Universal Design and LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, and Queer) Issues:

Creating Equal Access and Opportunities for Success

Jennifer R. Daniels

Illinois Wesleyan University

Tracy J. Geiger

Arizona State University

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Abstract

The authors extend the ideals set forth by the universal design (UD) framework seeking to include the unique needs of students in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. Universal design is a philosophy that, when applied to higher education, constitutes acceptance of, equal access for, and equal opportunities for success for all students. The basic tenets of UD were originally developed to address the challenges of designing a campus for students with physical barriers, however recent theorizing has expanded the basic tenets of UD to encompass the needs of students with disabilities and disadvantages that are not necessarily visible (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008), such as LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students routinely face barriers to their success in higher education, including both direct and indirect discrimination and prejudice which oftentimes negatively affects their academic success and overall college experience. Each year, there are several ratings scales, or campus climate ratings, that attempt to gauge how suitable or "LGBTQ-friendly" an institution's campus is. Applying the UD framework, the authors examined the LGBTQ campus climate ratings as a potential existing measure of how well LGBTQ students' needs are currently being met.

Keywords: universal design, higher education, LGBTQ students

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Introduction

In this inquiry, the authors apply the principles of universal design to a relatively new area of concern in higher education: the more seamless inclusion of campus community members who do not identify as heterosexual and/or who do not identify as cisgender (one of the two gender binaries, i.e., either "male" or "female"). The problems and issues that such individuals face, which will be discussed in detail, will here on out be referred to as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues, more commonly known as "LGBTQ issues." Universal design (UD) is a philosophy that, when applied to higher education, constitutes acceptance of, equal access for, and equal opportunities for success for all students. The basic tenets of UD were originally developed as a means for articulating and formulating the best ways to address the challenges of designing a campus environment for the needs of students with physical disabilities, however theorizing has expanded the basic tenets of universal design to encompass the needs of students with disabilities and disadvantages that are not necessarily visible (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008). However, it should be made clear from the very outset of this discussion that by adopting the framework and research that has come from the UD domain, the authors are neither stating nor implying that being a member of the LGBTQ community constitutes a disability. Rather, the parallels made here focus on the challenges that LGBTQ students face and how those challenges can and do affect their ability to be successful in higher education.

While there has been a substantial amount of research reported in the literature on the importance of understanding how to create a welcoming atmosphere for students of different, yet

typical, subpopulations, such as race, sex, or differing abilities (i.e., Scanlan & Palmer, 2009; Theoharis, 2007), less has been directly connected to students whose social category may lead to potential limitations in a classroom setting. One possible approach for furthering the understanding of how to purposefully remove this obstacle for student success is to expand the meaning and application of universal design to include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in a meaningful and specified way. The authors contend that efforts made in this area are not only worthwhile for the students and faculty that are directly affected (e.g., self-identifying LGBTQ students/faculty), but also for the student body and campus community at large. These benefits can be easily implemented without requiring a specific change of student, faculty, or staff opinions on potentially controversial issues related to the LGBTQ community, such as marriage equality or the origins of sexual orientation. In other words, the suggestions made here should be applicable to a wide number of institutions and accommodate the social mores of a wide variety of individuals. These suggestions are made without a political agenda or platform and should be typically seen and applied broadly enough that they do not force additional discomforts on community members that will object to the very presence of LGBTQ students.

Theoretical Argument Connecting LGBTQ Issues to Universal Design

It is well established that diversity in the college classroom and on the college campus is ideal (e.g., Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008) and therefore has benefits for students. This diversity extends well beyond the traditional notions of race, sex, and differing abilities. To best understand and begin a thoughtful discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, one should establish the definitions of relevant terms, including but not

limited to, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, and intersex.

　　While the essential difference between sex, a biological trait, and gender, one's chosen identity and more psychological in nature, might be relatively well known, some of the other categories and labels are more subtle and less common to those who are not a part of LGBTQ communities. Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation can all be related terms, however gender identity focuses on one's "sense of being male or female" and gender expression is one's way of "communication gender to others," while sexual orientation is "enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings" towards other people (Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, 2009). Transgender, as defined by the National Center for Transgender Equality (2009), is "an umbrella term that refers to people who live differently than the gender presentation and roles expected of them by society" (p. 15). Another definition more directly states that "if one's gender identity conflicts with physiological sex, he or she falls into the transgender category" (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009, p. 118). Lastly, genderqueer and intersex are ways of identifying oneself outside of the traditional gender and biological sex binaries; genderqueer is related to one's gender while intersex is related to one's anatomy. Genderqueer can be defined as an identification "other than man or woman, both man and woman, or any combination of the two" (Allies of Texas State University, 2007, para. 1). Intersex is a broad term that refers to people who are born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of female or male (Intersex Society of North America, 2008). While those who are intersexed are no more likely to identify as LGBTQ, they typically face the same types of discrimination as LGBTQ individuals (Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, 2009).

