

Morris Transcript

[00:02] Ashleigh: Today is April 19th, 2018, and I, Ashleigh Coren, am interviewing a student, and we are in Marie Mount Hall.

[00:13] Ashleigh: So to start off, tell us a bit about yourself.

[00:16] Taylor: Um, so, my name's Taylor Morris, I am a graduate student now but I went here for undergrad as well. I came in fall of 2011, graduated spring of 2015 from undergrad, and I have been in grad school ever since. I'm from Maryland as well.

[00:33] Ashleigh: So what brought you to the University of Maryland?

[00:37] Taylor: Um, a scholarship was one big thing. But also the LGBTQ acceptance. I was deciding between two schools where I had gotten a full ride, and Maryland made sense. It was closer to home for me cause I'm from Maryland, and um **the LGBTQ acceptance, especially for that time, was ahead of the others.**

[00:55] Ashleigh: Can you talk a little bit more about the acceptance?

[00:56] Taylor: Sure, um, so, I was just transitioning, so I'm trans, um, female to male, I came out right during my senior year, so right as I was applying to college. And so the big question was where will I live, you know, how will I get my care, things like that, and Maryland was very empathetic on the interview day for the scholarship.

[1:17] Taylor: We had met with the housing person and they were like well we don't have **gender neutral housing** yet, that's changed but um, you know, we can make accommodations, we can kinda, we can tweak with it, like we've had some trans students before, like basically we've got you covered. We'll take care of you. It's not official, but we'll take care of you. So that was more than what I had gotten from other universities.

[1:38] Ashleigh: So what was your first contact, other than that experience, with the LGBTQ community here on campus, and what was the nature of that contact?

[1:44] Taylor: That's a good question, probably some event at the **LGBT Equity Center**, I probably visited in. Um, for whatever reason, I didn't sign up for the version of **university 100** that was LGBTQ, **Queer Camp** was not a thing yet, and the one project I just didn't sign up for, so just a lot of stars lined up that I really wasn't involved, it really wasn't until later in my year, in my UMD program that I got involved a lot. But I'd say, I probably went to an **LGBT Equity Center open house** and, you know, learned about the different groups.

[2:15] Ashleigh: So since then, what changes have you witnessed or participated in at the university?

[2:20] Taylor: Hm, it was a really different time, I was in engineering because insurance for trans coverage was not a thing really in 2011. Nonbinary was much less heard of, trans was not having the media coverage it has now, gender neutral housing didn't exist, student insurance did not cover trans issues yet, so really just changed a ton.

[2:48] Taylor: The like, you know, like they've had the **little rainbow stickers of turtles**, but they didn't have **trans stickers of turtles with the trans flag**, and like that'll never happen, they'll never do that, and then finally in the past couple of years it's happened. Um, so, and then like this **trans terps campaign** that's going on right now would've never happened when I first came here. So it's just really shifted. The idea of **gender neutral bathrooms**, all that has really been within since the time that I've come here.

[3:16] Ashleigh: So what other organizations or groups do you belong to, and why did you decide to join?

[3:21] Taylor: Yeah, so, I got involved with **Theta Pi Sigma**, which was an **LGBTQ frat** that started my junior year. And it's mind blowing, right? And LGBTQ frat, that's something you wouldn't have heard of 10 years ago. They were just starting it so it would've been fall of 2013, um, and, I wasn't sure if I wanted to go, and like what if it's too fratty, what if it's whatever, but I went to their interest meeting, and then their rush, and it ended up being an amazing experience, really connected with the LGBTQ community. It was super diverse, like the first president was a lesbian, the board very racially diverse, um, well there were different boards from the first time, they switch every semester.

[4:02] Taylor: But you know, me and one other guy, my best friend actually, I met through the frat, so I owe so much of my Maryland experience to that. Also I participated in, finally my senior year I'm like I never got into **queer camp**, and I apply like please can I go, it's gonna be my last year here, I didn't know I'd go here for grad school so I got to do that finally and I've been, as a counseling psych student who's also LGBTQ identified, I've been a **mentor for queer camp** ever since. So that's now, that's one of my main involvements now

[4:28] Ashleigh: Can you talk a little bit about queer camp?

