

Using Cultural Humility to Improve the LGBTQ+ Experience of Inclusion

Sarah Brow and Melissa Basso

Stetson University

### Abstract

Campus Climate is a construct used to describe current attitudes, behaviors, standards and practices within an institution of higher education. Climate is assessed using a comprehensive survey. Personal experiences, perceptions and institutional efforts are measured (Rankin & Reason, 2008). Cultural Humility is a multi-dimensional concept comprised of lifelong learning and critical self-reflection, the recognition and confrontation of power imbalances, and finally, institutional accountability through modeling (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The researchers aim to share cultural humility education with the community in order to improve inclusivity experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals.

*Keywords:* campus climate, LGBTQ+, sexual orientation, cultural humility, college students

### Using Cultural Humility to Improve the LGBTQ+ Experience of Inclusion

While college campus environments have improved significantly for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, faculty and staff, research still suggests that perceptions and experiences of LGBT campus members continues to range from subtle to extreme forms of discrimination (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld & Frazer, 2010). Even with the growing push for college campuses to be both diverse and inclusive, LGBTQ students report facing “chilly campus climate” (Rankin, et al., 2010). In light of this research it is valuable to question what interventions are in place to broaden all campus members (faculty, staff and students) experience of inclusivity.

Many are familiar with the concept of cultural competence, a desirable objective for a diverse and inclusive health and science training curricula (Betancourt, Green, & Carillo, 2002). While cultural competence curriculum is a valuable first step in moving forward as a better functioning and more inclusive space, the limitations of cultural competence have existed since its initial application. Embedded in the cultural competency framework is a preference for a measurable one-size fit all learning experience. As a result, both individuals and institutions frequently believe they are knowledgeable in addressing diverse cultural needs, simply because they have participated in or offered multicultural training.

Cultural humility broadens the idea of competency from a one-size fits all program to a philosophy of lifelong learning. While competencies can be instructed, assessed and abandoned, cultural humility espouses the value of a commitment to personal growth. Humility requires having an open disposition to any “other,” self-reflection, and recognizing and redressing power imbalances to benefit all. While often applied to healthcare settings, the researchers suggest that cultural humility is a concept that can be used in virtually any setting.

Through a review of the literature, assessing national campus climate data and further exploration of cultural humility, the researchers posit that the limits of the “cultural competency” approach have restricted the greater improvement of the experience of LGBTQ+ communities’ inclusion on college campuses. Furthermore the researchers suggest that cultural humility is the key to bridging the gap to the “other.” The way to complete inclusion is through the door of humility.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Learning Objective 1: Define Campus Climate. Review National Climate Findings for the LGBTQ+ Population**

Campus Climate is a construct used to explore current attitudes, behaviors, standards and practices of employees and students of an institution. Climate is measured through personal experiences, perceptions and institutional efforts (Rankin & Reason, 2008). Research suggests that how students experience their campus environment influences both learning and developmental outcomes. Findings indicate that discriminatory environments have a negative effect on student learning, and research supports an educational value in diverse student bodies and faculty (Rankin et al., 2010). Positive effects of inclusivity include enhanced learning outcomes and overall psychological and social wellness (Rankin et al., 2010; Black, Fedewa & Gonzalez, 2012).

Extensive research has been conducted on the real effects of campus climate. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson and Allen’s (1999) summary of the research findings concluded that the perceptions of students regarding campus climate have real effects on students. The summary suggests that a diverse student body improves students’ abilities overall and enhances their abilities to understand multiple perspectives and tackle complex problems (1999).

Across the nation, colleges have started implementing policies that affirm their commitment to “diversity and inclusion.” Open support is encouraged with inclusive mission statements, open recruitment of diverse student and faculty bodies, and formal groups and departments dedicated to serving under-represented groups (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). LGBTQ+ individuals are a part of the “diversifying” campus movement. However, most of these studies have found that LGBTQ+ individuals are the least accepted group when compared with other under-served populations (Rankin, et al., 2010). As a result, these individuals are more likely to report negative experiences and less than welcoming campus climates based on sexual identity (Rankin, et al., 2010).

In 2001, a nonprofit organization named Campus Pride launched a national study to measure Campus Climate for LGBTQ+ campus members (Rankin et al., 2010). In 2010, Campus Pride released the findings from their study. The study indicated that LGBTQ populations on campuses “experienced significantly greater harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual allies and were more likely to specify the harassment was based on sexual identity” (Rankin et al., 2010, p. 15). Further, 33% of queer spectrum and 38% of Trans spectrum respondents reported, “seriously considering” leaving their institution due to challenging campus climates. They reported experiences ranging from a lack of social inclusion to name-calling, graffiti and physical abuse (Rankin, et al., 2010). Further, participants who identified as Trans masculine, Trans feminine, and gender non-conforming (GNC) reported higher rates of harassment based on gender identity (Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger & Hope, 2013).

