The Murray State faculty and staff have long strived to make our institution one of support and affirmation towards LGBT people. Students from MSU Alliance led by Rachel Loomis, Chris Morehead, and Joe Tarry distributed a letter in the fall of 2010 to faculty to launch the Safe Zone Project. The Project began with the purpose to “strengthen the idea of Murray State University’s commitment to create a more inclusive environment for our LGBT community.”

During 2012-2013, Murray State began an intentional effort in collaboration with MSU Alliance to further develop the Project. The Project now serves as a signature advocacy and visibility program co-coordinated by Dr. Josh Adair and me through LGBT Programming. We have compiled an online resource manual and partnered with colleagues at Vanderbilt University and the University of Louisville to initiate a training component for the Project. Our trainings range from “101” orientations to “2.0” discussions on topics of particular interest.

In November, a discussion was held on the intersection of religion and LGBT identity that was facilitated by Dr. Renee Meyer, who currently serves as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Murray.

Today, we have 400+ participants! In addition to individuals in the Project, we are now seeing an increase in units participating. Since July, we have seen a number of units join, including: Human Resources, Public Safety, the Office of the President, the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, and – just this month – the School of Nursing and Health Professions!

If you get a chance, visit our Official LGBT Alumni Facebook Page and give a shout-out to your favorite Murray State ally. Stay tuned and stay in contact! Cheers,

Jody Cofer Randall
Logan Johnson

Although Baltimore, Maryland is home, Logan Johnson quickly identifies Murray State University as his home away from home. What began as simply tagging along with a friend on their college visit, turned into something much more. After visiting both “MSUs” in Kentucky on that trip, Logan knew which one was his institution of choice! Coming out of high school, Logan had a secret that very few people – really only his brother – knew as he feared marginalization and, possibly, discrimination could come from them knowing.

Logan was born anatomically female, but he says something never felt right. When he arrived at Murray State in the fall of 2011, Logan began to work through his feelings about his sexual orientation and gender identity. It was during his sophomore year when he began to expand his research into issues pertaining to gender identity. He had the support of friends that stood by him during what he knew was going to be a long journey ahead. It was also during that year when Logan became a residential advisor (RA) for Franklin Residential College. He came out to his staff and coworkers as a lesbian, but that did not last long. It never felt right. It was going into his junior year that he realized what he was dealing with and began to identify as a straight man. He also began the planning process for his transition.

During transition, people begin to live as the gender with which they identify rather than with what they were assigned at birth. It is also the time when some people, like Logan, decide to begin hormone therapy and consider other medical procedures. When talking about his transition to date, Logan notes how he has had to develop an appreciation for patience as he recognized progress can be slow and varies from person to person. Logan cites tremendous institutional support at Murray State and a circle of friends and peers that have been with him since he first told himself, “I’m going to be who I’m meant to be now.”

Logan plans to graduate in December 2015 with a bachelor’s degree in Exercise Science, pursue a graduate education, and end up in Colorado as an Occupational Therapist. His next step in his transition is pursuing a legal name change at home in Maryland. Logan hopes that by December, his legal name and the one printed on his Murray State diploma will align to read – “Logan Anthony Johnson.”

Logan invites others to follow along on his journey via Instagram and YouTube.
Spring Panel Series
What is it like to be ___ in America?
Each segment in this series will examine the experiences of people with varying identity characteristics through moderated panel and Audience discussions.
Contact: Student Organizer: Alec Brock

Alumni Spotlight
Stephanie Wells

I arrived at Murray State University in the summer of 2000 to attend band camp for Racer Band. I started my studies that fall in Art Education. I made a lot of friends through those activities very quickly. When I came to Murray, I labeled myself as bisexual because I knew I wasn't straight. However, I hadn't yet had a relationship with a woman and still thought it may be possible for me to have a romantic relationship with a man. I started attending Alliance meetings during my first semester and felt instantly welcomed and accepted. I found a group of people that I trusted and that I knew were going through a lot of the same experiences in life that I was. After starting a relationship with my first girlfriend, during my first semester; I stopped labeling myself as bisexual and came out as lesbian. I came out to my parents and was met with a lot of adversity. However; my brother, hometown friends, and new found friends at Murray were very supportive.

