

*Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles:  
A History of LGBTQ Life at the University of Chicago*

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW #30**

**HOWARD, JEFFREY (1979-) STAFF**

*At U of C: 2008-2015*

*Interviewed: May 7, 2013*

*Interviewer: Amanda Bennett*

*Transcript by: Lauren Stokes*

*Length: 2 parts, 56:08 and 2:49*

**Interview May 7, 2013 with Jeffrey Howard at the University of Chicago.**

[00:00:00]

AB: So the office, does the office have an official stance on “queer.”

JH: No. If people want to use queer, that’s fine. [AB: OK, because I know like Queers and Associates...] Yeah, no, I use it all the time here. I just don’t use it personally.

AB: I know when my parents came and were at orientation, I know they saw the LGBTQ booth, and they came over to it, I wasn’t really out to them, but my sister might have mentioned it in like a manipulative sister thing, but they came over and they were like “Do you know what the Q stands for? It stands for Queer...”

JH: Yes. I get that a lot. Or sometimes with the parents, they’re like “Oh, it stands for questioning,” I’m like “Mm-hmm!” [laughter] “It is!” I mean, it can be either, but I’ll tell them, , no, we use it as Queer, that’s not Questioning, but it could stand for that too, and I have a lot, there’s actually a lot of parents that come over like “What is LGBTQ?” and I start explaining it to them, after I get past gay they’re like “Ohhhh, thank you,” and they shuffle off very quickly. [Laughter] I’m like, okay... I notice that more with international students than with other students, and you have the parents who are like the PFLAG mom who comes up, and they’re so excited, yeah...

AB: Yeah, no, I’m from a small town, and my parents are conservative, so it’s definitely... yeah.

JH: Even some of those, the PFLAG parents, they don’t know what the Q is, Queer, so...

AB: Interesting. Do you deal a lot with parents?

JH: Just during orientation. Maybe in the five years I’ve had two, maybe three parents that have reached out to me for current students. We get a lot of questions through admissions,

especially from parents whose high school students are trans, then I'll get more questions, although if my mom did that to me when I was an undergrad, I would be mortified.

AB: Yeah. And do prospective students reach out to you directly, too?

JH: Yeah. I do get a lot of, especially around April, when people are trying to make their decision of whether or not they're going to come here, I will get a lot of questions, yeah.

AB: Great. We can move on, then. So years at Chicago?

JH: Five.

AB: Five, okay. Degree, I guess that's not really...

JH: Yeah, I don't have a degree from here.

AB: Current occupation is also obvious, relationship status?

JH: Single.

AB: It's so awkward to ask these right at the beginning of the interview, and then affiliations is like for alumni who are affiliated with activist groups or something.

JH: No.

AB: OK, awesome.

[END 00:02:49]

[START 00:00:00]

AB: So before we talk about Chicago, I worry that we're going to miss important information about you, so if you wanted to start by talking about your own college experience, or wherever you want to start, wherever your story begins.

JH: Well, my original story does not have anything to do with the University of Chicago, so I don't know how helpful that is...

AB: That's fine. We're interested in knowing about you too, as a person, so.

JH: Can we come back to this question? Because I don't really know what I want to say, it seems awkward.

AB: Yeah, it always is! So how did you end up here, at the University of Chicago?

JH: Okay, well this kind of all ties together. So I went to, I did my undergraduate degree at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. It is a school that's affiliated with the Reformed Church of America, it's Dutch Reform, somewhat conservative. I came out my sophomore year. That was 1999, so this was a while back, and that was at a time when, you know, coming out meant that you could... I'm just going to skip that part.

So the college wasn't extremely accepting, so I actually ended up leaving there, because I didn't feel comfortable being there. I went somewhere else to study photography for a year and a half. I went to a school called Andrews University, which is Seventh Day Adventist, which is actually worse, but I didn't have to live on their campus, so it kind of, it was a bit of a trade off. Eventually I did end up going back to Hope when I finished out that year and a half and when I went back to Hope I decided that I was going to change things, so I formed a Gay-Straight Alliance, which, that was a new concept back then, and most schools didn't have something like that. I met with a lot of resistance from administrators, it got a lot of press nationally for them denying it to us. I was also president of our LGBT Student Union, but that wasn't officially recognized because we kept it only to LGBT-identified members. If it was recognized by the school, which it wouldn't have been, but should it be recognized, we would have to make it open to everybody, so there were so many students that weren't out at the time, that's not something that we wanted, so that's why I formed the GSA, because that was an appropriate group for allies. So the experience wasn't super great.

The administration was very conservative, the faculty were awesome, the other students were amazing, but I remember being really frustrated because at Hope folks in the administration, staff members really, even faculty to a certain extent weren't allowed to be out, so I didn't have anybody necessarily that I could go to. I had a lot of conversations with the Dean of Students there and he actually was the person that recommended that I think about going into student affairs. So I kind of kept that in the back of my head, and I moved to Chicago right after that, and I worked—my undergrad degree is in communications, and my minor is in history—and I decided to work in marketing when I moved to Chicago just to see if that was something that would make me happy if I could do this, then I don't have to spend a ton more money on grad school, if I don't like it then I'm going to go back to grad school and see what it is I want to do.

