

# A different kind of romance

## St. Valentine's Day experiences in the LGBT+ community

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Cards, balloons, flowers and chocolates. Steak dinners at candlelit restaurants or movie nights on the couch. Red hearts and teddy bears.

Valentine's Day heralds a time for celebrating romantic love. The holiday is traditionally spent out at fancy restaurants, with hands holding tight to other hands, or cuddled underneath a blanket with an empty chocolate container, pressing the button to play the fifth episode in a row.

Whether spending it in a relationship or not, Valentine's Day is the time of year that highlights the love in a person's life.

For some, however, the holiday marks a time of loneliness, difficulty and even prejudice.

"I would imagine it is difficult for a lot of the LGBT kids, especially the ones that are either completely homosexual or just have leanings towards same-sex preferences," Julia Hines, the secretary for Eagles for PRIDE, said.

The LGBT community refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other people of non-heterosexual preferences. With a history of violence and prejudice against this community, a day for celebrating love can either be a time for struggle or for more special celebration, Hines said.

As an executive member of Eagles for PRIDE, Hines expressed how hard it can be to talk to someone "without being scared that you might find prejudice or hatred toward you."

Meanwhile, the overall the community displays mixed opinions on

Valentine's Day, just like the heterosexual community.

Cillian Donahue, AU student and member of the LGBT community, said that the holiday "can feel really isolating" for LGBT people, particularly when single.

"The fact that Valentine's Day is portrayed a lot of the times on social media particularly between straight couples...there's something about gifts and things at stores being so heteronormative," Donahue said.

While the holiday can be difficult for the LGBT community, Vice President of Eagles for PRIDE, Jake Wenger said that the experiences of the community, like any community, should not be generalized, as each person has unique feelings and experiences.

Eagles for PRIDE, Ashland University's LGBT club, works to create a safe space for LGBT youth here on campus.

"The point of the organization is that it's known that there is an LGBT community here in this area on campus," Wenger said. "I think that helps for people just to come out because this is the first time that they are away from their families, and maybe they can't come out to their family, but they can come out here at college."

While still a new organization on campus, Hines said that Eagles for PRIDE would consider hosting a Valentine's Day event sometime in the future to give students a fun and comforting space.

This safe space of Eagles for PRIDE exists not only in tough times of the year around holidays but also as a constant presence on campus.

"AU itself is a lighthouse sur-

rounded by the sea, because in AU you find so many people who are accepting, including the staff and other students, and it just definitely feels like a place where, on campus, you definitely have allies, and I think we're starting to get people to understand that," Hines said.

Hines feels as Ashland University's campus is growing more diverse and more accepting, the broader media, including social media, television, film and literature, continues grow in support, normalcy and acceptance.

LGBT representation in books, television and movies that Hines, Donahue, and Wenger recommend for Valentine's Day include "Love, Simon," "I'll Give You the Sun," "We Are The Ants," "The Foster's," "Sense8" and "Grey's Anatomy."

Hines, recommending the novel "We Are The Ants," said that representation in which the characters' sexual identity "is definitely a part of [the plot] but it's not the full story" is important, as those characters "show that [the LGBT people] are just the same as anyone else."

Representation of LGBT in media is becoming more prevalent in more accepting ways, and while the process is slow, it cannot be pushed, Wenger said.

While normativity for the LGBT community grows in the eyes of the Ashland University campus and the world as a whole, the individual member struggles with Valentine's Day and his or her or their sexual identity still persists.

It is especially difficult for those who are closeted or face adversity, Donahue said.

"No matter what your experi-



SUBMITTED BY CILLIAN DONAHUE  
Enjoying the evening on a winter date with Cillian Donahue (right), Liz Buccì cuddles up for a picture in front of the frosted trees.

ence is, someone out there has had the same or something very similar you or what you have gone through," Wenger said. "If you can't come out to your blood family, your friends are your family, and this community is your family. You are not alone."

As for those not in the community who hope to make this holiday more enjoyable for all, Donahue recommends being cautious of one's words "because you never know what your friends are experiencing," stressing the AU commu-

nity be genuine and kind.

While Valentine's Day can be both enjoyable and lonely no matter what one's sexual preference is, the holiday can signify something important to anyone and can emphasize any sort of love in one's life.

