

BACKGROUND

My name is Andrew Keegan. I am a graduate student in the public administration program at Montana State University. I also work as the graduate assistant for LGBTQ student support housed within the Diversity & Inclusion Student Commons on campus. My research is focused on the intersection of queer identity and personal and collective minority experience on public lands and the normative role of administrative units overseeing wilderness areas in advocating LGBTQ—and no less importantly other minority group—visibility and creating safe spaces within respective jurisdictions. My classmate is Kiersten Iwai, whose research is focused on the role of leaders in responding to ethical calls of normative change and in transforming organizational culture and promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Kiersten and I work closely both within and outside of our program. Recently, Kiersten introduced me to the social media platforms of Mikah Meyer (<https://www.mikahmeyer.com/>), who has made national outdoor and travel news by showcasing his identity as a gay man visiting and recreating on more than 400 national parks units. We contacted Mikah earlier this year to propose the idea of visiting Bozeman to talk about his understanding of the intersection of sexual identity with his personal experiences on public lands. After indicating his interest, we are now in the process of securing sponsorships to finance his visit and community talk.

Already, there has been considerable interest expressed by a number of conservation organizations throughout town in Mikah's visit, and we sense that there is a great deal of interest we have yet to identify on campus and among other groups in Bozeman. I was recently involved in organizing a panel on campus discussing queer work and politics, where I spoke about the need to challenge our kneejerk cultural narrative that (dis)locates queer existence to urban and away from rural geographies which consequently dilutes queer citizenship and stewardship on critically significant natural landscapes like national parks. From the Q&A session following the panel, in addition to conversations Kiersten and I have had with others since then, our sense is that there is an overpowering desire across the wider Bozeman community, and especially among the conservation community, to expand a critical dialog concerning diversity, inclusion, and visibility of difference in outdoor/wilderness-oriented communities such as our own.

Another focus of Mikah's personal narrative is his religion/faith and how it intersects with his sexual orientation. During his travels, Mikah makes a point of visiting places of worships that have reached out to show their support of the work he does, and he often preaches or showcases his choral talents with their congregations. Naturally, this lends itself to involving the faith community in Bozeman as a clear stakeholder in Mikah's visit.

Currently, our projected budget for this event is just shy of \$3500. We have identified three off-campus organizations (Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and Greater Yellowstone Coalition) who have committed to donating \$500 each, and the Center for Western Lands and People have agreed to donate \$250. We are awaiting responses from Montana Wilderness Association, NPCA, and Yellowstone Forever, each of whom were initially approached with a \$500 donation request. The Departments of Earth Sciences and Land Resources & Environmental Sciences and the Colleges of Letters & Sciences and Education, Health & Human Development have also indicated their interest in sponsoring this event.

The itinerary for Mikah's visit, although not fully settled at this time, includes his participation at Hope Lutheran Church's morning service on April 22. In the early afternoon, Mikah has agreed to lead a small hike with the LGBTQ Mentors Program and other interested participants. Finally, Mikah's visit will conclude that evening with a community talk hosted in ballrooms B, C & D of the SUB. Taking the form of an informal panel, Mikah will act as a kind of keynote, wrapped up with a Q&A session with him and a handful of key community members who have undertaken similar work locally (such as that being

spearheaded by the Montana Racial Equity Project) regarding diversity, inclusion, and difference in outdoor recreation.

REQUEST

<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Justification</i>
<i>Airfare, FAT-BZN</i>	(1) roundtrip	\$ 600.00	
<i>Lodging</i>	(2) nights	\$ 400.00	
<i>Transportation</i>	(2) days; rental car, gas expenses	\$175.00	
<i>Parking fee at FAT</i>	(3) days	\$36.00	
<i>Per diem</i>	(3) days	\$150.00	
<i>Speaker fee</i>	(1)	\$,1000.00	
<i>Marketing</i>		\$125.00	
<i>AV/tech</i>		\$200.00	
<i>Venue</i>		---	
<i>Sponsor dinner</i>		\$750.00	

Mikah will need airfare, lodging, and transportation accommodations to make this event possible; AV/tech and marketing expenses are necessary to make this event an operational success and to draw a robust audience. Perhaps most beneficial from this request is the possibility of hosting a sponsors’ dinner with Mikah that will give department heads and one of two student representatives from sponsoring departments and colleges the opportunity to meet Mikah and to establish mutually meaningful and creative connections with sponsors and potential professional contacts from the wider community.

IMPACT & IMPLEMENTATION

Ultimately, we believe that this is a fantastic opportunity to build upon a critical conversation centered around diversity of experience on public lands and in outdoor-oriented communities, both here in Bozeman but also beyond to the larger public lands-oriented community. Mikah’s continuing work is an invaluable fixture that has the possibility of bringing together many groups that may not otherwise do so to engage in this collective dialog and to create social capital.

The various non-profit organizations with whom we have been in contact have commented on the difficulties they sense that they experience trying to collaborate with obvious partners in the university. From this perspective, the event offers an opportunity for students to network and establish beneficial professional connections within the non-profit and conservation communities that operate in Bozeman and beyond.

We believe that students from the number of departments, although immensely varied in their disciplines and academic concentrations, can draw meaningfully diverse perspectives from this event. For example, students of Earth Science may build on themes in human geography and socio-relational power dynamic enacted on physical landscapes, students of Political Science the normative role of public lands administrators in promoting and encouraging diversity and inclusion, while recognizing a mutual theme of environmental justice and social equity. Less immediately apparent perhaps is the learning outcomes for students of the College of Education, Health & Human Development, for instance, yet the College’s widespread interests from hospitality to exercise—the latter is especially worth noting, I believe, acknowledging the manifold health disparities that beset LGBTQ populations, such as substance abuse and eating disorders, and the recognition of physical and psychological benefits of increased outdoor

recreation—aligns rather handsomely and can be expected to contribute evocatively to the discussion that will take place following Mikah’s talk and that which we hope will be sustained following his departure.