So after about four and a half years I worked for the Chicago Transit Authority in their marketing department, I decided that I wanted to go back to school and it was actually either urban planning or student affairs, higher ed student affairs, and I decided that I was going to go into higher ed student affairs, so I went to Loyola University here in Chicago, they have one of the best programs in the country for student affairs, so I went there, and one of the reasons why I decided to do that was I wanted to be an out person at whatever school that I ended up at, whatever university, so that a student that was in my position when I was in college had somebody they could go to. I had absolutely no intention, or never thought I would be in a place to do what I'm doing now. I wasn't going to go into LGBT work, I wasn't going to go into diversity work, that wasn't what I was necessarily interested in, I was more interested in broader campus life and student activities and advising. That's where my intentions, that's what I was hoping to do. I was actually

working at Loyola for about a year in their marketing department and then I left, I just quit so I could finish my degree, and about three months afterwards the job was sent to me by Celia Bergman who's the Dean of Students for the School of Social Service Administration. She had taught some courses at Loyola and I'd taken some courses from her and she knew that this was at least an area of interest of mine. I did do a lot of research when it came to this, this was kind of my area of focus even though I had no intention of going into this work. So I applied for the job, I used the Loyola network because my boss is actually a Loyola graduate from the same program and so was Celia, and there's actually quite a few of us here on campus, and I ended up with the job and it actually worked out really well.

The first two years—so this is a brand new office, and it started in 2008, more or less when I started, and it was great, for the first two years it was part-time, so while I was finishing up my graduate work I was part-time here, and that worked out really well and when I graduated, shortly thereafter the position went full-time so that's how I ended up here.

[00:06:03]

AB: Nice. And though you said you didn't want to go into it, are you happy that you ended up here?

JH: I've enjoyed the opportunity to build an office from the ground up. I have really enjoyed my time here. I've enjoyed working with students, I've enjoyed working with faculty and staff and so many wonderful community partners. I mean, I get frustrated a lot. Diversity work is, it's challenging, so I think after about five years I'm starting to wear down a lot, so. But I'm proud of what we've managed to do in five years and it's been a really good experience. When I do eventually leave, cause I will not stay here forever, but I'll walk away and I'll be very proud of what we've accomplished and I'll look back at this as a great experience. Did that answer your question?

AB: Yeah. So what was the situation like when you got here for gay students on campus?

JH: Actually, it really wasn't that bad. So the university already had sexual orientation and gender identity in its non-discrimination policy, which is great, so that's one of those challenging things that a lot of schools are still facing. I know colleagues all over this city and they don't have that yet. And then we also, the university, this was the first major institution to offer domestic partner benefits. That was back in 1992. So we had a lot of things that were already in place. We had the policies in place and we had some of the benefits pieces in place, so it was a good situation to walk into.

And part of the reason why this office was founded, too, I should say, was back in 2003, 2004, when the initial diversity statement was made by the president and the provost at the time, they left out the LGBT community. They talked about diversity, and it's visible diversity, and I have actually found that that is, when you talk about diversity at this institution, it's generally not talking about LGBT students. It's talking about visibility you

can see, like spiritual diversity, or students of color, that's where the focus is, and that's one of my many frustrations, is that it doesn't always include the LGBT community. It's better now than it was, and part of that is because, I'm assuming, it wasn't an office or a presence on campus.

But anyway, going back to that statement, so LGBT students, rightfully so, got very upset that they were excluded from this and it's interesting, this is a very U of C thing, depending on who you ask, I say they were excluded. Ignorance does not forgive somebody for leaving a group out. I'm sorry, it doesn't, so they were excluded. If you ask other people, they were not explicitly mentioned. That's bullshit. I'm sorry, that's complete bullshit. I swear a lot, so... [AB: That's alright, that's totally fine.] I don't agree with that at all. I'm sorry, just, you exclude a group, you exclude a group, okay? Let's just call it what it is. So they did a report. It came out in 2004 and said here are the things that LGBT students need...

AB: Who did the report?

JH: It was Campus and Student Life. Back then it was called VPDOS, Vice President and Dean of Students, it was a really weird... what Campus and Student Life is now. So they did the report with students, they had a student task force and they had a few staff members, so they went through and looked at it, and there were things in there, like recommendations like having a center, having a staff member, having programming, having gender neutral restrooms included in all of the remodelings, things like that... outreach to Admissions, more Admissions outreach to LGBT students. Everything that's been in the report has been done, so we're in good shape there, but, so that was already, I already had this framework when I came in to kind of see where we needed to go with it.

