CHALLENGES FACED BY LGBTQ+ STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT

Dr. Cornell E. Lewis[1], Dr. Terry D. Long[2]

[1]*Expanding Visions Ministries*

[2]*Adjunct Professor, Lake Erie College, The University of Arizona Global Campus*

Abstract

The LGBTQ+ community has been known to face several challenges in higher education that can negatively impact their academic success and overall wellbeing. These challenges are often rooted in discrimination, lack of institutional support, and social isolation. Therefore, it is crucial for institutions to develop effective strategies that can help address these challenges and better support LGBTQ+ students.

To this end, we have compiled a list of effective strategies that institutions can use to support LGBTQ+ students in higher education. One such strategy is to provide LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula and resources. This involves incorporating LGBTQ+ perspectives and histories into existing coursework, as well as offering specific courses that focus on LGBTQ+ issues. It also involves ensuring that LGBTQ+ students have access to relevant resources such as books, articles, and videos that represent their experiences.

Another effective strategy is to establish LGBTQ+ student organizations and support groups. Encouraging the formation of student-led LGBTQ+ groups can provide a safe space for students to connect with one another and find community. These groups can offer social support, advocacy opportunities, and a platform for LGBTQ+ voices to be heard.

Additionally, training faculty and staff on LGBTQ+ issues and appropriate language use is essential. This can involve providing ongoing training sessions for faculty and staff to ensure they are informed on LGBTQ+ issues and equipped to provide appropriate support. This includes training on how to use inclusive language and how to appropriately intervene in cases of discrimination or harassment.

Keywords

LGBTQ, Higher Education, Effective Strategies, Discrimination

Introduction

Higher education is essential for students to achieve their career aspirations and personal growth. However, for LGBTQ+ students, the journey through higher education is often more challenging due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. LGBTQ+ students often face unique challenges that affect their academic performance, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging in the campus community. Therefore, it is critical to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in higher education and recommend specific strategies to support them.

It is essential to recognize the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students. According to a survey conducted by the National LGBTQ Task Force, over 80% of LGBTQ+ students experienced harassment and discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This discrimination can lead to a hostile learning environment that affects the academic success and overall mental health of LGBTQ+ students. Thus, it is crucial for higher education institutions to understand the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students and develop policies and practices that support their well-being and academic success.

In this paper, we will provide a brief overview of the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in higher education. We will discuss the impact of discrimination, lack of representation, and limited access to resources on the academic and personal success of LGBTQ+ students. Furthermore, we will recommend specific strategies that higher education institutions can implement to support the needs of LGBTQ+ students. These

strategies include policies and practices to create an inclusive environment, providing LGBTQ+ students access to resources, and creating support networks for LGBTQ+ students.

Overall, it is vital to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in higher education. By doing so, higher education institutions can create a safe and inclusive environment that supports all students' academic success and emotional well-being, including those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in higher education

LGBTQ+ students face unique challenges in higher education that can significantly impact their academic success and overall well-being. These challenges include discrimination and marginalization, lack of representation and visibility, inadequate support systems and resources, and mental health issues, including higher rates of suicide.

Discrimination and marginalization: LGBTQ+ students often experience discrimination and marginalization in higher education, including harassment, exclusion, and bias from peers and faculty members. This can create a hostile and unwelcoming environment, leading to feelings of isolation and fear and ultimately hindering academic progress.

Lack of representation and visibility: Many LGBTQ+ students struggle with a lack of representation and visibility in higher education. This includes lacking representation in academic programs, courses, and leadership positions. The absence of positive LGBTQ+ role models can make it challenging for students to find a sense of community and belonging, leading to a feeling of disconnection from the institution.

Inadequate support systems and resources: LGBTQ+ students often face a shortage of resources and support systems in higher education. This includes a lack of safe spaces, counseling services, and other resources that are specifically tailored to the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students. Without adequate support, students may struggle to navigate the challenges they face in higher education, leading to increased stress and anxiety.

