

## **WHAT WORKS FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER & QUEER (LGBTQ) STUDENTS**

### **I. Do your homework ahead of time!**

**Know where you're at.** If you're NOT comfortable with a particular identity, don't promote yourself as having that competency. If you are a generally empathetic person, don't assume that is enough to put LGBTQ students at ease. If you are politically supportive but personally uncomfortable with LGBTQ students, you will not be able to help them in a crisis. Get some education or training before you offer yourself as a resource.

**Take it seriously.** Violence and harassment happen to LGBTQ students every day. Please take their issues seriously, even if you don't accept their identities as valid for your own reasons. They are students, and they have a right to an educational environment where they can learn without being burdened by others' prejudices. They deserve safety and acceptance on campus.

**Educate yourself.** See the attached list of terms commonly used to describe people identifying as LGBTQ. Check out the DEC or our "Diverse Sexualities" teachers for suggestions! Browse the Campus Pride website (<http://www.campuspride.org/>). You should think of this in terms of professional development, not as a casual pursuit. Ongoing education is important: as the LGBTQ community makes strides towards equality, terminology is reclaimed, etc.

**Include us in your curriculum.** The LGBTQ community is a group of people who is not necessarily parented by other members of their community; their biological parents typically cannot or do not teach them their history, culture and traditions, and these things can be powerful sources of affirmation, identity and pride. Schools can play a vital role in providing these histories to LGBTQ students. Additionally, inclusion of LGBTQ issues and history signifies to others that this group is an important member of the community, not strange "others."

**Evaluate your institution for equity.** How many courses cover LGBTQ history, culture and issues? How much training is available to you as faculty and staff? Are students entering all fields prepared to encounter people of diverse sexual identities and orientations, and treat them respectfully? How many gender neutral bathrooms are available? The dominant perception that a campus is "safe and accepting" may not be shared by minority groups that are actually being targeted. Listen to student feedback; validate their concerns, and follow up on them. Know the procedures for reporting bias and harassment incidents; get involved in the SafeZone program (<http://www.spscc.ctc.edu/getting-to-know-us/offices/security/safe-zone>).

**Take care of yourself.** Allyship is not a simple or easy endeavor. Think about finding support resources for yourself—a discussion group with like-minded people, an office partner, etc. Mistakes are inevitable, and you need to be able to process the resulting emotions using your own resources, without unnecessarily engaging the student(s) who were involved. A simple apology, followed with a promise to continue your learning process, is best.

## II. Set the tone on the first day of class

**Put a non-discrimination policy in your syllabus.** You can copy the college's policy (<http://www.spscc.ctc.edu/getting-to-know-us/policies>) or create your own, but please state outright the types of behaviors and expectations you have for the class. This also gives you a set of standards to refer back to when biased statements come up: "Our syllabus says that classroom discussion will be \_\_\_\_\_. Can you rephrase your idea without using that word/promoting that stereotype/etc.?"

**Make yourself known.** If you are LGBTQ yourself or if you are a straight ally, come out! You can tell stories about yourself or friends or acquaintances that will let students know you are a safe person. Brainstorm ways to promote yourself. As an LGBTQ-friendly teacher, you can be an asset to students, but they need to be able to find you. You can find LGBTQ-related signs and posters for your office; be present at LGBTQ-related student events; give your name to counselors and academic advisors for referrals; and contact the LGBTQ student group through Student Life, and ask them to pass on your name by word-of-mouth.

