



**GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND
TRANSGENDER ISSUES**

**Compiled Research Briefs & Summaries White Paper
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Research Briefs & Summaries

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“A General Investigation of College-Based LGBT Centers”

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Introduction

The majority of research on students identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) in higher education does not focus on the student affairs entities created to support these populations, specifically LGBT centers within US colleges and universities. Currently, no research examines both the administration of, and student services provided through, LGBT centers on college campuses, and the climate of the institutions where these centers are located. In that sense, this study is distinct from other research in the field.

This research project aims to answer the following inquiries:

1. How are college-based LGBT centers staffed?
2. What is the climate of the institutions where these centers are located?
3. What types of services do college-based LGBT centers provide?

Method

An online survey was distributed to the 173 United States (US) college and university LGBT centers listed in the Consortium of Higher LGBT Resource Professionals’ directory of college and university offices. These LGBT centers were contacted via electronic mail (email), asked to identify one center representative to participate in the research study, and provided a direct link to the online survey. Reminder emails were sent to participants twice during the 23-day survey activity period to encourage maximum participation

The research instrument consisted of a 51-item online survey administered to college and university LGBT centers. The survey contained both qualitative and quantitative items focusing on administration, institutional context and climate, and provision of services as they relate to college and university LGBT centers. The majority of the items were multiple-choice; 10 questions were open-response. Responses were coded as appropriate, and are described in the subsequent section of this report. Although the online survey was a pilot study rather than a formal study, the researcher received substantive feedback from an expert in the field of LGBT studies to determine the quality of the instrumentation.

Results

The study had a 25% response rate. Of the 44 respondents, 68% represented public, four-year institutions; 2% represented public, two-year institutions; 23% represented private, four-year institutions; 2% represented “other” types of institutions; and 5% of respondents did not indicate the type of institution they were affiliated with.

Sixty-three% of respondents provided LGBT services through a formal LGBT center, while 32% provided these services through another office/department. Only 25% of formal LGBT centers indicated LGBT services were a part of the office/department's original mission. Of the respondents who provided LGBT services through another office/department, 7% reported providing them through student physical health or student mental health offices/departments, respectively; and 43% reported providing such services through multicultural student services or other offices/departments, respectively. Remaining results are outlined within the context of the research questions.

Staffing

All respondents indicated their LGBT center was staffed.

- 64% employ professional staff
- 7 % employ paraprofessional staff
- 30% employ graduate assistants
- 16% employ graduate student employees
- 45% employ undergraduate student employees
- 5% employ faculty

Based on responses describing general duties of center staff as related to the provision of LGBT services, responsibilities have been categorized as administration, programming, support services, resource management, and office support.

Administration. *Defined as supervising personnel, directing an office/department, planning and implementing a budget, conducting assessments and evaluations, influencing institutional policies, etc.*

Responsibilities of professional and paraprofessional staff, faculty, graduate assistants, and graduate student employees were described as administrative. Paraprofessional staff was mainly responsible for logistical tasks supporting administration and/or assisting with administrative tasks. Graduate assistants were responsible for supervising student employees, reporting, and managing the daily operations of the office/department. Graduate assistants and graduate student employees were responsible for volunteer management.

Programming. *Defined as the creation, coordination, and execution of events that are educational (including curriculum development and trainings) or social in nature seeking to increase knowledge of LGBT issues or diversity issues generally.*

Respondents reported professional staff performed programming-related tasks. Graduate assistants, and graduate and undergraduate student employees were responsible for coordinating and assisting with programs. Graduate assistants and undergraduate student employees were responsible for program facilitation, while only undergraduate student employees were responsible for marketing and advertising for programs.

Support Services. *Defined as services provided to members of the LGBT community - individual and group counseling, advising LGBT student organizations, and ally programs (or safe zone/ safe space programs).*

Respondents reported professional and paraprofessional staff, graduate assistants, undergraduate student employees, and faculty performed tasks related to providing support services.

Resource Management. *Defined as researching, identifying and obtaining information (books, journals, articles, brochures, etc.) for a physical or virtual LGBT resource library, overseeing a physical library, and/or maintaining website(s) related to on-campus LGBT services.*

Responsibilities related to securing and maintaining information for resource libraries were performed by graduate assistants, and both graduate and undergraduate student employees. Only graduate assistants were responsible for website maintenance.

Office Support. *Defined as clerical and reception duties, and tasks that support administration.*

Both paraprofessional staff and undergraduate student employees were reported as providing office support. Paraprofessional responsibilities focused on clerical and administrative support, while undergraduate student employee responsibilities focused on reception duties and assisting graduate assistants.

Institutional Climate

Responses indicated that faculty, staff and students were either tolerant or somewhat supportive of LGBT students. In general, attitudes towards LGBT students were reported as primarily receptive; however, 5% of respondents indicated overall attitudes towards LGBT students had become hostile over the last three to five academic years. Fifty% of respondents indicated within the last two to three academic years, hate crimes and other discriminatory acts against LGBT students were reported on their campus. 39% of respondents reported LGBT students were the victims of hate crimes, etc. within the last academic year.