[4:30] Taylor: Sure! Um, so Queer Camp, I believe it was started because of an **endowment from one of the wealthy sports family** had a lesbian child and because of that some of the money that they donated got siphoned to the Equity Center, who knows how long that'll last, but for the past 5 or 6 years or so, estimating here, um, that they funded this camp, a weekend retreat, for new, primarily for new either freshmen or transfer students for the university to get to know the university, to get to know other LGBTQ people, um, and, uh, so I wasn't eligible, it didn't happen my first year, I didn't sign up my second and then didn't get in my third year, cause it's competitive, there's actually so many people who sign up for a limited amount of space, but really, it's a nice weekend to get away from everything, and for some of the students it's really touching to see that they've, they're not out, they're scared to come on the trip, like, it's really their first time being in LGBTQ spaces, it's really rewarding.

[5:32] Ashleigh: *For all the things you've been involved in, have you held any leadership positions?*

[5:37] Taylor: Yes, a mid-tier leadership position. I am a dork through and through, academically, so I was the **academic chair for the frat**

[5:44] Ashleigh: *So switching gears, in regards to civil rights, particularly for the LGBTQ community here, what challenges does the university still have, and what things still need to get done?*

[5:58] Taylor: It's a good question, um, I'm a little bit more distant from it as a grad student now, um, I think you could argue for more gender neutral bathrooms, just cause there is a sizeable trans community, and I think they are shifting to trying to have one per building, or have something relatively accessible, but I don't think that's a done process, you know, off the top of my head, I can think of certain buildings that have it, like **the gym** has it, you know you can use the family restroom to change, that you have to actively out yourself though to use that. **Stamp** has gender neutral bathrooms, so there's some progress on that.

[6:32] Taylor: I would say as far as rights, I think it's, a lot of the rights I think we've already gotten, you know, in the time I've been here we've gotten um, **gay marriage**, we've gotten **student health coverage**, a really generous coverage as well, really very unlimited coverage which is really nice, for surgeries and stuff like that.

[6:52] Taylor: I'd say the overall, still kinda cultural attitudes, you know that still, I still don't feel comfortable being openly trans in all spaces. I still like, for example when I go to the gym a lot, I love the gym, I'm very, it's just a thing I do, but I still, if I'm wearing a trans specific shirt, or anything like that, I won't go into a locker room. So you know, I'll go into the locker room, I'm not dumb about it, I won't like change in front of people, I'll go into a stall, you know, I'm smart about it. But that's the thing is you have to be very tactful about it still, and I pass very much as male, whereas for people who don't pass as male, I wonder if they would feel comfortable being in the gym at all. So I'd say there's still, legislatively the university is very progressive I feel, um, but attitude wise, it's not just Maryland, it's everywhere, but um, there's still a ways to go.

[7:45] Ashleigh: *So what would you want future UMD students to understand about being LGBTQ on campus right now, in 2018?*

[7:52] Taylor: What I would want them to know, is to get involved. My experience completely changed, I mean, the frat's still running, but it's very small at this point, it's not as big as it was when I was in it, um, but some community connectedness, to just get involved, cause it can be super isolating otherwise. I think gay acceptance is really good, but um, especially trans, non binary, try to get involved as much as possible, to have a real community, cause Maryland is such a big school in general, I would say just get yourself wired in and give yourself the chance to be engaged, um, yeah.

[08:28] Ashleigh: Thank you, um, is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Any memorable moments, um?

[08:26] Taylor: Oh man, memorable moments, I've got a fair amount of them, well, **a lot of them are parties**, um, you know, I think um, just, you know, things like **Queer Camp**, where that's obviously a very sober environment, but, you know, in general, times where people in the community has gotten together, and been able to have a lot of fun, and let like loose and to be, you know, to be in a party, to be in a space, where your queerness is normal, where it's like, you know, sometimes a couple of these parties I've invited my straight friends, and it's weird, interesting to see though, to see them for once be the outsider, that they were kinda trying to fit in at this queer party, and I think that's just one of the things I guess I'll really never forget about Maryland, just how people could get together and have fun, really celebrate in their diversity, and really different identities. Of course there's sometimes conflicts, but it's something that I'm um, that I'm really proud of to have been a part of in Maryland, and that Maryland had an accepting enough atmosphere that a thing like an **LGBT frat** could exist.

[09:40] Ashleigh: Well thank you Taylor for taking the time to speak with me this afternoon, and thank you for your contribution to university archives.

[09:46] Taylor: Thank you!