So that was in place, there were a couple of student interns, so as a result of this they, even though they didn't have a full-time or a part-time professional staff member, they had student interns that were doing some programming. So they were already here, so when the office started they were, that was a position that was kind of folded into it, so that was one less thing to worry about, and there were already a few programs here and there, so there was, there's a welcome back reception which has been around for—was this year the 21<sup>st</sup> year?—so that's been going on for a very, very long time, and there was an end of the year barbeque that had been going on for a few years even before the office started. So there were things like that, that were happening, that all kind of came into the office. The year prior to the office starting up Queers and Associates started a graduation ceremony, so they gave that to us when the office came online, so that was something that we inherited. And then we have discussion groups in the office. We call them Q Groups, we're constantly trying to figure out what exactly they are supposed to be. They were... [AB: I've been to one of those, yeah.] OK. So they're interesting because they were formed at a time when there was nothing else on campus for LGBT students, so they formed these groups

AB: Were they started by the office?

JH: They were started, they came out of this recommendation, this report, and they were basically put into place for something for students to, someplace for students to go in the absence of an office. Now we have an office, so now we struggle with those groups because they were created at a time when the need was very different. So some of the groups now don't really have a whole lot of people going to them, so we're constantly trying to figure out where we go with them. Which one have you been to?

AB: I've been to the... QWORUM.

JH: QWORUM. OK, that's one of the more popular groups, so...

AB: Yeah, I know there used to be a Bi one but it's not happening this year.

JH: No, we changed it. So what we found over like the last four years was that very few people were actually going to that group, and they were going to the other two groups, so we made them, tried to make them a little bit more inclusive, so Bi Queer Lesbian women and Bi Queer Gay men, so trying to, because people weren't just going to this one meeting, I think you can have the same conversations in a larger group, so yeah, that one's gone. If there were enough people that wanted to do it, we would bring it back, but that's where we got... so those were the things that were in place.

AB: Do you know who started the...

JH: Oh, and there was a mentoring program. The LGBT mentoring program has been around since 2002? 2001? It's been around for a while, and that was started by Kathy Forde and another gentleman whose name I can't remember, but he's no longer here.

AB: OK. Do you know who started the welcome back reception?

JH: I don't. That might be a question for Kathy Forde. I know she was actually doing some of the programming, so the College kind of picked up some of the slack too, so the Mentoring Program was doing programming before the office as well. If she's not on your list of people to interview she should definitely, definitely be on your list. And Bill Michael, because he's actually the Executive Director of the Logan, but he at the time was, he's the guy that did the report. He used to be in Campus and Student Life. He, so he was kind of responsible for the student interns and overseeing the LGBT pieces, so he would be a very important person, and he's actually partially responsible for, in large part responsible for A) the office and B) the space, 5710, so.

AB: Yeah, I love the space.

JH: Yeah, so that's all him.

[00:14:33]

AB: OK, cool. So yeah, so you got here, there were these programs in place, and did you have any goals in mind, where to go forward?

JH: It was building the office, so trying to establish programs, trying to build a brand identity, you know, my marketing is always there. Really it's just been focusing on getting the office established. So now we're pretty well established but you know we did new things, like we had an orientation program. We've been doing more social activities, that's something that's changed over the last five years. When we tried to do it the first year nobody wanted to do anything social so that's been a huge change.

We did, one of the first things that I brought in was anonymous rapid HIV testing. What was happening was students would go to the student care center, or whatever it's called now, it was the Student Care Center back then, but you could go there to get your HIV testing, right? But you couldn't get the results the same day and what was happening was when the results were available, whoever from SCC was calling people, leaving messages on their Voice Mail. This was probably back in the time when you know people had answering machines, saying "Oh we have your HIV test results in, you can come in and get them." You know, people don't want everyone knowing that if they have a roommate or something, that's a problem. So we brought in folks to do that, so that's something we've had quite a few people, several hundred have been tested since we started, so that was pretty cool. Did that answer your question? [AB: Yeah, yeah, sure!] I don't even remember what the question was.

AB: Just like, I guess, your goals when you started, and...

JH: Yeah. So it was establishing the office and trying to build up relationships with various offices and trying to get us a foothold.

AB: Yeah. So I thought that this office was mostly undergrad, but I've talked to grad students who use it too, so how has it been balancing, trying to relate to all aspects of the University?

JH: It's a challenge. This is actually, so this office serves all of the students in the University, I mean, that's Booth, SSA, Pritzker, everywhere. Not many offices have that scope, I mean, even OMSA, they don't serve students in the Medical School or at Booth because they have their own separate offices, but we do. So it's a challenge, I'm the only staff member, so, you know. We have probably about fifteen to twenty percent of our student population identifies as LGBTQ, which is huge, and we get that figure from incoming, we use the incoming college students... you do a survey during Orientation and we ask all the questions, and that's where that comes from. So that's... it's been a huge challenge, I mean, the resources are stretched pretty thin.