Mental health issues and higher rates of suicide: LGBTQ+ students face higher rates of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. These issues are often compounded by the challenges of discrimination and marginalization in higher education, leading to a higher risk of suicide among LGBTQ+ students.

Overall, addressing the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in higher education requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes and responds to the unique needs of these students. By providing resources and support systems that address discrimination, lack of representation, and mental health issues, higher education institutions can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all students.

Strategies for supporting LGBTQ+ students in higher education:

1. Creating inclusive and welcoming campus environments:
Creating inclusive and welcoming campus environments is essential for supporting LGBTQ+ students in higher education. Some ways to achieve this include:

- Hosting events and activities that celebrate LGBTQ+ culture and raise awareness about the issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community.
- Displaying symbols of LGBTQ+ pride, such as rainbow flags, around campus.
- Encouraging student-led LGBTQ+ organizations and providing them with meeting spaces and funding.
- Offering gender-neutral restrooms and housing options.

2. Providing access to LGBTQ+ resources and support services:
LGBTQ+ students may face unique challenges and require specialized support services. Some strategies for providing access to LGBTQ+ resources and support services include:

- Creating LGBTQ+ resource centers staffed by professionals who are trained to address the specific needs of LGBTQ+ students.
- Providing mental health services that are sensitive to LGBTQ+ issues.
- Offering legal and advocacy services to support LGBTQ+ students in navigating discrimination or harassment.
- Establishing support groups for LGBTQ+ students to connect with one another and share experiences.

3. Implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and practices:
Implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and practices is crucial to ensuring that LGBTQ+ students feel safe and supported on campus. Some examples of inclusive policies and practices include:

- Gender-inclusive language in all official communications and materials.
- Nondiscrimination policies protect students from harassment and discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Clear protocols for addressing incidents of discrimination or harassment.
- Providing access to gender-affirming healthcare and coverage for hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries.

4. Educating faculty, staff, and students about LGBTQ+ issues and experiences:
Educating faculty, staff, and students about LGBTQ+ issues and experiences is essential for creating a supportive and inclusive campus environment. Some ways to achieve this include:

- Offering training sessions and workshops on LGBTQ+ issues and how to be an effective ally.
- Encouraging the inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in academic courses.
- Providing LGBTQ+ cultural competency training for faculty and staff.
- Encouraging LGBTQ+ student representation on campus committees and student government.

5. Cultivating LGBTQ+ leadership and mentorship opportunities:
Cultivating LGBTQ+ leadership and mentorship opportunities are important for fostering a sense of community and empowering LGBTQ+ students to become leaders on campus and beyond. Some ways to achieve this include:

- Offering LGBTQ+ leadership and mentorship programs.
- Encouraging LGBTQ+ students to take on leadership roles in student organizations and committees.
- Providing opportunities for LGBTQ+ students to connect with LGBTQ+ professionals in their field of study.
- Celebrating the accomplishments of LGBTQ+ students through awards and recognition programs.

By implementing these strategies, higher education institutions can create a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers LGBTQ+ students to succeed academically and personally.

Case studies of successful LGBTQ+ support initiatives in higher education:

Examples of universities and colleges that have implemented effective LGBTQ+ support programs and initiatives:

1. The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor:
The Spectrum Center at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, is a resource center for LGBTQ+ students that offers a range of support services, including counseling, advocacy, and education. The center also provides a safe space for students to connect with other LGBTQ+ students and allies. The Spectrum Center has been instrumental in developing LGBTQ+ inclusive policies on campus, such as gender-neutral housing and restroom facilities. The center also offers a Gender and Sexuality Living Learning Community, which provides an inclusive living space for LGBTQ+ students.
The impact of the Spectrum Center's initiatives has been significant, with a 2018 survey showing that 92% of LGBTQ+ students at the University of Michigan felt that the campus welcomed them, compared to 67% in 2007.

2. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA):
The UCLA LGBT Campus Resource Center provides various programs and services to support LGBTQ+ students on campus. The center offers peer mentoring, leadership development, educational programming, and a weekly discussion group for LGBTQ+ students. The center has also played a role in developing inclusive policies and practices on campus, such as gender-neutral restrooms and including gender identity and expression in the university's nondiscrimination policy.
The impact of the UCLA LGBT Campus Resource Center has been significant, with a 2019 survey showing that 86% of LGBTQ+ students at UCLA felt comfortable being out on campus, compared to 64% in 2013.

3. The University of Maryland, College Park:
The LGBT Equity Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, provides a range of services to support LGBTQ+ students, including counseling, advocacy, and education. The center also offers several programs and

initiatives to create a more inclusive campus environment, such as the Lavender Leadership Honor Society, which recognizes student leaders who have made a significant contribution to the LGBTQ+ community on campus.

The impact of the LGBT Equity Center's initiatives has been significant, with a 2019 survey showing that 87% of LGBTQ+ students at the University of Maryland, College Park, felt that the campus was inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, compared to 64% in 2009.

Analysis of the impact of these initiatives on the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQ+ students:

These case studies demonstrate that effective LGBTQ+ support programs and initiatives can significantly impact the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQ+ students in higher education. In each of these examples, LGBTQ+ students reported feeling more comfortable and included on campus due to the initiatives implemented by their universities.

Moreover, these initiatives have also positively impacted the broader campus community, helping to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all students. By implementing policies and practices that support LGBTQ+ students, universities and colleges are sending a message that all students are valued and respected members of the campus community. This, in turn, can help to create a more positive and supportive campus culture, benefiting all students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, LGBTQ+ students face unique challenges in higher education that can significantly impact their mental health, academic success, and overall well-being. These challenges include discrimination, harassment, lack of representation, and lack of access to supportive resources. It is essential that universities and colleges address these challenges and take concrete steps to support their LGBTQ+ students.

To recap, LGBTQ+ students in higher education face challenges related to their identity that can impact their ability to succeed academically and socially. These challenges can include discrimination, harassment, lack of representation, and lack of access to supportive resources. These students need access to resources and support to help them navigate these challenges and feel safe and supported on campus.

Given these challenges, universities and colleges must prioritize and invest in LGBTQ+ support programs and initiatives. This includes the development of policies and practices that promote inclusivity and diversity, the provision of resources and support for LGBTQ+ students, and the creation of safe spaces where LGBTQ+ students can connect with one another and receive support.

By taking these steps, universities and colleges can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ students and help ensure all students succeed academically and personally. We urge all universities and colleges to prioritize and invest in LGBTQ+ support programs and initiatives to support the unique needs of these students.

References

Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Boesen, M. J. (2013). Putting the "T" in "resource": The benefits of LGBT-related school resources for transgender youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 10*(3), 208-225. doi: 10.1080/19361653.2013.786625

Griffin, P. (2017). Transgender students in higher education: Strategies for creating a more inclusive campus environment. *New Directions for Student Services, 2017*(160), 67-77. doi: 10.1002/ss.20226

Krumholz, L., & Foreman, M. (2017). LGBTQ+ college student success: A review of the literature. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 19*(2), 135-153. doi: 10.1177/1521025115626982

Rankin, S. R. (2003). Campus climates for sexual minorities. *New directions for student services, 2003*(111), 17-23. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.95

Rankin, S. R., Weber, G. N., Blumenfeld, W. J., & Frazer, S. (2010). 2010 State of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Charlotte, NC: Campus Pride.

Rankin, S. R. (2018). Campus Pride Index 2018: Best of the best top 30 LGBTQ-friendly colleges & universities. Campus Pride. Retrieved from https://www.campuspride.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018_Campus_Pride_Index_Final.pdf

Ryan, C., & Futterman, D. (1998). Lesbian and gay youth: Care and counseling. New York: Columbia University Press.

Taylor, Y., Lahad, K., & Leonard, D. (2018). LGBTQ-inclusive higher education: A comprehensive model for change. *Journal of Homosexuality, 65*(12), 1587-1607. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2017.1386738.