



Access & Equity for All Students: LGBT Student Needs

Access and equity for all students in California colleges and universities have always been high priorities of the California Postsecondary Education Commission. The Commission has conducted research, gathered data, and made recommendations to expand opportunities and improve outcomes for all students in the state's postsecondary systems. Recently, the Commission turned a spotlight on two groups of students whose challenges may not be as visible as race/ethnicity, poverty, or language, but whose success on campus is affected by equity issues.

These groups are students with disabilities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) students. The Commission's concern led to formation of an Access and Equity for All Students Advisory Committee that is exploring the issues of both of these groups — and is treating these groups as separate and distinct. This report focuses only on LGBT students, and will describe the remainder of the process that Commission staff will pursue in this research.

At the Commission's December meeting, a panel of people with expertise in LGBT student needs and experiences will describe their personal experiences, what they consider to be critical needs of LGBT students, where the Commission might find data on these needs, and possible administrative strategies and public policy options.

A similar panel on students with disabilities will be presented at the March 2009 Commission meeting. At the June 2009 meeting, the Advisory Committee and staff will offer the Commission their recommendations for approaches that might help better assure equity and access for both groups of students.

LGBT Student Data

There are very little data available to identify specific issues of LGBT students and to assess how their access to college and their ability to succeed contrasts with non-LGBT students of similar backgrounds. The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) has sought this kind of data, but only for the past two administrations of the survey. The 2006 survey showed that students who use LGBT services at UC campuses stay in school and graduate at about the same rate as students who do not use those services. The data only reflect students who self-identify, so we do not have good information about how many LGBT students attend UC but do not use those services, nor do we have data about their retention or success in college.

The 2008 UCUES study was conducted a bit differently with regard to LGBT students, and is not directly comparable, but it yields generally similar results. In 2008, gender identity and sexual orientation were included as variables in the core survey, so the results reflect a much larger sample of students than in 2006, when only 13,000 students were asked questions related to LGBT status. In 2008, students were not asked whether they accessed LGBT services on campus, but they were asked the same questions about their feelings of satisfaction and their grade-point averages as in the 2006 survey.

The 2008 results show that 2,976 students, or 4.8% of 61,863 respondents, self-identified as being LGBT. LGBT and non-LGBT students had virtually identical grades at UC, and also had very similar grades when they entered UC as freshmen or junior transfers. The data also indicate that four out of five LGBT students feel they belong on campus and would still choose to enroll "knowing what they know now" about being at UC. However, LGBT students report slightly lower levels of satisfaction and belonging than non-LGBT students.

The only other readily available source of quantitative data regarding LGBT students is data related to crimes at colleges and universities. The Commission reports crime statistics as required by state law. While data are disaggregated for hate crimes, data do not disaggregate hate crimes that specifically target sexual orientation. The usefulness of the data in understanding hate crimes on campuses is also called into question by the fact that the data maintained by the Commission, which is drawn from a federal data bank, show a drop in reported hate crimes, from 86 in 2002 to 13 in 2003, and then to less than five in the three subsequent years. It is difficult to explain this change, although it may relate to changes in reporting requirements or some other external issue. These data problems suggest that the crime statistics do not really tell much about whether LGBT students experience more threats to their safety than other students.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation also collects hate crime data annually, and disaggregates by type of crime and by motivation, or type of hate being expressed. The most recent report was released in October 2008 and covers the 2007 calendar year. On a national basis, the FBI found that hate crimes overall decreased slightly from 2006 to 2007. The overall reduction came from fewer race- and religion-based crimes, but crimes motivated by sexual orientation bias increased 6% nationwide. The report notes that different numbers of law enforcement agencies participate in the data collection each year, so year-to-year comparisons may be flawed. The FBI also does not assign a cause for relative changes in any category of the hate crimes reported.

Nationally, more than 7,600 hate crimes occurred in 2007, of which 1,265 were based on sexual orientation bias. About 135, or 10.7%, of sexual orientation-based crimes occurred at colleges or schools. This was a slightly lower percentage than the 11.3% of all hate crimes that took place in schools and college, but there was no disaggregation between K-12 and postsecondary schools. Anti-gay crimes affected a total of 1,512 victims nationally, nearly 60% of whom were victims of anti-male homosexual bias. More than a third of all hate crimes reported are categorized as vandalism or property damage, with intimidation ranking second, and assault third.

