

# ‘Proud to BU’ Fails to Ring True When Pride is Removed From Campus

By: Morgan Kee

Growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, and in the suburbs of Arkansas, Jaise King learned early on to handle identity with caution. In the Black church and traditions of the South, he saw queerness treated as “heavily repressed” and attempted to be “stamped out.”

By the sixth grade, King realized his own identity within the LGBTQIA+ community, but waited four years before “wearing it on his sleeve” in public. When the time came to look at colleges, he turned to the Northeast — eventually Boston University (BU) — to find somewhere he could exist without feeling held back.

Yet, the university's recent enforcement of its signage policy and removal of outward-facing Pride flags diluted that hope for many. Students are working alongside faculty to create inclusive spaces, but these actions raise doubts about whether the community can truly feel “Proud to BU”.

For King, BU’s actions remind him of the South. While he feels more authentic here, he sees an institutional problem the university must address.

The issue began in September 2024, when President Melissa Gilliam updated the school’s Events and Demonstrations Policy, expanding a student-specific guideline to the whole university, according to the Daily Free Press.

The crackdown on Pride flags began in September 2025, when the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality program and the Children's Center received directives from the university to take down their flags. Pressures peaked in March 2026, when BU removed flags from private offices over spring break.

"Pride flags are a way of people communicating that this is a safe space," said an anonymous student. They wanted to keep their name private, given the current political climate. "It's hard to feel proud at an institution that you can't feel safe at."

The BU community soon pushed back, arguing the policy treats symbols of pride the same as symbols of hate.

Heather Barrett, a CAS Writing professor and third-generation BU alum, struggles to reconcile pride in her queer identity with confidence in her school after the university's decision.

"I feel so fraught about this phrase [Proud to BU]!" Barrett wrote in a Q&A. "On the one hand, BU Pride runs deep ... I've often felt proud to be yet another member of my family who attended BU and got an excellent education there. With all of that said, my pride in BU is limited to those individual relationships, and I don't feel it in the larger institution."

Motivated to speak out, Barrett published an [op-ed](#) in Advocate titled "Campus is not a closet: Why removing Pride flags from Boston University is not 'neutral'," insisting the conversation focus on the human impact beyond policy.

“[I] wanted to add my own perspective,” Barrett wrote. “Targeting Pride flags could be particularly harmful to LGBTQIA+ students and others on campus who need visible signs of support to know where it is safe for them to be open about their identities.”

However, not every reader accepted Barrett's message. She soon received unsolicited emails at her BU email address.

“One was a transphobic activist who made a fake whistleblower complaint against a gender-affirming clinic for young people who urged me to question whether or not trans people have a right to exist — of course they do!” Barrett wrote. “Another was an anti-gay activist who told me I need conversion therapy to cure my mental illness.”

Barrett knew she was taking a risk. Still, the importance of speaking out about the issue outweighed the consequences, given the potential to change a policy or even let other LGBTQIA+ members at BU see they're not alone.

Those outside the queer community also grappled with BU's decision. Almost two weeks after spring break, Pride flags reappeared across campus, particularly in the CAS Writing Center windows. The three large Progress Flags, placed by Courtney Pina Miller, CAS Writing lecturer and DEIJ committee co-chair, still hang in each window facing Commonwealth Ave.

Miller first noticed the removals in September 2025 while dropping her kids at BU's Children's Center, and flags that had hung for years were suddenly gone. She called it a "violation of what should be a joyful, inclusive space." After the eliminations increased over break, Miller and her colleague decided to carry out a "small act of resistance."

"We just bought a bunch of flags, the biggest ones we could find, and a bunch of little ones, and just kind of... came in one morning a few weeks ago and hung them up," she said. "It just felt like the right thing to do."

Many passersby noticed the flags in the Yawkey Center and expressed appreciation for the visible display of support.

"Individuals were reaching out to us, texting us, emailing us, saying thank you, that's awesome," said Miller. "It's our responsibility as people outside of this community to use our privilege to speak on behalf of people who are feeling dehumanized and under threat. I felt very proud that I could make people feel happy for a little moment."

Miller says the way BU handled the removals makes her doubt the policy's neutrality. In addition to pride flags, the university removed public displays of support for individuals detained by federal immigration agents from offices in March and April 2025, according to the Daily Free Press.

“I’m not persuaded by [the idea of a neutral policy] based on what has actually been removed and targeted and just the way that they’re doing it,” said Miller. “On the weekends, in the middle of the night ... over break, it feels so ... covert.”

A [BU Today](#) article from March 24 quoted BU officials explaining the policy’s intentions, but on April 6, President Gilliam emailed the student body, acknowledging its disproportionate impact on the LGBTQIA+ community and announcing a pause in removals following community pushback. Some saw this as a win; others felt placated.

“Initially, I was really... surprised and also... happy because I know just how careful people have to be with wording,” said the anonymous student. “I was also ... inspired by seeing people come out and express how they felt, and having that actually lead to something.”

But this temporary win doesn’t erase the underlying issue. Without permanent change, the BU community remains uncertain, but its dedication to supporting Pride flags on campus and what they represent remains clear.

Despite doubts about university support, the BU community continues to advocate for LGBTQIA+ peers and will keep doing so no matter what happens in the future.

“Their identities are beautiful and meaningful exactly as they are, whether any person or institution outside of them validates them or not,” Barrett wrote.