

LGBTQ+ Student Success: An Eight Campus Analysis

Dylan Bateman, Johnni Logue, Antonio Ruiz Ezquerro, David Schieler, Stephanie Urbina

Florida State University

Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) find themselves more visible than ever before. Nevertheless, they are still considered minoritized groups in terms of their sexual-orientation and/or gender-identity (Renn, 2017). Whether we look at higher education institutions in the United States or the United Kingdom (UK), one thing remains certain; students attending different institutions will have different needs. Public universities, private universities, community colleges, and career-focused institutions will attract distinct groups of students given their diverse interests and focuses. For the same reason, LGBTQ+ students' needs at these institutions will vary depending on cultures, climates, available services, strategic directions, religious affiliations, and more. Our group sought to answer the following question as we visited several institutions across the state of Florida and in the UK: "How do the needs of LGBTQ+ students and the resources provided to them differ at different institutional types?"

We acknowledge there is a dire need for the creation of more supportive campus environments (Garvey, Rankin, Beemyn, & Windmeyer, 2017; Taylor, 2015). In a recent study, Nguyen, Brazelton, Renn, & Woodford (2018) demonstrated this need through the use of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Their study illustrated how the presence or absence of LGBTQ+ related microsystems affected the campus mesosystem. They concluded that as the presence of these microsystems increased, so did the positive perception and sense of belonging of LGBTQ+ students towards the campus climate (Nguyen et al., 2018; Garvey et al., 2017). As Karaman & Tarim (2018) point out, belonging is a basic human need that affects psychological needs, safety, respect, self-actualization, and esthetic needs. By understanding the importance of belonging, we can discern how the level of support, resources, and acceptance an institution gives to its LGBTQ+ students play a crucial role in their experience and holistic development.

Literature Review

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have long been advocates for positive social change when it comes to civil rights issues. In the 1950s and 1960s, students took an active role in the Civil Rights Movement, participating in sit-ins to protest segregated lunch counters throughout the South. This sort of activism continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s as students fought for Black Power and for an end to Apartheid in South Africa (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). This type of activism on issues regarding race makes sense considering the context in which HBCUs were founded. Unfortunately, these progressive actions on issues of race have not translated to progressive stances on LGBTQ+ issues.

Many HBCUs are lacking in terms of resources for LGBTQ+ students and have a reputation for being unreceptive and even hostile towards the LGBTQ+ community (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). HBCU students within this community reported feeling unsafe, high rates of harassment, verbal and physical abuse (McMurtie, 2013), and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Carter, 2013; Kirby, 2011, as cited in Mobley & Johnson, 2015). With LGBTQ+ students reporting such a myriad of negative experiences, it is clear additional support is needed to ensure their success on campus.

Perhaps close ties with churches held by many HBCUs are responsible for the lack of support provided to LGBTQ+ students. Harns (2010) found students at HBCUs believed the Black Church was a significant contributor to homophobia on their campus. Another study found similar rates of homophobia among Black and White participants after controlling for church attendance, suggesting race is a less significant factor than faith (Negy & Eisenman, 2005). No

matter the cause of the lack of resources or the less than ideal climate for LGBTQ+ students at HBCUs, it is clear there is work to be done to better support these students.

Career/Professional Colleges and Universities

According to the Career Education Colleges and Universities (CECU) organization website (n.d.), career/professional schools are “accredited, postsecondary schools, institutes, colleges and universities that provide career-specific educational programs... (that) cover the full gamut of postsecondary education: from short-term certificate and diploma programs, to two- and four-year associate and baccalaureate degrees, to master's and doctoral programs.” Some common career fields include information technology, allied health, business administration, commercial art, radio and television broadcasting, and culinary and hospitality management. A considerable gap in research exists on LGBTQ+ students, their needs, and the resources provided to them at these institutions. The lack of research on these colleges and universities is not without notice as criticism against them grows. A recent article in Inside Higher Ed highlights this criticism, with Senator Elizabeth Warren proposing the elimination of some career/professional schools (Kreighbaum, 2019).

