Speaker 1:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap:

This past summer, Missouri State University welcomed [Grey Garris](https://search.missouristate.edu/people/greygarris), the new assistant director of [multicultural programs](https://www.missouristate.edu/MulticulturalPrograms/) and [LGBTQ+ student services](https://www.missouristate.edu/MulticulturalPrograms/LGBT-Resource-Center.htm).

Before joining Missouri State, Garris was based in the south. He’s from Birmingham, Alabama, and completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Mississippi State University. I’m Emily Yeap.

In light of LGBTQ+ History Month in October, Garris joins me today to talk about efforts to support the advancement of the LGBTQ+ community. He also highlights what’s in store for the celebration at Missouri State.

Grey Garris:

My approach to anything related to LGBTQ student services is that different populations of the queer community need different things. So, specifically, I hope to eventually be able to do different focus groups, different support groups with trans students and gender non-conforming students, with queer and trans people of color specifically; different designations of individuals within the queer community across the campus to make sure each individual is receiving different supports that they need rather than just doing a group, LGBTQ students receive X.

Emily Yeap:

While Pride Month takes place in June, LGBTQ+ History Month is celebrated in October. It was founded in 1994 by a Missourian – high-school history teacher Rodney Wilson. Garris explains the difference between the two.

Grey Garris:

The main difference between Pride Month and Heritage Month is that Pride Month is more of a celebration of the queer community as a whole, and Heritage Month being in October is also LGBTQ History Month so it’s a celebration of the achievements and successes of prior queer people as far as activism, as far as programs, as far as ways to move forward public policy, things like that.

For this university, we hope that LGBTQ History Month is going to include not just educational programs, but actual events for students to socialize within the community. So, we’re bringing back our social events. Originally, they were banquets but we’re transitioning them to more of a social. This year, it’s going to be The Night of Green Carnations in reference to Oscar Wilde. So different events like that including panels regarding queer and trans persons of color’s experiences, both on the campus and off, and various other educational opportunities.

Emily Yeap:

In what ways can people on campus and in the community show support for LGBTQ+ people?

Grey Garris:

We have a couple of different ways that you can help the university itself. One is our Transitions Closet. We do offer a Transitions Closet where students can come through and take articles of clothing that they may need, whether it’s a trans student going through a transition and needing a new wardrobe, or an international student who needs professional clothing for interviews. That closet is open to students, and they can take and keep those clothing items. So, if you would like to participate in donating some clothing to that closet, I encourage any of the listeners to do so. They can just come into our new Multicultural Resource Center and drop them off.

But on a more, I guess, theoretical note, is doing more continuing education for yourself. Even something as simple as learning the real concepts behind the use of pronouns within higher education and stuff like that. Instead of it becoming a politicized measure, an actual approach of respecting individual students' experiences, individuals across the world’s experiences, and knowing how to speak to people in a way that provides respect to them as a person.

Emily Yeap:

As a minority group on campus, LGBTQ+ students often face various struggles. Garris highlights their main concerns.

Grey Garris:

Our students are mostly concerned with the upcoming legislative session in Jefferson City. They are concerned with different experiences that they’re having on the campus when it comes to being a trans or gender non-conforming students regarding not even just the use of their pronouns, but the respect of their experience as an individual.

A lot of it is going to be working with faculty and staff to make sure that these students are being actively respected and not just tolerated within the classroom space and welcomed by, not only the students across the campus because our students are a lot more accepting, but making sure our faculty and staff understand how to welcome these students into their spaces. It can be something as simple as helping out with our Heritage Month programs, helping out by making sure that we have different resources being promoted to queer and trans students, making sure that these students are supported through the upcoming legislative sessions that we’ll be going through, which, Missouri was known previously for a number of anti-trans bills that were put on its docket, and we expect a similar upcoming session. Representative Quade, Representative Fogle, have tried to work on getting some of those bills at least stopped, but we hope that eventually we will be able to not be in this space anymore with these legislative sessions.

Emily Yeap:

Events for LGBTQ+ History Month are free and open to the public. They will be a mix of in-person and online events via Zoom and Instagram live.

Visit missouristate.edu/MulticulturalPrograms for more details.

I’m Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

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For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.