

A Compass Special Report:

Under the cover of darkness... co-ed visitation *is a fact of life*

by Yushawnda Thomas

It's 2 a.m. Saturday morning and Rachel is awakened by a loud banging on the door of an adjoining dorm room.

As she hugs her boyfriend who is sleeping beside her, Rachel hears a key slipping into her door. Someone tries to enter but the chain stops them. Then, a deep male voice says, "Ma'am, she has the door locked from the inside."

Rachel, in a panic now, shakes her boyfriend awake.

"It's campus police!" she whispers tersely. "They're doing a room check!"

Her boyfriend curses and jumps up from the bed. As the police began knocking impatiently at the door, he heads for the closet but Rachel jerks him towards the bed.

"Wait! Get under the bed," she whispers.

Her comforter is so long the dorm director doesn't notice him when she comes into the room and checks the closet John had been a breath away from moments before. When the director leaves, Rachel throws up a corner of her comforter and pulls her disheveled boyfriend from under the bed.

"I'm gonna kill my roommate for locking me out of my room," he says angrily.

Rachael and her boyfriend (not their real names) are among many ECSU students who routinely defy the campus restriction on co-ed visitation.

Although ECSU has outlawed co-ed visitation beyond the lobby of all dorms, the policy is not strictly enforced.

Doles Hall (men's dorm), for instance, is usually vacated by all chaperones by 11 p.m. and if the lobby is full, females can still enter the dorm through the side fire escape. The door is usually ajar and has no alarm.

Fire escapes at Hugh Cale, Wamack and Symera allow easy access to rooms for female visitors. These fire escapes are in constant use after dark for that purpose.

At Butler, women have two flights of stairs to choose from, whichever provides the quickest route to their destination. There is little chance they are seen going anywhere other than on the first floor.

Dorm directors, who are usually in their rooms with the doors shut, don't notice the illicit visitors.

Unlike the men's dorms, women's residence halls almost always have at least one overseer present, and are strict in enforcing the co-ed visitation policy.

Women are only allowed to have male visitors in the lobby. The female dorms are locked at 1:00 a.m. on weekdays and at 2 a.m. on weekends.

Bias and Mitchell-Lewis attempted to restrict male visitors by placing locks on the fire escape doors; nevertheless female residents kept removing the locks to allow male visitors entrance and exit. In October alarms were installed on all fire escape doors; now if the door is open the alarm sounds. Students say the presence of these alarms has slowed down nocturnal visits somewhat — although they still happen.

By the time a dorm director responds, the male visitor is usually in the room.

In the New Dorm, females prop open two fire escape doors so male visitors can enter. Entrance can also be gained through windows on the first floor. The TV/visitation room leads directly into the hallway, which allows access to the stairs and elevator. A booth at the front door is usually occupied by either a resident advisor or the dorm manager; the booth does not allow the occupant to see inside the TV room, however.

The Complex, ranging from A to G, is a housing unit which enables men and women to have a room to themselves with minimum supervision. Co-ed visitation goes on there all day, and occasionally, all night long. Only two directors are assigned to keep track of 200 students.

If the directors notice a pattern of co-ed visitation taking place, they will conduct "surprise" room searches — which are usually unsuccessful.

Students who are caught violating the policy must appear at a hearing conducted by a board of faculty members and students, according to Dr. Leon White, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

"The first time you are caught they have the option of sending you home for good," said Dr. Leon White. "But most likely you will be put on probation for a period of time ranging from one semester until the time you graduate."

For a second offense students can be put out of school for one semester or for up to an entire year, said White.

ECSU tends to be more lenient with first offenses but officials are more strict with those guilty of second infractions, he added.

Student observers say they are not aware of many cases in which students have been sent home for violating the

University's co-ed policy.

"People don't get caught that often," said one student. "They don't have enough dorm checks to catch people on a regular basis."

ECSU's co-ed visitation policy is designed to ensure the "safety and security" of students, according to Vice Chancellor White.

"We don't want co-ed visitation," he stated. "It leads to too many other problems involving female safety — including rape and assault."

White also said co-ed visitation could cause relationships to deteriorate between men and women on campus.

"Men are very close to not respecting women," he said.

ECSU students interviewed by *The Compass* say they oppose the campus restrictions on co-ed visitation. They see it as an unfair attempt to impose, unwanted old-fashioned values on them.

"I didn't come to school to be treated like a child," said one ECSU junior. "Why should I have the freedom at home, but not at this University?"

"We can make our own decisions," said another student. "We pay the rent; we ought to be able to do what we want in our rooms."

Still other students said they didn't have to sneak around to visit members of the opposite sex.

"Your parents sent you to college to grow up and mature and become a responsible adult and then you've got to sneak around to go get your groove on. Come on."

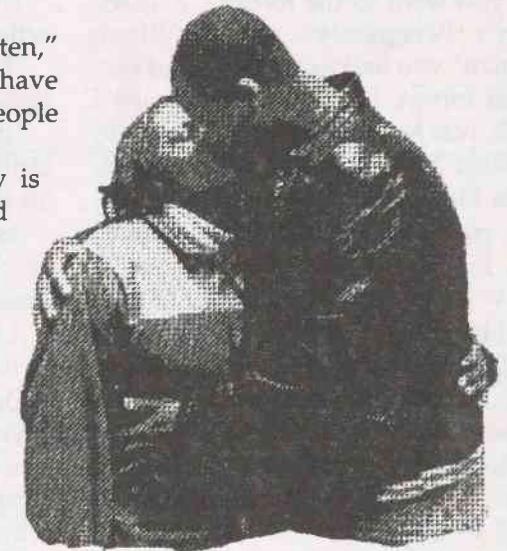
Still other students disagreed with the idea of the University's placing restrictions on their behavior and protecting their safety.

"We are about to go out into the real world, what are they protecting us from?"

"I get locked in the dorm at one o'clock — locked in like an animal," complained one junior. "I'm not trapped like that at home."

Many students protested having to live with a policy that is not effectively enforced.

"The school needs to make one of two decisions: either we have co-ed visitation or we don't. If they decide to strike it, we need to have cameras on the doors, staff members sitting at the front desk, our suite keys need to fit the front doors, and they need to put a booth on this end of campus (New



Dorm). Laws aren't worth anything if there isn't anyone to enforce them." says Valerie Bouldon, president of the New Residence Hall.

Students also object to having family members stopped at the door when trying to visit.

"Why is it that you think that every time a male and female get together all they can do, or all they have to do, is have sexual intercourse?" said Bouldon. "I need to be able to study with men and I have male friends. I have a brother who is not allowed to come into my room. We have things that don't need to be discussed in the lobby or the TV room."

The UNC System has no overall policy on co-ed visitation, according to Joni Worthington, UNC System Director of Communications. "The decision is left to the institutional board of trustees. Under the board policies, co-ed visitation is handled and approved."

Several schools in the UNC System allow co-ed visitation. They include North Carolina State University and A&T University.

Students feel that the University has no way of stopping illicit visitations no matter how hard they try.

"If people want to visit co-ed then there is really nothing that the University can do about it unless they post guards at the door every night."

One ECSU official admitted that the campus co-ed visitation policy will eventually be phased out.

"We're looking at about two years before the policy on co-ed visitation is changed," said the official.

When informed of the upcoming plans for ECSU, one student felt methodized visiting would bring an end to the excitement. "Once we get co-ed visitation, all the fun is going to be gone."