to push for more ideas for campus events as well as weekend programming.”90 A larger, more consistently welcoming facility equipped with basic furnishings typical of a student union (perhaps a kitchen, pool tables, food, etc.) and a more robust weekend line-up would more likely keep students on campus.

The overall appeal of North Central rests on its superior academics and its secure, small-college intimacy. Unfortunately, poor student social life keeps North Central from its full potential. Student programming somehow has not matched student desires. “I know the ‘cool’ thing to do isn’t to go to programs at North Central sponsored by RHA and CUAB,”91 but why are programs failing? As Viviana Kabbabe-Thompson, Director of Multicultural Affairs, remarked, “I don’t care if I don’t do a program every week . . . What I care about is that the programs that I do are helpful for students.”92 Perhaps the social calendar offered at North Central is attempting to plan too many small events, leaving an inadequate amount of planning and time for events that actually draw a large number of students out. Events should be participatory and diverse and, rather than offering small, similar events on campus each week or weekend, devoting time and publicity to a variety of events every few weeks might ensure students pointedly stay on campus for those events, such as Springfest hosted by CUAB each year.

CUAB is granted, approximately, 44% of Finance Committee’s available funds each term according to a 2005 reporting.93 Finance Committee’s available funds are sourced by student

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activity fees paid by each student as part of their tuition. In 2005, the amount allotted to CUAB for fall term was $45,203 to be spent on programs the board felt would appeal to the overall student body. But, as previous research has shown, student attendance at campus events is consistently an issue. Reworking the college social program to better suit the student body would ensure that less of this money is wasted on poorly attended programming. Current social programming resembles the following as reported in a October 19, 2007 Chronicle article:

“Planning for Homecoming is just the beginning for CUAB. There are many events to come such as Movie Night, where students will get to vote on the movie; Trivia Night; and Salsa Magic Night during week nine in which two instructors will be accompanying student participants.”

Perhaps the social needs of the entire student body are not being met; the North Central NOW reports, as of spring 2008, there are only approximately 15 students involved in CUAB. All other student organizations listed in the same issue have greater student involvement with the exception of the Roller Hockey Club which reports a student involvement of 14, and the Uncommon Life Movement which matches CUAB’s student involvement at 15 students. Resorting back to traditional forms of participatory programming, such as social dancing, and dedicating the time, planning and funding necessary might prove valuable and might reach a greater portion of the student population.

The importance of satisfying social programming to a healthy college career is paramount. Commentary about the college’s current social program has been comprised of, almost exclusively, student reporting. Student perception of student life at North Central College has been most extensively recorded in the student newspaper, the Chronicle, which has been the

94 Ibid.
96 “Building Communities Near and Far” North Central NOW: College Alumni News, Spring
foundation of this research. Although North Central has strived for years to provide students with a fulfilling social calendar, something is preventing success. Social dancing on campus provides more than music and exercise--social dancing provides the campus with a sense of community and allows students to participate in a social atmosphere, to physically and emotionally relax after weeks of stress-inducing academics. And, in conjunction with other improvements, a greater focus on social dancing could increase student satisfaction with the resulting social program. That is not to say that reintroducing social dancing to North Central’s campus will alleviate all problems affecting student social life, but, just as a lack of social dancing on campus indicated an unsatisfactory social program in 1946, it’s speaking to a lacking social program in 2010. A general knowledge of trends in North Central’s social program (granted via the Chronicle and Spectrum as they reveal the versatility and robustness of the social program as well as student reactions and opinions to the social program) recognizes that the 1960s and the 1980s seem to satisfy student social desires most adequately post-World War II. Community on campus seems to be well established during the 1960s and 1980s as students reflect on homecoming activities, freshman “initiation” rituals, nightlife, etc. Markedly, social dancing on campus increases throughout the 1960s and the 1980s. (Overall, the 1970s are marked by economic hardship at North Central College which might explain a decrease in student satisfaction with the social program and a decrease in on-campus social dancing during this period.) There is a correlation between student satisfaction with provided social life and the level of social dancing observed on campus which suggests further attention be paid to the possible importance of social dancing.

North Central, while providing outstanding academics, has habitually struggled to provide students with adequate social outlets. Without both components, students’ best interests
are not being served. The social program at North Central College merits further improvements so that student social life stands on par with North Central’s remarkable academics.
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