Associate and Baccalaureate Colleges

Associate and baccalaureate colleges, also referred to as community and state colleges, play a vital role in American higher education. Kasper (2002) reviewed the history of community colleges since the founding of Joliet Community College in 1901, the first 2-year institution in the United States. In his review, he highlighted the responsiveness of community colleges to the needs of the community. Considering their responsiveness and the increasing level of specialization within the academy, even in vocational arenas, it is not a wonder that in 2001 the Florida legislature approved S.B. 1162, allowing specific community colleges the ability to offer

a limited number of baccalaureate degrees based on unmet local/regional demand (Education Commission of the States, 2015).

While associate and baccalaureate institutions have traditionally been thought of as being more accessible to traditionally underrepresented student populations than master's and doctoral institutions, the support services provided to these populations may not match such accessibility. Kuk (2016) describes student affairs organizations at associate and baccalaureate colleges as relatively new and shallow endeavors, which tend to focus services on academic support and career readiness. For this reason, our group anticipated a heightened need for LGBTQ+ services, while finding a more generalist approach to such services. Manning, Pring, and Glider (2012) discovered a near absence for LGBTQ+ specific support services at community colleges. Three years later, Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin (2015) confirmed this near absence of non-academic resources and discovered that such absence shifted a greater proportion of students' campus climate perceptions to classroom settings. Again, in 2018, Nguyen, Brazzleton, Renn, and Woodford, explored the availability of LGBTQ+ resources at community colleges and came up institutionally short-handed. This last study also identified community colleges as likely to possess student-led initiatives and organizations for the promotion of LGBTQ+ acceptance, such as Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs).

The often large, public, and secular nature of associate and baccalaureate colleges idealizes them for LGBTQ+ support; however, it appears institutional resources may be missing in the name of efficiency and affordability. If these institutions favor holistic student development and success, then an increased attention to greater resource equity may be necessary.

Private Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities

Many private liberal arts institutions are also religiously affiliated. Accordingly research shows there has been a trend among private, religious institutions to discriminate based on sexual orientation (Gjelten, 2018; Najmabadi, 2018; Pappano, 2018; Parks-Ramage, 2018). It is important to note this trend has begun to shift toward support for LGBTQ+ students, however such support often emerges slowly and with initial resistance (McEntarfer, 2011). Fine (2012) argues that the biggest factor influencing LGBTQ+ student support at private institutions is access to resources such as money, space, and community support. Additionally, Beemyn (2002) states that the odds of a private institution investing in LGBTQ+ spaces are dependent on the size of the institution's endowment. A dearth of research exists applicable to private liberal arts institutions and their support for LGBTQ+ students. Unfortunately, that research highlights more differences between private liberal arts institutions than similarities - all of which complicate a concise and predictive literature review.

United Kingdom Colleges and Universities

Higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) is seen as a valuable contribution to society which serves several purposes. Students are seen as possessing capabilities to fulfil their personal and career potential, advance their knowledge and understanding through teaching, and contribute to an economically successful and culturally diverse nation (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009). In recent years, the UK has seen a shift in the nature of higher education in several areas. While students are enrolling in colleges and universities at increasing rates, the demographics of the student population are also shifting. Previously, the college going population was comprised of full-time, traditional aged students. The student population now includes many part-time and mature students (Higher Education Funding

Council for England, 2009). Additionally, UK institutions are catering to an increasingly internationalized student body (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009).

While the idea of the “typical student” is young, male, and middle-class, UK post-secondary institutions are trying to move away from this stereotype. Through several collaborative programs, institutions are working to widen participation in higher education, particularly among people from communities that are underrepresented (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009). The Higher Education Act of 2004 established an Office of Fair Access, which promoted access to higher education for all underrepresented groups. While the Office of Fair Access has made strides toward providing access and fairness, specifically for students of color and students from lower socio-economic groups, the experiences of LGBTQ+ students are not routinely assessed. It is difficult to identify LGBTQ+ students, and as a result, LGBTQ+ students may have lower rates of student satisfaction (Grimwood, 2016).