"It's important to remember that V-Day is just a day to celebrate people that you love and that doesn't have to be romantic love," Donahue said. "Even if you're not in a relationship there are people in your life that you love, and it's a day to celebrate that, too."

# Peer Educator initiative re-instated

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Ashland University's Peer Educator program has been re-instated as a part of Ashland's strategic plan, Ashland Rising 2020.

The plan identifies five strategic imperatives for AU. One of these imperatives is titled, "A Healthy, Safe and Supportive Campus Environment."

Deborah Sullivan, director of campus wellness, decided to re-implement the educator program after four years of AU not running the program.

"I decided it would be a good thing to bring back," Sullivan said.

The Peer Educator's mission is to educate Ashland University students in all aspects of wellness while also preparing them with the necessary tools to lead a healthy life-style.

Sullivan said the goal of this imperative is to provide programs that promote healthy behaviors for students, faculty and staff. It also encourages students to become leaders within the AU community as the program itself is student lead.

"The national initiative is designed for student to student interaction to encourage a healthy lifestyle," Sullivan said. "I thought what better way to do that than to have it be student lead."

Two of those student leaders in the community are Malorie Anile and Priya Battula. Anile is a dietetics major while Battula is a business major. They are the co-chairs of the peer educator program and are advocates for a healthy lifestyle.

"We're serving as role models and educators for optimal well-being," Anile said. "We're trying to bring different initiatives that help bring awareness to our campus community."

The program is mainly focused

on the dimensions of wellness within a person.

"We are a group of people who are interested in working on wellness," Battula said. "We focus on the seven kinds of dimensions on wellness."

The seven different dimensions of wellness that the educators focus on include emotional, environmental, intellectual, occupational, physical, social and spiritual wellness.

It was these dimensions that brought the student lead group together at Ashland.

"All of the people in our group had an interest in one of the dimensions of wellness," Battula said. "That's how we came together to form the group."

It is within these dimensions that a healthy lifestyle is encouraged. The dimensions focus on how you can lead a healthy life, and fitness and good nutrition are examples of physical wellness dimension.

As a college student, Anile knows all too well just how easy it is to forget about physical well-being.

"This program is to increase awareness for students in taking charge of their health," Anile said. "I think we get busy with school and our social lives and we forget about our physical well-being. A lot of things get pushed to the side."

Anile said she hopes that the peer educator program will help students to balance their lives in a way that sticks.

"It's important for students to incorporate the dimensions of wellness amidst all the business," Anile said. "It's also important to find an easy way to do this that sticks around for the long run."

Both Anile and Battula became educators after they had undergone a rigorous 12-hour training program in the summer organized by the Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education (NAS-

PA).

After the training program, both students had to pass a national exam to become certified peer educators.

The NASPA training was what gave Anile many of the tools needed to become a peer educator, while also teaching life skills.

"We learned a lot about working together as a team" Anile said. "We also learned about knowing how to lead peers and have empathy while also discussing diversity."

The main takeaway that Battula got from the training program was how to become a more effective listener.

"We improved our skills on how to listen more consciously," Battula said. "Learning how to be a

good listener is a very good thing I would say."

The peer educator group currently has a diverse array of majors in it, not just physical exercise or dietetics. This is one of the reasons that Battula finds it so exciting to be a part of.

The group also has two international members, one being Battula. She originally found out about joining the group through Facebook.

"I found out about this group through a Facebook page and immediately took an interest. Battula said. "I was really looking forward to joining this group."

As the director, Sullivan said she was overjoyed to have international students take part in the educa-

tor group, and she would like to see even more diversity.

"We're just thrilled to have international students be a part of this," Sullivan said. "It's an awesome dimension to add to the group. It's a nice mix but we only have one male. We would like to encourage gender diversity too."

The group meets bi-weekly and is always looking for new recruits, Sullivan said.

Updates, tips and pictures about wellness from the peer educator group can be found through the AU portal, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The group's Facebook page is Ashland University Wellness. The Twitter handle is @AU-campuswell, and the Instagram account is aucampuswellness..



STEVEN SHRENKEL  
Priya Battula and Malorie Anile took the healthy campus pledge to heart by becoming student leaders of the campus wellness group.