

# MISSOURIAN

## Heterosexism. Sexism. Racism.

### A LGBT sorority at MU leads the way in promoting progressive attitudes and speaking out for oppressed groups

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By SETH GRAVES

Gamma Rho Lambda has chapter meetings every Sunday night at 8 p.m. For more information about resources for the LGBT community, as well as other information regarding gender and sexuality issues, contact the LGBT resource center, 884-7750. More information about remaining events can be found at [web.missouri.edu/~umcstudentlife/gbt](http://web.missouri.edu/~umcstudentlife/gbt).

In less than two months, three MU students have turned a half-serious idea into a new sorority.

Ashley Price, Kelley Robinson and Ashlee Kolieboi are the co-founders of the MU chapter of Gamma Rho Lambda, a national sorority dedicated to promoting a progressive attitude toward lesbians, gays and people who are bisexual or transgender.

Kolieboi said when the organizers first considered forming a gender-blind Greek chapter, they jokingly called it a "frarority." Then they heard about Gamma Rho Lambda. "Though it was a sorority, we liked their progressive ideology and decided to go for it," Kolieboi said.

Using their connections with other organizations on campus, the three students were able to gather enough interest to put together a "colony," the first step to becoming a full-fledged sorority chapter. After the colony has survived three semesters, the founders say they expect the national council, based at Arizona State University in Tempe, Ariz., to officially move the MU group's status to chapter.

"We started thinking about it when talking about sororities being close-minded when it comes to gender," Price said. "Then we thought we would start Googling sororities that favored the LGBT community but also just encouraged open-mindedness about gender for anyone."

That was two months ago. Since then, the idea just took off, Price said, attracting men and women eager to bridge what they consider the "huge disconnect" between the LGBT and wider MU communities. "We want to compel ourselves to say that MU is an accepting place," Price said, "but really, mid-Missouri is not the most actively open environment for the LGBT group."

Laura Kurtz, left, and Tracy Johnson "break the silence" they have kept for nearly a day Wednesday in Speakers Circle at MU. Gamma Rho Lambda and four other campus groups organized the event to raise awareness and tolerance of oppressed groups. April is Pride Month. (JESSIE KING/Missourian)

Robinson is a ritualist officer for MU's Kappa Alpha Theta chapter, where she says she learned how the Greek system operates. She plans to use that experience if MU's Multicultural Greek Council grants Gamma Rho Lambda's request to become recognized on campus. The group will model

the ideology of already existing organizations on campus, such as the Gay/Straight Alliance and the Triangle Coalition.

Tracy Johnson, a member of Gamma Rho Lambda, said many of the new sorority's members think the constitutions of chapters within the Panhellenic Council harbor a message of "false dichotomy of male and female" that many of Gamma Rho's members fail to fit into. Johnson and Price both cited the marriage ceremonies and formals commonly held between sororities and fraternities.

"Their structure seems often driven by the image of the typical 'sorority girl,'" Johnson said. "And that fits for some people, but it's creating a lie about how gender works. We're hoping to defy those customs."

Price says Gamma Rho's national membership requirements — such as the sorority being closed to men, but open to women who identify as male — were a topic of much conversation before the first initiation of 22 members on April 8.

"We had to struggle with being called a sorority and at the same time taking on the progressive attitude," Price said.

On Wednesday, members of Gamma Rho Lambda collaborated with Delta Lambda Phi, a fraternity for gay, bisexual and "open-minded" men, the Triangle Coalition and the Legion of Black Collegians to sponsor the National Day of Silence, held to commemorate victims of oppression around the world. Throughout the day, members remained silent to represent those who are routinely silenced by social stigma, racism, threats and assault. At 4 p.m., participants broke the silence with a series of speeches attacking oppressive forces around the world.

**According to a recent National Gay and Lesbian Task Force climate report, thousands of anti-gay incidents, including acts of vandalism, harassment and assault, occur on university and college campuses every year. A survey by the task force found that 5 percent of LGBT respondents were the target of anti-gay physical assaults, 16 percent were threatened with violence, and 76 percent reported being verbally harassed.**

Lindsey Smith, Gamma Rho's national council representative, visited MU the first week of April. She said she was impressed with the speed at which the MU members were able to generate interest in creating a local chapter. In addition to the Arizona State University chapter, the sorority has one other official chapter at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Ga., where Smith said it was more difficult getting members on board.

"A lot of sororities with our mind-set pop up for a while, but they grow too big too fast and fizzle away," Smith said. "We've already got four graduates from (Gamma Rho), and we're growing steadily instead of in a short burst," she said.

Charlie Calvin, a MU junior and president of Delta Lambda Phi, said he is looking at participating in more activities with Gamma Rho Lambda. "We've considered being their 'brother fraternity,' but we aren't at that stage yet," Calvin said. "We're just in the recruitment process now."

MU's Organization Resource Group is currently considering Gamma Rho Lambda for membership, which would make the new organization eligible for funding by MU. Gamma Rho leaders say they have many social activities in mind, such as drag shows and community service activities, to give members group opportunities for fellowship without initially living together in Greek housing.

One goal the current members would like to accomplish is to sponsor a child in Vietnam through an organization such as SOS Children's Villages.