**Think about how you will recognize students' proper names and pronouns.** You can do roll call with last names only, and ask students to respond with their preferred first name, making sure to note this in your roster. You can have a sign-in sheet, and follow the same procedure. You can ask *every* student in the class for their preferred gender pronoun (PGP), announcing "I want to respect all gender identities in this classroom, so please let me know if I misgender you" or "If you feel safe doing so, please let me know your PGP". You can approach *individual* students, asking "I noticed that one student in class addressed you as 'he' and another as 'she.' May I ask how you would like to be addressed?" or "I made an assumption about your gender identity and I just wanted to check in with you and ask what gender pronoun you prefer." Transgender people are well aware that many cisgender people are uncomfortable with ambiguity about gender, and most will appreciate your honesty and respectful attempt to find out how they would like to be identified. Prior to learning someone's pronouns, try to stay away from gendered language: you can say "this student" or "this individual" or if possible, use their name.

**Steer students towards resources.** After evaluating your campus, pass that knowledge along to students. Announce where the closest gender neutral bathroom is, even if you steer away from the words "gender neutral" and use language like "single occupancy, locking bathroom, for those who have privacy concerns". (Using the restroom may be a situation that is frightening, uncomfortable, or even dangerous for LGBTQ students. Many report harassment in public restrooms.) Tell them about targeted scholarships, like the Pride Foundation scholarship. (LGBTQ students often have family circumstances that render them ineligible for federal financial aid.) If you know a particular advisor, counselor, or other faculty or staff member is a strong ally, refer students to these people. Tell them about the Diversity and Equity Center (27, by the stage). Send them to Student Life (27, upstairs) to learn about other support resources.

### III. Maintain a LGBTQ-friendly classroom environment

***Interrupt bias when you see it, and offer assistance to the victim.*** Teachers and college employees have ultimate power over the campus environment. Back up LGBTQ students when people make discriminatory, hurtful, or ignorant comments. Don't make the victim be the only one to speak up! If a student is LGBTQ and doesn't speak up in response to an attack, realize that they may be overwhelmed and panicking, and step up (without attempting to speak for them): "That comment offends *me*, and I have read/heard that many LGBTQ people dislike it because of \_\_\_\_\_". Realize that a single biased comment or an incident of misgendering can prevent an LGBTQ student from participating in your class, for that day or in some cases for the rest of the quarter. LGBTQ students are resilient (or they would never make it to college in the first place!) but they need strong, vocal support from their allies in order to feel safe and concentrate on academics instead of concentrating on survival.

***Don't tolerate hate speech or slurs in your classroom.*** Your silence implies that you condone or accept the slurs. Within the LGBTQ community, some people use the word "queer" proudly while others don't like it at all; some people use "homo" while others consider this term a slur. The same basic etiquette applies to the LGBTQ community as to others: let people identify themselves. If they identify themselves as queer (for example), that does not give every member of the classroom permission to call the person "A queer".

***Avoid gendered language, gender essentialism and broad generalizations based on gender.*** Generalizations about gender in your stories, jokes, anecdotes and explanations may appeal very strongly to the situations of your cisgender, heterosexual students, but many LGBTQ students are excluded from the joke and from the discussion. Gendered examples and gendered cases in foreign language classes can be very problematic for some students—try not to make assumptions, and offer alternative phrasings if possible. If you are distributing a form or creating a survey, think about demographic information: can you be more inclusive with gender options? (The conference application used by the Diversity and Equity Center has 6 options, plus a blank space permitting self-definition.) If your profession uses terminology or frames issues in a way that is disrespectful and dismissive towards LGBTQ identities, provide alternatives: "This word isn't used much anymore" or "This is still used by a lot of professionals, but LGBTQ community has objected to it on the grounds of \_\_\_\_\_".

***Avoid leaning too hard on students.*** Once a student builds trust with you, they may be willing to serve as a resource. However, it often falls on LGBTQ students to be the sole or primary source of education for their teachers, counselors, families, peers, etc. Please don't make a student your "token gay"! Students may seem very resilient, outspoken, even angry, but they may be truly vulnerable and exhausted. Help *them*—don't make them help you!

***Admit when you don't know something!*** You don't have to be an expert on everything. It's okay to make mistakes as long as you take responsibility for them. A brief, heartfelt apology is better than a long-winded explanation of *why* the mistake happened.