GALA is currently undertaking an oral history project to document the stories of queer staff and students involved in the Fees Must Fall campaigns, to record their roles in the protests and to ensure that their voices and participation are not further marginalized.

It was with this project at the back of my mind that I came across a small gem of a collection in our archives. With almost 200 collections, there are still some that I have yet to encounter, and this was one of them: The Wayne Sampson Collection.

Wayne Sampson was involved in the Wits Gay Movement while attending the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in the late 1980s. His collection consists of publications from the Wits Gay Movement, meeting notes and sketches, as well as other Wits publications from 1987, a time of student protests and police retaliation on campus. It also includes some anti-apartheid and anti-conscription material as well as some local gay magazines and newsletters from the time.

Echoes with the latest student protests can be seen in the statement below issued by the student publication Wits Student on 5 May 1987. At that time, students were protesting against the upcoming national elections, which, under apartheid, saw most of the population denied the vote. Images of students and staff gathering in protest on the Great Hall steps and heavily armed riot police cracking down on the protests at Wits are eerily familiar, as can be seen from the statements that follow.
The ivory tower: under attack from all sides

On SABC TV last night, police claimed that they fired teargas to disperse Wits students who were attacking them with stones. You were there, you know that these claims are blatantly untrue. We ask: how many other lies must we swallow? Now is the time for Wits students to actively support the majority of South Africans who will be engaging in a massive nationwide stayaway today and tomorrow to protest against ongoing state violence and a general election which does not take them into account.

Sasua, 300 academics, student representatives, and members of the Academic Staff Association took this call to an emergency Senate meeting yesterday.

Senate, which mainly consists of full professors and heads of department, decided to recommend to Council that the University close on Wednesday, May 6 in protest against teargassing and harassment of students. This decision must be approved by the University Council, which meets today.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Karl Toer, expressed full support for the call for closure.

Senate unanimously decided to call a University Assembly on Thursday, May 7 at lunchtime.

The call for a two day stay-away must be seen not only in the context of the events on campus, but also in support of the nationwide stay-away today and tomorrow in protest against the white elections and brutal repression in the townships.

The sudden upsurge of incidents of the SATS and Post Office strikes, the raids on Conna House and into Zambia have been enough to show us that the emergency has not solved the problems facing South Africa. Clearly the elections are not addressing the most pressing issues of the day. The continued denial of people’s basic rights and the brutal subjugation of those who cry out against the injustices will never be the answer to South Africa’s problems.

Yesterday’s police action is an indication that the Nationalist government is not interested in resolving conflict in South Africa through rational means.

Sasua and Sasuca yesterday reinforced their call for students to support “One Person, One Vote in a Unitary South Africa” as the only realistic answer to solving South Africa’s problems peacefully.
There was no provocation

"I can't believe it. I always thought that students provoked police but today there was absolutely no provocation at all. It was peaceful and yet I saw the most horrific brutality."

(Wits student)

An estimated 1 000 students assembled on and around the library lawns yesterday to hear Winnie Mandela speak. The meeting had been called by Nasu, Sis, and Saco to discuss the white elections in the context of continued state repression. Students were eager to hear from Winnie Mandela, who was expected to discuss the issue.

But just before she arrived, students were informed that the meeting was being held secretively. The banning order was presented to a young RSS member by Special Branch members accompanied by riot police. However, students continued to protest the meeting to continue and for Winnie Mandela to speak. Students were asked by students leaders to remain calm. They stressed that the protest should remain peaceful as a contingent of about 40 police had arrived. Police standing on the plaza used a loudhailer to order students to disperse. Very few students heard the call.

Organizers of the meeting asked students to move into the Old Mutual Sports Hall. Very few had entered when police invaded the hall, using tear gas to disperse people. A woman practicing karate was allegedly repeatedly slapped until her face bled. She pleaded with the police to check her sports bag. It was rammed with a mace. The police left her alone, satisfied that she was indeed a sportsperson.

The police presence in Yale Road was overwhelming and it has been rumoured that they had come from as far afield as Pretoria. In another incident it is understood that a student turned over a policeman who had beaten him. The policeman was knocked into a bush but police reinforcement overpowered the student. He was allegedly beaten with sjamboks even after he had been handcuffed. Their massive presence enabled police to arrest around 100 students in the sports hall.