Support for LGBTQ+ students in the UK has varied over the years. In 2015, 49% of universities did not have policies protecting LGBTQ+ students, in contrast other universities were highlighted as “gay friendly” institutions (Grimwood, 2016). These universities were reported as being progressive in challenging discrimination and fostering an inclusive learning environment for LGBTQ+ students (“Top Universities,” 2015). While many students who attend these “gay friendly” universities report a positive student experience, they also recognize there is still room for improvement in the ways universities challenge the heteronormative culture (Grimwood, 2016).

Although LGBTQ+ societies exist within many UK colleges and universities, these societies are typically student run. As such, it is less likely that these societies are developed or publicized to their full potential. Grimwood (2016) argues that a quality LGBTQ+ society can

enhance the overall experience for LGBTQ+ students and provide these students with the support and encouragement they need for both academic and personal success.

In 2018, Stonewall, a UK-based LGBTQ rights charity, produced a report that reflected the experiences of 522 LGBTQ+ students at Britain's universities. More than 60% of LGBTQ+ students had been verbally attacked by other students, while 7% of trans* students had been physically attacked by another student within the last year. Many LGBTQ+ students did not feel comfortable reporting homophobic harassment to a university staff member and almost half of LGBTQ+ students hid their LGBTQ+ identity while attending a university due to fear of discrimination (Stonewall, 2018a). Due to reports like this, many universities are now aware of the need for LGBTQ+ support on campus. These universities established tools for students to report discrimination and have collaborated with LGBTQ+ students to create policies, accommodations, and public spaces that are more inclusive (Stonewall, 2018a). While many universities have made progress for LGBTQ+ students, there is still work to be done for all LGBTQ+ students to feel safe, included, and free to be themselves (Stonewall, 2018a).

Campus Analysis

Bethune-Cookman University

Bethune-Cookman University, originally the Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, was founded by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune in 1904 ("History of B-CU", n.d.). As an HBCU, Bethune-Cookman serves a student population that is primarily African American. The university is also affiliated with the United Methodist Church and Christian influences are found throughout campus. For instance, the university mission is "to develop global leaders committed to service, life-long learning and diversity by providing a faith-based environment of academic excellence and transformative experiences" ("Our Mission", n.d.). While the mention of

diversity in the university mission might lead one to believe the university is a welcoming place for LGBTQ+ individuals, the religious affiliation seems to complicate this.

During our visit to Bethune-Cookman University we met with Captain Nels Pate, the Associate Director of Safety and Security, and Darcell Streeter, the Executive Assistant to the Vice President. Both individuals provided valuable insight into how Bethune-Cookman University supports LGBTQ+ students. First, when asked about LGBTQ+ student success on campus, Captain Pate shared that “students are students, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, or how they dress” (personal communication, May 15, 2019). We found it surprising that gender and sexual orientation would be compared to someone’s choice of clothing in this manner. Based on the information provided during our discussion with campus professionals, it does not appear that Bethune-Cookman is making any effort to track the success of the LGBTQ+ students on campus. We do want to acknowledge this group is likely more difficult to identify due to the private nature of students’ sexual identities, unlike gender or racial identity which are often required fields on university paperwork.

As we have mentioned, LGBTQ+ students at different universities are going to have different needs. While we acknowledge LGBTQ+ students must share needs with the larger student population, there are certainly needs which exist solely for students within the LGBTQ+ community due to their sexual orientation. The staff at Bethune-Cookman, however, were unable to identify any unique needs held by their LGBTQ+ students (N. Pate, personal communication, May 15, 2019). We found this particularly surprising due to the amount of literature that paints HBCUs to be less than accepting environments for these students (Majied, 2010; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). The staff members stressed that Bethune-Cookman provided the same services to all students, regardless of any “different

preferences” they might have (N. Pate, personal communication, May 15, 2019). The continued use of the outdated term “sexual preference” was frustrating, but not as frustrating as the lack of insight these professionals had into the needs of a subset of their student population. We know individuals who hold marginalized identities can benefit from additional attention or assistance in navigating the various systems of oppression which operate in our society. The LGBTQ+ students’ needs at Bethune-Cookman are not widely known among student affairs administrators, suggesting the effort made to meet these needs may be limited.

