

The Magazine of the Mizzou Alumni Association

MIZZOU

MU Alumni Speak Out

MAA, Mizzou Athletics and Triangle Coalition sponsor LGBTQ Alumni Panel.



From left, Mason Kerwick, Greg DeStephen, Pam Cooper, Nikole Potulsky and Asher Kolieboi discuss their experience at Mizzou during an LGBTQ Alumni Panel April 9 as part of Pride Month.

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Photos by Mikala Compton

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A lot has changed at MU and in the Columbia community since Pam Cooper first arrived in 1987. A lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) activist, Cooper gave presentations to many human sexuality and abnormal psychology classes about LGBTQ issues.



Pam Cooper, MA '00, of Columbia

“There was a lot of processing internally and accepting ourselves as gay, as *not* abnormal, and there was work on trying to tell the rest of the world during speakers bureaus,” said Cooper, MA '00, a senior research specialist in the Sinclair School of Nursing, to a room of MU students attending the LGBTQ Alumni Panel April 9 as part of Pride Month. “But now look at you!

“We never would have seen anything like this in an alumni center. We have driven the hatred and the shame underground. I’m not saying it’s gone, but the predominate emotion and feeling in this town is of acceptance.”

The panel also included:

- Nikole Potulsky, BA '99, of Portland, Ore., was a student activist and MU LGBTQ Resource Center's first coordinator. She is program director at Fight for a Fair Economy, part of

Service Employees International Union.

- Asher Kolieboi, BA, BA, '09, of Nashville, Tenn., was co-founder of Legalize Trans and a prominent trans and Queer People of Color advocate and organizer at MU. He is a divinity and theology graduate student at Vanderbilt University.
- Greg DeStephen, BS BA '11, of Dallas, an All-American diver, is the only MU athlete who has been publicly out while actively competing. He is a campus recruiter for Ernst & Young.

Panelists discussed the struggles they experienced on campus as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community.

Kolieboi remembered an encounter with Brother Jed Smock, an evangelist preacher who often set up in Speakers Circle, on the National Day of Silence in 2009, a day to raise awareness of the bullying LGBTQ students experience. Kolieboi organized MU students to form a circle around Smock in Speakers Circle. As Smock verbally assaulted the students, they stood in silent, nonviolent protest. Unable to rile the students, Smock eventually moved out of Speakers Circle.



Nikole Potulsky, BA '99, of Portland, Ore

“Sometimes you can win people by being loud, but I

think when you stand in your own right and your own knowing of yourself and who you are, that's more powerful than anything you can say," Kolieboi said.



Greg DeStephen, BS BA '11, of Dallas

When asked by moderator Mason Kerwick, a senior journalism major and Triangle Coalition's communications officer, what advice they would give the students in the room, panelist echoed Kolieboi's message of self-acceptance.

DeStephen said he considered transferring after his first semester at MU because after he felt like an outsider, but what got him through was his self-confidence.

"If I were to talk to a freshman in that same situation, [I'd say] just be confident in who you are," DeStephen said. Working in the corporate world, DeStephen also said that being out is an asset to his company. "The corporate world is pushing so hard for diversity and inclusion, so it makes you a stronger part of the team."

In closing, Potulsky said that fighting for marriage equality and nondiscrimination policies are important things to fight for, but those tactics are about being integrated into society.

"What we really want is freedom," Potulsky said. "We

really want to be able to be who we are fully without fear. That's a long game. We have a lot of work to do. No matter where you land in life, no matter what your calling is, just know there are important contributions you can make, and you have no idea whose life you save by making those contributions. So speak up and out and often.”



Asher Kolieboi, BA, BA, '09, of Nashville, Tenn

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