Celebrate and Support a Fair Kentucky!

This Saturday!

Join us on April 11th for the ninth annual Celebrate! This event is a time for us to reflect on the year and plan for the future. We have two outstanding LGBT alumni of Murray State University joining us this year as special guests. We have Kristie Helms, ’93, Vice President and Global Head of Social Business and Promotional Strategy at State Street. We also have Viktor Kerney, ’98 and ’01, Director of Outreach at Bent-Con. In addition to our special guests; Artisan Kitchen of Paducah, KY will cater the event, Top Shelf Bar to Go will serve up a variety of tasty beverages, and a team of volunteers will organize a silent auction filled with a wide-variety of items. The benefactor for Celebrate is Murray State University’s LGBT Programming. The funds raised at Celebrate go towards the array of programming and services Murray State offers to provide a welcoming and affirming campus climate for LGBT and ally students, faculty, and staff. Each year this gathering is hosted by different supporters and this year it will be at the home of long-time allies, John and Sally Mateja on beautiful Lake Barkley. More information about Celebrate can be found here.
LGBT Programming Coordinator

Jody Cofer Randall

An ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community at Murray State University is anyone who approaches issues related to sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression with an open mind. An ally has a desire to address inequitable situations even if it means doing so in a public manner. An ally does not have to be an expert on matters relating to the LGBT community.

The benefits to the individual for serving as an ally range greatly, but one can observe common themes. Whether it is the staff member that appreciates being around others that are different than themselves, the student leaders who want to make an impact on their peers, or the faculty member with the colleague who has been struggling to come out of the toxic closet, the benefits are very personal and enriching.

Being an ally to the LGBT community is not without perceived and actual challenges from time to time. One of the more common concerns is that of being labeled LGBT “by association.” Others include the time commitment and expertise needed for such a role. These concerns and others are easily navigated for those passionate about creating inclusive environments for LGBT individuals.

The work of an ally is ongoing. An ally may confront oppressive practices by mediating difficult discussions on identity or by investing in one’s growth by reading up on issues confronting LGBT people prior to having an LGBT individual present them with a problem.

When talking about the role of a good LGBT ally, the messenger can sometimes be just as important as the message. Having a variety of messengers with varying identities is another great way to help those unsure about identifying as an ally. That is why Katie Belanger will be at Murray State University on April 3 to present “Being an LGBT Ally: A Straight Person’s Perspective” during MSU Alliance’s first annual Pride Week.

If you get a chance, visit our Official LGBT Alumni Facebook Page and stay in touch. Cheers!

Lavender Celebration

LGBT and Ally Graduates Invited!
If you are graduating in May, August or December this year and you identify as LGBT, the Lavender Celebration is for you! The Lavender Celebration is a time of expressing appreciation by honoring participating LGBT and ally graduates.

This event will take place Friday, May 1st at 12:30pm in the Commonwealth Suite in Curris Center.

Admission is free for LGBT and ally student participants and guests.

Contact the Office of LGBT Programming by April 22nd if you are interested in participating! Contact Jody at jcofer@murraystate.edu

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

What is it like to be an LGBT person in America?
April 23, 2015 - 7 pm • Curris Center Stables
Student Spotlight

