

AN EXAMINATION OF CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND
TRANSGENDER (LGBT) STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

The challenges facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students on college and university campuses are many. For example, LGBT students face harassment and discrimination at significantly higher levels than their heterosexual peers, and are twice as likely to receive derogatory remarks (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). As the visibility of LGBT college students and the adversity they face has increased, there is ever more pressure on college and universities to evaluate whether LGBT students' needs are being met. A dependable method of determining this is to conduct an assessment of the campus climate for LGBT students.

Campus climate can be consists of the mutually reinforcing relationship between the perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of both individuals and groups, as well as the actual patterns of interaction and behavior between individuals and groups (Cress, 2008). Thus, in order to assess a campus climate, one must determine the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members. Campus climate has a significant impact upon students' academic progress and achievement and their level of satisfaction with their university. Whether or not a student feels as though they matter on their campus is largely a result of the climate. Evaluations of campus climate for LGBT students allow administrations to uncover what inequalities may exist on their campus, which is the first step toward being able to correct them.

There have been many methods of improving campus climate that have been effective at a variety of colleges and universities. Administrations that wish to provide LGBT students on their campus with a better experience should invest in as many of these practices as possible. The most important action in improving campus climate is to institute an LGBT resource center or office with a full-time staff member and significant office space. Other impactful strategies include establishing a Safe Zone or Allies program, encouraging LGBT students to form organizations for themselves and their allies, increasing the amount of interaction between LGBT students and faculty—especially LGBT faculty, and establishing a Queer Studies academic program.

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Introduction

Recently, there have been several incidents on college campuses across the nation that have involved some form of homophobic attacks on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. One such incident was the distressing story of Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University freshman who committed suicide after learning that his roommate had surreptitiously broadcast via the Internet a sexual encounter Clementi had with another man. The tragic story of Clementi, compounded by numerous additional suicides committed by gay teenagers throughout the country, led legislators and school officials to begin to intensify efforts to strengthen anti-bullying programs. Now more than ever, fewer people are of the opinion that bullying is an unavoidable fact of life and is an act that immature people have always and will always carry out (Renn, 2010). Those who are “different” are typically the targets of bullying, aggression, and violence, and LGBT students are bullied at perhaps the most frequent rates of any non-dominant social group (Rankin, 2003). When such painful stories as Clementi’s make national news, campus administrators at both the campus where the event took place and other universities must be compelled to reflect upon the quality of life for LGBT students on their campuses.

In reflecting upon the quality of life on campus, one must consider campus climate. “Campus climate is a measure—real or perceived—of the campus environment as it relates to interpersonal, academic, and professional interactions” (Study Group on University Diversity, 2008, p. 1). Climate refers to the experience of individuals or groups on campus, as well as the quality and extent of interaction between those various individuals or groups. It is important to assess campus climate because, in an unhealthy campus climate, individuals often feel marginalized, isolated, and even unsafe. If a campus climate is not healthy, there is a lack of respect for others and dialogue between differing perspectives is either nonexistent or hostile.

LGBT students are a group that is often affected by a negative campus climate, because they are frequently the targets of intolerant attitudes.

Assessments and investigations of campus climate for LGBT students began at colleges and universities (e.g., The University of Massachusetts and Rutgers University) in the late 1980s and have become an increasingly common practice. Learning the condition of the campus climate for LGBT students can be viewed as the first step to ensuring that LGBT students' needs are being met as effectively and thoroughly as possible. Aside from determining whether LGBT students face harassment and bullying, there are additional factors to be considered when assessing campus climate (e.g., the presence of LGBT topics in the curriculum and the availability of resources to LGBT students).

Studying campus climate is an attempt to describe how students, faculty, and staff experience interactions with one another. Cress (2008) stated that, "it is a way of discerning how the environmental complexities of a campus affect the overall functioning of both its members and the organization" (p. 96). The results of campus climate assessments illuminate not only the shortcomings in student services on campus, but also the campus' strengths. In turn, administrators can foster the processes that are already working well and intervene where students' needs are not being fully met. In order to enhance the role of higher education institutions in providing students with the opportunities to learn how to live and work in a complex, diverse society, it is essential that campuses assess the campus climate and respond accordingly (Cress, 2008).

The current report is the result of an examination of the literature pertaining to campus climate for LGBT students on college and university campuses. First, there will be a discussion of the general term "campus climate," including its initial appearance and definitions in the literature

and the impact it has upon students. Then, to provide background knowledge and establish a starting benchmark, an exploration of the history of LGBT students' presence on campus will be presented. The outcomes of the earliest and most recent LGBT campus climate assessments will be reviewed. Finally, based upon a review of the literature, there will be an overview of best practices to improve campus climate for LGBT students.

“Campus Climate” Defined

A multitude of researchers have explored campus climate and have conceptualized it using their own explanations and language. Some may believe that campus climate can be used interchangeably with the term “campus culture,” and although climate and culture are certainly related, they are two distinct concepts. As compared to culture, climate is more concerned with current perceptions and attitudes rather than deeply held meanings, beliefs, and values. Peterson and Spencer (1990) explained that climate has three main distinctions from culture: “(1) it examines common participant attitudes, perceptions, or observations that can be compared among groups over time; (2) it focuses on current patterns of beliefs and behaviors; and (3) it is malleable in character...Whereas culture is the organizational value, climate is the atmosphere or style” (pp. 7-8). Another difference between culture and climate is that culture seeks to examine an organization from a holistic point of view, and climate focuses on specific sections or parts (Bauer, 1998). Campus culture is undoubtedly significant and worthy of being examined, but its dissimilarities from campus climate preclude it from being incorporated into this report.

“Campus environment,” on the other hand, has historically been used to denote an idea that is very similar, if not identical, to campus climate. Although present research regarding campus environment occasionally pertains to either ecological issues such as sustainability (McIntosh, Cacciola, Clermont, & Keniry, 2001) or to the actual physical surroundings of a university’s grounds (Willis & Helal, 2005), “campus environment” and “campus climate” continue to be used interchangeably in the current literature. Accordingly, literature pertaining to campus environment was reviewed for the current report, and will be cited with the term “environment” replaced with “climate” for the purpose of consistency.

The climate of an organization was first conceptualized in regards to business workplaces.

Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow (1996) explained climate as the "shared perceptions, among members of a relevant group, department or organization, of contingencies between specific behaviors and their consequences, both private and public, positive and negative" (p. 133). Peterson and Spencer (1990) defined climate as, "The current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions of and attitudes toward those dimensions" (p. 7). Fine and Sheridan (2008) defined climate as, "The atmosphere or ambience of an organization as perceived by its members. An organization's climate is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions" (p. 1). Waldo (1998) conceptualized campus climate as simply the "measurable perceptions of various aspects of campus life" (p. 748).

The climate of a college campus is inferred by the individuals within it based upon their appraisal of every event and non-event they observe and experience on campus. It consists of the mutually reinforcing relationship between the perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of both individuals and groups as well as the actual patterns of interaction and behavior between individuals and groups (Cress, 2008). Therefore, in order to determine a campus climate, one must examine "the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members" (Bauer, 1998, p. 2). As Martin and Siehl (1983) noted, organizations do not have one sweeping organizational culture that shapes climate perceptions. Instead, perceptions of climate can differ because of organizational members' affiliations with different subcultures (e.g., an LGBT subculture).

