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University Park,
June
03,
2022

GSU alum celebrates his pride at Commencement



Commencement provided an opportunity for [Social Work](#) student Peter Brassea to celebrate his pride, both in his exceptional academic achievements and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

The first in his immediate family to graduate from college, Brassea's scholastic journey has not always been a straightforward path. He never planned to attend college, and in 2012, after his mother passed away following a battle with cancer, Brassea dropped out of high school. In 2013, he enrolled at Prairie State College in order to obtain his GED. Just a year later, at the age of 18, Brassea also came out to his father after struggling for years. While his father was accepting, some were not, and wound up pulling away.

"They just needed time. They didn't know how to process it," Brassea said.

After facing both academic and personal struggles in his younger years, Brassea ultimately earned a full ride to GSU as part of the [Dual Degree Program](#) and graduated with a bachelor's degree in social work in 2020. In 2022, Brassea successfully completed his master's degree in social work and was asked to speak at the commencement ceremony.

Upon being selected to deliver the [Commencement speech](#), Brassea began to deliberate wearing a pride stole to the event. A neighbor offered to buy the pride stole for Brassea after noticing his apprehension, and Brassea chose to wear the stole while delivering his moving commencement speech, which touched on the loss of his mother. Despite his earlier deliberations, Brassea was pleased with his decision, saying, “I wanted to represent the LGBTQ+ community.” It was important Brassea to do so, as “this is an opportunity our community doesn’t get—to graduate from college, let alone be the Commencement speaker.” Brassea added, “there are so many factors that keep us from graduating. This was a huge deal.”



Brassea is grateful to GSU, both for the ability his full ride has afforded him to graduate without a great deal of student debt, and for the welcoming, inclusive, and supportive campus community. While he initially considered attending a larger university, Brassea found himself afraid of not being accepted, something that he did not experience at GSU. “Our staff and faculty make us feel welcome,” he said, adding that GSU students are lucky to have faculty and staff members to talk to about being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. “It’s one thing to identify,” Brassea said, “it’s another thing to ask students how they feel and make them feel comfortable by sharing their own experiences.”

Brassea shared his journey with Dr. Joi Patterson and Dr. Amy Vujaklija. Scroll down to episode 36 to listen to [Teaching and Learning Podcast](#).

Although Brassea has graduated, he hopes to see future generations of LGBTQ+ students at GSU supported as he was, and in new ways, as well. He hopes to one day see the university have a Pride parade or event, as being able to celebrate in this way is deeply meaningful to LGBTQ+ people. “You get to celebrate yourself as a whole person,” Brassea said.

Brassea plans to continue to contribute to the LGBTQ+ community, as well. As a social worker, he wants to focus on helping the LGBTQ+ community, particularly younger members of the community who face homelessness after their families kick them out of the house due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. He also has a message for others in the LGBTQ+ community he hopes they will carry with them: “Be proud and be you...be as bold as you want to be.”