Learning from LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force Report: Key Findings & Recommendations

University Life Symposium
January, 2013
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Charge

1) Collect data on George Mason University’s current policies, programs, procedures and practices related to all aspects of Mason LGBTQ student life

2) Conduct focus groups and/or public hearings with students, staff and faculty as well as explore ideas from “experts” in the field or from other university programs.
3) Submit report: overview of the campus climate in terms of Mason's programs, policies and practices as well as students' experiences in their classrooms, residences, co-curricular activity, common areas of campus, athletic facilities, and other relevant aspects of student life.
4) Present short-term and long-term recommendations, along with estimates of the fiscal and human resources required for implementation and the anticipated impact on the LGBTQ student population.
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<th>Position/Role</th>
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Ric Chollar
Associate Director of LGBTQ Resources
Suzanne Scott
Director of Women and Gender Studies
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Scope

6 Working Groups:
- Faculty & Classroom
- Gender ID/Expression
- Housing/Residence Life
- Specific Populations
- Student Services
- Visibility & Presence
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Methods

Analysis of Already-Existing Research Studies
Focus Groups
LGBTQ PhotoVoice Interviews
Mapping of Bathrooms
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Existing Guidelines, Tools, & Research

2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People
Campus Pride Campus Climate Assessment Index
CAS Standards for LGBT Programs & Services
2008/9 NASPA Diversity, Inclusion, Campus Climate Survey
Themes of Experience for LGBTQ Students at George Mason University – B Silver Thesis (2011)
Faculty (2)
OHRL: Student Residents (2)
Professional Staff (1)
Students: Trans*/Gender Variant (1)
LGBTQ (2)
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - OUTLook on Mason: LGBTQ PhotoVoice

Participants take photographs, write summaries, in response to “How do you experience Mason’s Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students?”

10 (at end - 9) participants, meet approx bi-monthly over Spring Semester – sharing, discussing, critiquing, selecting photos

Culminated in week-long display and public forum (during Pride Week), where students shared their work, experiences, & recommendations with Mason administration, faculty, staff and other students

Lisa Lindley, Principle Investigator. Co-facilitators/instructors: Ric Chollar, Suzanne Scott, Lynne Constantine
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - OUTLook on Mason: LGBTQ PhotoVoice

Where Innovation Is Tradition
Transgender/Genderqueer Students at Mason: How Safe Do You Feel (%)
Transgender/Genderqueer Students at Mason: How Safe Do You Feel (%)

- With Other Students: 100%
- With Your Professors: 57.1%
- With University Staff: 71.4%

Bars represent:
- Very Safe
- Somewhat Safe
- Not Very Safe
- Not Safe At All
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Classroom/Faculty Focus Groups

16 faculty interviewed (CHSS, CEHD, COS, CVPA, Global and Community Health New Century College, Women and Gender Studies, Sociology/Anthropology and English)

Faculty interviewed stated they were comfortable in dealing with situations relating to LGBTQ issues and all were interested in additional training.

Faculty admit that they are not as knowledgeable about transgender issues as they could be and that when LGBTQ “issues don’t come up” it may well have something to do with their assumptions about heterosexuality as the norm.
Faculty noted that when dealing with LGBTQ content they acknowledge that LGBTQ students sometimes experience frustration when the teacher fails to provide clear and accurate information in response to the students who are not knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues. The faculty point out the necessity of various strategies for teaching these subjects without alienating the (offending) student.
“I find with teachers and inside a classroom sometimes that addressing LGBTQ issues is difficult. They just don’t know where to stand with it you know? It’s not that they don’t support...um... but it’s as if they feel that their job is in jeopardy if they decide to engage in discussion about it,” it seemed to me [researcher] that this pointed to an under-representation of LGBTQ experiences within the classroom. After all, what does it imply to students when their lives as LGBTQ individuals are excluded from the curriculum of so many departments within our university? How can students develop a positive understanding of their place within a community that does not acknowledge their presence?

If students feel that their situation as LGBTQ individuals is so taboo that even professors cannot speak of it in their own classrooms, then what does that imply for their understanding of their own identity?