Importance of Campus Climate

To demonstrate the importance of measuring campus climate, it is important to explore the impact that campus climate has upon students and their success. Cress (1999) asserted that, at a basic level, students' perception of campus climate affects how they respond to the environment. That is, negative perceptions are likely to lead to discontent, insecurity, and a desire to leave the environment, while positive perceptions are likely to be linked to contentment, security, and a desire to stay in the environment. As Cress (1999) stated, "The importance of the relationship between campus climate with students' sense of self and their academic accomplishments cannot be underestimated" (p. 18).

Cress (1999) stated, "there appears to be an intricate relationship between student perceptions of campus climate, educational achievements in terms of grade point average and development of academic knowledge and skills, and how students feel about themselves with respect to social and academic self-concept" (p. 23). Indeed, various studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between a negative campus climate and lack of students' academic success, which is conceptualized by measures such as lower grade point average, higher dropout rates, and less frequent degree completion (Cress, 2008; Cress & Ikeda, 2003). Kuh, Vesper, Connolly, and Pace (1997) found that students' views of an institution are linked with outcomes such as knowledge acquisition and critical thinking skills. Since campus climate affects whether or not a student becomes actively involved on campus, and perceived level of involvement is an established predictor of academic success and persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999), it seems that campus climate impacts retention and educational achievement.

Beckham (1988) found that students' perception of a negative or indifferent campus climate interrupts their level of comfort. The level of comfort students feel is critical to achievement in

and satisfaction with college life because it sets a tone for academic pursuits (Turner, 1988) and impacts attrition (Green, 1989). Similarly, through their research of campus climate's impact on racial and ethnic minority students, Sáenz, Marcoulides, Junn, and Young (1999) discovered that perceptions of a poor racial campus climate can have a negative effect on the connection that students feel to the academic and social arenas of college life. Research suggests that learning is not just affected by motivational factors intrinsic to the individual, such as self-confidence, perceived value of education, and expectations for success. It is also affected by the social context, including whether or not the learning environment is encouraging and supportive (Tiberius & Billson, 1991).

In addition to impacting academic achievement, there is also evidence that campus climate has an affect on students' personal development. Kuh and Vesper (1998) found that the way students feel about their learning environment impacts the development of their values. For example, if the campus is fair and thoughtful, and concerns itself with the greater good, then students are more likely to share these values as well. Another specific instance of campus climate affecting development is that students' significant personal experiences with faculty and peers contribute to their self-understanding (Kuh & Vesper, 1998). Additionally, Evans and Broido (1998) found that the perceived campus climate had a direct effect on students' self-concept.

Al-Timimi (2003) explored the hypothesis that the perceived campus climate is a factor in the psychosocial development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Her results demonstrate that students' perception of campus climate is a predictor of their ability to adjust to life in the world of higher education and on their particular campus, and she asserted that, "for students, perceived university environment is one of the primary sociological factors that can impact

adjustment to college” (p. 14). Al-Timimi (2003) found that the way that students experience their institutional environment or campus climate consistently affected their development.

There are several studies that highlight the impact of campus climate upon certain populations of students. Ponterotto (1990) found that, as a result of an inhospitable climate at most of the predominantly white institutions, there were higher dropout rates among Black, Hispanic, and Native American students. Haro (1994) studied Hispanic students’ decision to persist or drop out and found that a large proportion of students cited a negative campus climate, feeling unwelcomed or alienated at their institutions, in their choice to drop out. Also, in a qualitative study of 13 campuses, Hughes (1987) found that Black students postpone social, personal, emotional, and cultural development as a result of the inability of predominantly white institutions’ campus climates to respond to Black students’ social and developmental needs. In addition, Nettles (1988) found that Black students’ perceptions of campus climate were negatively associated with their cumulative grade point average.

In summary, the way that students experience campus climate impacts them in several ways. Campus climate affects students’ sense of self and their ability to achieve academically. It can also impact students’ level of comfort, sense of connection to the campus, and satisfaction with college life. Additionally, campus climate can affect students’ development. Because it can have an impact upon students in so many ways, it is important to study campus climate.

History of LGBT Presence on College Campuses

Prior to the 1970s, colleges and universities followed a philosophy similar to that of Willard Waller, whose 1932 book *The Sociology of Teaching* was the guiding force behind scholars' and educators' approach to homosexuality for several decades. In the book, Waller (1932) noted that homosexuality was a deviant, contagious, and dangerous disease that could and should be avoided in schools by means of terminating teachers who demonstrated homosexual characteristics in their "carriage, mannerisms, voice, speech, etc." (Waller, as cited in Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 51). Parallel to the actions taken at institutions of education at the primary and secondary levels, colleges and universities routinely expelled male and female students caught in—or suspected of engaging in—compromising same-sex activities (Dilley, 2002a, 2002b; MacKay, 1992) in order to eliminate sexual deviance from their campuses. These expulsions were commonly kept quiet, but some schools inserted a note onto expelled students' final transcripts explaining that they had been expelled due to "charges relating to homosexual activity" (Loughery, 1998, p. 173). This would prevent students from gaining admittance to another college, which was likely the rationale behind including it. More frequently, though, the language used by universities in their policies to expel students for engaging in gay activities was kept vague (e.g., expulsion for "conduct unbecoming of a student" [Dilley, 2002a, p. 415]) so that their institution would not be associated with deviant sexual behavior.

Even Harvard University, now a pioneering campus for the advancement of LGBT rights, formed a Secret Court in 1920 to investigate and expel suspected gay students. Five hundred pages of archived files from the Secret Court convey the stories of the men and the humiliating, terrifying experiences they endured as Harvard carried out what has been referred to as a gay "witch hunt" (Wright, 2005, p. 46). Although Harvard initiated its purge of gay students in

1920, this pursuit occurred more widely at colleges and universities across the country starting in the early 1940s and continuing through the early 1960s (Dilley, 2002b). The sweeping trend of eliminating gay students from campus necessitated hiding their sexual preference from anyone who either had the authority to expel them from campus or who was likely to report them to the authorities. Thus, gay men's experience of campus life during this period was one of silence and anxiety; most would only socialize with other gay men at secret off-campus gatherings (Dilley, 2002b). While the layouts of men's restrooms, libraries, and other campus buildings were often well suited for clandestine meetings between gay students, staff would eventually catch on and begin patrolling those areas. In fact, there are several accounts of undercover investigations by college administrators to discover non-heterosexual activity on campuses and in neighboring vicinities, as well as offering immunity to suspected gay students in exchange for more information (Dilley, 2002a).

As the professional field of student affairs emerged in the middle of the 20th century, a new way of thinking about gay college students appeared (Renn, 2010). Deans of men and deans of women, who were typically responsible for maintaining social order on campus by enforcing disciplinary codes, had been instrumental in the process of removing students identified as homosexual deviants (Dilley, 2002a). After some time, these student affairs administrators, as well as their colleagues in the burgeoning field of college counseling, began to take a treatment approach rather than a disciplinary approach with non-heterosexual students. Believing that homosexuality was a treatable disease, student affairs professionals with good intentions were sometimes convinced by campus medical staff to keep a student on campus and enlist him or her in psychological treatment (Bailey, 2002; Dilley, 2002b). This approach was rooted in counseling psychology and followed standard practice during a period of time when

homosexuality was listed as a disease in the American Psychiatric Association's (1968) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Treating mentally ill students had multiple benefits—it was within the mission of the college counseling profession, and keeping gay students in higher education was a way to offer them treatment that they might not get if they returned to disapproving families (Renn, 2010). Unfortunately, the psychological treatment prescribed to students whose gay identity had been discovered was “unbendingly committed to ‘straightening’ all homosexuals” (Hechinger & Hechinger, 1978, p. 38) by making them believe that their gay activities and self-identifications were false, sinful, or both.

