

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

JUNE IS LGBTQ+ PRIDE MONTH, BUT WHY DO WE CELEBRATE PRIDE AMONG THE UWLA COMMUNITY?

By President Robert W. Brown

June is LGBTQ+ Pride Month, a time to honor and celebrate our LGBTQ+ community. At UWLA, we take pride in our diversity - one of our key strengths as an institution.

Taking pride in Pride may sound funny, but it is serious business. Understanding and embracing our LGBTQ+ community is extremely important now, perhaps, more than ever. This community has been maligned and attacked for decades, yet they remain proud and strong. Even today, despite the community's tremendous efforts to build awareness, acceptance, and understanding - and with millions of people living more openly and authentically than ever - this community remains under attack. Even today, LGBTQ+ rights are being actively threatened by state and local governments across the country.

Consider a young transgender person in Texas or Florida who not only is being made to feel like a second-class citizen by the transphobic comments of state leaders, even their right to actual health care has been jeopardized. Or consider a same-sex couple in Mississippi who recently adopted a young child but can't rest easy because less than a decade ago, their state imposed a ban on gay adoption, which a Federal District Court later overturned.

With the recent conservative additions to the U.S. Supreme Court, civil rights organizations everywhere are on guard and preparing themselves for potential attacks that might challenge previously protected same-sex rights to marriage and family. These fears are not far-fetched. Consider that in 2022, Justice Clarence Thomas - in his concurring opinion overturning *Roe V. Wade* - directly stated his interest in revisiting the previously settled *Obergefell v. Hodges* same-sex marriage rights decision. Fortunately, Congress acted in late 2022 with the Respect for Marriage Act, which recognizes and protects same-sex and interracial marriages under federal law and interstate relation. (1)

The LGBTQ+ community is a group that must be protected and celebrated without question. At UWLA, we aim to support all of our diverse communities; it is the right thing to do in keeping with our Family FEEL values. As an opportunity university, it is critical that we, of all institutions, create a welcoming atmosphere of acceptance and support for people from

marginalized backgrounds or communities.

In our School of Business, we teach diversity as a competitive advantage. Although DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access) has become a business buzzword, it is also a cultural beacon guiding many top companies and organizations worldwide.

And in our School of Law, we teach and train lawyers who will go out into the world to defend any people's rights that may be hanging in the balance. We celebrate graduates like our 2020 JD recipient Sam Salar, who dedicates his career and law practice to serving the LGBTQ+ community's needs. Sam, UWLA salutes you just as we celebrate any other graduates who leave UWLA to boldly support and defend their communities.

You see, at UWLA, DEIA is not just a buzzword; it is who and what we are. We are an opportunity university for all communities and all types of students from all manner of backgrounds. Opportunity and diversity are in our DNA as an institution, and we will rejoice in that, at least as long as I am president.

This month and all year long, we stand with, celebrate, embrace, and defend - when necessary - our LGBTQ+ students, staff, faculty, and friends at UWLA and elsewhere. We do all this with PRIDE!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert W. Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Brown" clearly legible.