Despite improvements in climate, the results of this national study suggest that negative experiences are still normative on college campuses. While many campuses have actively increased efforts to become more diverse and inclusive toward minority populations, some

campuses efforts are more profound than others. Homophobia, heterosexism and hetero-normative views continue to be common on college campuses (Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

Maslow's (1943) well-known hierarchy of needs emphasizes the importance of meeting basic human needs that are essential to growth, development, and overall wellness. Few findings dispute that feeling safe, being affirmed, and comfortable in one's environment are linked with a high level of personal or professional performance.

Maslow states:

“Practically everything looks less important than safety, (even sometimes the physiological needs which being satisfied, are now underestimated). A man, in this state, if it is extreme enough and chronic enough, may be characterized as living almost for safety alone” (Maslow, 1943).

Inclusivity and safety go hand in hand. Until students from all different backgrounds can report equal feelings of safety and inclusivity, progress remains limited.

### **Learning Objective 2: Define and Introduce Cultural Humility**

For a simple yet powerful approach to inclusive programming, cultural humility has proven effective. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia first introduced cultural humility in 1998. The researchers proposed cultural humility as an effective training model for medical professionals interacting with diverse populations. Cultural humility was presented as an alternative or supplement to existing multicultural education as an ever-evolving process or way of being, rather than a curriculum or finite step-by-step procedure. Researchers have continued to study cultural humility and apply the concept to different helper settings. Throughout years of research, the definition of cultural humility has remained nearly unchanging.

Cultural humility is defined as a life-long process of openness, self-awareness, humility,

self-reflection and critique while being willing to interact with diverse individuals (Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholt & Ousman, 2016). Researchers agree that individuals and communities with a firm understanding of cultural humility are better equipped to understand and create inclusive environments. The optimal outcome of cultural humility across all fields' of study is mutual beneficial and optimal care for all (Foronda, et al., 2016).

Cultural humility is by definition inclusive. The humble practitioner of cultural humility is by design open, interested in seeing new meaning and in understanding those that are different. Humility as a way of being can be applied to any aspect of individual or cultural difference. No matter the cultural differences (educational, socioeconomic, race, sexuality, gender or intellect, etc.), the power imbalances created by privilege and nourished by misunderstanding can be buttressed and enriched with humility (Hook & Watkins, 2015). Instead of investing more time, trainings, and money into explaining the differences in cultures (i.e. cultural competency training), cultural humility asks individuals to know themselves well enough to accept the "other." Cultural humility teaches individuals to stay open, listen and ask questions when met with difference and feelings of unknowingness. Rather than make assumptions, the culturally humble pause, and learn from each experience.

The researchers trust that cultural humility training would benefit university settings specifically because it could be applied to all culturally diverse populations. Specifically, because campus climate data continues to report "chilly" climates for the LGBTQ+ population (Rankin, et al., 2010), the researchers suggest using cultural humility training to improve feelings of inclusivity.

**Learning Objective 3: Apply Cultural Humility Education Initiatives to Improve the LGBTQ+ Experience of Inclusivity**

Research suggests that improving inclusion and perceived feelings of inclusion would result in a more positive campus climate. Several studies have explicitly indicated that inclusive campus policies and programs have had a positive impact on the greater campus climate (Katz, Federici, Ciovacco & Cropsey, 2016). Inclusive programming has been associated with improved psychological and social outcomes for all students (both hetero-normative and sexual minority groups alike). Students from schools with known inclusivity programs have reported feeling greater comfort with their sexual identities. Comfort levels create feelings of safety, leading to an overall improved social climate for LGBTQ+ individuals (Katz, et al., 2016).

Since Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) first introduced cultural humility, the intention of the philosophy has evolved to include “*institutional action*” (Chavez, 2012). Because universities are responsible for fostering safe environments where individuals from all backgrounds can thrive and grow, cultural humility training should be incorporated into the personal and professional development of all students, faculty and staff members. When applying cultural humility training at the university level to improve the LGBTQ+ experience of inclusivity on campus, it would be important to address three primary learning objectives.

First, the trainer would illuminate the differences between cultural humility and cultural competence. In the first stage, the trainer would integrate experiential practices that enable self-exploration, comprehension and appreciation of difference (Chang, Simon, & Dong, 2012). Second, a well-developed university curriculum would stress the value of self-questioning and critique to foster a full bodied engagement in listening and learning both in the moment and throughout a lifetime. Third, a commitment to the development and preservation of mutually beneficial partnerships across barriers of power and privilege would be stressed for faculty, staff

and students (Chang et al., 2012). In the third stage, advocacy is of utmost importance on college campuses. The third stage seeks to build institutional action through willingness and commitment to ever-evolving processes.

### **Discussion**

Through an examination of the current research, it is clear that adversity and negative climate still exists on college campuses, especially for marginalized groups. Specifically, the LGBTQ+ population faces negative campus climate both in and outside of the classroom across the student body, faculty and staff members. While inclusive mission statements and campus initiatives may be appealing, institutions must be certain that they are not simply checking a box. Inclusion is an environment, and humility is a simple and effective way of being that could prompt significant change, especially for minority populations.

