

Speaking Up: Forming Alliances to Preserve Local Queer History

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Abstract: When assembling a narrative of the LGBT history of Central Illinois, the corresponding archival holdings within the University of Illinois Archives and the Champaign County Historical Archives were sparse. The mid to late 70's were documented thoroughly, but the 80's, 90's, and 2000's have many groups of years that do not have a single document. While the hope is that these documents exist and will eventually make their way into the archives, it is important to Champaign County that an effort be made to ensure at least partial coverage exists. The UP Center, an LGBT resource center serving Champaign County, formed a partnership with the Champaign County Historical Archives to begin an oral history project. In addition to filling in gaps that exist within the preserved documents, much of the information gained has caused for the records that do exist to be reexamined under a different context. For example, when looking at student records, each Registered Student Organization (RSO) is required to submit paperwork declaring the mission of the group as well as listing a minimum of two members including a president. Traditionally, president is a position of power or leadership with the candidate being chosen by their peers. In the early years of the Gay Task Force at the University of Illinois, however, the president was simply a member of the group that was willing to have their name on a piece of paper that effectively labeled them as non-heterosexual. By covering new events, providing context to existing documentation, and increasing the personalized and emotional content of these social movements, the twelve interviews (and counting) are a crucial piece of preserving this rich history.

About the author:

Lucas McKeever is a recent graduate of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. For the past year and a half, Lucas has been working with the Uniting Pride Center (<http://unitingpride.org>), the LGBT resource center of Champaign County in central Illinois. He has been working with the Champaign County Historical Archives to ensure preservation of organizational documents as well as larger community LGBT history. In addition to conducting an oral history project on the queer history of Champaign County, Lucas has set up a LibraryThing.com account (http://www.librarything.com/profile/Champaign_UP_Center) for the center's circulating collection, initiated and facilitated a social/support group for individuals to discuss the intersections of sexuality and disability

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/accessupgroup/>), helped coordinate and plan large annual events (<http://unitingpride.org/events>), supervised undergraduate interns, and worked in an administrative capacity for basic day-to-day operations of the organization.