There were graduate events, mixers, going on, so we picked that up too and we just expanded that, used the space more, because it wasn't available, and we have, it's interesting. The graduate students are more likely to come out to events than the undergrads, and the way, to a certain extent it's been explained to me, is that if you're an

undergrad you want to go to events that your friends are putting on, and you want to support them, so they're less likely to come to an office event, cause there's such a strong network already within the undergrads. The graduate students are so spread out across the institution, so this is more of a centralization point for them, so they can come together, and we're doing the events, and they can meet one another from across the divisions and schools. Plus they don't want to have somebody, they don't want to organize things quite as much either. In some ways they're busier, or they don't live in, a lot of people don't live in Hyde Park, so I think it makes it more of a challenge.

AB: So how do you work with student groups like Q and A or OutLaw or...

JH: Informal advising, whatever they need, it kind of depends from year to year. I'm happy to order things for student organizations and just have them reimburse me. I know ORCSA, in the past, was a challenge, especially for Q and A, trying to get things done, so we kind of tried to step in and make it easier for them.

All of the student organizations on campus have a seat on the LGBT Advisory Board. I started that I think my second year and part of the reason why I wanted to do that was to bring all these groups together in one room so they could see what it is each other is doing. When I started here there were three events related to, for the LGBT community on the same night, and there's only so many people that are going to go to these events, right, so you can't, we needed to be a little bit more, we needed to be talking to one another, so that's part of the reason why we do that. Plus it also helps me keep pulse on what's going on in all the different areas. They're all very different. [AB: Yeah.] And we've had representation from every single different professional school and some of the divisions, so that's been great. I mean, when I have a Booth student on my board that makes me really happy. And Pritzker, they've been consistent.

AB: Awesome. Yeah, I heard about the board because I talked to Nebula Li last week, so I didn't even know it existed. [JH: Yeah, she's awesome.] Yeah, she is. OK, let's see, I had other things to ask, but I'm trying to remember them. So is that essentially what you've done, are there other things that you've done since you've been here that you want to mention?

JH: So all the programs, I mean everything, all the educational programs. Oh wow, what do we do? We've done things such as we've participated in the AIDS Run Walk, we've raised several thousand dollars for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, we did the HIV testing, we started having study breaks that we do jointly with OMSA. We do a graduate mixer now with OMSA, we collaborate a lot with them. We have expanded our resource collection by—we've probably doubled it since I've started. Since I've been here, open housing started right when I started, but it finally got expanded to first years to a certain extent so they can switch out after their first quarter. Our housing staff, they're amazing, so if somebody really needs an open housing assignment at the beginning of the year, they'll probably yell at me for saying this, but they will help people out if they need to on a case-by-case basis, but I was on the review committee for the first year, after the first year, after the pilot, I was on the review committee for that, so... I'm trying to think of



what else. Fortunately because the Counseling Center does the Coming Out support group, so that's something we don't have to worry about. College Student socials, that was something that didn't happen until a couple of years ago. That was something that came out of the advisory board, it came up and they asked and we did it, and it's been successful, so that's been a good thing. That's that shift, right, because we tried to do those the first year and it just failed, miserably, so...

AB: Do you know why that is?

JH: I don't know. I think, I don't think... there's been a big shift in the student population. Folks when I first started were less social than they are now. That's just how it is. [AB: That's what I've heard.] I think social is better, personally, you know, you can't spend your entire life in the Reg, right? I don't think that's healthy. So I'm trying to think what else we do. The mentoring program is actually now part of the office. It started in the College, and this past summer they transitioned it to us, so we have it, that's been exciting, I get to... we have our Cubs game coming up and I'm excited because we're actually selling the tickets this year instead of, and actually getting the money back so we can do something with it, so I'm excited about that. We started doing Orientation programming, I think I mentioned that already?

AB: Is that just like Queer 101, or?

JH: Yeah, Queer 101. So we are at all of the fairs, and there's a lot of them. There's one for undergrad, there's one for grad, each of the professional schools have their own, so it's a lot of bouncing around and the Welcome Back reception's a part of that. Actually we started a new, so, October is LGBT History Month and National Coming Out Day, so we started OUTober to kind of celebrate that, so we do a lot of programs in October, like ten to fifteen, so it's definitely the busiest month. Then after that it gets a lot calmer. So that's another newer thing. We started, a few years ago we did a Coming Out Stories project...

AB: Yeah, I talked to Daniel Gomez, too, and he mentioned...

JH: Yeah, so that was fun, and I'll go full credit, I stole that from Loyola, you know, I think it's great to hear other people's stories and I think it's helpful for people while they're coming out to see that not everything is horrible. So that was kind of a fun project which probably should, I'd like to pick that back up again. We pass out condoms at 5710 now. It's not quite as exciting, but, we give out several thousand condoms every year, so it's quite a lot, and credit for that goes to the Center on Halsted, they give those to us for free. [AB: That's awesome.] Yeah.

[00:25:34]

AB: Do you have a lot of partnerships with organizations outside the University?