From B Silver (2011), Themes of Experience for Students at George Mason University

Where Innovation Is Tradition
Student Services (using CAS Standards as Guide)

- Student Health Services
- Alcohol, Drug, & Health Education
- Sexual Assault Services
- Counseling & Psychological Services
- Career Services
- University Police
- Student Involvement
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Special Populations

- Athletes
- Fraternity/Sorority Members
- Military/ROTC/Veterans
- Off-Campus Students
- Transfer Students
- Students of Color
**Bathroom Project:** Comparing official Facilities/Planning maps of buildings (designated to have “unisex, private, single use” bathrooms) with students’ actual experience – team of students searched for the listed facilities, documented what they found for availability, safety, accessibility

Traditionally (binary) gendered men’s and women’s public bathrooms not workable choice for transitioning and gender nonconforming students – Virginia Building Code mandates at least one accessible “unisex” bathroom in each new building

Will share results with Space Management, Campus Planning, and Student Services and Spaces Advisory Committee (SSSAC)

Will publicize (hand-outs, posting map on website)
Of the participants in the Mason NASPA survey, Mason’s LGBTQ students reported both witnessing and experiencing harassment and discrimination on campus at significantly higher rates than heterosexual students.
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force: Major Findings

From NASPA survey: When asked who was the source of the harassment and discrimination, LGBTQ students indicated the primary source to be other students (47%), faculty (33%), administrators/staff (27%), and teaching assistants and campus police (13%).
From NASPA survey:
When asked where on campus the instances of harassment and discrimination occur, over half (53%) of Mason LGBTQ students reported the classroom as the area of greatest concern.
Mason NASPA data also show that nearly 20% of survey respondents classified as LGBTQ indicated that they were international students.
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force: Major Findings

From focus groups: Less than half of LGBTQ Mason students felt very safe in their classrooms (48%), with other students (44%), on Mason’s campus at night (27%), and in the surrounding community during the day (29%) and night (10%).
Among the focus group of transgender/gender variant students, more than half felt not very safe in the surrounding community at night. 29% of these students reported not feeling very safe in their classrooms, 17% in their residence halls, and 14% in the surrounding community during the day.
Approximately 60 bathrooms across Fairfax, Arlington, and Prince William campuses were identified by floor plans from Campus Planning as single-use, and available as gender-neutral restrooms. Eight of these spaces were unable to be found or were inaccessible to students; and at least 8 others had current signage prohibitive to gender inclusive usage.
Among residential students, the room change process was of particular concern. In addition, residential students reported feeling uncertain about the attitudes by residence hall staff (both Resident Advisors and Resident Directors) toward LGBTQ students.
Residential students also asked for gender-neutral housing, and that gender options should be added to the Housing Selection Survey.
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force: Major Findings

Generally, the LGBTQ students’ experiences in the classroom reported through surveys and focus groups were notably different from the perceptions of the faculty interviewed about classroom issues and concerns.
Faculty interviews show substantial differences between those faculty and instructors who typically teach courses with some LGBTQ and/or feminist content and those who teach courses without such content.
6 Major Areas of Focus:

1) Institutional Commitment:
   Inclusion in University Policy and Statements
   University Publications
   Surveys, Forms, Records and Processes
   Facilities: Gender Neutral Bathrooms and Locker Rooms
   Training
   Contracts
2) Academic Affairs:

Issues for Faculty and Integration into Curricular Education
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force: Recommendations

3) University Life:

Student Services and Integration into Co-Curricular Education

Housing & Residence Life

Counseling & Health Care

LGBTQ Resources
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force: Recommendations

4) University Police: Campus Safety

5) Admissions, Orientation and Transfer Services: Visibility & Recruitment

6) Intercollegiate Athletics
LGBTQ Campus Climate Task Force - Next Steps

Implemented So Far (Examples):

• Safe Zone and Social Justice Trainings for OHRL Pro Staff
• Safe Zone Trainings for Provost Team and Equity/Diversity Services
• Identification and Links with LGBTQ Liaisons in Key Depts (Police, CAPS, Career – Others?)
• Still in Progress: “It Gets Better,” Mason version
• Still in Progress: Bathroom Project
• Still in Progress: Planned Piloting Gender Neutral Housing Options