The 1960s was a period of time when gay students began to evolve in the way they viewed themselves as individuals and a group (Dilley, 2002a). Until the gay liberation movement began, gay men on college campuses had the options of either maintaining a “normal” heterosexual lifestyle while surreptitiously engaging in gay activities, or publicly exhibiting their gay identity and risking expulsion and a criminal record. By the late 1960s, the women's movement, the antiwar movement, the hippie movement, and the “sexual revolution” had changed the way countless Americans perceived their personal identities. Fueled by the aforementioned social movements, the gay rights movement resulted in a rejection of the clinical term “homosexual” by the majority of gay men in college. An excerpt from a position paper of Lawrence Gay Liberation, Inc. (n.d.) written in the early 1970s explains the reasoning behind the shift in terminology:

The “gay community” should not be confused with the stereotyped “homosexual” community which is as repressive and limiting as the “straight, heterosexual” community, since in both of the latter groups the limiting and harmful stereotypes that society has imposed on femininity, masculinity and sexual roles are

emphasized. Many straights limit love to heterosexual situations involving aggressive men and submissive women, and, because of societal oppression, "homosexuals" have been forced into one-night stands and impersonal sexual encounters in contrived situations. By contrast, the gay community offers a unique opportunity for Gays to work for a freedom and self-expression based on consideration of others as individuals, without the overtones of exploitative sexuality endemic in the straight community. This encourages personal freedom of expression and affection toward others of either sex. (p. 1)

In 1969, at the end of a decade when social and cultural norms were attacked openly in America with a fervor that had never before been witnessed, the Stonewall riots took place (D'Emilio, 1992). What started as a routine bar raid by police to arrest homosexuals ended in three nights of violent demonstrations against police, led by working-class drag queens of color and other similarly extra-marginalized members of the LGBT community. The Stonewall riots were the Greenwich Village LGBT community's response to unrelenting harassment by New York City police officers. They sparked a movement in urban enclaves of gay men and lesbians as well as among gay and lesbian students on college campuses (D'Emilio, 1992). Although the first known student organization for gay rights—the Student Homophile League at Columbia University—was officially chartered before the momentous impact of the Stonewall riots (April 19, 1967), the Stonewall riots also caused a rapid increase of participation in the new gay liberation movement (Beemyn, 2003). This was especially true on college campuses, since much of the political activism throughout the 1960s was student-based.

Gay students were no longer willing to hide their identity and limit their social life to a few secretive, safe locations. They highlighted their similarities with heterosexuals as the basis for

deserving equal treatment from higher education institutions and the administrators within them (Dilley, 2002b). No longer afraid of the potential repercussions of exposing their sexual orientation, gay students began staging protests, such as the 1970 sit-in attended by hundreds of LGBT students and other student activists sympathetic to their cause at a Cornell University bar whose owner had recently refused to serve gay students (Beemyn, 2003). The sit-in ultimately resulted in the owner writing a formal letter apologizing for “any mistreatment that gay patrons might have experienced in the bar” (Beemyn, 2003, p. 221) and assuring that, from that point forward, pleasant and efficient customer service would be available to everyone at all times.

In 1973, Robert Cullinan wrote of this new “gay” identity emerging on college campuses. In the same year, “homosexuality” was officially removed from the list of mental disorders, which helped to alleviate the challenge of keeping gay students on campus instead of forcing them to return home to oft-disapproving families (Renn, 2010). Cullinan (1973) explained that, “what is surprising is that homosexual students across the nation are projecting a new image of self acceptance and are challenging the prejudices of society against them. Organizations of homosexual groups are finding a place in the structures of many of our larger universities” (p. 344). Indeed, merely five years after the American Psychiatric Association reversed its stance on homosexuality, Hechinger and Hechinger (1978) reported there were more than 200 campus gay and lesbian groups. These groups commonly published statements similar to that of the Gay Liberation Front of Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, which begins with the following declaration: “WE AS THE WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY GAY LIBERATION FRONT demand the freedom for expression of our dignity and value as human beings through confrontation with and disarmament of all mechanisms which unjustly inhibit us: economic, social, and political” (as cited in Cullinan, 1973, p. 344).

These earliest gay and lesbian student groups certainly seemed to organize themselves quite easily, but gaining official institutional recognition on their campuses was not nearly as simple. This struggle marks a period of legal battles, or “litigations for legitimacy” as Dilley (2002b, p. 169) so aptly referred to them. During this period, university administrators refused to recognize gay campus organizations on various campuses (Gibbs, 1979; Gibbs & McFarland, 1974; Liddel & Douvanis, 1994). State anti-sodomy laws were often cited in administrators’ decisions to deny recognition and were the basis upon which they drew the conclusion that a gay student group could potentially commit or even promote illegal activity. Administrators also cited the religious beliefs of the heterosexual majority of students on campus and issues of moral education as reasons for denial of recognition (Dilly, 2002b). The refusals to recognize gay student organizations were viewed by the students as their administrations’ latest method of controlling and silencing them. In various states (e.g., New Hampshire, Virginia, Missouri, Kansas, Florida, and California), students brought the issue to court, and judges reversed the actions of many university administrators in order to uphold individuals’ First Amendment right to associate and to further their personal beliefs (D’Emilio, 1992). Since the courts have ruled that gay student groups cannot be denied recognition, these groups can now enjoy the privileges reserved for officially designated student groups, such as using facilities and meetings spaces, using their institution’s name as part of their organization’s name, and inviting speakers to campus (Gibbs & McFarland, 1974).

Indeed, the 1970s was a decade that featured significant achievement on the part of gay men and lesbians (D’Emilio, 1992). After winning a series of legal battles through the decade, “overt discrimination seemed to dissipate” (Dilley, 2002b, p. 175), and LGBT students were able to establish a palpable presence on college and university campuses. They achieved this through

the work of gay student organizations, that staffed tables in student unions to disseminate educational information, publicized and held open meetings, encouraged heterosexual participation and garnered allies, and refused to force members to apply a label to their sexual identity (Beemyn, 2003). At the University of Minnesota in 1978, Jack Baker became the first openly gay student in the country to be elected student body president (Dilley, 2002b). The visibility of LGBT students on college and university campuses increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Student affairs professionals took notice, just as they had when the presence of other underrepresented students had increased, and researchers began to explore ways to understand LGBT student experiences and their identities (Renn, 2010). As hostility toward LGBT students increased because of the publicity of the AIDS epidemic, administrators acknowledged the importance of attending to the safety of all students as well as the necessity of understanding their experiences and identity development processes, and thus began to form institutional committees to investigate issues and concerns of LGBT students (Renn, 2010).

Findings from the Earliest Campus Climate Assessments

Campus climate was first referred to in 1982, when Hall and Sandler drew attention to the “chilly” climate for women on college campuses. The researchers compiled data from several sources, including empirical studies, surveys, and individual responses to a “call for information” issued in conjunction with their project in order to garner additional anecdotal evidence regarding the experiences of women on college campuses. In their report, Hall and Sandler (1982) stated, “A variety of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, both overt and subtle, can communicate to women that they are not on par with men; are not to be taken seriously; are viewed not as individuals but rather as members of a second-class group; do not need and will not use a college education or advanced degree” (p. 4). Heller, Puff, and Mills (1985) summed up some of the most resonating findings from the original report. The findings were that faculty interrupt women more than men; subtly discriminate against women by making demeaning sexual allusions or using sexist humor; perceive women primarily as sexual beings; and view them as less capable and less serious than men. With their research, Hall and Sandler (1982) called attention to campus climate. In turn, researchers began collecting data to assess the campus climate for not only women, but additional subpopulations of students as well.