JH: We have a decent amount. We've partnered with the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Affinity Community Services, Center on Halsted, those are the ones that I can think of off

the top of my head that we probably partner with the most. When I started here I actually started an informal group with all of the other LGBT offices, or people who work with LGBT students across the city, kind of building our own network, and we talk to each other all the time, so that's been kind of nice, even if it's just for drinks. So that's kind of like another informal collaborative piece, and we've collaborated with them in various ways. I know one of my very good friends is the director of the LGBT Center at NEIU, and this is their first year, and I know when we brought Keith Boykin in he kind of also snagged him for a discounted price, cheaper than what we got because he was already coming, but that's OK. So I steal ideas from him too.

And you know, one of the things that we started doing this year actually, so this office, we don't do trainings, I've been trying to get a safe space program up and running for three years now, and that's very frustrating because we don't have the staff to do it, and we don't have the funding to bring somebody in to do it, so that's been something that I've been pushing for for several years now. Hopefully next year? I don't know. We did a Trans 101 for staff and then we did a student one too, and the staff one, we had over forty people show up, from offices all over the University, so that's something that we will continue doing. That's a little cheaper to do than a safe space. That's expensive.

AB: It's like an official program?

JH: A safe space? Yeah. Both of them are going to become official programs. So we'll do the Trans 101 again in the fall, and hopefully that will be something that goes on every single year, because I think it's important.

AB: Yeah definitely. So that actually kind of, I was wondering how, it seems to me like a very difficult task to serve LGBT, like all of the acronyms and then whatever else you want to include, Q, I, whatever, so how do you and the office try to balance that?

JH: Actually, it's not been a challenge. I mean, the Advisory Board helps, so I know what it is people are interested in. We get feedback from folks all the time. Generally, I don't think we've ever had bad feedback from anything that we've done. If anything it's we want more of this. I think where the most challenging piece is isn't necessarily from students asking for things, it's from administrators, who are super excited that we're here, but they have this concept or notion of what they think we should be doing, and we're not like a safe space program. I mean, that's pretty standard at any other school. All of our peer institutions, all of the Chicago institutions, they all do it but us, so trying to do any sort of training, you know, a lot of offices offer training, but I'm only one person, and I'm already over-extended with what I'm doing, to take on training is not gonna, that's just gonna make the situation worse. Plus once you do it for one group, people are gonna find out and then everybody's going to want you to do one, which just, there's just no capacity for that. Even with the Trans 101 that we did for staff, we piloted it, and then we had folks coming up to us, their feelings were hurt, because we didn't include them, and we were trying to get it to a very small group of people to see if this was helpful or not before we opened it up to everyone else, so some feelings were hurt, and I had to explain

why we did this the way we did it, and you know, there are some folks that we'll bring into the next round, but that just shows that there's a lot of interest in this.

So that's been more of a challenge, and I'm on so many committees, and groups. I'm on the Bias Response Team, although I'm rolling off of that, which is kind of an extension of, I mean, if there's any sort of incident on campus that relates to the LGBT community, I know about it anyway or people are coming to me anyway for it, so we track all that, and it's not that much, so, I mean, it's not, this is a pretty good place. I was an Unlawful Harassment Complaints Advisor for a couple of years, so those keep you busy, and then whenever something does happen, we get pulled in, so it's a lot of meetings.

Does that answer your question? [AB: Yeah.] So it's not, it's not difficult serving all these populations, it's just a matter of time. And you know, when people are getting trained, that's also serving students too, because you have staff members now that can, that hopefully will be able to help and support students or, you know, have a better understanding and sensitivity, so that benefits everybody.

[00:31:35]

AB: Are there, I know some of the graduate students that I've talked to have complained about the lack of out professors at grad school. Is that, I don't know, how is that in the college, or on campus, do you find that there are a lot of adults who use the office at all?

JH: No. I mean, we're focused on, we're only focused on students. I've had a lot of staff members, even a few faculty members ask us about an LGBT faculty and staff group, but that's not something that's going to come out of the office. And again, that would be really awesome, I know people that would love that, so if you want to organize it, I'll help get the word out, but that's going to be where it lies, because I think people look at us and are like "Oh, there's the gay guy on campus, he can do everything," and I, if I barely have time for what I'm doing now, I'm surely not going to take on a staff piece, and that really needs to come probably from the Provost's Office, to get the faculty involved in it, and should be coming from them and HR. I mean, I would participate, but that's about it. If I had time. I mean, that's not something that's important to me, I don't need that, I didn't come here for that, so.

But I mean, there are people who are out, there are some faculty members that are very visibly out, and so I, that's great. I don't know to what extent students know about them, I think a lot of them they do already, like Kristen Schilt, who is another person you should interview, if somebody hasn't already, because she's awesome. So yeah, in staff, kind of hit and miss, you start to know who everybody is on campus, but there's more of a degree of outness with staff than with faculty, I think.

