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Coming Out On Display

Jim McKinnon
University of Dayton, jmckinnon1@udayton.edu

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Coming Out On Display

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Sunday October 1, 2023

By Jim McKinnon

On October 11, the University of Dayton community will celebrate National Coming Out Day for the 30th time. The University Libraries are marking the occasion with a display on Roesch Library's first floor for LGBT History Month (October) highlighting UD's support of the LGBTQ+ community.

The Importance of National Coming Out Day

First celebrated in 1988 to mark the first anniversary of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, the annual Oct. 11 commemoration is a reminder that one of the LGBTQ+ community's most basic and powerful tools in the quest for equality, inclusion and justice is visibility — coming out.

Coming out to family and friends should be easy, right? That's not always the case. Many LGBTQ+ people don't feel comfortable coming out. They may feel like their family and friends won't be supportive or understanding, or they may be afraid of alienating others.

Many people feel alone in their struggle to come out — yet often, the internal struggle is more traumatic than family and friends’ reactions. UD is doing what it can to help those struggling with the coming out process.

In 1994, the University joined 125 other universities to celebrate National Coming Out Day on campus for the first time. Since then, it has been celebrated each year; in 2022, LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff and allies including President Eric Spina convened for a group photo.



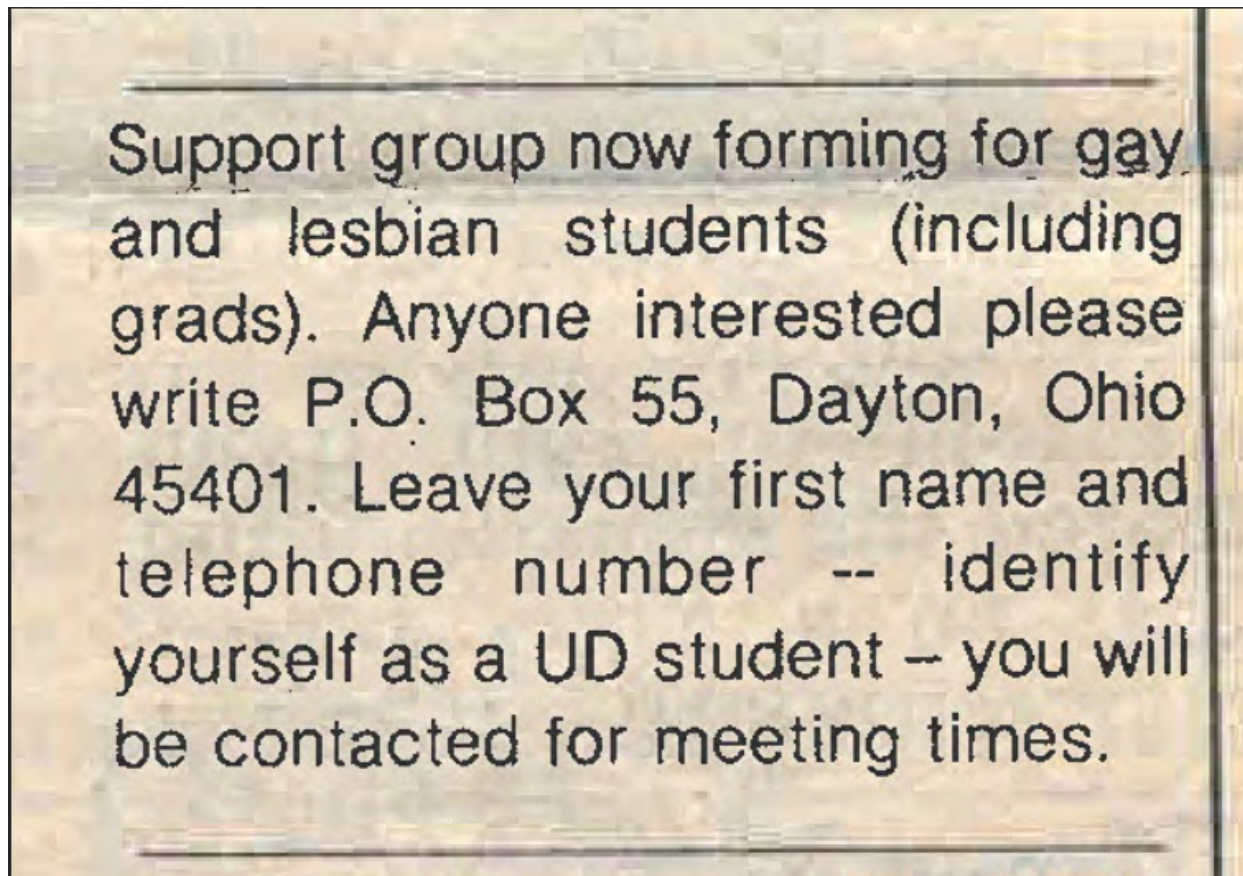
October 11, 2022 — The first University sponsored National Coming Out Day photo for students, faculty and staff