Predictably, the resources provided to LGBTQ+ students at Bethune-Cookman do not differ from the resources provided to all students. The professionals we spoke with emphasized the counseling services provided on campus, although none of the counselors received any training specific to LGBTQ+ issues or needs (D. Streeter, personal communication, May 15, 2019). The university does have an active Safe Zones program which allows faculty and staff to designate their office as a safe place for students to come and discuss LGBTQ+ issues or concern. Other than these office spaces, there is no physical space dedicated for these students to congregate or build community. Throughout the 2015-2016 school year, Bethune-Cookman was home to an active Gay/Straight Alliance group as well; however, after many members of the organization graduated, the group dissolved. There has been difficulty finding a staff member “willing to dedicate the time it takes to advise” this group (D. Streeter, personal communication, May 15, 2019). Without this group on campus, LGBTQ+ students are left without a student organization dedicated to individuals who share their identity. Administration changes also left the Office of Diversity and Inclusion unstaffed. This means there is no programming taking place on campus dedicated to LGBTQ+ issues. The staff also mentioned this type of

programming would be difficult without “a dedicated office that could handle the potential up rise it could cause” (D. Streeter, personal communication, May 15, 2019).

Due to recent administration changes at Bethune-Cookman University, LGBTQ+ students on campus are left without many resources to help them be successful. Additionally, the language used by staff members on campus shows the need for additional training on inclusive and sensitive language regarding LGBTQ+ individuals at a minimum. While it is impossible to know if administration changes are truly the root cause for the recent decrease in LGBTQ+ student support on campus, one thing is clear—LGBTQ+ students are viewed, at least by some within the Division of Student Affairs, as having the same needs as every other student on campus. As long as university officials maintain this view, the specific needs related to minoritized sexual orientations and gender identities will go largely unmet at Bethune-Cookman university.

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University was founded in 1925 by John Paul Riddle and T. Higbee Embry. Their physical campuses are in Daytona Beach, Florida, and Prescott, Arizona, and they offer programs and degrees online as well. It is a private institution with a total enrollment of 6,338 students, making it “is the largest and oldest aviation-focused university in the world (“Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University”, 2019). Eighty percent of students identify as male and it is a conservative school (A. Clevenger, personal communication, May 15, 2019).

Embry-Riddle’s mission statement is “to teach the science, practice, and business of aviation and aerospace, preparing students for productive careers and leadership roles in service around the world” (“Values, Mission, and Vision,” 2019). The Division of Student Affairs’ mission statement is

“...to support and complement the academic mission of the University by working collaboratively with students, faculty and staff to provide co-curricular programming and services that promotes the intellectual and personal development of our students...

Through our efforts, we focus on student development on such critical issues as personal responsibility, sense of community, respect for others, appreciation of diversity and ethical citizenship.” (“Division of Student Affairs,” 2019)

During our visit, we spoke with the Dean of International Programs, Dr. Aaron Clevenger. He oversees six departments at Embry-Riddle which are: International Admissions, the Office of Global Engagement, International Student & Scholar Services, The Embry-Riddle Language Institute, International Student Experience, and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion. According to our interview with Dr. Clevenger, most students have a hard time coming to terms with their identities and coming out (personal communication, May 15, 2019). Not many students are “out” as members of the LGBTQ+ community and many factors could be the reason for this. First, the national political climate is reflected in many spaces at Embry-Riddle. Dr. Clevenger stated in the past, individuals have written anti-LGBTQ+ statements or slurs on a large rock located in a university designated free-speech zone (personal communication, May 15, 2019). It is presumed these acts of hate make LGBTQ+ students feel unsafe and unwelcome on Embry-Riddle’s campus.

