Narrator:

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

Nicki Donnelson:

Historically, Pride Month was recognized in October, although recently, many activities have moved to celebrate Pride in the summer. At Missouri State University, we want to welcome and support all students, and we develop programming to recognize LGBTQ each October. I’m Nicki Donnelson. Today on the Missouri State Journal I have Shy Wells. They are the assistant director of multicultural programs and LGBTQ+ services at Missouri State University. They tell us about the “why” behind the celebration at the university.

Shy Wells:

I think the biggest thing and the biggest reason that we as a university celebrate LGBTQ History Month is because we do have students who are LGBTQ, and it’s important that all of our students get recognition. But also, it falls directly within our three pillars: community engagement, cultural competence, and ethical leadership. Teaching individuals how to be ethical leaders wherever they’re working with individuals who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Community engagement because we do have community members, as well as students, who are LGBTQ+. And then, also just working in the cultural competence. So, it really connects directly to Missouri State’s three pillars.

Nicki Donnelson:

While MSU will be offering panel discussions, educational opportunities, and fun activities for students throughout the month, Wells points to “Let’s Vogue” on October 21st as the highlight for them.

Shy Wells:

One of our biggest events is at the end of the month, it’s October 21st, it’s going to be “Let’s Vogue”. So, that talks about ballroom culture. That was one of the very first instances that LGBTQ+ community really became noticed was during ballroom culture. Actually, the first drag queen was born in 1825, so that’s a huge, huge recognition to talk about William Dorsey Swann. Was an individual that started out ballroom culture in Washington, D.C., and then it quickly transitioned into New York City where ballroom culture is extremely popular now with like Lady Gaga, voguing the dances. So, it’s a historical moment as well as an opportunity for students to have fun and be able to engage with others in the community regardless if they’re LGBTQ or not.

Nicki Donnelson:

“Let’s Vogue” is only open to current students. Wells says that community members should also check out the Glo Centers programming, specifically Ozarks Pridefest: Harvest Pride, which will be held October 8th in downtown Springfield. The multicultural resource center also focuses on building advocates and allies, along with offering resources and support. Wells gives many examples of the resources available through the campus and the MRC. They begin with the Transitions Closet, a free clothing resource for any student going through a life transition. Wells tells us more.

Shy Wells:

So, the Transitions Closet is open to all students, and it does have some education for our LGBTQ+ students, having a better understanding of how to safely bine, have an education on how to connect to resources within the community. We also have the counseling center, which is, I say, a great resource for all of our students because it’s free, it’s accessible, and they actually have small group sessions that are available for just about anyone. But they do have some emphasis on LGBTQ+ students as well. And then, we also have Melaqueer which is a LGBTQ+ organization for students of color and students who want to have a better understanding of culture. And then, we have Advocacy and Alliance, which was formerly known as Spectrum, now has a group as well that educated students who want to become an ally. So, those students work really hard to create allies within the community. And then, we also just have a lot of community connections as well. Like I said, the Glo Center is a great connection, PFLAG, we’ve worked a little bit with APO, so those are just all resources that we directly connect with throughout the school year.

Nicki Donnelson:

To continue to build allies and understanding and to provide a more welcoming environment, the university offers LGBTQ+ safe zone training, which Wells would encourage everyone to participate in.

Shy Wells:

The opportunity for them to learn how to be a better advisor, how to directly connect with our coworkers, you know, with our students that we may not always understand. So, it’s a really good opportunity for individuals to have more exposure, but also be guided through what kind of conversations are appropriate or not appropriate, or you know, how we understand pronouns and different things like that that are coming along in the LGBTQ+ community. You do not have to be a member of the LGBTQ+ community to be supportive and help guide students, community members. All the different things that are going on around the city, it’s really important that we have allies and people who can help make sure that everyone has access to those human rights and the opportunity to really be engaged within the community.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Shy Wells. I’m Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Narrator:

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