



SIUE's Shaw Shares Experiences, Inspires at LGBTQ+ STEM Conference

by Doug McIllaga

November 26 2020 7:45 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Michael Shaw, PhD, distinguished research professor in the College of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Chemistry, was among the featured speakers at the 2020 LGBTQ+ STEM Conference held virtually in October.

The five-day conference brought together “researchers in all fields of STEM to highlight and celebrate the contributions of the LGBTQ+ community, and to discuss a broad range of scientific topics and issues pertaining to equity, diversity and inclusion.” The event was organized in part by faculty from the University of Windsor who launched a resource group within the Canadian Society for Chemistry for LGBT+STEM, and featured 12 international speakers.

“I was delighted to be invited to speak at the conference,” said Shaw. “It’s important for people to have a sense of community with diversity. The ‘80s and ‘90s - a time when HIV/AIDS was rampant in the gay community and not easily controlled medically - were not nearly as accepting as today, so there were pressures to remain closeted. I feel the AIDS pandemic resulted in a smaller population of people my age who have had careers as ‘out’ STEM professionals, especially ones in long-term relationships.”

Shaw presented: “Balancing a Chemistry Career and a Relationship: Reflections on Three Decades of Coming Out.” He recounted his career and 30-year relationship, and discussed his research and experiences from various institutions.

“Many decisions that couples face, like how to fairly prioritize professional and personal goals, are common to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples,” Shaw said. “Same-sex couples faced many additional challenges prior to the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, such as navigating immigration processes for international couples. I discussed my teaching and research in inorganic electrochemistry, coming out professionally as a faculty member at a primarily undergraduate institution, and some of the challenges and opportunities my partner and I faced along the way.”

While science is an ideal, Shaw emphasizes it is put into practice by scientists who are equally as subject to biases, which makes discussions related to equity, diversity and inclusion important in the scientific community.

“The more points of view at the table, the better chance we have to catch biases in the interpretation of data,” he explained. “Experts with diverse experiences can come together to build stronger science. Equity and inclusion are important aspects of this process since it takes a huge amount of effort to become an expert in a field. People who start out at a disadvantage (economically, socially, etc.) have a harder time getting a seat at the table, but their different perspectives are necessary.”

Segue, SIUE's weekly radio program exploring the lives and work of the people on campus and beyond, will feature an interview with Shaw. The episode airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 29. Listeners can tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or sue.edu/wsie.

Shaw was also recently featured on the 500 Queer Scientists website.

Central to SIUE's exceptional and comprehensive education, the College of Arts and Sciences offers degree programs in the natural sciences, humanities, arts, social sciences, and communications. The College touches the lives of all SIUE students helping them explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.