A series of confrontations that occurred at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst during the Fall semester of 1984 convinced the university that LGBT students were "subjected to an unusual amount of harassment and may well lack any of the usual student services sensitive to their needs as a group" (Yeskel, 1985, p. 1). This gave rise to an evaluation of the campus climate, including the needs of and existing services for LGBT students. Felice Yeskel, a graduate student empathetic to the struggle of LGBT students at the university, was charged with completing the evaluation. The wide-ranging evaluation included telephone surveys, open-

ended surveys distributed among the campus community, surveys in the student newspaper, and surveys sent to student services units and residence halls. Results showed that more than half of those surveyed believed there were widespread anti-gay and anti-lesbian attitudes on campus. More than one-third of all students surveyed reported that they frequently saw anti-gay or anti-lesbian graffiti on campus. Nearly 75% of the students surveyed believed LGBT students were physically and verbally harassed; over one-half believed these students had been the victims of vandalism; and close to half believed that LGBT students received threatening phone calls. Despite believing or actually knowing that harassment and violence toward LGBT students were so prevalent, students' responses on the survey demonstrated a reluctance to take action—only one fourth indicated that they were willing to intervene directly, and fewer than five percent noted they would merely report an incident (Yeskel, 1985).

In the same study, responses among the LGBT student community revealed that they perceived a similar pattern of harassment. About 85 percent of LGBT respondents reported seeing anti-LGBT graffiti; almost half reported having received verbal threats, one in three had been harassed over the telephone; and about 20 percent reported that they had been the victim of physical confrontations or assaults. Additionally, many of these students also felt their sexual orientation was responsible for more subtle forms of discrimination (e.g., receiving lower grades than they believed they deserved [60%], job discrimination [21%], and being forced out of housing [13%]).

Yeskel (1985) concluded that "lesbian, gay, and bisexual students experience a range of verbal and physical assault which exceeds that of any other group of students" (p. 20). When assaults did occur, LGBT students were either afraid or unwilling to report such instances because they considered university staff to be insensitive to gay and lesbian issues. Based on LGBT

responses, faculty were also not a viable option for LGBT students seeking assistance or allies—professors were deemed to be ignorant of the experiences of gay men and lesbian women.

Finally, LGBT students who were most open about their sexuality were much more likely to experience harassment and discrimination. The University of Massachusetts report concluded that a:

...clear definition of sexual identity is a primary task for the college years. This is a stressful task even for heterosexual students and often an overwhelming one for lesbian, gay and bisexual students. The lack of adequate physical protection, the anti-gay stance of many academic courses, the inadequacy of student services and the openly anti-gay atmosphere in many residence halls combine to create a climate producing anxiety and depression for many of these students. This is particularly true for those whose self-image suffers from the negative attributes assigned to lesbian, gay and bisexual people by societal prejudice. (Yeskel, 1985, p. 21)

Another campus climate assessment similar to the study conducted at the University of Massachusetts occurred two years later at Rutgers University (“Rutgers sexual orientation study,” 1987). Students enrolled in a Homosexuality and Society class at Rutgers University completed a survey regarding their perceptions of campus climate for LGBT students. The results showed that almost one-third of the respondents thought it was likely that an LGBT student would be harassed, threatened, or assaulted and nearly one-half believed that a LGBT student would receive unfair treatment on campus. These results matched the responses of LGBT students, who were also surveyed as a group. One-third of the LGBT students reported at least one instance of verbal insults, one of every six reported being threatened at least once with physical violence, and one of five reported having been chased or followed. A more severe level

of harassment was also reported, although with significantly less frequency—four percent of LGBT respondents reported having been physically assaulted, and two percent had been assaulted with a weapon. In turn, many LGBT students reported that, out of fear for their safety, they kept their sexual identities secret. The anti-LGBT sentiment was so prominent on the Rutgers University campus that the student researchers feared for their own safety even after the study was finished. The report concluded that LGBT students do not have access to, or receive, the same rights and services as heterosexual students.

Another early campus climate assessment was conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (University of Illinois, 1987). This survey was carried out as a result of the Chancellor appointing a task force to study LGBT issues. Compared to UMass-Amherst and Rutgers, there was less awareness amongst the administration of the problems faced by LGBT students. Although fewer incidents were reported through the study, about 40 percent of the gay and lesbian respondents reported having been "socially ostracized," and about one-third reported having felt ridiculed in classes. LGBT respondents reported a negative impact upon their well-being, including a decrease in already low self-esteem and feelings of isolation, occurred as a result of what they perceived as passive acceptance of anti-LGBT actions.

Despite the fact that uncovering students' feelings about homosexuality and the source of those feelings does not constitute a complete campus climate analysis, attitudes and perceptions are a significant aspect of campus climate and are therefore a basis for illuminating the realities of life on campus for LGBT students and the difficulties they often encounter. As Engstrom and Sedlacek (1997) noted in their report of heterosexual students' attitudes toward their gay and lesbian peers at a large state university in the Southeast, students' attitudes toward LGBT

students have “important implications for practitioners who are concerned about creating positive attitudes toward students from diverse backgrounds and cultures” (p. 566).

Herek (1988) researched the basis for differences among heterosexual undergraduate students in their reactions to gay people, with special emphasis on the issue of gender differences. The results revealed a consistent tendency for heterosexual males to express more hostile attitudes toward homosexuality than heterosexual females, especially toward gay men. In both men and women, the social psychological variables of religiosity, adherence to traditional ideologies of family and gender, perception of friends' agreement with one's own attitudes, and past experiences with lesbians and gay men appeared to be the basis of negative attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians (Herek, 1988). Conversely, heterosexual students were more likely to have tolerant attitudes toward their LGBT counterparts if they belonged to a liberal religious denomination or were not religious, endorsed non-traditional views of gender and family, did not perceive their friends as holding attitudes similar to their own, and had positive interactions with lesbians and gay men in the past (Herek, 1988).

D’Augelli (1989a) conducted a similar analysis of anti-gay and anti-lesbian harassment experienced on college and university campuses. He surveyed 125 openly gay and lesbian students, faculty, and staff at Pennsylvania State University about their perceptions of campus climate and their experiences of discrimination and violence. The results demonstrated the scope of homophobia on campus: 75% of the respondents had experienced verbal harassment at least once, 50% had experienced verbal harassment on more than one occasion, 25% had been threatened with physical violence at least once, 64% feared for their personal safety on campus, and nearly 90% hid their sexual orientation from their roommates and other peers (D’Augelli, 1989a). Reflecting upon this research, D’Augelli (1989b) soon thereafter lamented the fact that

the problem of homophobia at institutions of higher education had not yet been identified as a campus “problem” or at least not labeled as one.