Another potential factor is the close relationship between the university and the United States military. One member of their Division of Student Affairs shared that Embry-Riddle is the strongest feeder of Air Force Officers, behind the Air Force Academy. Traditionally, the United States military has been perceived as taking a conservative stance on LGBTQ+ issues. In the past, the United States military had policies such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, which mandated

LGBTQ+ service members not disclose if they were members of the LGBTQ+ community.

While that was repealed in 2011, there is fear the current administration could bring this policy back, enact similar policies, or even ban LGBTQ+ members all together.

If students do not feel safe and empowered to identify as LGBTQ+ on campus, it becomes more difficult to assess their unique needs. Thankfully, there are some resources at Embry-Riddle which help ensure the success of all LGBTQ+ students. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion strives to “foster a diverse, inclusive campus with programs and services that challenge students’ ability to adapt to diverse, inclusive environments, engage in creative, productive and meaningful activities, and understand how their behaviors impact others” (“Diversity and Inclusion”, 2019). The office includes a physical space for students to build community. Some examples of programming include Hub Huddles, a “small group discussion sessions geared toward tackling the tough questions and issues related to diversity and inclusion” (“Diversity & Inclusion”, 2019), a career speaker series, a diversity speaker series, and a leadership development program.

Another office that supports LGBTQ+ students is the Office of Title IX Compliance. Their website provides a list of online, state, national, and local resources including organizations, hotlines, campus security, and counseling. Dr. Clevenger stated the students on campus are becoming more involved, specifically through the P.R.I.D.E.!, or the People Respecting Identity, Diversity, and Equality group (personal communication, May 15, 2019).

Embry-Riddle finds itself in an interesting space between promoting identity expression and promoting future career success, influenced by the conservative values of the United States military and airline industry. Dr. Clevenger acknowledged this by suggesting Embry-Riddle can do more for their LGBTQ+ students (personal communication, May 15, 2019). Our research

group commends this recognition as a vital first step toward creating a more hospitable environment of support.

Daytona State College

Since its founding in 1957, Daytona State College has grown exponentially. Now with five campuses across Volusia and Flagler counties, the non-residential college features low-cost tuition and takes specific effort to cater to a diverse student body (“History of Daytona State College,” 2017). Granted authority by the state of Florida in 2006 to award baccalaureate degrees, the institution offers more than 100 degree and certificate programs to over 26,000 students.

Our visit to Daytona State College took place on the main campus in Daytona Beach, where 89% of enrolled students took their courses according to 2017/2018 enrollment data (“Enrollment & FTE,” 2018). During the visit our research group met with Erin LeDuc, Director of the Center for Women and Men, Bruce Cook, Director of Co-Curricular Activities, and Lonnie Thompson, Director of Equity & Inclusion/Title IX/Counseling and Accessibility Services/Veterans’ Affairs. As our literature review predicted, each of the individuals we met with oversaw many different services with a limited number of reporting staff members, creating a generalist approach to student support (Kuk, 2016).

DeLuc, Cook, and Thompson all work with closely with the department of Student Development, which features a mission intent on providing “a variety of helpful services and resources to continually support [student] academic and career goals” (“Student Development,” 2018). This mission is apparent in the work of DeLuc, Cook, and Thompson, who described LGBTQ+ student success being “about them finding their path and pursuing it” (B. Cook, personal communication, May 16, 2019). Cook went on to state that he believed it was his role

“to support that path and help remove any obstacles in the way.” DeLuc affirmed Cook’s position adding, “We are student development. Right? We are on the ground, working with our students...to better support [them] to find their way” (E. DeLuc, personal communication, May 16, 2019). Thompson, Cook, and DeLuc all demonstrate a commitment to their personal definition of success through the removal of student obstacles.

