

**Commission for LGBT People**  
*End of Year Report*  
2017-2018

Co-chairs: Jennifer Jabson & Danielle Burton

The Commission for LGBT People is a body appointed by the Chancellor to advise on planning, implementation, and evaluation of university programs, policies, and services designed to improve the status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people on the Knoxville campus. The Commission, in its role as an advocacy group, is committed to the protection and advancement of LGBT students, faculty, and staff at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

**Accomplishments**

The Commission for LGBT People assessed the needs of LGBTQ+ faculty and staff by holding two open discussion forums in Fall 2017. Approximately 12 individuals participated in the open forums. Participants' responses informed the development of a LGBTQ+ faculty and staff needs survey. To date, 23 faculty and staff have completed the survey. The Commission will continue to collect responses in the coming year. The survey results will be used to support specific efforts for access, equity, and support of LGBTQ+ faculty and staff at UTK. A report that combines results from open forums and survey will be generated in the coming year.

We collaborated with the Pride Center and Dr. Jennifer Jabson of the Department of Public Health to support the first Appalachian LGBT Health Equity Symposium. Seventy-five individuals attended and participated in the event. Twelve posters were presented by local healthcare providers, advocates, and scholars. A full panel of scholars, practitioners, and advocates led a discussion on health equity, resilience, and barriers faced by LGBT people in East Tennessee. Steven Glassman, former interim CEO of the Mazzoni Health Center in Philadelphia, gave a keynote address concerning the possibility of developing a center of health equity for LGBT health, research, and training in Knoxville. A report produced from the event evaluation is forthcoming.

In support with our transgender and non-binary community members, we examined restroom location and signage across campus. A proposal for action will be presented to the interim Chancellor in the coming academic year.

Partly in response to faculty and staff requests for greater connection and awareness of Commission activities, we broadened our communication network by creating a Friends of the Commission listserv and a Facebook page for LGBTQ+ faculty and staff at UTK. We also hosted multiple LGBTQ+ faculty and staff socials throughout the academic year to increase visibility, community, and pride.

In collaboration with multiple groups across campus, the Commission advocated for the students' ability to change their display names in the UTK Banner system. We also collaborated with the Pride Center to reinstate and revamp the SafeZone program at UTK.

We awarded two outstanding LGBTQ advocates for this year's Chancellor's Awards. Danielle Burton received the LGBT Student Leadership Award, and Tatiana Leavitt Messersmith received the LGBT Advocate Award.

Finally, the Commission's LGBT Mentoring Program provided mentorship to 9 LGBTQ+ undergraduate students this year. We look forward to continuing to provide mentorship and service to our undergraduate LGBTQ+ student population.

### **Plans for 2018-2019**

The Commission will continue upholding its commitment to the protection and advancement of LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff at UTK. The Commission will continue advocating for LGBTQ+ visibility on campus, particularly in recording sexual orientation across campus documents and surveys. We will continue assessing the needs of LGBTQ+ faculty and staff and advocate for training in LGBTQ+ issues across campus. The Commission will enhance its LGBT Mentorship Program by increasing visibility of the program and recruiting new faculty/staff mentors and student members. Finally, the Commission will continue supporting the Pride Center and collaborating with leadership in the reimplementation of the SafeZone program.