Sara’s comments on final draft:

I have to say you’ve done a great job on your revisions. Your structure is SO much better now! I like addressing atheism and homosexuality in tandem.

The story is still really long but it does flow well. I think we could trim some without losing important content.

I like the new national perspective stuff. Did you discuss these issues with Muscato?

**Reporter byline**: Ian Servantes

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**Assigned word count: 500-600 vs.** 927 Better now that it’s been revised. ;)

**Print Hed & Dek (give at least 3): Print Dek**: Leap From Faith: A group for nonbelievers helps Theo Tushaus become comfortable with his homosexuality

Leap From Faith: Theo Tushaus’ journey through atheism, homosexuality, and acceptance

**Web Hed & Dek (give 1)**: Leap from Faith: A group for nonbelievers helps Theo Tushaus find comfort in his homosexuality

**Story Links:** (at least 3 that could be embedded into story on website)

**Suggested Tweet**: A gay student finds comfort in his homosexuality after discovering a godless group (link)

**Suggested Facebook post**: A gay student finds comfort in his homosexuality after discovering a godless group (link)

**Suggested Web Excerpt**: Admitting he was gay to a group of friends was not only the first time he told someone else, but also the first time he told himself. Finding the comfort to do both started with his conversion to Atheism.

**Best version of lede**: How can morality exist without religion? What's the meaning of life without God? Do you know you'll go to hell for being gay? Those are some of the questions Theo Tushaus ~~faces~~ gets as a gay atheist. Like his conversion from Christianity, he handles his responses logically.

**Body of the story**:

Need more of a transition here.

Even though the number of atheists in America has risen by 4 percent since 2005, according to a Gallop poll on religiosity and atheism, and support for gay rights has grown, neither demographic have enjoyed full freedom from discrimination. Another Gallup pull from last year reported that 54 percent of Americans would vote for an atheist president. It's a majority, but still behind all the other groups polled for — 58 percent said they'd vote for a muslim and 68 for gays and lesbians.

Arguments for gay rights have reached the highest level, with the Supreme Court currently hearing two cases on gay marriage. Support for the issue has grown 14 percent in the past 12 years, but still sits just under 50 percent nationwide, according to a poll from the Pew Research Forum.

Tushaus, a sophomore at Mizzou has become a strong advocate for both groups. He's a member of MU SASHA, a group of nonbelievers that support human rights, and the president elect of the MU Triangle Coalition, a group for the members of the LGBTQ and their allies.

While Tushaus downplays his desire to lead ~~and says he only ran for the Traingle Coaliton's executive position because nobody else seemed interested~~, he displays all the necessary traits. When arguing for gay rights or secularism, he's strikingly articulate for someone also so calm and gentle.

~~He understands why some people who are gay or atheist aren't vocal about their beliefs or ardent about activism, but it's a sentiment he can't get down with.~~ "There are things I want to change. I'm not going to sit back and let it happen," Tushaus says.

But he wasn't always this way. Becoming comfortable with his sexuality began with his leap from faith.

Theo grew up in a liberal, Christian household in St. Joseph, Mo. He went to church with his parents, Dave and Lynn, regularly, but didn't talk about religion often. "For me, religion is a personal matter," Lynn says. "I'm not real vocal about my religion."

It wasn't until his freshman year of high school when Theo found someone to discuss God with thoroughly — or a lack thereof. He'd just joined the debate team and found out an older teammate was an atheist, the first one Tushaus ever met. The exposure led him to question his own beliefs.

First went hell. Theo didn't like the idea of an "eternal punishment for a finite sin. From there came the conclusion that if Christianity was wrong about hell, the whole thing could be falls. The idea seemed plausible, but not in a traditional sense. For about a week, Theo believed there could be a God separate from the world's religions and became a deist.

"Even that takes a leap of faith," Tashuas says on his short-lived view, "because scientifically we can't prove anything beyond our experiences exists.

So Theo became an atheist.

However, he wasn't as clear about his sexuality. Theo started dating a girl who he met at a debate tournament senior year, trying to convince himself that he could be bisexual ~~and just date some for the rest of his life~~.

"Stupid," he says looking back, before laughing. Bisexuality would only serve as a facade for Theo, not the answer to his true sexual orientation.

It didn't help that people in his high? school, even his friends, would use slurs like "gay" or "fag." Theo says the environment couldn't allow him to be comfortable with his homosexuality.

When his freshman year at MU began in 2011, Theo immediately started attending weekly meetings for MU SASHA. In it, he found another safe haven to talk about taboo topics. In addition to religion, he was able to discuss homosexuality with similar minded, non-judgmental peers.

"Before that," Tushaus says, "I just sort of had the Internet. Chat rooms and forums only go so far to make you comfortable.

This might be a good spot to add more information from Dave Muscato about how atheism is spreading via the Internet.

Then it just slipped out. Theo was chitchatting with friends on a September evening in a dorm room at Hatch Hall when his friend, a girl, mentioned liking boys. It was hardly a bombshell, but then Theo agreed.

It was the first time Theo even admitted it to himself, let alone someone else. A strange mix of emotions spiraled through his mind: fear and happiness; anxiety and relief.

"When you're in denial, you just have this burden on you that feels like it's separate from your body and it's pressing on your mind," Tushaus says. "All of the sudden, that was gone." Good.

Immediately after, Theo began hanging out at the LGBTQ resource center and attending meetings for the Triangle Coalition, which he was elected president of a year later.

It couldn't have happened without joining the group of nonbelievers. Not so smoothly, so quickly.

"I definitely wouldn't be the person I am today," Theo says when asked where he'd be had he not joined SASHA. He might have come out eventually, but would still probably be uncomfortable identifying as a gay man and definitely wouldn't have become as outspoken.

"I don't think he's changed as much as he's become himself," says Muscato, who is also the former vice president of MU SASHA.

**Sidebar or Info Box if needed**:

**Sources**: Make sure you include their Facebook pages, Twitter handles, websites etc. in addition to phone and email. Include when, where and how you interviewed the person. (By phone, email, in person; at the office, home, etc.)

Theo Tushaus (interviewed multiple times in person, at the student center over the past three weeks)

816-273-9888

tjt3nc@mail.missouri.edu

https://twitter.com/SashaToosh

<https://www.facebook.com/theo.tushaus?fref=ts>

Dave Muscato (Interviewed over the phone March 19 & April 8 )

573-424-0420

mail@davemuscato.com

<https://www.facebook.com/davemuscato?fref=ts>

<http://www.davemuscato.com/>

<https://twitter.com/davemuscato>

Bradly Brackenbury (interviewed over the phone March 20)

816-682-8704

<https://www.facebook.com/angels.with.machineguns>

Lynn Tushaus (Interviewed over the phone March 27)

816-262-4689

Dave Tushaus (Interviewed over the phone April 10)

816-390-2159

**Documents as Sources**: (links or copies of data, reports, records; must include statistical support for your story)

<http://www.wingia.com/web/files/news/14/file/14.pdf>

<http://features.pewforum.org/same-sex-marriage-attitudes/>

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+religious+affiliation+of+gay%2c+lesbian%2c+bisexual%2c+transgender+and...-a0179564703>

**Media Support**: (news articles on your general topic)

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/sen-chambliss-gay-marriage-gay-article-1.1295002>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/26/magazine/from-bible-belt-pastor-to-atheist-leader.html?pagewanted=all>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/us/ex-gay-men-fight-view-that-homosexuality-cant-be-changed.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/26/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-prop-8.html?_r=0>

<http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/segment/5153bd9c02a76031b3000001>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/28/us/politics/gay-marriage-brief-gets-more-republican-support.html>