Students milled around the campus as Winnie Mandela spoke to what had just happened. Students were asked to withdraw to the student center while a delegation met with Winnie Mandela to work out a response. A meeting held in the canteen condemned the brutality of the police action and took a decision to support the UDPC/Cata's call for a two-day protest, today and tomorrow. A delegation was appointed to speak to the students to the Senate. The police charged the canteen but found that there was no barricades in open areas. There followed a mad rush by students for the exits.

Students reassembled on the plaza, cheering as close to 100 academics joined them on the Great Hall stairs. The crowd was addressed by people representing Nasu, SSS and the Academic Staff Association. Without warning or provocation, police fired teargas into the open space. The police had just moments before said they would defend students against police action. A list of 112 people known to have been arrested was read out and a rubber bullet and teargas canister were passed around the meeting.

The national anthem was then sung and the meeting officially ended.

Students were released after 9 pm last night. They spoke of "forty four being crowded into a van" and of muttered conversations conducted by the police in Afrikaans, threatening to beat up students. One particularly dishevelled student told Wits Student how three riot policemen allegedly beat him as he lay on the ground, before removing him from campus.

While the students arrested yesterday have all been released, we remind students of the continued detention of Chris Pigoza, Lawrence Boys, Khotso Muga, Tsetse Mokhe, Raymond Sutner and Tom Waap. All members of the University community who are still detained under the emergency regulations.
SRC STATEMENT

Yesterday a meeting was called to discuss the universities response to a national protest call from the UDF and COSATU.

Some 4000 students were seated on the library lawns waiting for Winnie Mandela to speak when the police arrived on force on campus. An order to disperse was given and students started moving into the Old Mutual Sports Hall. Police surrounded the hall and began to indiscriminately arrest students. About 150 students and staff were arrested. During the afternoon teargas and rubber bullets were fired on several occasions.

In response to these events student leaders met the administration to discuss an appropriate response from the university. The Academic Staff association, the Post Graduate Executive and student representatives from SAUS, YCS, MSA, BSS, Arts Students Council and the SRC itself attended the meeting. The common request from all sectors was for the university to close on Wednesday and to hold an university assembly on Thursday to discuss these matters.

A student meeting held at the same time resolved to heed the call to stayaway on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The SRC condemns the brutal and excessive police action on campus and re-affirms the right of students to peaceful protest and freedom of expression.

The call for students to stay-away has emerged from a national protests which will be observed by the majority on the 5 and 6 of May. It is in accordance with the demands of the majority of South Africans that NUSAS has made the call for 1 person 1 vote in a unitary South Africa. We believe that all students should side clearly with the majority by supporting the non-racial poll and expressing their abhorrence of the police action on campus.

Issued by the SRC.
While the above statements were issued by the Wits SRC and Wits Student publication, below is a statement issued by the Wits Gay Movement, showing solidarity with the protest action on campus and the fight against apartheid, and condemning the violence used by the South African Police (SAP).

In July 1985 PW Botha declared a State of Emergency, giving power to the police and the military to implement curfews controlling the movement of all people and preventing the media from covering any unrest. It also allowed for scores of people to be arrested and detained without trial under the Internal Security Act. Wits students and academics protested against these measures by the apartheid state, this was followed by police violence and detention of protestors.

In the Wits Gay Movement newsletter below, the third paragraph states the movement’s solidarity with the protestors and mentions the arrest of one of their members in the protest action.
What these public statements show is that for many students the fight against apartheid was a fight for equal rights for all, regardless of race, sexuality or gender, and that the gay movement at Wits was involved in the broader political struggles of the time. Unfortunately this was not the case with all gay movements of the 1980s in South Africa. The Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) was expelled from the International Lesbian & Gay Association (ILGA) for refusing to take a political stand against apartheid, which came to a head with the detention of anti-apartheid and gay rights activist Simon Nkoli in 1985. And as a tangential point, it can be added that Simon Nkoli was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the Gay & Lesbian Organisation of the
Witwatersrand (GLOW), which had their first meeting on the Wits Great Hall Steps (photograph below). A copy of the Wits Gay Movement’s newsletter Stonewall can also be found amongst the material in the Simon Nkoli collection, showing the interlinkages between activists and organisations within GALA’s archive collections.

![First GLOW meeting, Great Hall steps, 9 April 1988](image)

Article written by the GALA Archivist, Linda Chernis – 8 February, 2017

**Fees Must Fall Oral History Project**

Should you wish to share your stories, or donate ephemera such as posters, placards, t-shirts, flyers etc., please contact the GALA Archivist: linda.chernis@wits.ac.za.