

[00:02] *Ashleigh Coren*: Today is April 23rd, 2019, and I'm here with Alice Donlan. She is being interviewed by Ashleigh Coren, and we are in Hornbake Library. So, Alice, tell me a bit about yourself.

[00:13] *Alice Donlan*: Sure! I am the Director of Research at the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center here at the University of Maryland. I've been in that role for about three years. I'm also – I earned my PhD at the University of Maryland, so between 2007 and 2013 I was a graduate student here. And I got my PhD in Human Development in the College of Education.

[00:41] *Ashleigh*: So, basically, those things brought you to the University of Maryland – ?

[00:44] *Alice*: Mmhm.

[00:45] *Ashleigh*: What was it about – was there anything else about the University that drew you to campus?

[00:50] *Alice*: Yeah, so I had had a friend who had gone here for her PhD that I met in a job before I came here, and I hadn't – I'm from Virginia, and so I hadn't really considered Maryland that much because there is a strong, mm, Virginia-Maryland divide. *[laughs]*

[1:08] But she talked to me about the opportunities for graduate assistantships here, and how she got tuition remission, and that seemed like a really good opportunity, so I got into two schools for Master's programs and I visited – oh, I got into Mason and I got into Maryland. And I went to Mason and the course was like thirty people, and... *[Pauses.]* It was a good course, like it seemed like the students were engaged, but I came here and there were *three* people in the course. And it just let a lot more room for deep conversation in.

[1:47] And that may have just been the course that I happened to walk into, but I was really impressed with Maryland. And so that pulled me over here.

[1:58] *Ashleigh*: I want to switch gears for a little bit.

[1:59] *Alice*: Mmhm.

[2:00] *Ashleigh*: So, what is your definition of community?

[2:04] *Alice*: That's a great question. Um... *[pause]* I guess it would be a group of people with supportive, connective relationships that is that occurs over a period of time, and maybe has a common set of values or agenda that kinda looks out for one another.

[2:32] *Ashleigh*: Okay. What was your first contact with the UMD LGBTQ community? What was the nature of that contact, and what changes have you witnessed in, or participated in, in respect to this community at the university?

[2:47] *Alice:* Sure! So when I came as a graduate student, I had – I identified at the time as bisexual. And I had just a couple of friends in my department who were queer-identified. And so the – It was less about a formal community and it, it really wasn't outside of my department, even. It was very insular.

[3:10] As a graduate student I didn't really venture that much outside of my department and then that much outside of my college, to be honest. So my, you know, LGBT community at Maryland at the time was just friendships, I guess? Nothing really formal.

[3:27] And then when I came back as a staff member, I was a little bit older now I identify as queer, and I was much more looking for a queer community to be part of, and to be part of in part of my professional development and it was something I was looking for as a staff member, as a community member at Maryland at large, I wanted to find my queer community.

[4:01] And so, now I'm much more involved with the LGBTQ Equity Center. I started a queer faculty learning community, I've planned a happy hour for queer faculty and staff once a semester for the last year, and so it's been much more purposeful, I guess, now. Before, it was just sort of organic relationships.

[4:27] *Ashleigh:* So you've been both a student and an employee. Can you talk about how being an LGBTQ employee on a college campus, whether that's been different from what you expected it to be, both as a student and as a staff person?

[4:41] *Alice:* I think.... there, there are times when I get a little bit surprised at – we always talk about college campuses as though they're these completely liberal bastions, and completely insular, and for the most part I've had really good experiences at Maryland, both as a graduate student and as a staff member.

[5:05] But every now and again when I'm not – when I don't have my guard up, something will happen where I'll go, "Oh, that person's really uncomfortable with me!" And – it's never been like a high-stakes scenario, it's never been like I thought I was going to get kicked out of a program or anything like that.

[5:26] But there have just been moments where I realized that things weren't a hundred percent okay, and....you know, they – they sort of surprise me. They – the – you know. It's not what I'm used to experiencing. I do think... [Pause.] In general, what I get at the University of Maryland is a lot better than what people might get in, like a cor– a very formal, corporate office, for example.

[5:57] So, yeah, I guess it has kind of met my expectations in that if something negative occurs I'm generally surprised by it.