AB: Does that include for the staff like RHs and dorm people?

JH: Yeah, RHs. Anybody who's actually paid by the University and is not enrolled as a student unless they're taking like one class, I mean, that doesn't count, but...

AB: So how is it being like “the gay guy” on campus. I mean... [laughter]

JH: It's fine. I don't know, it doesn't really bother me, just... the only thing that kind of sometimes gets on my nerves is people will, they'll introduce me to somebody and then as soon as they go they just look at me and you want to know if they're part of this community or not, and yes, that's what it comes down to. So that sometimes kind of bugs me. Or people...

They'll ask for fashion advice. [Laughter] I'm like, “OK, well,” you know, and I call them out on it, I'm like alright, well, let's tokenize, you know, and if I know them really well I don't really care, I'm kind of poking fun at them, maybe that just comes with the territory, but I think in other situations it would be really bothersome. Sometimes it bothers me but not enough... stuff is gonna happen, that is such small stuff that I'm not gonna worry about that. I don't go home and I don't cry about it, it doesn't bother me, I'm just like “Ennnh” and then it's done. I've grown a pretty thick skin over time. Some people don't like it when you say that but it's kind of true. You're not going to function in society unless you kind of learn how to deal with stuff and just kind of let it roll off your back.

AB: Yeah, I guess, I'm trying to imagine what it would be like to have a job where you're kind of automatically outed just by announcing what you do.

JH: That's fine, that doesn't bother me at all, I don't care about that, I mean, I've been pretty out all my life, like since 19, so... I was on the Board of Directors for an LGBT community center in Grand Rapids, Michigan when I was 21, so that's pretty young, so I guess I'm just used to it? I don't care. Somebody's gotta do it. But again, I didn't set out to do this, this is just the job that I ended up with.

[00:36:32]

AB: Do you have any goals for the office of LGBTQ life before you leave? Besides the Safe Space, or the training?

JH: The trainings are really where I'm focused right now. We did the LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index that's put out by Campus Pride every year, so that's kind of the guide for how inclusive a school is, and we, so it's a five-star rating, five is the best, and even without themed housing and a safe space program and some other things, we still got a five, in fact we ended up in the top 25 LGBT-friendly schools in the country, which surprised me. I mean, I thought we would do pretty well, I didn't realize that we were going to be that far up, so that was kind of one of my goals, was to make us into one of the, I wanted us to be the example for other institutions, for other schools, and we are, faster than I thought we would be, so I'm pretty happy about that.

AB: I guess I was going to ask if you think UChicago is kind of typical of where we stand, but I guess that...

JH: Oh, this is a much better place than a lot of other schools. It may not feel that way, but it really is. I mean, we have a huge student population, LGBT student population, there are an awful lot, I mean, we do more programs than schools with semesters do, you know, so we're doing a lot more...

I think it helps that we're in Chicago, even though the neighborhoods are really far away from Hyde Park, I mean, I live in Andersonville, and I don't have a car, so that's a hike.

AB: Wow. Yeah, I have to go there to buy salsa shoes, because the only good dance supply store is up there, so...

JH: Yeah, I know where you're talking about, yeah... then that's a challenge, you know, we're trying to find ways to connect people better to the community, so we're going to start trying to do excursions.

AB: Yeah, I got an e-mail about the Andersonville one!

JH: That's our pilot. If it goes really well we'll expand it out, probably do Lakeview in the fall, Andersonville in the spring, and I don't know about winter yet, I haven't gotten that far, but since it's winter it's not quite as much fun.

AB: Yeah, people don't do things as much.

JH: We'll figure something out for that. I'm excited about that, that's going to be fun. And you know, I'm not complaining that it will be in Andersonville either. My GAs [?] has graciously volunteered to bring people back down to Hyde Park, so I'm like "Yes!" I'm excited about that, when people are out exploring the neighborhood I'm just going to sit in a coffee shop and drink my coffee. [AB: Which is your favorite coffee shop up there?] The Coffee Studio. I don't know if you've been there or not. [AB: Yeah, I really like it.] It's probably my favorite coffee shop in the city. I love Andersonville. I like it better than Boystown. I don't like Boystown.

AB: Yeah, I really like Andersonville as well.

JH: People are nice up there, people will, you'll walk down the street, and people will smile at you, they'll say hi to you, it's, there's a sense of community there that you don't have, I think, in Lakeview. People move in and out of Lakeview all the time, Andersonville is more established people, and people are, they look out for one another, it's like, I'd almost say it's like a small town [AB: Yeah, it definitely feels that way.] It feels that way, even though you're in a city, and you know you're in the city, but the way people interact with everybody else, it's really cool. Plus I love the puppet bike, which is, it's always there, and it makes me so happy.

AB: Yeah, I went to the farmer's market all the time this summer.

JH: Yeah, so it's right there. It's a great neighborhood. I mean, it really is, and it's becoming more and more gay, and I mean like gay men. [AB: Really?] It used to be the lesbian neighborhood and I don't know that I would really say that anymore.

