

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) population in college campuses have been increasingly "coming out of the closet" for the past few decades. The reason for this is because of the impacts in the media as well as the positive legislative outcomes revolving around the LGBTQ community. The perception of the LGBTQ community has been becoming more positive as a result of more writers, educators, and students being receptive and open about their own sexualities (Rigby, 2002). The campus climate in college campuses in regards to LGBTQ students remain controversial depending on the values of the school. For example, some studies have shown that those who identify as LGBTQ are marginalized or outcasted within certain college environments, while some educational institutions affirm a strong belief of reinforcing equity within higher education through policy reform and institutional governance in their mission statement. As a result, it is important to provide inclusiveness in the college environment through upholding diversity, learning, and equity.

Diversity is measured on the availability of diverse coursework in a college's academic curriculum, the backgrounds of the college's student population, as well as the diverse extra-curricular opportunities the university provides (Giroux, 2005). The best measure of accountability on the administrative spectrum is ensuring a campus climate that is inclusive about the needs of LGBTQ students through educating the wider community, particular for those students who feel they are marginalized. These students may endure harassment or bullying within their schools, which result in lower absenteeism as well as difficulty progressing in their academic expectations. Increased problems of mental health, alcohol abuse, and depression are common effects associated to those LGBTQ students who were physically abused. It is important for colleges to foster diversity, especially for student groups who may feel marginalized at the college (Giroux, 2005).

Learning is measured on the amount of educational initiatives the university offers in order to ensure that every student becomes informed on the various contextual challenges diverse individuals face (Kosciw & Gay, 2004). In 2010, Sue Rankin, Genevieve N. Weber, and Somjen Frazer conducted the comprehensive study *State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*, which was co-sponsored by the Q Research Institute in Higher Education of the national organization Campus Pride; this called for stronger collaboration between LGBTQ staff, students, faculty and administrators to protect student groups who were at high risks of harassment (Rankin & Weber, 2010). In the early 1990s, about one-fifth of reported incidents occurred due to one's sexual identity and how their unwelcoming college environment provoked harassment (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1992). Seventy-one percent of respondents said they had comfort with their overall campus climate, 77 percent with their work climate, and 65 percent in their classroom climate. On the other hand, 31 percent experienced a hostile campus environment and 21 percent experienced some form of harassment due to their sexual identity or gender expression. For queer and transgender students, 13 percent and 43 percent respectively feared over their personal safety and 43 percent of queers and 63 percent of transgender students concealed their sexual identities to avoid harm. There was a significantly higher correlation for those who identified as LGBTQ people of color. The only preventative measure is by educating the wider community on the stigmas the LGBTQ community face, particularly for colleges with a negative campus culture in regards to LGBTQ students (Rankin & Weber, 2010).

Equity is an important focus in higher education, especially for those students who feel their ability is weakened due to the campus climate (Lyne, 2006). Thirty-three percent of queer students and 38 percent of transgender student felt the urge to leave campus. The problem of inequity within higher education spurs across the participants who felt discouraged from attending social or academic events. As a result, they had lowered learning outcomes, lower

self-esteem, and lessened emotional, mental, and physical health. For best practices that would better include LGBTQ students, Sue Rankin suggested a number of practices including the need for assessments, inclusive policies, training and development, as well as counseling, healthcare, and housing services that were inclusive of the LGBTQ community. It is important to also have inclusive curricular and co-curricular education which emphasizes the equal balance of learning and diversity within a college environment. LGBTQ students remain vitally important in a college community. However, due to increased instances of inequity, there is an even higher need for extended services that can create a balanced interest between administrators, staff members, and students (Rankin & Weber, 2010).

Colleges need to fully reach the needs of all students in order to provide the strongest possible education; and that all starts with combining both learning and diversity within their campus climate (Astin, 1993). In terms of the specific actions student affairs professionals can take in enhancing policies and assessing the needs of LGBTQ students, it is important to have LGBTQ values being integrated in academic curriculums. Other possible solutions would include holding speaker panels represented by scholar-practitioners speaking on LGBTQ topics. This would allow for an open-forum of multicultural education which touches on the experiences of LGBTQ students as well as raising awareness on their marginalized status. By advocating, supporting, and developing LGBTQ students, colleges will be able to permanently sustain LGBTQ coursework and programs, thereby reinforcing an inclusive campus atmosphere (Astin, 1993).

In Susan Ambrose's *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, she identifies seven tactical learning approaches which can provide a more inclusive classroom environment (Ambrose, 2010). The first principle includes enabling students' prior knowledge to help, not hinder, their learning. This means that what the students have learned or experienced in the past is transferrable in knowledge, so students need to recognize the importance of not placing misconceptions or stereotypes to devalue a member of the LGBTQ community. Secondly, students need to understand how they can adapt to different learning environments and therefore apply what they have learned. Third, it is important for students to determine, direct, and sustain their capacity to learn. A huge part of learning diversity is being able to value and positively influence others. This contributes to the success, motivation, and self-worth of other individuals trying to forge their own identities. There is a myriad of campus resources that can help those LGBTQ students who may feel marginalized; as such, the fourth principle is developing competencies in applying what has been learning. When a student of color or someone who resonates with the LGBTQ community feels they are being affected in some way, they need to recognize their intersected identities and be aware of the assumptions or contextual differences which may impact them as well. Those who hold an LGBTQ identity are responsible for sharing their challenges and focusing on their emotions to empower others who may feel oppressed. The fifth principle is having a goal-directed practice that is coupled with targeted feedback on student learning. This means that educators need to have an unbiased framework that undermines prejudice, embraces independent assessment-based observation, and upholds performance-oriented diagnostic learning processes. The sixth learning principle is enabling the students' to uphold their current level of social, emotional, and intellectual aptitude in ways that could impact their learning environment. In every aspect possible, diversity and learning are intertwined because of the diverse thinking, atmosphere, and cross-cultural environments each student has been exposed to. It is also critical to examine one's privilege, development process, and personal identity to evaluate how they can contribute to the larger context of equity issues within higher education. The seventh principle is becoming a self-directed learner, in which the student themselves are monitoring or adjusting their own learning. This is a highly important, self-reflective implication of LGBTQ students as they must

monitor the needs of their community, create tangible impacts that can influence campus climate, and foster deep relationships with others to create an inclusive learning atmosphere (Ambrose, 2010).

In conclusion, the importance of diversity and learning within the context of LGBTQ students remain critical as their identity directly impacts their performance and influences their campus climate. By creating a safer college environment, student affairs professionals are able to challenge and educate students on ways campus resources are to be utilized to maximum capacity. Student affairs professionals are the cornerstone of enabling diversity and learning, and by creating a campus culture that fosters inclusiveness, LGBTQ students can progress in their own personal development.

## References

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