[6:07] *Ashleigh*: In regards to LGBTQ civil rights here at the University, what challenges do we still have, and what things still need to get done?

[6:15] *Alice*: I think resources is probably the number one challenge that I think we have. So there's a LGBTQ Equity Center and their mission is primarily student-focused, which I think is appropriate. Like, they don't have many staff. I think there's three full-time staff members there, they're serving the entire campus, and their focus is really on the student experience.

[6:43] But I think there is a real gap in the support that we offer for faculty and staff. And I think, you know, that could come through the Equity Center if they were allowed to hire maybe one or two more staff members who were purposefully focused on that, or it can come from the community, so if the LGBTQ fac-staff association kinda gets its feet off the ground a little bit more, there might be more kind of organic capacity for that.

[7:24] I think there's also pockets of campus where people in power are not necessarily focused on issues of diversity and inclusion in general, including issues relating to LGBTQ people. I think there are parts of campus – I've done some interviews with students from underrepresented groups, including queer students, on campus, and I think there are parts of campus that are less comfortable.

[7:56] For example, if someone's gender-nonconforming, or if they are um, trans, or queer, and they go into a space that is, on campus, very...*[Pause.]*...narrow in what it accepts as a person and what it accepts as an appropriate expression for a person, I think students, faculty, and staff can get kind of implicitly excluded from those spaces.

[8:29] And so I think in addition to capacity, there is a need for some reflection and leadership in those pockets of campus where...*[Pause.]* I think inclusion needs to be a little bit more centered in their work.

[8:46] *Ashleigh*: Can you talk a little bit more about the group that you formed, and sort of some of the things that you have noticed or things that have been difficult for you in sort of forming this community here on campus?

[8:59] *Alice*: Sure! So I started the queer faculty learning community in fall of 2017. It kind of came out of conversations between my team – so the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center – and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. So after the murder on campus, we had decided to meet with ODI to be a little bit more intentional about how we were serving the community.

[9:30] And everybody was just sort of...*[pause]* Well, the campus was traumatized after, after the murder, and I think...most of the offices we interfaced with were trying to see, "Okay, what we've been doing has not been enough. What can we do to make this campus a safer, more inclusive place?"

[9:53] And in that conversation, we started talking about identity-based faculty support. So, having kind of minority-majority groups where faculty and teaching staff, because we focus on teaching could come together to talk about their experiences.

[10:18] And I started thinking about, “Okay, what group could I lead?” And we have we have **an ADVANCE group** on campus, so there’s there’s some support already for women instructors, and women faculty members. And I’m a white woman, so – I’m a queer woman, and so I was trying to think about, “Okay, what supports exist already for queer instructors on campus? And – from a formal place, I don’t think there’s much of anything.”

[10:55] And, so, just trying to think of, like, what I could bring my identities to. For me, a queer faculty learning community made a lot of sense as a way to contribute. And, I also wanted to just meet more people, just from like a social, selfish [laughs] aspect? I just wanted – you know, I started working here, and then two weeks later, the Pulse shooting happened.

[11:28] And, so, there was just sort of a – because that was part of how I got to know campus, was during this event, it sort of sparked in me a desire to be with more queer people, and just be with people that were maybe feeling similar things with what I was feeling.

[11:47] And so...like, both as a service to campus, for a gap that I think exists, and [chuckles] just for myself, I wanted to form this group. And so getting the buy-in from my staff was really easy. They wanted to put together faculty learning communities, I suggested this, and my boss and my team members were on board immediately. I get like sixty dollars a semester for snacks – [laughs] like, I just go get snacks for the meetings – and I think the hardest part is everyone is so busy that sometimes there’s five people, sometimes it’s just me and one other person.

[12:31] Which – I’m kind of fine with, but I feel like it would be great if the University did something where you could like get...I don’t know, like a reduced teaching load, or, or a service reduction, or something, if you were also participating in these community groups. Because we know that faculty and staff from minority groups, and especially faculty and staff of color, are often kind of double, triple-burdened, because they’re asked to serve on every committee, and they’re asked to serve on every dissertation committee.