Through the years of attending Murray State I stayed involved with Alliance and held officer positions. During my second semester at Murray, I was voted in as Secretary. The next year I was voted in as Vice President. During my third and fourth years, I served as President. During my first year as President, several members of Alliance and I started a petition to have sexual orientation added to the non-discrimination statement of Murray State University. At the time Murray State was the ONLY state university not to have sexual orientation included in its clause. We presented the petition to many University officials and initially were dismissed and even told by one official that the verbiage was "just words". It was very disheartening at first but with hard work, dedication, and unwavering bravery of many Alliance members and the community over several years, the University President recommended to the Board of Regents that the statement be officially changed and action was taken to amend the statement in February, 2008. Being part of the effort to start a student-driven initiative that led to over 800 students signing our petition and to organize allies on the importance of changing the statement was the most empowering and prideful achievement of my time at Murray State. I still regard that as one of the most proud moments in my life.

Around this same time I started performing as a drag king at local bars and events. Alliance was running low on funds and we had previously attempted mildly successful fundraisers. Most of the group dreaded the idea of another bake sale or car wash. An idea of a drag show as a fund raiser was presented by yours truly and the majority of the Alliance group was leery of the idea at first. With trust, anticipation, and a handful of drag queens and kings waiting in the wings; the first MSU Alliance Drag Show was staged. If I remember correctly we raised about $400 and we couldn't have been happier. As years passed, the drag show(s) continued to bring funds in for the group and many charities Alliance would donate to. By the time I graduated, Murray State and the community as a whole was more accepting and friendly to its LGBT members.

Today I work for AT&T Mobility and have a wonderful partner also named Stephanie. As the years have passed, my family and I have grown closer and they are more accepting of me than I ever thought they would be. I still occasionally work on art projects and am involved with the LGBT community as much as possible. I still attend and advocate for LGBT rights and issues every chance I can or am needed. Murray State and especially Alliance helped me with my confidence and ability to show pride in who I was. I made life long friends who I still speak with on almost a daily basis. I also found a voice that I know no one can take away from me or tell me I don't have a right to use.

The advice I would give to the current LGBT students at Murray would be to just remain focused! Even though certain rights, such as marriage, may come to us as a nation, there are still things, especially locally and within the university environment, that can be changed and improved for the LGBT community. Never let anyone tell you it can't get better because it can and it should. Stay strong and stay together!
Alliance
Social. Support. Activism.

As promised, this month we are highlighting our first two MSU Alliance Scholarship recipients. First, however, we would like to give thanks to those involved in launching our scholarship. We could not have made this happen without support from Dr. Don Robertson, vice president of student affairs, Jody Randall, LGBT coordinator, and the tireless work of our very own officers and members - past and present.

The first recipient of our scholarship was Dillon Todd, a senior interior design major. Some qualities that stood out to us were his commitment to MSU Alliance through membership and his continual service and performance in our bi-annual drag show fundraisers. Dillon has always stood out as a wonderful advocate for our community both at Murray State and beyond. To learn more about Dillon, refer to the Student Spotlight section in last month’s issue of Cheers!

The second and most recent recipient of our scholarship was Robert Scott, a senior non-profit leadership studies major. The qualities that Robert showed that stood out include his avid drive to make change for our community. Shortly after we first met Robert, it became clear that he would become one of our most dedicated members through all his hard work with MSU Alliance, as well as taking part in Out Racers – a program through LGBT Programming that helps students develop their own LGBT program ideas. Robert took part in Out Racers during the 13’-14’ year and organized a program on LGBT portrayal in the media. Robert also stepped up this year to become one of our officers, holding the Treasurer and Secretary positions.

Stay tuned next month as we will be talking about our attendance at two LGBT conferences this semester: OUT in Front (February, Vanderbilt University) and Come Together Kentucky (March, Northern Kentucky University).

In Fairness,
Morgan Randall
President, MSU Alliance

Film Series

Free admission film showings followed by brief discussions

The Case Against 8
Winner of the Directing Award: U.S. Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival in 2014. Battles are won because they are fought. A behind-the-scenes look inside the historic case to overturn California’s ban on same-sex marriage.

March 2, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.
Curris Center Barkley Room

Pariah
Winner of the Excellence in Cinematography Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2011. Pariah tells the story of Alike, a 17-year old African-American teenager embracing her identity as a lesbian.

March 9, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.
Curris Center Theater

deepsouth
Winner of the Freedom Award at L.A. Outfest in 2013. deepsouth is a documentary about the neglected HIV/AIDS crisis in the rural American South. Beneath layers of history, poverty, and now soaring HIV infections, three Americans redefine traditional Southern values to create their own solutions to survive.

March 30, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.
Curris Center Theater
With support from Health Services, MSU Alliance and the Women’s Center

In The News

HRC Further Discusses Proposed Ordinance

LGBTs? In my Sitcoms?

Transgender Rights Rally in Madisonville This Weekend

Hopkinsville HS Students Alleged Discrimination Over LGBT Related Yearbook Quote