AB: Because I'm the member of this Chicago lesbian Facebook group, or queer women, I guess, and whenever anyone posts I'm coming to Chicago, what neighborhood should I live in, everybody's like Andersonville, Andersonville!

[00:40:49]

JH: And I would say that, oh yeah, I would still say Andersonville. A lot of people are moving up to Rogers Park. I like Andersonville. But all of the lesbian bars in the city... and that's a challenge here, because as I'm sure you've seen, where are the women? Where are the queer women, right? Especially at things like our graduate mixers... that community is different than all the other ones. I mean, gay men are much more social in like a bar-type setting, and I think that's reflected in the larger community when you see all of the lesbian bars in the city have been closing because that's not how generally that community socializes. That's been hard to try and explain here because people just want to see numbers, and that's really frustrating because they don't get it. I don't always, even though I'm the content expert, I don't get to be the content expert because everybody thinks they know my job better than I do, or my community better than I do, when they're not a member of the community. That frustrates me.

AB: Do you have examples of that that you could share? [pause] It's okay, if you don't want to offend anyone that's fine!

JH: Just know that it's very numbers-focused, so it's very much, how many students of color showed up, how many women showed up, and break down the numbers. And I disagree with that, I don't think that's... I think it's good to take notice of that and make sure we're doing the proper outreach, but that should not be the only focus of what we're doing. Numbers aren't, numbers don't necessarily tell the full story, and I think some folks, that's their only thing, they only want to focus on those populations, and... anyway, I'm probably not explaining that very well, but I get very frustrated by that.

AB: How would you rather measure things, or how do you think that the impact is better gauged?

JH: I think it's not... quality over quantity. I really believe that. I mean, we had, when we had our Trans 101, for students there were only about a dozen people there, and I don't consider that a failure. Some people would think "Oh, you didn't have enough people, that's a really small program, it didn't work," but it was actually great because there were less people, the conversation was much better, and I think those folks that were there took more out of that program than somebody who was just, you know when you have thirty people in the room and they're not going to be able to ask questions. So it's different. You know, when we're doing social events it's nice to have good numbers.

It is important for me to make sure that the folks who are coming to our programs represent the overall student population and if I see that there are, let's say we don't have very many black students who are coming to our events, I pay attention to that, and try and do what we can to outreach to that student population, but I don't think saying "I have to have X number of these students here," I don't think that's the right approach personally.

If I ever leave this institution, interview me again, [Laughter] and I'll have all sorts of different things to tell you! I'll tell you what I really think...

AB: Yeah, some of the... I know Nebula was like "Do you want me to tell you the truth? Do you want me to tell you what I actually think?" and I was like "Yes, please do," but it's tough.

JH: Yeah, I would have very different answers for some of the... but that's, yeah...

AB: Alright, we'll talk to you again in the future. How is it working in Hyde Park, how do you think this neighborhood is for gay people or queer...

JH: I think it's a non-issue. And actually I think it's a non-issue on campus to a certain extent. I think a lot of students come here and they're ready to do something, and a lot of it's already done, and I think students, I think incoming students are kind of frustrated by that, they're like "No, we've got this and this and this and this and this and this," there's not really anything for you to do, and it doesn't seem to be, at least from what I've heard, now I only hear from a certain small portion of the community, but it just isn't something that comes up. I think people wish it would come up more, like in a classroom or whatever, however it's going to come up, they wish... does that make sense? [AB: Kind of.] I think they wish that there was something they could rally around. And there's not.

[00:46:03]

AB: Do you think it's actually a non-issue or do people just assume it's a non-issue?

JH: I think it's always an issue, but I mean it's, it's a non-issue in that there are policies in place and there are programs in place that other schools would be pushing for when we don't have to. One of the things that I've been doing for the last few years is co-chairing a work group that's looking at how can we be better and how can we support trans students more. Open housing, gender-neutral housing is one component of that, and we have one of the most awesome open housing policies of any school in this country [AB: That's awesome], one that applies to the entire housing system except for six houses that are same-sex for people who want to have that experience, and there's something to be, you know, I understand that, people may want that for the bonding or whatever it is. But that's a small portion of our housing system, so we have it all across there, but we've looked at things like preferred name policy, ID cards, trying to get preferred pronouns in the student systems, that'll be much, we're not there yet... we've looked at how students can put their preferred gender in the system, there's a lot of things that we've looked at.

We're going to roll out a preferred name next year, option. [AB: That's awesome] Yeah, I'm pretty excited about that, and you know, it's going to be a small roll-out, class rosters and a few places like that internally, then hopefully larger, like ID cards and start expanding it out further, but I'm pretty excited about that. That's another one of those things that I've been working on, one of those things that I wanted us to get to, so we're almost there.

AB: I was going to say, I know a couple of trans students who kind of complain that the office doesn't do enough, but I think that's probably because they don't see all of this that you're working on.