In 1989, University of Chicago professor Arthur Reynolds stated that, “the social environment of homosexual students has not been adequately investigated” and that although other studies had illuminated the negative perceptions of gay people, “they do not provide a comprehensive picture of the context” (p. 62) in which the homophobia, prejudice, and other negative attitudes take place. Reynolds (1989) administered a university climate measure to gay and straight students in order to address the “differences in perception of university climate between homosexual and heterosexual students” (p. 64). The major finding from Reynolds’ (1989) study was that, “male homosexual students perceived the climate as significantly less emotionally supportive, less intellectual, and less tolerant of change and innovation than the heterosexual comparison group” (p. 66). Another important conclusion Reynolds (1989) made was that “negative attributes of male homosexual students also operate at the organizational and structural level of the university” (p. 67), which strengthened the reasoning for using a person-environment perspective when considering the hardships of LGBT students.

These early campus climate assessments make obvious the extent to which LGBT students were made to feel unwelcome at a variety of colleges and universities throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the initial efforts to investigate campus climate resulted in the establishment of permanent resource centers and offices providing similar services, as well as programs to educate and cultivate LGBT allies amongst students, faculty, and staff. However, some of the early assessments failed to follow-up and continually reassess campus climate. Indeed, in her analysis of whether higher education is “making the grade” in regards to meeting the needs of LGBT students, Rankin (2006) lamented that “there is no consistent measurement of these concepts nor

are there longitudinal studies of change over time” (p. 114). Still, there have been a number of empirical studies assessing campus climate that have been conducted and published in recent years.

Recent Assessments of Campus Climate for LGBT Students

In 2003, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) commissioned an assessment of campus climate for LGBT students from a “national” perspective; Susan Rankin directed the study and prepared the report. The study’s generalizability to all American colleges and universities has since come into question by multiple researchers, including the author herself (Rankin, 2006; Renn, 2010). The claim that the data are not representative of nation-wide campus climate is based upon the study’s sample. Respondents were from only 14 higher education institutions and each of the participating institutions had established LGBT resource centers or similar offices (Rankin, 2003), which is still not the norm for colleges and universities today.

Regardless of whether the scope of Rankin’s (2003) data is broad enough to allow for the findings to be applied to all colleges and universities, the results can help learn about and understand the campus climate to some extent. Of the 1,669 LGBT students, faculty, and staff/administrators who completed the survey, 36% had experienced some type of harassment within the last year, most commonly in the form of derogatory remarks (Rankin, 2003). Twenty percent of the respondents reported that they feared for their physical safety because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and 43% categorized their institution’s overall campus climate as homophobic. Additionally, 41% percent of respondents indicated that their institution was not taking action to address issues related to sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In general, the results of this national study showed that there was much room for improvement in the campus climate for LGBT students on the campuses involved.

In another assessment of campus climate for LGBT students, Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, and Robinson-Keilig (2004) surveyed a total of 525 members of the campus community at a large

Midwestern state research university. The respondents were categorized into four groups (i.e., general students who were proportionately representative of academic class and field of study, resident assistants, faculty members, and student affairs staff members). Referring to the limitations caused by focusing on a specific subgroup of a campus population in assessing campus climate, the authors stated that, “a multiple perspectives approach to studying the campus climate is essential if campus leaders are to gain a fuller understanding of the campus community’s perspectives” (p. 9). Investigating the perspectives of various campus constituents allowed the authors to compare LGBT students’ perceptions of campus climate with those of their non-LGBT peers, as well as compare attitudes based on specific characteristics of group members such as academic class and gender. Brown et al.’s (2004) utilization of a multiple perspectives approach distinguishes their study from previous assessments (e.g., Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997) that garnered data either exclusively from LGBT students or exclusively from heterosexual students, and therefore could not reach conclusions regarding the similarities or differences between the two groups’ perceptions of campus climate. Results suggested that different groups within the campus community had different perceptions of campus climate for LGBT students, and that individual characteristics (e.g., gender, progress toward degree, and academic discipline) were related to respondents’ perceptions of campus climate (Brown et al., 2004). These findings may not be particularly surprising, but they are nonetheless important, as differences in perception of campus climate based on group membership and individual attributes had seldom been established with empirical evidence.

Recently, the Q Research Institute for Higher Education released the report entitled “2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender People,” a national assessment

of campus climate authored by Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer. This study is the most comprehensive assessment of campus climate to date, detailing the collective experiences of over 5,000 students, faculty members, staff members, and administrators who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and/or queer at institutions of higher education throughout the United States, in addition to their heterosexual peers. The data demonstrated that LGBT survey respondents face harassment and discrimination at significantly higher levels than their heterosexual peers, and are twice as likely to receive derogatory remarks. LGBT participants were “significantly less likely than their allies to feel very comfortable or comfortable with the overall campus climate, their department/work unit climate, and classroom climate than their heterosexual counterparts” (Rankin et al., 2010, p. 12). On a slightly more positive note, the vast majority (approximately 75%) of respondents to the survey reported that they were “out” to their friends in regards to their sexual identity, and an even higher percentage of faculty, staff, and administrators were “out” to their professional colleagues (87%, 88%, and 92%, respectively). However, “undergraduate students were least likely to be ‘out’ to their nuclear family (46% as compared to 70% of graduate students/employees)” (Rankin et al., 2010, p. 9). This particular statistic is noteworthy because of its implications for student affairs professionals. If less than half of undergraduates have felt comfortable or supported enough to come out to their immediate families, then they will likely need a strong support system on campus.

Due to the fact that campus climate assessments use an array of research designs and methodologies (see Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Renn, 2010), it is difficult to compare more current studies with one another, much less draw conclusions about progress in campus climate by evaluating the contrast between results of studies completed within the last eight years and those conducted 20 or more years ago. Also, there is not one instrument that is consistently used to

measure campus climate for LGBT students; most researchers tailor their methods to their institution's characteristics. Additionally, campus climate can vary greatly between institutions, even if they are of a similar size and mission. Regardless, Rankin et al. (2010) straightforwardly asserted, "The settings of college campuses have improved for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, faculty, and staff over the years" (p. 8).

Best Practices for Improving Campus Climate for LGBT Students

This section will focus upon various interventions, resources, and campus elements that can be impactful in improving campus climate for LGBT constituents. Based on the findings from various studies (Beemyn, 2002; Chestnut, 1998; Evans, 2002; Rhoads, 1997), several categories of best practices to improve campus climate emerged. The categories to be addressed are LGBT resource centers, student organizations, Safe Zone programs, and improvements to the academic environment.

LGBT Resource Centers

In the relatively short amount of time that LGBT resource centers have been in existence on college and university campuses, a dramatic change has occurred in their mission statements and the way they are described. Originally, these offices focused almost exclusively upon sexual identity issues; their primary concern was to provide support services to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students and educate the campus community about LGB students' experiences (Beemyn, 2002). Because the visibility of transgender students steadily increased throughout the 1990s, many LGBT resource centers and offices have begun to make connections between sexual identity and gender identity and have formally modified their names and mission statements to reflect an inclusion of transgender. Every center that has been established since 1997 has been trans-inclusive, at least in title, by adding a "T" to the "LGB" or using alternate encompassing language like "queer," "rainbow," "Stonewall," or "pride" (Beemyn, 2002). While only four of the 56 LGBT resource centers in existence in 2001 included straight allies in the title of their office, almost all of them implemented extensive outreach to heterosexuals, usually through Safe Zone programs and efforts to educate individuals who have less positive attitudes toward LGBT people (Beemyn, 2002). Almost all of those 56 resource centers or

offices include faculty, staff, and administrators in their target audience—only four indicated that they exclusively focus on students (Beemyn, 2002).

