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Housing the 'Coeds'

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Housing the 'Coeds' : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Friday December 9, 2022

Housing the 'Coeds'

By Camila Sánchez-González

I used to believe that women always had a place on campus. However, in my recent exploration of the University Archives and Special Collections, I've learned that from the early 1930s to the early 1960s, women literally did not have any place to stay on campus.

Even though the presence of women on campus increased dramatically throughout the early 1940s, women didn't have housing on campus until the University of Dayton built its first women's residence hall. This building is what we know as Marycrest, established in 1962. Before this, women either commuted from home or stayed in a residence called the Loretto, run by Dominican sisters in downtown Dayton.

The Loretto, which had rooms for about 200 women, was known amongst the women of UD as a safe haven where they could come from their studies and be amongst other students and working women. This space, although not perfect, provided a safe and welcoming environment for women to get that “college experience” even though it wasn’t on campus. As described by one of the women who lived in one of the rooms at the Loretto, “Girls today wouldn’t want to live like that, but at the time, we thought it was the most wonderful place in the world.” The Loretto closed in 1976.

It wasn’t until 1958 that the first woman, Joan Chonacky, stayed overnight on campus. She didn’t live there though; she was confined to the infirmary. This gives a clear indicator of the discrepancies women faced as students.

It isn’t until the March 1960 issue of the *Coed*, a special issue of the *University of Dayton Alumnus*, that we see some conversation on the potential for campus housing for women. From the short article available, government funds were discussed, but nothing was finalized. However, what was important from this issue, besides highlighting the past 25 years of education for women, was the acknowledgement of the issues the student body faced. Students, especially women, should not be turned away due to lack of space or resources. A diverse student body provides talent and skills toward a more diverse and versatile workforce.

Come explore the archives

I encourage you all to learn more about these individuals and the history of UD. You can learn more about these issues and topics within eCommons, see the links below, or by contacting the [University of Dayton Archives and Special Collections](#).

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— *Camila Sánchez-González is the 2022-23 OhioLINK Luminaries intern in the University Libraries.*



The Loretto

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In the absence of residence halls for women prior to 1962, many women students at UD lived downtown at the Loretto, 125 W. First St.