Thompson discussed practices of sexual and gender inclusion from an institutional view, specifically related to facilities and policies/procedures. Daytona State College appears to be building and renovating campus facilities with attention to a diversity of needs. While our attention was drawn to gender-inclusive restrooms, Thompson also mentioned other accommodations (L. Thompson, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

Cook’s work with the student-led Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) is notable. He discussed that in the last year the student GSA partnered with a similar faculty/staff organization to bring a gay rights activist and speaker to the annual faculty and staff training symposium (B. Cook, personal communication, May 16, 2019). While only certain portions of the symposium were mandatory for attendees, the inclusion of such an educational opportunity in any portion of the symposium is commendable. Cook also discussed the importance of relationship building with students, saying, “It’s important to stay close to the students and listen a lot to them. It’s the only way you find out what they need” (B. Cook., personal communication, May 16, 2019). This approach to needs-identification through relationship building particularly benefits marginalized and minoritized populations, who may not have access to systems and processes related to resource allocation.

DeLuc’s comments however, indicated the Center for Women and Men may be doing the greatest volume of work to promote the success of LGBTQ+ students at Daytona State College.

As published on the Center’s website, “The Center for Women and Men exists to prepare, empower, and support a diverse student population in achieving their education, professional, and personal goals” (“Center for Women & Men,” 2019). DeLuc explained that there is a population of LGBTQ+ students who have been kicked out of their family homes due to their sexual orientation and are experiencing homelessness. The Center for Women and Men seeks to meet these students’ needs, through providing temporary housing, food, laundry, and transportation, as well as counseling services (E. DeLuc, personal communication, May 16, 2019). While these services are not restricted to LGBTQ+ students, they are often utilized disproportionately by LGBTQ+ students due to the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students at a low-cost, non-residential campus, such as Daytona State College.

Daytona State College appears to recognize the existence and needs of LGBTQ+ students at the institution. The explication of “gender” separately from “sex,” as well as “sexual orientation” within the institutional equity statement is yet another demonstration of this recognition (“Equity,” 2018). While additional services, specific to LGBTQ+ students could be created, it is acknowledged by our research team that such services may be outside the reach of any baccalaureate student affairs organization (Kuk, 2016).

Stetson University

Stetson University is a small, private university of 4,330 students, located in DeLand, Florida. Stetson was founded as a Baptist University in 1883, but the university moved away from its religious roots in the 1990s. The mission of Stetson’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion is “to educate the campus community on issues relating to social identity development— in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status and ability — and how those factors can impact one's college experience” (“Office of Diversity and Inclusion”,

2019). The office is housed in the Cross-Cultural Center and is home to the Multicultural Student Council (MSC). The MSC is composed of nine student organizations. Of particular interest to our research group was the WISE Program, focused on supporting and mentoring minoritized students, and the Gender and Sexuality Resources division, dedicated to increasing awareness of LGBTQ+ identities with the use of Safe Zone trainings and the Gender and Sexuality Diversity Conference.

Other LGBTQ+ services at Stetson University include an Equity and Inclusion Group. The group offers the university guidance regarding overall diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts. As Lindsey Carelli, Assistant Director of Interfaith Initiatives, described it, one of these guiding principles is recognizing Stetson's history of exclusion related to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, but not allowing it to define them, instead, looking for ways to move forward (personal communication, May 16, 2019). It is worth mentioning that Stetson University has a very inclusive non-discrimination policy, which includes sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and genetic information within its description of protections (“Non-Discrimination Policy for Employers,” 2019).

To ensure the success of LGBTQ+ students, Stetson University has established a robust Safe Zone training program which is popular among faculty and staff. So far, twenty-one people have been trained and certified by OUT Alliance to provide Safe Zone training on all of Stetson's campuses. Impressively, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion has mandated all student leaders, including RAs, FOCUS, and SGA leaders, go through the Safe Zone training. To support this motion, Stetson's Student Government Association passed a bill requiring continued training of all these student leaders. The staff also backed this practice, as all employees in the Athletic

Department and in Public Safety have gone through the Safe Zone training (L. Carelli, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

For a small, private university, Stetson has a surprising amount of effort to support LGBTQ+ students. In addition to Safe Zone training, Stetson has Kaleidoscope, a community-based organization which strives to produce a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ and allied students, where they can discuss their feelings and thoughts about sexual orientation and gender identity (“Safe Zone Stetson University,” 2019). Kaleidoscope’s strategy uses education and awareness programs aimed to reduce anti-gay violence, harassment, and discrimination, and to promote a greater understanding between students, school administration, and the local community.