In 1997, the National Consortium of Directors of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources in Higher Education was founded. This organization is a means for LGBT center administrators to offer each other mutual support and advice, seek suggestions for improving the campus climate for LGBT people, and advocate for the establishment of LGBT centers and offices at other institutions (Beemyn, 2002). This consortium, therefore, contributes to the development of LGBT resource centers. Directors of well-established centers can stay up-to-date with the latest best practices and provide wisdom and advice to administrators of new LGBT resource centers. Additionally, job listings can be posted to the consortium listserv. Perhaps the most important factor in the development of LGBT centers and offices is the personal and political landscape of a particular campus. LGBT students must feel that there is a need for a center at their institution, and they must also have the means to advocate for one. A survey of all LGBT resource centers in existence in 2001 indicated that students played a principal role in creating almost all of them (Beemyn, 2002). This highlights the need for students to make their voices heard in order to bring about change on campus. The level of openness and support on the part of staff, faculty, and administrators also factors into an institution's ability to create an LGBT resource center, as this determines whether students feel as though they should even make the effort to express their wishes. The attitudes of regents and trustees—as well as legislators in the case of state universities—are also extremely significant aspects in determining whether a potential new LGBT resource centers can be established, as those constituents have the utmost authority regarding funding and can thus force a resource center to rely solely on private donations.

Careful deliberation needs to take place concerning how to best utilize an LGBT resource center's resources (e.g., funding, staff, and space). While many centers are funded to plan and implement programs along with their services, others are not. UCLA's LGBT resource center, for example, cannot use their generous operating budget for programming—it must remain a student-initiated function, and the staff can only assist students with their effort to execute programs and events (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). Andreas (1993) listed several actions administrators should take in order to create successful programs, such as understanding the mission of the institution, learning about the students and other constituents being served, and conducting research to help the campus understand a problem or need. Other actions that should be taken include involving students as completely as possible, knowing the political influence structure of the institution and anticipating opposition, and using campus consultants to provide specialized skills.

There are many common programs and services offered by a majority of LGBT resource centers, such as providing information and referrals to other offices, crisis intervention, discussion groups, student organization advising, community service, and communication with the center's constituents. Professionals who have worked in the field of LGBT student services since it came into existence have deemed such programs and services as the most basic and necessary in order for an LGBT resource center to be effective (Sanlo et al., 2002).

Another common program implemented by LGBT resource centers is an "Out in the Workplace" session. There are two formats that these programs typically utilize. The first brings faculty, staff, and students together for a discussion about the experience of being an openly LGBT professional on campus. The second is an informational session to give graduating LGBT students an idea of what to expect as they enter the world of work, provide them with strategies

of how to find employment where the work environment is welcoming toward LGBT individuals, and inform them of the benefits that they may want to ensure a potential employer provides (Sanlo et al., 2002). These events are commonly co-sponsored by the institution's career services offices.

Other LGBT resource centers have peer counseling programs that are intended to “minimize the stress related to coming out by providing support and educational programs” (Browning & Walsh, 2002, p. 151). The peer counselors and discussion leaders are interviewed to ensure that they are aware of and sensitive to issues faced by LGBT students and the concerns heterosexual students have about LGBT issues. They are carefully selected in order to reflect the diversity of the student population in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, peer group affiliations, and academic interests, and resource center staff trains them in basic counseling, issues related to boundaries and confidentiality, and LGBT psychology (Browning & Walsh, 2002). Many LGBT resource centers' peer counseling programs require a yearlong commitment, and peer counselors receive academic credit. This provides them with a reward for their effort, and also “allows for a structured supervision process to monitor the delivery of counseling and educational services provided by the peer counselors” (Browning & Walsh, 2002, p. 152). The importance of the participants presenting themselves not as counselors but as informed peers who provide support, resources, and referrals must be communicated effectively. The structure of LGBT resource center's peer counseling programs results in an increase of students who are capable and confident in addressing LGBT issues on campus—both the peer counselors themselves and the students with whom they interact. Another benefit of the program is that once the peer counselors have graduated and started their life in the “real world,” they are well equipped to contribute to the elimination of heterosexism in society at large.

Although there are many services that are generally offered by LGBT resource centers, it is important for the staff of each campus' center to determine what their students most need and how they can use their resources to have the greatest impact upon the campus climate. "In order to determine which programs and services best fit the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, their existence must be documented, their issues and opinions understood and made known, and their persistence to graduation facilitated" (Eyermann & Sanlo, 2002, p. 38). Through assessing campus climate and learning what deficits exist in meeting LGBT students' needs, administrators can come to know which programs and services should be offered. Some of the most notable LGBT resource centers are at Syracuse University, UCLA, Stanford, and the University of Michigan.

As institutions continue to acknowledge the necessity of serving the growing population of openly LGBT students, additional LGBT resource centers will be established, as is the case for Multicultural Resource Centers and International Student Services Centers. This, in turn, will create a demand for professionals with experience, skills, and training in understanding, advocating for, and empathizing with LGBT students and their unique development. Therefore, graduate programs for aspiring student affairs professionals should provide this training for students, regardless of whether they hope to eventually work for or closely with an LGBT resource center. Since LGBT students are present on every campus, regardless of whether they are visible, professionals that work with college students must be sensitive to the needs of LGBT youth.

Student Organizations for Those Who Identify as LGBT and/or Allies

Evans and Rankin (1998) explained that a "fear of discrimination, harassment, or violence leads many LGBT individuals to adopt a very low profile on campus" (p. 183). It is important for a

campus to offer many opportunities for LGBT students to engage in extracurricular activities while feeling comfortable in their identity. Otherwise, they “may choose not to be involved...for fear of rejection or harassment” (Scott, 1991, p. 120). Student organizations provide much more than leadership opportunities—they also allow members to develop practical skills such as public speaking, financial management, and promotion techniques (Scott, 1991). Some examples of LGBT student organizations include Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), QuEST (Questioning Established Sexual Taboos), LGBTQ and More, Spectrum, Prism, and Pride Union. Students who belong to campus organizations also “have the opportunity to become more familiar with the campus community, to form connections with faculty and staff members, and to gain self-confidence” (Mallory, 1998, p. 324). LGBT students may conclude that student organizations will not be welcoming because of the harassment and homophobia they have witnessed or experienced on campus; this necessitates the existence of student organizations that are overtly LGBT-friendly. Ward (1998) noted that even if an LGBT student chooses not to participate in LGBT student organizations, “the knowledge that student life includes groups for GLBT students reduces her or his anxiety about being GLBT at the university” (p. 345). LGBT student organizations fulfill a variety of roles on college campuses; these include providing networking opportunities and resource libraries to offering social and educational programming (Mallory, 1998). For students who have recently come out, are new to the community, or are under 21 years old, LGBT student organization activities may be the only prospect for establishing contact with other LGBT students and allies. LGBT student organizations can also serve as political action groups—mobilizing to achieve equality on campus and in the surrounding community and providing knowledgeable comment on how political candidates’ platforms may affect LGBT individuals (Mallory, 1998). Another

important purpose common among LGBT student organizations is informing the campus community about issues regarding sexual orientation, homophobia, and other difficulties that LGBT students encounter as a result of discrimination (Scott, 1991). This is achieved through the organization's sponsorship of speakers, film series, panel discussions, art exhibits, workshops, conferences, and awareness weeks.