LGBT Services

LGBT services are classified into two categories – support services and programs. Again, support services are services provided to members of the LGBT community. Programs include educational and social events, and activities that seek to increase the knowledge base of the student population at-large regarding LGBT issues or diversity issues generally.

Support Services. Fifty-nine% of respondents sponsored ally programs - participants included university students, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the local community. Of the 26 LGBT centers that sponsored ally programs, 19% did not provide training for their participants. Of those centers that provided training, only 1% made the training mandatory. 82% of the 26 LGBT centers sponsored recurrent trainings (the majority on a monthly basis). Recurrent training topics included basic training review, issues specific to LGBT college students, and multiple identity intersection.

Fifty-five% of respondents sponsored a LGBT resource library. Of these 24 institutions, 67% had physical resource libraries, and 33% had both physical and virtual libraries. Less than one-half of respondents sponsored Lavender Graduations, and an overwhelming majority (79%) of centers that did sponsor graduations did so during the spring semesters only. Approximately one-half of respondents reported advising an average of three LGBT student organizations, primarily categorized as advocacy or support groups. Approximately one-half of respondents sponsored LGBT ally training specifically for students. Of these 20 centers, only one required attendance at these trainings. 70% of respondents provided recurrent trainings – primarily on a monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual schedule. Comparable to the discussion of ally programs in this section, over 75% of respondents reported that recurrent training topics included basic training review, issues specific to LGBT college students, and multiple identity intersection.

Programs. Twenty-five respondents reported sponsoring educational programs for their student population, and of these, nearly 100% reported consequent positive effects on their institutional climate as a result of the programs. Twenty-three respondents sponsored entertainment/social programs, and nearly 100% reported positive effects as well. Only 11 respondents sponsored academic courses/programs, and 82% of these respondents reported consequent positive effects on their institutional climate.

Respondents were also asked to rank issues relevant to their center’s efforts to provide LGBT services. The table below represents a summary of these responses.

Extremely Important	Lack of funding
Very Important	Lack of funding
Somewhat Important	Lack of participation in educational programming by student population
Neither Important nor Unimportant	Lack of participation in academic courses/programs by student population
Somewhat Unimportant	Few participants in safe zone programs
Very Unimportant	Lack of institutional support Few students in ally programs Lack of participation in entertainment/social programming by student population
Not Important at All	Lack of participation in entertainment/social programming by student population

Discussion & Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the research questions can be answered as follows:

1. How are college-based LGBT centers staffed?

The majority of college-based LGBT centers are staffed by professional staff and undergraduate student employees.

2. What is the climate of the institutions where these centers are located?

The climates of institutions where these centers are located are somewhat tolerable of LGBT students. As a general trend, attitudes are becoming increasingly receptive towards LGBT students.

3. What type of services do college-based LGBT centers provide?

College-based LGBT centers provide services that can be categorized as support services or programs - services that can foster the social, psychosocial, and/or cognitive development of LGBT students, as well as members of the student community at-large.

“Transgender People on University Campuses: A Policy Discourse Analysis”

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The goal of this study is to examine the language used to discuss transgender people on university campuses. My main research question was: What do university reports describe as problems and solutions for transgender people in universities? The primary data for this study consists of 16 reports issued at four Big Ten schools from 1992-2010. These reports address the inclusion of gender identity and expression (abbreviated in this study as GI&E) in non-discrimination policies, the status of transgender people on university campuses, or both. This study employs policy discourse analysis, a hybrid methodology that analyzes written documents using feminist, critical, and poststructural theories in order to identify the subject positions generated through policy discourse. These reports should be viewed in the context of primary sources that illustrate a long history of LGBTQ civil rights battles. My aim is to understand how these reports framed discussions about transgender people, and what this in turn tells us about the reality produced by the reports.

The resulting study therefore reveals significant discrepancies between objectives sought, means used, and outcomes achieved. For example, a university’s report on the status of transgender people may use language depicting them as “vulnerable” or as “victims,” even as it strives to make the university more welcoming to transgender individuals. The predominant images of transgender people are those of victims of harassment inspired by ignorance, and supplicants for protection to university decision makers. The discourses used to shape these problems, solutions, and images are those of facilities, education/training, and support. The role of LGBT resource centers is central to the provision of services for transgender people and these centers form a significant part of the support discourse. The predominant protection discourse is one that presents itself as offering safety to transgender people through isolation and segregation – a solution that operates, among other things, to relieve cisgender people’s discomfort around gender variance through transgender “accommodation,” but at the cost of reinforcing the marginalization of trans people. This study shows the need to reframe the discourse on university campuses about transgender people and offers concrete ideas about how to do so in order to make campuses truly gender-friendly.

Thanks to the work of dedicated scholars including Susan Stryker and Genny Beemyn, the history of the transgender civil rights movement and the role of LGBT offices and groups on university campuses has been preserved and illuminated. The work to include and protect transgender individuals stands alongside the modern gay rights movement, as well as being intertwined with it. Minneapolis, Minnesota was the first municipality to protect gender identity in 1975; more recently Kalamazoo, Michigan, passed its non-discrimination ordinance in a public vote in November, 2009. Business and higher education policy inclusion lagged behind cities and states, for the most part, until the 1990s. Similarly in LGB identity development research, the T piece has only recently been written about as a unique developmental journey by Aaron Devor and Brent Bilodeau. This dissertation draws together history, developmental theory and feminist policy analysis in order to examine the language in documents produced by select Big Ten schools in their processes to include GI&E in their non-discrimination policies and/or examine the status of transgender people on campus.