Stetson also has a Lavender Graduation. The purpose of this ceremony is to recognize self-identified LGBTQ+ graduates, certified Safe Zone allies, and other faculty, staff, and students who have dedicated their time to furthering social justice and cultural awareness. The ceremony is sponsored by the Multicultural Student Council and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Stetson University is also a partner of the Only Love Project. The Only Love project was created as a response to the national wave of bullying targeting members of the LGBTQ+ community. The project consists of college campus photoshoots or campaigns featuring students who commit to showing acceptance for all. These photos are presented through social media and on campus in a gallery. The displays are open to the public for them to come and support these students.

United Kingdom Colleges and Universities

The recent shift in the UK’s higher education system has created a chain reaction. As the student demographics have shifted, the needs of students have also shifted. To meet these needs,

new policies, accommodations, resources, and facilities have also been created. UK colleges and universities are committed to ensuring students develop their personal and professional capabilities to their full potential. This time is especially important for LGBTQ+ students. Many students do not feel they can be open with their family or that the college or university can be a safe place to openly discover and express their identity (“Stonewall,” 2019). Providing a welcoming and inclusive environment can ensure LGBTQ+ students feel supported and valued within the university community (“Stonewall,” 2019).

In the UK, university students still face several barriers that can hinder their success. Students experience, or fear they will experience, bullying, harassment, and even violence from other students and staff members. There is also a lack of LGBTQ+ specific tools and resources within college campuses (“Stonewall,” 2019). Many universities, particularly older universities which have not undergone recent renovations, may still have gendered facilities on campus. Additionally, LGBTQ+ students may experience exclusion from typically gendered extracurricular activities, including sports and societies (“Stonewall,” 2019)

Our group visited the University of West London (UWL), King’s College London, the University of Oxford, and the University College London (UCL), and found each of them have taken action to help students overcome barriers. To protect LGBTQ+ students from discrimination, these institutions have adopted extensive equality policies. The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation (“Government Equalities Office & Equality and Human Rights Commission,” 2015). Several of these universities have also expanded upon this definition to recognize ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, and the intersection of these identities

(“Equality & Diversity Statement,” 2019; “Diversity & Inclusion Statement of Policy,” 2018).

By expanding upon the legal definition, institutions show students they are committed to the safety of all students.

While attending a university, LGBTQ+ students in the UK experience disproportionately high rates of mental health issues (“Stonewall,” 2019). Therefore, it is important that there are appropriate counseling services available to these students. Specific counseling for LGBTQ+ students is not available at any of the four UK institutions we visited; however, all four of these institutions maintain quality counseling services for students. The counseling staff consists of trained, accredited counselors and psychologists who have a thorough understanding of LGBTQ+ students and their needs (“About the Counseling Service,” n.d.; “Diversity & Inclusion Statement of Policy,” n.d.; “Individual Counseling,” n.d.; “Student Psychological & Counseling Services ,” 2019) King’s College London specifically highlights how counseling provides students with a safe, confidential space to explore a variety of experiences including gender identity, relationships, and sexuality (Introduction to the Service, n.d.).

It is important to create an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students within the campus community, however, many students are concerned about experiencing discrimination when they enter into their careers after graduation (“Stonewall,” 2019). To help students overcome this barrier, universities should be equipped to give students LGBTQ+ specific advice on legal protections and how to find an LGBTQ+ inclusive employer (“Stonewall,” 2019). The University College London (UCL) and King’s College London recognize that the job search after graduation is always hard, but there is an added pressure for LGBTQ+ students to find the right employer. To support LGBTQ+ students in their job search, UCL and King’s College both offer a guide for LGBTQ+ students to provide information on inclusive employers (“Stonewall”,

2018b; “Diversity and Inclusion,” n.d.). King’s College also offers a variety of events that allow LGBTQ+ students to speak with and hear from successful LGBTQ+ professionals (“Diversity & Inclusion”, n.d.-b).

