

# UCF welcomes its LGBTQ+ community with open arms

By Jon-Paul Schaut | March 8, 2017

**T**imes have changed since the University of Central Florida, formerly known as Florida Technical University, opened its doors in 1963. Wars have been fought, social uprisings have happened and revolutions for equality have come before the world. Though the battles aren't over yet, this country has begun to expand its mind and become accepting of all who call it home.

This holds true for UCF as well. In the school's creed, community falls third on the list behind scholarship and integrity, but some may say community is most important. UCF has a wide range of students of every race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation and according to many students, it welcomes all its students with open arms and equality.

In an age where people are told to be who they want to be, many have come out as identifying with something other than heterosexual. This community, known as the LGBTQ+ community, is comprised of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other.

History shows this group of people have been quieted, looked upon as outcasts and subject to hate crimes. Though problems may still exist, this group has experienced a growing support from the country and world at large. According to the Pew Research Center, since the 2015 Supreme Court Ruling on same sex marriage, support and acceptance on the LGBTQ+ community has been steady at over 50 percent of the country approving this decision.

This idea can be seen on UCF's campuses as it encourages those students who identify differently not to be afraid to be their true selves.

Colin Brooks, a 20-year-old theatre studies and creative writing double major at UCF, proudly identifies as an openly gay male. The process of coming out started for him in high school, but by the time he arrived at UCF in the fall of 2014, Brooks was very comfortable in his own skin as one would see him today. As a freshman starting his life on his own, he did not know what to expect. His friends and family were supportive of him but coming to UCF was a new obstacle to overcome.

Now a junior, Brooks feels just as good about himself and his school as he did on day one.

“My experience at UCF has been really good,” Brooks said. “There has been no hate speech and this seems to be a very open and positive campus to those of us in the LGBTQ+ community. I have always felt safe, accepted and included on campus.”

He even went on to joking

“I’ve actually gotten a lot of positive reactions, just because you know straight girls love a gay guy,” Brooks said.

Brooks is not the only one who feels this way about the school. R Jenson, a 20-year-old theatre studies major, has had a very similar experience. Jenson identifies as agender, asexual and panromantic.

“Agender means I don’t identify as male or female or any gender outside of that,” said Jenson. “Asexual means I am not attracted to any gender sexually though this does not mean I don’t want to have sex.

Panromantic means I would date anyone of any gender.”

Jenson knows that their specific case is something people are not necessarily used to seeing or may not know exactly how to handle. This however has not hindered their time at the school.

“Everyone is pretty chill here. Everyone tries to use my pronouns [they, them],” Jenson said. “As for the campus there are some gender neutral bathrooms that the LGBTQ+ Services have outlined on a map, so it’s not too much of a hassle to go to the bathroom, which is a bigger deal than it may sound.”

In the end, both students said they were happy at UCF and agreed it is a safe and accepting university.

Their advice for LGBTQ+ students was to be themselves, don't be afraid to speak up and to be smart and safe. Their advice for everyone else was to be accepting and open minded.

"I believe there is plenty of beauty in the world in all shapes and forms. Once people open their eyes to it, they will see it all fits together rather nicely," Brooks said.