The data that is studied in the following chapters includes written reports, campus newspaper articles, faculty senate minutes, and historical documents. The policy discourse analysis method addresses the research questions regarding how the discussion of transgender people was framed at four Big Ten universities.

The policy discourse analysis method is one that can reveal rich data on a topic of study but also presents challenges. The initial pilot study of reports from the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota enabled phase one and two coding as well as an opportunity to test the methodology that is employed on 16 reports in the following chapters. The four institutions that were selected for study all added GI&E protection in the last six years: the University of Wisconsin (2005), Michigan State University (2007), University of Michigan (2007), and the University of Minnesota (2009); all are large state funded research institutions with a history of campus activism and LGBT resource centers. The use of policy discourse analysis to study documents discussing the topic of GI&E protection coverage in non-discrimination policies and/or the status of transgender people at select Big Ten institutions illuminate the following: what university reports describe as problems and solutions for transgender people in universities, the predominant images of transgender people that emerge from university reports, discourses that are employed to shape these problems, solutions, and images, what subject positions are re/produced through these discourses and what realities these problems, solutions, and images construct.

How can institutions support initiatives that are gender-friendly and challenge the gender binary that genderism reinforces? Educational opportunities must be offered to all levels of institutional leadership, most especially senior administrators who have the most control over university policies and practice. If those who have influence on policy do not understand the topic of genderism and the lived experience of gender variant people, the discourse of protection will continue to be the predominant one, reinforced even by well-intentioned committees.

The recent growth of policy inclusion for transgender people is noteworthy. When this study was proposed in 2006 there were 75 universities and colleges that included trans people in non-discrimination policies. Now there are more than 400. Policy inclusion is a good thing, but it is just a first step in a complicated process of making campuses *de facto* more gender-friendly. If these policy changes are based on a discourse of transgender protection, what are campuses accomplishing? Are they simply reinforcing genderism in the guise of transgender inclusion? At this point the research and policy initiatives seem to be stuck on incremental policy change, such as gender neutral bathrooms and the option of adding a preferred name in the university's record system, rather than the push to transform campus culture to be more gender-friendly, as with the Minnesota Transgender Commission. I argue that the focus has been predominantly on students, neglecting the inclusion of trans staff and faculty. Current non-discrimination policy is made by power holders, not by stakeholders in the communities that the reports are written about, and thus will not actually advance gender equity. The notable exception to this rule is the Minnesota Transgender Commission.

Allan discusses the possibility of changing the subject position: we *can* imagine new possibilities. Individuals and committees can think about and identify "more desirable subject positions and then consider what discourses would be most likely to produce such positions" (Allan, 2008, p. 157). For example, if committees want to avoid reinscribing genderism through a victim discourse, they could draw on discourses which are outside of the traditional narrative, interrupting these well-worn conversations about transgender vulnerability and victimization for one that positions transgender people as leaders on challenging gender norms.

The University of Minnesota Transgender Commission is an example in how the victim discourse can be interrupted and reframed into a more gender-friendly discourse. My hope is that this dissertation provides a sort of roadmap for what pitfalls institutions should avoid and what model they should aspire to, by looking at the discourse used in the Minnesota Transgender Commission reports, as well as their accomplishments, while undertaking policy change and inclusion of gender variant people in order to make campuses into gender-friendly places.

Thus, a key implication of this study is that without an examination around the language used to talk about transgender people, and the concomitant genderist attitudes towards gender variant people, achieving progress beyond inclusion of gender identity and expression in non-discrimination policies will not be achieved. There is a significant difference between including GI&E protection in a non-discrimination policy and making a campus gender-friendly and inclusive of gender variant people. And, as informed by policy discourse analysis and subaltern studies, this study suggests that the examination of language used to discuss transgender people must account for both the categorical assumptions of a binary system and the systemic nature of genderism and its oppressive effects on cisgender and gender variant people.

In closing, I would like to cite the University of Minnesota Transgender Commission report, and highlight that this commission's work points to the intersectionality of identities and the work that white people must do:

The Commission strives to honor transgender people and celebrate gender diversity, make visible the systems of gender that profoundly affect all our lived experiences, and eliminate the discrimination faced by transgender and gender non-conforming students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members.... One of the priorities of the leadership team has been to consider who the Transgender Commission does and does not reach, who feels ownership in the Commission's work, whose voices get heard, and how to make the Commission's work fit within a larger vision for social justice.... The Commission was pleased to sponsor two public conversations about culture and race in LGBTQ communities.... [These] created space to hear and honor voices of people of color, to allow white folks to explore white culture and privilege, and for all to speak honestly about how to build a social justice movement that truly works for the liberation of all our communities. (2008-2009, p. 2)

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