California accounts for 1,400 incidents of all hate crime, or more than 18% of the national total, even though its population is only about 14% of the nation. Of the 1,400 incidents, 263, or 19%, were based on sexual orientation. This was considerably lower than the 674 incidents based on race, but was higher than any of the other types of hate crimes reported.

The FBI report does disaggregate hate crime reports by state and city, and it also reports statistics for those postsecondary campuses that submit data. Ten CSU campuses, five UC campuses, and three community colleges submitted data for 2007. The campuses reported a total of 41 hate crimes, of which eight were identified as based on sexual orientation. It is possible that college students may be victims of crimes reported by law enforcement agencies in cities with campuses, but the crimes did not take place on the campus and do not specifically tie to students.

Further analysis of the FBI data could lead to additional insights, but it is not clear how strong the data are, especially because anecdotal evidence suggests many anti-gay hate crimes are never reported. The data provide some evidence that anti-gay hate crimes do affect college campuses and make victims of some number of students.

The issue of crime is not necessarily the key issue for LGBT students. A major issue is campus climate — whether LGBT students feel safe and supported, whether they are able to find friends, whether the faculty, other students, and university staff make them feel welcome, whether they are able to access services that are unique to their needs, whether there are role models who identify as LGBT. There are many reasons students may or may not succeed in completing their college goals and achieving a degree or beyond. To what extent their sexual orientation is a meaningful factor in college achievement will be a very difficult thing to assess, but it should be explored further.

Panel discussion

To provide several perspectives on the experience and needs of LGBT students on California campuses, Commission staff has invited a panel of knowledgeable students and service providers to address the Commission. They are drawn from all of the state's systems of postsecondary education but are not speaking for the systems, only from their personal perspectives.

- **Lance Chih** is a student at Folsom Lake Community College in the Los Rios Community College District. He is planning to transfer to CSU Sacramento to major in political science, then to earn a law degree and work in K-12 education. He came out as gay at 15 and responded to anti-gay harassment by becoming politically active. He is a board member of Respect Sacramento and has testified before the Legislature and spoken to college classes and teacher training.
- **Steve Hansen**, a second-year student at University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento, is treasurer of the law school's Lambda Students Association, vice president of the Health Law Association, and board member of the Government Affairs Student Association. He works in the state government affairs office of Genentech and is a former legislative director for Equality California, a statewide LGBT rights advocacy organization. He is also a board member for the Sacramento CARES Clinic and the Downtown Sacramento Partnership.
- **Wiggys Sivertsen** has worked at San José State University for nearly 40 years, both as a visiting professor of sociology and, for 11 years, as director of counseling services. She has spent her entire professional life working to educate the public about LGBT communities and advocating for the rights of all "at risk" communities. She is involved in many community organizations, and was a founding member of the Bay Area Municipal Elections Committee, the only political action committee dedicated to LGBT civil rights in her region. She was selected as Woman of the Year in 2007 by Assemblymember Ira Ruskin.
- **Shane Snowdon**, LGBT Resources Director for UC San Francisco, has worked for nearly 10 years with UC's medical schools and health centers to institute LGBT-sensitive policies and practices. Her work has been recognized by her selection for the UCSF Chancellor's Award for Exceptional University Service. She was previously the director of the Women's Center at UC Santa Cruz and has served as executive director of several local and national agencies specializing in health care, community development, environmental protection, and domestic violence.
- **Mark Yanez** is a third-year student majoring in Sociology and Women and Gender Studies at UC Davis. As one of five interns at the LGBT Resource Center, he is responsible for planning Pride Week, serving people who visit the center and maintaining a safe space for all, and putting on workshops. He came out in seventh grade and worked with the Gay-Straight Alliance through high school. He plans to pursue graduate studies in social work and law and to work with LGBTQI youth or sexuality studies.

The panelists are expected to share some of their personal experiences as well as their views on how LGBT college students should be supported so that bias and discrimination do not damage their chances for success. They have been asked to specifically address where more data is available to further illuminate the situation for LGBT students, and to suggest any legislative or administrative policy ideas that could help identify and meet student needs.

This information, and other data that staff gather during early 2009, will be compiled in two reports, one on LGBT students and one on students with disabilities. Those reports are expected to include recommendations for possible policy or administrative options, and will be presented to the Commission at its June 2009 meeting.