[13:09] And then to say, “Also, come to this meeting every other week,” might not be possible unless something else was taken off their plate. So on the one hand, I’m completely fine with it being like this informal group that people can kind of come in and out of. That’s completely fine. And on the other hand I feel like if we wanted to scale this up, it would require a commitment to recognize the burden that’s already on these faculty members.

[13:43] *Ashleigh*: Can you talk a little bit more about TLTC and sort of how TLTC has created programming to either support LGBTQ stuff on campus or developing sort of teaching materials for people to use in their classrooms?

[13:57] Alice: Mhm. So the TLTC, it grew out of the Center for Teaching Excellence, I think in 2015 it sort of transitioned over. It has since become a lot bigger and a lot more well-known on campus, and offered a lot more programming.

[14:14] There are members of the staff who are very strong allies of the LGBTQ population, and – for example, my colleague Alexis Williams, she won the Defender of Diversity award last year from the LGBT Equity Center for her work supporting the trans community on campus. She's been really involved with the Trans Terp campaign she is so thoughtful and so ... supportive isn't even the right word, because she's in it. I don't know how to express it.

[14:57] But she's just so clearly engaged. And then other staff members – it's more about their kind of personal commitment, I guess, to civil rights, and human rights.

[15:18] We do less about direct support for inclusion in the classroom than I think we all want to. This is something that our staff has been talking about a lot is that we have, for example, diversity and inclusion workshop series, but really diversity and inclusion should just be embedded in everything that we do, as opposed to having separate diversity and inclusion workshops.

[15:45] And that's something that we've just been trying to discuss as staff and figure out how we want to move kind of into a next phase of that. I am working with Carlton Green from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion on a workshop about infusing inclusion throughout your course. We provide, we kind of mirror out the language that the TransTerp group wrote to put in syllabi, so on our syllabus template we have language about pronouns, and things like that, where we will advertise workshops and things like that, that ODI or the LGBTQ Equity Center is doing.

[16:31] I did a roundtable a couple of weeks ago that was supposed to be "LGBTQ 102," so, assuming you have some general knowledge of the queer community, now let's come and talk about the queer community at Maryland. And we were able to use TLTC space for that, and it was advertised in our newsletter and things like that.

[16:52] I think in general, folks want to be doing more. And I think over time, more is going to seep in, just because of who the staff members are. So I think it's more coming from personal investment and interest than necessarily a mandate from campus, let's say.

[17:18] Ashleigh: Can you talk about a memorable experience, or something – you've been here for a while –

[17:22] Alice: [chuckles]

[17:23] Ashleigh: – something that will stick with you for a very long time, or something that really surprised you?

[17:28] Alice: Sure, um...I think....A couple things that have happened over the last year, is just – being excited about people showing up to things. So there was the first meeting in a long time of the LGBTQ fac-staff association happened last fall.

[17:50] And I got an email because I'm on the LGBTQ Equity Center listserv, and I went, and I was like, "I don't know if anyone's going to go to this." And there was probably fifteen, twenty people in the room. And it was just really, just a nice feeling that other people have carved the time out of their day to come. So the happy hour that I just scheduled, it was not a huge burden. [laughs] Um, in the fall, there were maybe like five of us.

[18:26] We had a lovely conversation, there were people from kind of the Baby Boomer generation, and they were talking about their experiences coming out, and their experiences, like, coming to terms with their own identity, and it was just wonderful and fascinating!

[18:43] And, you know, we just did the same thing last week, and had – or two weeks ago? Who knows. [chuckles] And had a happy hour. And there's just a nice group of people, and people that I don't know on campus were coming to these events. And I think that's just going to stick with me. Like, if you provide an opportunity for people to come together, and that can just be literally a Facebook event, then people will show up. And it maybe won't be fifty people, but it'll be four. And – you'll have a lovely time! I don't know, there's just something nice about that to me.

[Interview resumes on May 21, 2019.]

[19:23] Ashleigh: All right, so this is one of the last questions, which is: What would you want incoming staff and faculty to understand about being LGBTQ on campus right now?

[19:34] Alice: I guess that everybody's different, and that there's no one thing that everyone needs who's within the queer community. At the same time, you know, right now is a stressful period of time in terms of the court cases that are going up before the Supreme Court, and different attacks on the trans community, different types of attacks –

[20:01] There was just another murder this morning, of a young trans black woman and –

[20:09] Ashleigh: This is in Texas, correct?

