



Office of Equity and Inclusion

The Importance of LGBTQ+ Inclusion Spaces on College Campuses

The Issue

According to The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 40% of LGBTQ respondents aged 13-24 "seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth having seriously considered suicide. 29% of LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away." Transgender and nonbinary youth who described having the majority of people in their lives respect their pronouns attempted suicide at fifty percent the rate of respondents who reported that most people in their lives did not respect their pronouns (The Trevor Project, 2020). Research shows that the success of LGBTQ+ college students is often inhibited by these social and mental health issues and that providing an inclusive and supportive college environment is essential to improve LGBTQ+ student success (Pitcher et. al., 2018 and Higher Education Today, 2019).

Background

LGBTQ+ student services are relatively new, and the time period between the 1990s and 2000s demonstrates the evolution of institutional support for LGBTQ+ students. In the 1990s, I co-founded one of my state's first gay-straight alliances in a public high school; the support found from the group was life-changing for me. We were able to start the group because the Massachusetts Department of Education had recently created programming to support LGBTQ+ youth. Because college LGBTQ+ student services were largely non-existent during this time, I sought out a college known for LGBTQ+ culture and visibility. By the time I was in graduate school, approximately ten years later in the late 2000s, college LGBTQ+ inclusion spaces were becoming more common. At the University of New Mexico (UNM), I volunteered at the newly formed LGBTQ Resource Center working with both undergraduate and graduate students. The center had a few rooms for students to both socialize and hold meetings in. For me, it was a wonderful experience to have a place on campus to let down your guard and connect with others from the LGBTQ+ community. As a Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving institution, UNM's LGBTQ+ Resource Center had a clear commitment to racial justice and intersectionality represented through its diverse leadership, multicultural groups, and programming.

Review of Other Institutions

Today, there are over 100 LGBTQ+ student centers on college campuses, including at community colleges (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). In one of the first studies on college LGBTQ + inclusion spaces, Pitcher et. al. (2018) found that LGBTQ+ resource centers are important for three reasons: providing physical spaces, community and professional support, and serving as symbols of LGBTQ support and inclusion (123). I will discuss three examples of community college centers and an interview that I conducted with the Director of LGBTQ Student Services at Century College. I was previously aware of the existence of two of these centers, and the other was selected after researching community college LGBTQ+ resource centers. The services offered at these centers are representative of those offered at other LGBTQ+ resource centers. (Pitcher et. al., 2018).

Glendale Community College's (GCC) Pride Center opened in 2018 and is located within the Multicultural and Community Engagement Center. The Pride Center provides a safe space for students to gather and holds weekly group meetings and leadership development training around topics related to diverse sexual and gender identities (GCC Pride Center, 2020). Like UNM's LGBTQ Resource Center, GCC's Pride Center is committed to intersectionality as expressed in their vision statement, "We strive to recognize the complexities of intersectionality and encourage the exploration of both privilege and oppression across coexisting identities." Their mission statement also discusses their commitment to educating about "healthy masculinity, affirmative consent, and upstanding to prevent violence (GCC Pride Center, 2020)."

The Community College of Philadelphia's (CCP) MarcDavid LGBTQ Center also opened in 2018 and has a three-pronged approach to service focused on community, education, and advocacy (MarcDavid LGBTQ Center, n.d.). The training they offer includes "LGBTQ+ 101, Gender 101, Privilege and Microaggressions, and Call Out Culture and Tone Policing." The center is located in the student life building and includes a lounge area for students to socialize and find LGBTQ+ related reading material. Resources available include information on scholarships, job opportunities and sexual health (Fraser, 2018). According to G. Murphy, Vice President of institutional advancement at CCP, "The center is part of the college's larger mission to support LGBTQ students...We're providing accessible, high-quality education that will contribute to students' success while helping them make it to graduation..." (Fraser, 2018). While there is still insufficient data on LGBTQ+ student success, Murphy's remarks point to the struggle that some LGBTQ+ community college students face to be successful and make it to graduation.

The LGBTQ Center at Century College, located outside the Twin Cities in Minnesota, opened in 2014 as a result of student pressure and is completely funded by student fees. In May 2019, I interviewed M. Poessnecker, the former Associate Director of Student Life and the Director of LGBTQ Student Services at Century College. The LGBTQ Center houses a lounge space and offers advising and programming and workshops, including experiential education. Poessnecker said, "Though I can't say I'm a counselor, a lot of what I do are one-on-

one meetings...with students to talk about resources for housing, or hormones, or surgery, or mental health services-a lot of my work is spent doing that and... referral work." Poessnecker also worked directly with academic advisors and offered LGBTQ+ trainings specific for them. When asked about barriers that LGBTQ+ students continue to face on campus, Poessnecker was quick to describe many problems such as homelessness, hunger, incarceration, and working multiple jobs.

Montgomery College Actions Underway

There is currently a LGBTQ+ student group on Montgomery College's (MC) Rockville campus and LGBTQ+ safe zone trainings, and other workshops on LGBTQ+ identities and history are intermittently offered at the college. The Women's and Gender Studies program also offers the course Understanding LGBT Identities. General recommendations D and E of Montgomery College's 2020 Equity and Inclusion Roadmap for Success are Broadening Multicultural Affairs, including LGBTQ efforts, and completing a LGBTQ+ Needs Assessment for students, staff, and faculty in Spring 2021. In spring 2020, Jeanette Rojas, program manager for Equity and Inclusion, published a white paper "The Importance of Student Centers for First Generation and Students of Color" which recommends that the College create multicultural inclusion spaces for students (Rojas, 2020).

Recommendations

The creation of multicultural and LGBTQ+ spaces supports objective 7.5 of MC's Equity and Inclusion Roadmap for Success, and they could be housed together or nearby one another. All of the LGBTQ+ student centers I have described have lounge spaces, house student groups and activities, and offer training for the broader campus community. As students have communicated informally to faculty and staff, MC students would benefit greatly from similar LGBTQ+ inclusion spaces on our campuses. These centers should operate with an anti-racist practice (in programming, leadership, and representation), as well as with an intersectional understanding of LGBTQ+ identities. It is recommended that such spaces on MCs campuses would have at least two rooms including a lounge space and a meeting/work/event room. The lounge space could have comfortable furniture, a resource library, welcoming imagery and posters, and one to two shared computers. The meeting/work/event room should have tables or desks available for students to work with computers. The inclusion spaces could be managed by both staff and student aids. Possible funding sources include gifts and student fees. Clearly, such brave spaces would provide much needed support for LGBTQ+ students.

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