Moving forward, research should be conducted to validate the effectiveness and reliability of cultural humility training in a university setting. Specifically, institutions could infuse cultural humility into current trainings, new hire on-boarding and new student orientations. Cultural humility and cultural implications could also be incorporated into classrooms via lecture and course objectives- all subjects and topics have cultural implications. Most importantly, it is imperative that we prepare students with cultural humility to ensure they are prepared to enter and succeed in job search and professional development. NACE, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, defines “career readiness” of college graduates as the “attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepares college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace” (NACE, 2017). Amongst the eight core competencies, Global/Intercultural Fluency makes the list. NACE (2017) defines Global/Intercultural Fluency as: “the ability to value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures,

racism, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. The individual demonstrates, openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and understand individuals' differences." Without cultural humility, are graduates fully prepared to exceed and excel in the job market? Cultural humility is an attainable goal, but the responsibility falls within the institution. Through safeguarding, graduates can exit better prepared for the job market and the institution benefits broadly by way of retention, student success, public eye, and reported climate- just to name a few.

Like all trainings, there are both ethical implications and limitations that should be considered. First, cultural humility trainers would need to be both culturally competent and culturally humble themselves. Because the training would be reflective in nature; ethically, all trainees would need to receive a training disclosure and informed consent about emotions that could arise throughout the training. Also, because the training requires true participation and internal willingness from the trainees, it could prove to be challenging and unsuccessful for participants that do not feel the need to change or to become more open. Participants that feel "forced" may not be open to receiving the benefits of cultural humility training. Depending on where each trainee falls in their multicultural development, the results of the training could vary dramatically across participants.

Institutional change takes time and effort. Institutional action through humility has the potential to produce progressive change. In order for humility training to become effective, it needs to first be deemed necessary and effective by administration. Cultural humility training could benefit both institutions the community at large. With persistence, considerable progress can be made through the door of humility.

## References

- Black, W., Fedewa, A., & Gonzalez, K. (2012). Effects of “safe school” programs and policies on the social climate for sexual-minority youth: A review of the literature. *Journal of LGBT Youth* (9)4, 321-339. doi: 10.1080/19361653.2012.714343
- Betancourt, Joseph R.; Green, Alexander R.; Carillo, J. Emilio (October 2002). *Cultural competence in health care: emerging frameworks and practical approaches*. New York, NY: The Commonwealth Fund.
- Chang, E., Simon, M., & Dong, X. (2012). Integrating cultural humility into health care professional education and training. *Advances In Health Sciences Education*, 17(2), 269-278. doi:10.1007/s10459-010-9264-1
- Chavez, V. (2012). *Cultural humility: People, principles and practices- part 1 of 4*. Retrieved from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Mbu8bvKb\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Mbu8bvKb_U)
- Evans, N. J., & Rankin, S. (1998). Heterosexism and campus violence: Assessment and intervention strategies. In A. M. Hoffman, J. H. Schuh, & R. H. Fenske (Eds.), *Violence on campus: Defining the problems, strategies or action* (pp. 169–186). Giathersburg, MD: Aspen.
- Fielder, R., & Carey, M. (2010). Predictors and consequences of sexual “hookups” among college students: A short-term prospective study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39(5), 1105-1119. doi: 10.1007/s10508-008-9448-4
- Foronda, C., Baptiste, D., Reinholt, M., Ousman, K. (2016). Cultural humility: A concept analysis. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 27(3), 210-217. doi: 10.1177/1043659615592677
- Hook, J. N., & Watkins, C. J. (2015). Cultural humility: The cornerstone of positive contact with

culturally different individuals and groups?. *American Psychologist*, 70(7), 661-662.  
doi:10.1037/a0038965

- Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pedersen, A., & Allen, W. (1999). Enacting diverse learning environments: Improving the climate for racial/ethnic diversity in higher education. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 26(8). Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
- Katz, J., Federici, D., Ciovacco, M., Cropsey, A. (2016). Effect of exposure to a safe zone symbol on perceptions of campus climate for sexual minority students. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 3(3), 367-373.
- Lee, L., & Lund, D. E. (2016). Infusing service-learning with social justice through cultural humility. In A. S. Tinkler, B. E. Tinkler, V. M. Jagla, J. R. Strait, A. S. Tinkler, B. E. Tinkler, ... J. R. Strait (Eds.), *Service-learning to advance social justice in a time of radical inequality* (pp. 359-381). Charlotte, NC, US: IAP Information Age Publishing.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). *A theory of human motivation*. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-96.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2017). *Career readiness defined*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>
- Rankin, S., Reason, R. (2008). Transformational tapestry model: A comprehensive approach to transforming campus climate. *Journal of Diversity Officers in Higher Education* 1(4), 262-274.
- Rankin, S., Weber, G., Blumenfeld, W., Frazer, S. (2010). *State of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender people*. Charlotte, NC: Campus Pride.

Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998) Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education.

*Jouranl of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 9*, 117-125.

Tetreault, P., Fette, R., Meiglinder, P., Hope, D. (2013). Perceptions of campus climate by sexual minorities. *Journal of Homosexuality, 60*, 947-964. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2013.774874

Yost, M., Gilmore, S. (2011). Assessing LGBTQ campus climate and creating change. *Journal of Homosexuality, 58*, 1330-1354. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2011.605744