To provide a physically inclusive environment for all, students should be able to access the campus facilities aligned with their gender or that they feel comfortable using (Stonewall, 2019). These facilities include restrooms, sports facilities, and residence halls. All four institutions we visited have made strides towards removing barriers in this area by establishing gender inclusive restrooms on campus, often as they have completed renovations or built new buildings. These four universities seemingly take pride in their strides towards equality as their gender inclusive restrooms can be clearly identified on campus.

In addition to physical inclusion, students feel welcomed and valued on campus by staff and other students. LGBTQ+ student societies are an invaluable source of support for LGBTQ+ students. They provide a safe space for LGBT students to discuss their experiences with peers and collaborate with university officials to improve university policies and practices (“Stonewall,” 2019). A student run LGBTQ+ society can be found at each of the UK institutions we visited.

As colleges and universities in the UK strive to ensure student success, it is important they continue to work towards an inclusive environment. The University of West London, King’s College London, the University of Oxford, and the University College London are four universities that have made progress towards creating an inclusive community for their LGBTQ+ students in several ways. Certainly, these institutions are striving to live up to Grimwood’s (2009) expectations for LGBTQ+ societies in the UK.

Recommendations

Universities have to begin with the acknowledgment and acceptance of their LGBTQ+ students. Whether you support them personally, we must support the holistic development of our students. Simply knowing LGBTQ+ students are a part of your institution is not enough. Next, universities have to educate themselves on the LGBTQ+ community, just as they would any other community. Student identities must also be affirmed. We need to challenge ourselves to move past a couple of days of “all-encompassing” diversity trainings, as some institutions have done in the past - sending representatives to conferences, getting information, and bringing it back is one of the many things institutions can do to support their LGBTQ+ students. The power of knowledge is unmatched, and there are many resources online.

Tangibly, all of the institutions we visited in the United States could be encouraged to further develop their Gay Straight Alliances, moving toward a more active LGBTQ+ student organization/Pride Center. The main difference between these two models is that GSAs are generally seen as more suitable for High School environments. It promotes tolerance and coexistence which are great to have; however, a Pride model also promotes resources for those who identify as LGBTQ+ such as information on testing for sexually transmitted infections, relationship counseling, and support/community groups.

At the end of the day, we can do so much, and yet we will still have those students that never ask for help. So we need to go to them, and meet them where they are at, and ask them, “What do you need?” Assessment is a vital source in helping LGBTQ+ student success. What students are attending LGBTQ+ programming? Is programming even happening, if so how often? What are other institutions assessing that we could assess as well? Community partners? The list goes on and on.

None of this can happen without funding. Allocating a certain budget and/ or increasing the current budget for LGBTQ+ student success is vital. From here, individuals can be hired, programs can happen, organizations can feel supported, and materials can be bought. Inclusion will start to happen, and individuals will not feel so left out because they will finally have a seat at the table, and a say in what happens.

Taking a stand when something negative affects the LGBTQ+ community, both on and off campus, is always important. Universities should send a message by showcasing that hate will not be tolerated. Although the university has an obligation to protect students' right to free speech, this should not include hate speech targeted at other students, especially those holding marginalized identities. When universities take stands in support of the LGBTQ+ community, students feel even more accepted.

Lastly, leaders need to continuously build new leaders in order to create a sustainable system. By supporting LGBTQ+ student organizations, we are not only sending a message of support to this group, but also raising the next generation of leaders as well. Inviting these students to leadership development programs, sending them to conferences, and creating such opportunities specifically for them is an investment with an even bigger return.

All in all, students want to be successful, whatever that may mean to them. They want to know that we see them, we hear them, and we support them. If we do not do that, then why are we in higher education? It takes acknowledgement, effort, support, guidance, active listening, funding, assessing, reassessing, leading, delegating, educating, and holding each other accountable in order to truly service our students and make sure they are as successful as they can be.

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