JH: And that's really frustrating, because we are working on things, but we're not necessarily allowed to share that we're working on things, and that's very much how this institution is. You can't say anything until everything is perfectly worked out, and so we're doing a lot of stuff on the back end that people just don't realize that we're doing and I get very frustrated because people are sharing things with me and they're expressing frustrations and I can't necessarily share what we're doing. That's finally getting to a point where we can start sharing things, but we've been looking at this stuff. I mean, that's been one of my primary focuses is trans students and making sure that we're a good institution for them, so I hope, I hope that wasn't recent, that you heard that.

AB: Kind of, at the beginning of this year, but yeah. [JH: Yeah.] I guess I asked the Hyde Park question because I just know my ex-girlfriend and I got harassed a couple of times, not by University people, but just by community people in Hyde Park. But I mean, that's something that's really... no matter where you are.

JH: Yeah, I mean, I've seen people harassed. I've been harassed in Boystown, on Halstead Street, I mean, it happens everywhere. That doesn't make it OK. It's been interesting being down here, though, because we get a lot of community members at our events because to a certain extent we're the largest organization down on the South Side. I mean, Affinity Community Services for sure, largest community organization, and they're amazing, I'm not trying to take anything away from them, but we're doing a lot more programming and things like that, so people come to our events. It's almost like we're the community center for the whole area. Sometimes it feels like it's for the entire South Side because I feel like that part of the city, this part of the city, is often overlooked by the LGBT community. They're so North Side focused.

AB: Which is funny, I remember in Out in Chicago some of the first gay bars were down here on the South Side.

JH: Yeah, and there are, I mean there is a gay bar on the South Side, the Jeffery Pub, but that's it. There's one on the West Side somewhere too, but I can't remember what it's called. It's just, you know, that's a challenge. I think if U of C were somewhere on the North Side, I think this office would do very different things, but since we don't have access to all of that, we are doing more than I think we would otherwise, more social



events, and more trying to get people connected with the community, where if they were already up there they wouldn't need that. So that is another challenge.

We started doing, actually, we started doing some of our graduate mixers at Downtown Bar and Lounge, downtown. The LGBT alumni network does their events there, we started doing events there because we have a lot of graduate students who don't live in Hyde Park, so trying to, as much as we can, reach out to them. I don't know if it's ever going to be possible to do a mixer in Boystown, because then we're getting really far from Hyde Park, and we do still have people who live in Hyde Park, so it's trying to strike a balance.

[00:52:01]

AB: Is there anything else that's very specific to the University of Chicago?

JH: It's an interesting place. The University has actually done a pretty good job with the LGBT community policy-wise and getting better for the trans, I mean overall the trans piece we're still working on, but...

I think the gay liberation movement started here, like the group started as a, I think an undergrad group here and then merged into the larger Chicago one and then it kinda merged with other... I don't know how that worked, but...

AB: Yeah, the old Maroon ads for like gay lib meetings are really cool.

JH: Yeah, I'm trying to think. I mean, the University hosted part of the Gay Games in 2006, that's pretty cool. I'm trying to think of what specifically about U of C is unique when it comes to this.

One thing I've noticed here—the faculty aren't as engaged outside of the classroom as in other places, and that's a challenge. The faculty here are very much “We don't need you, we are experts, we don't need to be trained, because we know everything already and we're perfect.” Yeah. Which is not the case. So that's where something like a safe space program, we're not looking at faculty, at least not initially, because they don't feel like they need it. So we're focusing on staff. Even though they really do need it. They *really* need it. And I think that's a product of older faculty too. I mean, eventually they'll retire or they won't be here anymore, so you know, when you get the younger faculty members in it'll cycle out. That's one thing that I've just noticed is very unique—trying to get anything with the faculty is a challenge. Other than that we're pretty much the same as everybody else.

AB: Yeah, becoming more social. Fun doesn't die here anymore.

JH: No, no. And yeah, I hate that phrase. [AB: I know, me too.] It's like, that's stupid. I don't know why people are holding on to it. It's not true, I think maybe when I first started here

it was, five years ago, but I would not say that that's the case now. Do people get upset, do people like that phrase?

AB: I mean, I don't really care. When I was first applying I was much more serious as a junior in high school and then I spent my senior year in Spain, but I had already applied to all of my universities, so I really liked the University of Chicago because I was very serious and I wanted to go to a very serious university, but then I lived in Spain for a year [JH: Gotcha.] and that helped cure the seriousness.

I'm thinking is there anything else? Most of these questions are mainly more for students, so it's, I don't know if there's anything else that's more relevant to you. Is there anything else you want to talk about, or?

JH: Not that I can think about. I think that kind of covered a lot. Like I said, if I leave, you can come back and we'll have a longer good discussion.

AB: Yeah, definitely, definitely. I'll turn this off, then...

[00:56:08]

*End of Interview.*