Alec Brock

Alec Brock had a fairly ordinary childhood in Louisville, Ky., but he knew something was different about him. It was during high school when he figured out what that difference was. During the summer of his freshman year at Atherton High School – now nationally recognized for their 2014 efforts to serve transgender students – he began to accept what it was that was different about him. At the end of his sophomore year, he shared his sexual orientation with his family and found his support network growing. Alec credits much of his understanding and appreciation of diversity to his time at Atherton High. Looking back, he recalls how it seemed there were always openly LGBT students in class with him and how it seemed to help create an affirming climate for diversity in general. When the time rolled around for Alec to start exploring colleges, the Racer Nation was Alec’s first choice. He did not want to be a number at a significantly larger institution, but he wanted to continue his education somewhere that recognized and understood what exposure to diversity could do for students. As Alec began his freshman year, he experienced a bit of culture shock navigating Murray State University and western Kentucky. He quickly came to realize just how important Murray State’s efforts were in leading social justice issues throughout the institution’s service region. Now in his sophomore year and second semester serving as a resident advisor in Hart College, he regularly helps educate the greater community on issues impacting LGBT individuals. During the spring 2014 semester, with the support of the Office of LGBT Programming, Alec organized his own program around the intersection of conservative political views and LGBT identities by hosting outspoken openly gay conservative commentator Jimmy LaSalvia on-campus. Alec jokes about his friends sometimes picking at him for being what he calls a “New England republican with a touch of libertarianism” that happens to be gay living in the Bible belt of America. He says all-in-all, though, he loves his time at Murray State dearly. Alec says that meeting other LGBT students who have had much tougher experiences than he keeps him coming back to the importance of helping lead efforts at Murray State on LGBT identity and the intersectionality of identities. Currently, Alec is leading a panel series on “What’s it like to be ___ in America” where he is facilitating discussions on African American, LGBT, and Women’s identities. Alec plans to graduate in December, 2017. After that, he has not yet decided if he will continue on to graduate school in secondary education (at Murray State, of course!) to teach political science or try his hand at seminary citing his belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as another important layer of his identity. Either way that he decides to go, political science, theology, or both... Murray State gets to benefit from his determination and leadership a bit longer!

Faculty Spotlight

Jason Jaggers

I arrived to MSU in August of 2013. Unfortunately, I have not had the pleasure of taking classes here, but obtained my BS and Masters at the University of Louisville and my PhD from the University of South Carolina. All of my degrees have been in exercise science. I have been open about myself to everyone since first arriving. It’s not like I intentionally or deliberately tell my colleagues I’m gay, but I am not afraid to talk about my partner or even bring him to social events. Everyone here (Murray State University that is) has been very welcoming and accepting. The strengths, in my opinion, have been the openness and visibility of LGBT events around the University. As well as the strong show of support for the Safe Zone project among faculty, staff, and a few of the Colleges even. It delivers a very powerful message that all are welcome on campus and those who may have strong opposing views at least have the decency to show respect and keep to themselves. How did your identity affect your involvement? I have served on various committees and been a member of Safe Zone since arriving in 2013. My identity hasn’t affected my involvement. Jody Randall has been great keeping me up to date regarding what’s going on around campus and calling on me when another voice is needed. I’ve been very happy with my career here and feel I have been rather
successful since I began working at MSU. If you haven’t already, experience life away from home. Whether it’s to start grad school or for your professional life, spend a few years living 500+ miles away from home. As scary as it may sound everyone should experience life in other parts of the country. It makes you appreciate more where you’ve been and where you are going.

Alumni Spotlight

Chris Wells

I didn’t graduate in the traditional four years, though I arrived at Murray State in the fall of 1985 and went full-time for four years. Here’s why: I knew I wanted to study abroad, and a friend of mine had gone to Germany her Junior year and gotten hooked on the country and never came back. So I planned on doing a foreign exchange in my fifth year, after finishing my degree requirements, just in case I wanted to stay in my host country longer. I took a semester off to save money, then did a one-semester exchange in Costa Rica through MSU’s study abroad program. As I thought I might, I wound up staying in CR for two years total, but never got my credits properly transferred. I finally got everything straightened out some years after moving to Japan, and graduated in 2006.

I actually came out to my friends and family when I was 17 years old and a senior in high school. I wasn’t out completely at school then, as it could have been dangerous. When I went to Murray, I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say I was the only out guy on campus at the time. That is to say, I was the only one who wouldn’t prevaricate when asked directly about his sexuality and never pretended to be straight.

The university itself was making a few efforts to help the community. I remember that there was a special group counseling meeting, but no LGBT groups or societies, no Gay Pride Day, no out professors- no overt presence on campus at all. I was on the Speech Team, and the coaches were very supportive of the gay team members. We were allowed to explore whatever we wanted in our material, and I don’t remember any censorship. Also, my senior thesis was on social distance and propensity for violence against GLBT people. Once I explained my hypothesis, my professor was very supportive. I even won an award when we presented at the Science Academy! That was pretty cool for Kentucky in 1989!

Dr. Robert Valentine was a wonderful coach for the speech team, and I think all my friends really bonded and helped each other when I was at MSU.