Diversity exists among LGBT student organizations—most colleges and universities have only one LGBT group, but multiple organizations existing on a campus is not uncommon (Scott, 1991). At UCLA, for instance, students have established identity-based LGBT groups for Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, and African American students as well as organizations within various academic departments (e.g., the business, law, and medical schools). Some believe that having more than one LGBT student organization on a campus is counterproductive to the advancement LGBT issues because each organization might attempt to tackle different issues and none of their efforts will be as powerful as they potentially could be if all the students belonged to one organization (Scott, 1991). However, “it is generally acknowledged that having multiple groups is beneficial” (Mallory, 1998, p. 322). When multiple LGBT student organizations exist on one campus, there are more options for students to choose from when considering which group(s) to join, as well as increased opportunities for students to gain leadership experience.

As LGBT student organizations are a vital component of improving the campus climate, it follows that the advising for such organizations should be as effective as possible. One consideration involves the staff serving as advisors for LGBT student organizations. At some institutions, individuals feel that there is a conflict of interest when the LGBT resource center's director is also the advisor for an LGBT student organization (Sanlo et al., 2002). On the other

hand, the LGBT resource center director “may be called upon to formally or informally advise student organizations and use various models for promoting leadership development among LGBT students” (Sanlo et al., 2002, p. 82).

Based on personal experiences in advising and knowledge gleaned from observing his colleagues, Ward (1998) compiled suggestions on how student organization advisors can be most helpful in improving the campus climate for LGBT students. In order to work with diverse students, student affairs professionals who act as advisors must learn about people who are different from them. In advising LGBT students, a non-LGBT professional is most effective when he or she is knowledgeable about the coming out process and other essential LGBT concerns (Ward, 1998). It is also important for a heterosexual advisor to be courageous and confident enough to risk their position of privilege by coming out as an ally and advocating for LGBT students. Professionals who have reached a high level of proficiency in understanding LGBT concerns are capable of demonstrating genuine empathy toward LGBT students who may be facing rejection, isolation, and other struggles (Ward, 1998).

The challenge faced by all student organization advisors is to “recognize inequalities and inconsistencies and seek to raise the standards of civility and respect for all students” (Ward, 1998, p. 341) by engaging students in safe, thought-provoking dialogue that shines light upon double standards and inequities. The new thoughts and ideas about diversity that students are exposed to in the classroom require guided discussion and reflection, which may or may not be provided by professor. Advisors must be prepared to capitalize on the educational moments that so often arise when students freely voice their opinions in the comfort of peers.

Safe Zone/Allies Programs

In their exploration of the potential impact that Safe Zone (also titled Allies on some campuses) programs can have in improving campus climate, Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002) stated that instituting such a program is “among the first steps an institution can take to achieve a community that embraces diversity and creates a learning environment that is accepting of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals” (p. 9). Although Safe Zone programs differ in content on various campuses, they generally consist of a network of faculty, staff, and students who consider themselves supportive of LGBT students and are willing to provide a haven for those in need of an area where they can feel at ease and supported. The missions of Safe Zone programs most commonly include providing support—both visible and confidential—to LGBT individuals, fostering student development, creating an environment of acceptance and support, and reducing the prevalence of heterosexism and homophobia on campus (Klingler, 2001). Specific goals of Safe Zone programs most often emphasize individual interaction, including “providing safe spaces for students to talk, being aware of and providing resource information to students in need, increasing visibility and support for the LGBT campus community, and working to create welcoming environments” (Draughn et al., 2002, p. 13). A significant component of the Safe Zone program is that the members display a sticker in a visible area—such as the entrance to their office or residential space—to exhibit their status as a Safe Zone ally. On some campuses, individuals only need to request a Safe Zone sticker in order to serve as an ally (Evans, 2002). Most Safe Zone programs, however, require participants to complete a rigorous training program workshop in order to receive a Safe Zone sticker. In general, the workshops include general education about LGBT issues (e.g., vocabulary); examples of harassment, discrimination, and denial of rights; exploration of personal biases; awareness of campus and community resources; and how to assist an individual who is facing

issues related to sexual identity (Draughn et al., 2002).

It is important for individuals who wish to identify themselves as allies to the LGBT community on their campus to be educated on how to actually be an effective ally. Sanlo et al. (2002) stated, “there is a serious flaw in programs which do not require training and certification” (p. 98).

While completing a multiple-hour training session requires some level of commitment on the ally’s part, merely asking for a sticker requires little effort. Although the training provided by the Safe Zone program’s facilitators might not guarantee that the participants have the skills and knowledge necessary to assist troubled LGBT students and might not definitively weed out individuals with bad intentions, some education is always better than none (Sanlo et al., 2002).

In her study of the Safe Zone program at Iowa State University, which consists solely of providing a sticker to those who request one, Evans (2002) found that LGBT students on campus felt that the presence of so many visible Safe Zone stickers actually resulted in a false sense of security and that training should be required before distributing stickers “to ensure that individuals knew what it meant to be an ally to LGBT people and had appropriate knowledge, awareness, and skills to be helpful” (p. 535). Some respondents in Evan’s (2002) study explained that their acquisition and display of a Safe Zone sticker inspired them to learn more about LGBT issues.

Safe Zone programs certainly allow LGBT students to feel more comfortable and supported on their campus. However, Broido (2000) suggested that, “while providing support to students is necessary, it does not change the social structure that sustains homophobia and heterosexism” (p. 361). Providing participants with information about the best methods for responding to homophobic or heterosexist language and behavior in group-level interactions, and perhaps giving them an opportunity to practice employing those tactics, would further improve Safe Zone

programs' ability to improve campus climate for LGBT students (Draughn et al., 2002). Because posting a Safe Zone sticker can lead to backlash from homophobic individuals, participants should also be informed of how to respond to harassment that might ensue once they have identified themselves as an ally. Training Safe Zone allies to be "guides" who pose questions, raise contradictions, and encourage self-reflection can provide them with the skills to not only address homophobia but to do so in a way that enhances learning for everyone present (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). The program certainly increases the visibility of support for LGBT constituents on a college or university campus, and it can lead individuals to seek support in places that may typically be perceived as unwelcoming toward LGBT people.

Queer Studies Programs/Improving the Academic Environment and Campus Climate

While the task of meeting college students' developmental needs and ensuring their psychological and emotional wellness is generally delegated to the institution's Student Affairs division, creating a campus climate that is safe, supportive, and intellectually rich must also involve the institution's academic programs and faculty. Offering programs of study or specific courses that fall under the umbrella of Queer Studies can profoundly impact students' perceptions of the campus climate (Abes & Jones, 2004). Abes and Jones (2004) suggested, "in the classroom, course material should be included that presents diversity within and among sexual orientations, and teaching strategies ought to allow students to reflect on their own life experiences and identities in relationship to the course content" (p. 628). Also, Chestnut (1998) suggested that, "the provision of courses, lectures, and other means of presenting LGBT material and perspectives should be viewed as part of an overall strategy for improving a campus climate for LGBT students" (p. 228).

Queer Studies courses explore the experiences of LGBT individuals and provide accurate information about the realities of the context in which those individuals must go about their lives. One of the first lesbian and gay studies anthologies suggests that such programs intend “to establish the analytical centrality of sex and sexuality within many different fields of inquiry” and attempt to “decipher the sexual meanings inscribed in many different forms of cultural expression while also attempting to decipher the cultural meanings inscribed in the discourses and practices of sex” (Abelove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993, p. xvi). Courses in Queer Studies also address questions such as whether Western culture has always designated one’s sexuality according whether they engage in sex acts with partners of the same or opposite gender, whether all cultures classify sexuality in such a way now, and whether one’s sexual partners has always been considered an integral part of his or her identity. The investigation and discussion of the answers to these questions allows those involved to understand that classifications such as man, woman, gay, and straight are not natural and universal, but are instead are culturally and historically specific (Chestnut, 1998). This, in turn, leads to further examinations of how characterizations of sex and sexuality affect and are affected by a society’s science, art, theology, literature, and power structures.