[20:11] Alice: Yes, it was just – I was literally just checking it on my Instagram walking over. So I think I would want incoming staff or faculty to be willing to put in the time to engage with the current news.

[20:30] And, like, click on that thing that has LGBT in the title of the article. Like, click on it! Read it! And maybe understand that your colleagues might be – you know, twenty percent of their brain might be churning through something else right now.

[20:48] And so some patience, or some understanding with that, might be helpful. I'd also say I'd want them to try to maybe check some of – I mean, myself as well – try to check some of our own assumptions.

[21:11] You know, so when somebody comes for an interview, and they – you read them as a woman, like, maybe don't only direct them to the women's room. Like, maybe just say, "Here's where all the bathrooms are." Or maybe don't assume they have a husband, or don't assume that they are living a certain heteronormative life.

[21:36] Just kind of leaving a little space is always really appreciated.

[21:41] *Ashleigh*: Can you talk a little bit more about sort of the work that you do at TLTC and how that might be beneficial for faculty?

[21:51] *Alice*: Sure! So, one of the direct ways is through a queer faculty learning community that I run, so queer instructors of any rank can come. It's once every other week, and we talk for about an hour. It's structured around the TLTC's Fearless Teaching Framework, which I created, which defines effective teaching in terms of the classroom climate, the course content, the teaching practices, and the assessment strategies.

[22:18] So each week we talk about one of those macro-topics, and also the conversation just sort of meanders through what's happening in people's classrooms, what's happening in their departments, in their lives, to just try to add some support and build some community and also build more capacity around teaching and knowledge about teaching.

[22:39] And then we also run a number of workshops that center diversity and inclusion topics. So for example, I just ran one with Carlton Green, over in the office of Diversity and Inclusion, about how to infuse inclusion into your courses. So, we talked about inclusive climates, inclusive content, inclusive practices, and inclusive assessments.

[23:02] And then, my colleagues also run other workshops, and do consultations around issues related to inclusion as well. And we try to be strong partners with ODI, or other organizations, you know, Undergraduate Studies, or other organizations on campus that are here to serve minority communities on campus.

[23:29] *Ashleigh*: And can you talk a little bit more about, for incoming staff and faculty, a little bit about your experience being here?

[23:37] *Alice*: Yes! So when I came here, I started on May 30th, 2016, and it was right before the Pulse shooting and I was very affected by that emotionally. It felt very much like my community was targeted, and, um –

[24:03] At the time, it was the most deadly mass shooting – that has now been surpassed, because of our inability to do anything about gun control, but that's another topic – and I

remember just feeling really stressed and angry during those first couple weeks that I was working here, and it sort of made me want to center my own queer identity in my work. And, you know, that doesn't –

[24:36] There's not a direct pathway between someone else's trauma and me centering my identity, but in my rage at the response of that shooting, I just felt like I really wanted to be visible and I really wanted to be seen, and I really wanted to support other queer people on this campus and have community with them, because – not that I didn't feel a sense of community with my straight cis colleagues, but there was something about wanting to make sure that like, my queer family is okay on campus.

[25:14] And what can I be doing in order to have community for myself, but also help build community for other people?

[25:23] *Ashleigh*: Is there anything else, any last comments about your experience at the University of Maryland, both as a student and as a staffperson?

[25:31] *Alice*: Um, so I – I've been here during some really important you know, identity-development years in my life. So in, in my mid-twenties I was here as a graduate student and I was sort of figuring out what kind of labels I liked and how I wanted to present myself, and who, specifically, I wanted to be dating.

[25:52] And, then now, coming back as kind of a more formed identity, and I'm more, you know, I'm more secure in my identity and being at a place now where I can kind of help others, it's interesting to be in the same place and to have – like, the same physical place, but such a different emotional place, with my identity.

[26:20] So I guess it's just, you know, this has been a place that has been really central to my own growth, and my own development, and in general I've had very positive experiences here. You know, maybe a couple of not-so-great experiences here and there, but in general, this has been a really good place for me.

[26:41] *Ashleigh*: Well, thank you for your time, and thank you for your contribution to University Archives.