I’ve lived in Tokyo since 1994, and my husband and I just celebrated our 20th anniversary. We also got married last December in New York City, something which I can honestly say I did not think would ever be possible when I was studying at Murray. I feel incredibly lucky to have met someone to share my life with, and never take it for granted. Jun and I met at Japan’s first Japanese language improv show.

I was a founding member of the Tokyo Comedy Store in 1994, Japan’s first english-language improv and standup comedy show, and I was actually scouted by a talent agent during a TCS show, so improv has had a huge effect on my life professionally and personally. I’ve made a living as a narrator for the past 18 years, and love my work. I do television shows and documentaries for NHK World, an ESL educational radio show for NHK Educational, and lots of corporate and organizational promotional videos. I love languages, and my work requires me to speak Japanese with the clients, engineers and directors, while the actual scripts are in english. I really enjoy having a job that is always different, involves performing, and lets me speak a forieng language every day.

Jun has written five books on improvisation and acting and is working on a book on Buddhism and improv right now. He teaches improv and acting in Tokyo and gives workshops throughout Japan, and directs Japanese language improv shows at the Tokyo Comedy Show. I direct the English improv show Improvazilla, which we do once a month. I also teach improv workshops for the foreign community and we have a great group of people studying with us.

If anyone reading this comes to Japan, you can hear me in Tokyo Tower, on the Shinkansen/Bullet Train platforms, and on the audioguides for many national and private museums all around Japan. I feel very lucky that my speech team experience in
high school, in which I did competitive radio announcing and other events, as well as my four years in MSU’s forensics program prepared me to become a narrator. I never dreamed I’d be making a living doing something that I did for fun at school!

If it’s safe for you, and won’t cause your parents to withdraw support you depend upon for your education, come out and never look back. Challenge stereotypes and assumptions about LGBT people in class discussion and everywhere else. For LGB people, even as we continue to fight for marriage equality, speak up for our trans brothers and sisters- it’s their turn to have the spotlight and they need all our support.

Also, study abroad! I had a wonderful time in Costa Rica, go back to visit my exchange family every two years or so, and learning another language is one of the best things you can do with your brain, gay or straight. But do your credit transfer paperwork right away and don’t put it off!

**Fame Drag Show**

*Presented by Alliance*

Alliance hosted their biannual drag show fundraiser, *Fame*, this past Thursday, April 2nd. We are featuring it here since Pride Week began in March. On cast were Aubry La’Shae Shannell, Gypsy Red, Trixie Lynn James, Natalie Symone, Artemis Fine, and Trey Rawlings. The show also featured debut performers, Jay Byrd and Rhiannon Van Doren. Alliance hosts 2 shows each academic year, one in the fall and one in the spring. This is the 8th year that Alliance has presented Murray State with the opportunity to come out and support their efforts and cheer on the kings and queens. Thursday’s performance raised over $2,000 according to Murray State Alliance president, Morgan Randall. Photos are available through the Alliance courtesy of Derek Miller and others in attendance.
Pride Week in the Racer Nation

#RacerPride

Last week was Pride Week for the Racer Nation. The Murray State Alliance held a full week of events including a film showing of *deepsouth*, a day of awareness with purple ribbons, a night of games with the Alliance officers, the much anticipated *Fame* Drag Show, and a presentation by Katie Belanger on being an LGBT ally. Throughout the week, students were encouraged to stop by tables in the Curris Center and outside the Drag Show to get a picture with their own message to the campus. Students were able to show their support by posing with the message of their choice. As the semester continues, we hope to take many more photos of faculty, staff and students who wish to show their support.


Alliance

Social. Support. Activism.

Representatives from MSU Alliance braved the inclement weather and participated in the 6th annual OUT in Front Conference at Vanderbilt University on February 21, 2015.

Ariel Mitchell wowed the crowd and won the attendee haiku competition!

Attendees closed out the day at the OUT in Front Conference having learned a lot about themselves, each other, and the LGBT community!

In Fairness,
Morgan Randall
President,
MSU Alliance

In The News

Murray State Professor Takes 'Active Steps' in Diabetes and HIV Research

"InsideHigherEd" Reviews Book Including Chapter by MSU Faculty Member, Josh Adair