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## Closeted/Out (re)collects a century of stories from UC's LGBTQ history

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*Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles*, an exhibition held at the Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, documents and showcases once-neglected historical narratives from the University of Chicago's LGBTQ community. Presented by the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, this exhibition not only chronologically catalogs key events that shaped the University's queer past, but also explores the lives of individuals past and present.

Some of the oldest documents collected in this exhibition address female homosexuality in the early twentieth century, including photographs and love letters from the personal collection of Dean of Women Marion Talbot, Assistant Dean of Women Sophonisba Breckinridge, and Dean of the School of Social Service Administration Edith Abbott. Newspaper clippings publicizing the dismissal of two male instructors, Cecil Smith and Paul Goodman, are also displayed, underscoring the professional obstacles that LGBTQ individuals faced in the university and beyond in the first half of the twentieth century.

The exhibition also traces the development of Hyde Park's first LGBTQ organizations. The Chicago Gay Liberation Front was formed in 1969 and created spaces for gay people to interact for the first documented time in the history of the University. In an effort to increase the community's visibility on campus, it was renamed the Gay and Lesbian Alliance in 1978, and renamed again in 1995 to Queers and Associates—a watershed recognition of the shifting vocabulary of non-heterosexual communities.

One of the more harrowing episodes documented by the exhibition was the harassment that targeted LGBTQ students at the height of the AIDS crisis. In 1987, several students at the *Midway Review*, then a conservative student newspaper, founded The Great White Brotherhood of the Iron Fist. The Brotherhood sent a series of threatening letters to queer students, as well as their families and employers, as part of their “dragging-out party,” outing students against their wills.

Despite these distressing events, the exhibition also documents positive moments for LGBTQ communities from the university's role as a birthplace of the academic study of sexuality to more contemporary developments, such as the establishment of the 5710 Diversity Center on South Woodlawn Avenue and the robust growth of queer communities and support groups on campus.

While the collection of documents and artifacts were engrossing, it was the recorded interviews with alumni, faculty, and staff—available on iPads stationed throughout the exhibit—that brought *Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles* to life. Ninety-six oral histories have been collected and made accessible to visitors, bringing a deeply personal dimension to the exhibition. Be they heartrending or triumphant, these stories encapsulate the sentiments of people who made and wrote the university's queer history.

*Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles* is a resounding success in all respects: It thoroughly documents queer histories at the University, giving visibility to a community whose stories were once disregarded, as well as offering Chicago-centric context to the still-evolving gay rights movement. By giving voice to the marginalized, LGBTQ individuals who attended or worked at the University finally have the opportunity to reclaim their own histories.

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