There are multiple benefits of offering Queer Studies courses—they have the potential to improve campus climate as well as aid in the identity development and overall well-being of individual LGBT students (Chestnut, 1998). The mere existence of Queer Studies courses challenges the notion that homosexuality should not be spoken about and should remain hidden. Thus, courses regarding LGBT people and issues are a source of validation for LGBT individuals (Chestnut, 1998). Queer studies programs are also a source of self-esteem for LGBT students and those who are questioning their sexual identity (Chestnut, 1998). The course

material allows students to learn about a variety of LGBT identities and communities and broadens their perspective on how different cultures have categorized gender and sexuality. In turn, students “begin to realize that our society’s definitions and negative views of sexual minorities are neither infallible nor inevitable” (Chestnut, 1998, p. 226). The information that students learn in Queer Studies courses also enables them to challenge and make counter-arguments against anti-gay myths and stereotypes.

Another benefit of Queer Studies programs is that they provide positive role models for LGBT students. As students undergo identity development, they identify with and internalize aspects of others’ external identities. Without positive role models to emulate, LGBT students may instead identify with society’s negative stereotypes of LGBT people. It follows that “contact with healthy, productive, and fulfilled LGBT adults—and peers—is therefore one of the most important conditions for the development of a positive LGBT identity” (Chestnut, 1998, p. 227). Courses offered in Queer Studies programs will inevitably provide LGBT students with that contact, as the environment allows for all students to express themselves openly and honestly. Driver (2008) noted that, “research has shown that students are more successful when they can recognize individuals in power with whom they can identify” (p. 58).

Several solutions exist to the obstacle of institutions not having the means to implement an entire Queer Studies program. A lecture series in Queer Studies could be established, with a planning committee consisting of students, faculty, and Student Affairs professionals and funding from any number of academic departments, student groups, and/or student affairs offices (Chestnut, 1998). Another option is to have current faculty or graduate students offer courses in Queer Studies. This effort can also be the basis for a Queer Studies program—once multiple courses have been developed, faculty can coordinate what they are teaching and eventually develop a

course sequence (Chestnut, 1998). Additionally, when student interest in Queer Studies courses has been documented, it can be presented to the person leading the hiring process for an open faculty position, encouraging him or her to consider searching for a candidate with Queer Studies research and teaching experience. “We know that [LGBT college students] need acknowledgment, affirmation, and support *as LGBT individuals*, both from their institutions and from individuals within those institutions” (Chestnut, 1998, p. 221). LGBT students, as well as those students who may be questioning their sexual or gender identities, need LGBT role models, access to objective information, and a community of peers with whom they can feel comfortable being themselves (Chestnut, 1998). When these needs go unmet, students can become depressed and withdrawn, their academic performance suffers, they may turn to substance abuse to deaden their feelings, and in extreme cases, but all too often, they resort to suicide (Evans & Wall, 1991).

Offering Queer Studies courses is not the only means of improving the learning environment and campus climate for LGBT and all students. In addition to the content of the academic courses that are offered at an institution, the way faculty members behave within the classroom also impacts students’ perception of campus climate. “The classroom—the place on campus reserved for the free and respectful exchange of ideas—should provide an oasis from this seemingly constant barrage of anti-LGBT harassment, violence, and invalidation” (Renn, 1998, pp. 231-232). There are a number of actions faculty should take in order to ensure that this is the case. It is crucial to address anti-LGBT language in the classroom because ignoring the victimization of LGBT students sends a message that such behavior and speech are acceptable. Through confronting homophobic language and behavior, faculty members demonstrate that hateful, intolerant language has no place in the classroom or in society at large. Additionally, “faculty

are in positions to affect the lives of LGBT students and their peers by helping them *unlearn* incorrect ideas they may hold about various sexual orientations” (Renn, 1998, p. 235).

Material about LGBT people and issues can be infused into introductory-level courses in many fields of study. Little and Marx (2002) concluded that professors who want to improve campus climate for LGBT students need to be proactive in their approach to teaching about heterosexism and homophobia—instead of waiting to see if the topic presents itself in class during a discussion of another issue, they must list it on the syllabus and include readings that address heterosexism and homophobia. It is important for professors to provide opportunities for experiential learning in which the students develop empathy on the cognitive and emotional level as opposed to merely presenting them with information. “This approach will create a classroom environment that, even on the ‘chilliest’ of campuses, may allow students to develop respect for diverse sexual orientations” (Little & Marx, 2002, p. 213). Creating a welcoming and safe atmosphere in the classroom will increase the likelihood that LGBT students will feel comfortable participating in discussions and being visible, and that heightened visibility of LGBT students will contribute to heterosexual students’ familiarity with and empathy toward the LGBT community. Connolly (1999) articulated the fact that student affairs professionals can play a role in making classrooms more inclusive through helping faculty to think about students with greater intricacy and to construct a more complete portrait of their students. Student affairs professionals can share their expertise at formal faculty development sessions or during informal conversations with faculty, and they can always be influencing faculty by modeling a gay-positive attitude.

Summary

Over the past three decades, the general quality of life for LGBT people, including college students, has improved (Renn, 2010). This is evidenced by the inclusion of LGBT people in non-discrimination ordinances at various levels of government as well as on university campuses, the increasing visibility of LGBT people, and the policies that have been adopted to ensure that same-sex partners have access to the benefits that individuals in opposite-sex relationships enjoy. These policies are neither universal nor consistent, though, and they are only the tip of the iceberg. To truly receive treatment equal to that of heterosexuals, LGBT individuals must be able to go about their personal lives without fearing backlash because of their sexual orientation. This will require a paradigm shift of the social norm, which is much more achievable on a smaller scale, such as within a campus community (Evans, 2002).

Campus climate for LGBT college students will remain an issue at institutions of higher education until equality has been achieved. It seems that most colleges and universities are no longer attempting to ignore the concerns of LGBT students and the adversity they so often face on campus. Tragic as they are, events such as Tyler Clementi's death and its national news coverage help to reinforce the need to continue working toward assuring a safe and welcoming environment for all college students, including those who identify as LGBT.

Rankin (2003) noted that, "creating and maintaining a community environment that respects individual needs, abilities and potential is one of the most important functions of universities and colleges" (p. 38). As the student population at colleges and universities continues to diversify, assuring that such respect is given will be increasingly challenging. Assessing campus climate will allow administrators to understand how to most effectively meet the needs of everyone on campus without relegating any subpopulations to a less successful

experience. Woodard and Sims (2000), in emphasizing the necessity of conducting comprehensive campus climate assessments, stated, “Institutions need to look critically not only at policies and philosophies but also at the attitudes that influence policy implementation” (p. 550). Based on assessments, campus climate can be improved by implementing the best practices of LGBT resource centers, instituting Safe Zone programs and LGBT student organizations, and by making improvements to the academic environment.

Ensuring that a campus is welcoming to LGBT students is so important because when one small population of students suffers, the entire academic community suffers as well. If LGBT students are afraid of expressing themselves freely because of the backlash they have witnessed or experienced, the whole campus community will be affected. When the LGBT community is silenced, the campus loses a strong part of the diverse campus population that enriches the community and the academic experiences of all students.

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