As an archivist here at UD, I’m trying to collect stories of our LGBTQ+ community, both past and present. Here, I provide some context and share some moments in UD history I’ve found by using archival collections such as *Flyer News* and University documents.

‘Flyer News’ Ad, 1988

Prior to 1988, no support group existed on campus for lesbian or gay students. In January 1988, a small classified ad in the *Flyer News* shared information about a new LGBT support group, providing no group name, contact information, location or meeting time – only a P.O. Box. If anyone wanted to be a part of the group, they had to mail in their name and contact information to receive instructions. It seems so archaic, so secretive, like an underground society of sorts, but the University did not yet formally support LGBT students. One potential reason for the secrecy was fear: In 1988, the AIDS epidemic took 32,399 lives; that’s an average of 88.76 lives *per day*. While not every gay man had AIDS or even HIV, gay men were shunned, and people routinely made assumptions about their disease status. Being

gay or lesbian in the 1980s was not always safe; those starting the campus support group and those who attended the meetings could have feared assault or harassment had the group been more public.



Classified Ad from Flyer News, Thursday, Jan. 21, 1988

BGLAD, 1993

I have been corresponding with a UD alumnus, Bill Bobowicz ('95, '97), to learn more about his experiences as a student at UD. In 1993, after returning from the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, Bill recalls feeling motivated and wanted to do something for the gay community at UD. He told me that he had a conversation with longtime campus minister Father Jim Russell, S.M., about forming a new support group on campus. Father Jim was supportive, so he, Bill and a few other students began meeting and planning. BGLAD, short for Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians at Dayton, was then formed as the first University-sponsored campus group to support the gay and lesbian community.

SGA Resolution, 2014

The University has made great strides in making sure all students are accepted for who they are and feel safe on campus. In 2014, the Student Government Association issued Resolution: SR 1314-12, which called upon the University to (1) hire a full-time faculty coordinator whose sole responsibility was to facilitate and promote LGBT services and

programs on campus; (2) form a task force to investigate the campus climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and make recommendations on how to improve the climate for these students; and (3) remain apprised of the above-mentioned requests and remain committed to achieving these goals.

'In the Family Spirit,' 2022

The University has committed greater support to LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff since the 2014 resolution. In 2022, the University released a statement, "[In the Family Spirit](#)" — the University of Dayton framework for LGBTQ+ policies, practices and communication. The statement opens with:

It is important for the University to formally articulate its philosophy of why and how we support our LGBTQ+ community. Our approach is grounded in our Catholic, Marianist mission — which includes honoring the intrinsic value of all people and fostering a community where all people feel respected as children of God. This rationale stems from our mission as a university where rigorous intellectual inquiry and vigorous dialogue occur.

Your Story, Today

University Archives would love to hear from you, whether you're a member of the LGBTQ+ community or an ally, to learn more about your experience at UD. If you have any material you wish to donate to the archives, we would love to talk to you. You may have flyers or notes from a BGLAD meeting or photos of yourself and friends on campus — they're important to us. Our hope is to eventually have a larger exhibit, complete with a timeline and memorabilia documenting the LGBTQ+ experience at UD. Please reach out to me at archives@udayton.edu or 937-229-4267.



UD catering provided rainbow-colored cookies for National Coming Out Day, Oct. 11, 2022

Read and view more:

- Read coverage of the 1988 [March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation](#) in an article in *The New York Times* (Note: if you're a current UD student or a member of the faculty or staff, you can [subscribe to the New York Times for free](#)).
- To see more about LGBTQ+ history at UD, visit the display case off the first-floor lobby of Roesch Library near the leisure reading section, through October 31.

— *Jim McKinnon is the associate University archivist in University Archives and Special Collections.*