Some may assume that there is little to no connection between one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression and how one operates on campus. However, LGBTQ students are those most frequently affected by discrimination (Messinger, 2009); this discrimination affects how they act and make meaning of their college experiences. The very real and highly public nature of such discrimination and outright bullying that occurs on college campuses should indicate just how important it is for college and university staff, faculty, and other members of the campus community to protect the dignity, integrity, and safety of their LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students are most often the minority when they are in groups of people on campus; there are few places that members of the LGBTQ community would constitute a majority of the student population on any given campus, save for an LGBTQ resource center, for example. However, supporting LGBTQ students' equitable access to education and ensuring their success can indeed be accomplished. This equitable access should be constructed specifically so the needs of both LGBTQ students and non-LGBTQ students can be addressed and the concerns of all parties respected.

Challenges for LGBTQ students in higher education settings. First, it is important to understand how sexual orientation and gender identity/expression operate as a hidden stigma (as opposed to race, sex, and physical ability, which are oftentimes more openly visible). A student who has to battle a hidden stigma such as an atypical sexual orientation or gender identity/expression often has more of the social responsibility placed on him, and he must manage what can be an overload of interpersonal social information in potentially every public encounter. Once on campus, there is the double-edged sword of having a new place, perhaps away from home, where the student can live in a more open way. However, this new social setting also must be handled and navigated. In the educational setting, LGBTQ students have to

engage in a kind of risk assessment in deciding who is safe to come out to, or disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and in what capacity (Manilowitz, 1995). An LGBTQ student may have to decide which members of the campus community to trust enough to come out to because grades, the student's level of connection with faculty and/or staff, and the student's sense of safety can be at stake, therefore having the possibility to affect academic success. It is not impossible to think that a student's lower than typical grade may reflect some overt personal bias from a particular instructor or, more likely, from genuine misunderstanding of the daily impact that being a minority student has on academic work.

The indirect sources of potential barriers for LGBTQ student success are having difficulties managing personal anxiety and being time disadvantaged. Anxiety that is associated with being a member of a negatively stigmatized social group has been shown to be very effective in interrupting and reducing the performance abilities of such groups, a process that documented in the stereotype threat research (e.g., Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Because of this direct connection between increased anxiety and reduced performance, efforts to improve the campus climate for LGBTQ students should have a direct impact on their ability to concentrate on their course work and become or remain academically successfully. Aside from the potential for increased anxiety, LGBTQ students face the possibility of being time-disadvantaged, a phrase coined by Seymour and Hunter (1998). In previous analyses, both students of color on predominantly White campuses and science, technology, engineering, and math majors with physical disabilities have reported having to spend additional personal time and psychological energy to actively engage the learning system in challenging the existing pedagogical barriers, such as negotiating with support staff and attending to the completion of accommodations in the classroom or other campus setting (Pliner

& Johnson, 2004). Additionally, for the student that is a member of a disadvantaged social group, there may be the additional expectation that one will also serve as a representative for their social group as a whole, more commonly known as the token member. This pressure, whether intentionally applied or not, further saps the energy of a student and reduces the pool of resources that the student can pull from to fulfill course objectives. These disadvantages have not been widely applied to the situation of the LGBTQ student, but parallels can be directly made. Add to that the more direct barriers and stresses of open hostility and harassment (e.g., Baier, Rosenzweig, & Whipple, 1991; Herak, 1993) and it becomes apparent that there are a variety of challenges that LGBTQ students routinely face throughout their college experience. These challenges unfortunately continue to be manifested in the more individual setting of the college classroom.

Connolly (1999) outlined a wide variety of classroom settings that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students can find themselves in, and the potential challenges and opportunities that each of these exemplar settings offer to the individual student. (It should be noted that while this analysis focused on students with non-heterosexual sexual orientations, the same challenges would apply to transgender and other queer students.) At the more negative end of the continuum of classroom experiences of LGB students are those that explicitly or implicitly marginalize the student. The explicit marginalization would almost universally be recognized as objectionable, consisting of openly stated bigoted remarks and instructional materials that include obvious denigration of non-heteronormative behaviors and people. The implicit marginalization is the more insidious brand of communicating aversion for LGBTQ issues. It is often characterized more by its widespread application of heterosexual and normative gender identity as the only accepted standard for the classroom and, often by extension, the campus and

university as a whole. Connolly also points out that in this category of classroom, the instructor will adjust the in-class learning environment to be less heterosexist on a needs-basis only. That is, when a student approaches the instructor and comes out, or when the instructor suspects that a student in the class identifies as LGBTQ, the course is then modified for that instance. However, this kind of approach can place a great deal of pressure on both the instructor and the student. The student must take a risk in alerting the instructor to his identity, making great assumptions about the trust level he has with that instructor. While it is rightly the student's domain to self disclose to either just the instructor or to the entire class (Messinger, 2002), it can be a perilous prospect to trust one's potentially hidden and potentially stigmatized identity with an authority figure. This is especially so when it is often unknown whether the instructor is a member of the LGBTQ community and/or supportive and non-discriminatory towards LGBTQ students. The instructor, whether LGBTQ or not, must then adjust the course in a very self conscious and reactive way. This also requires the instructor to make assumptions about the particular needs of a student based on only one admission of his membership in one particular social category. In this type of class setting, even well-meaning faculty may tokenize a student by adjusting course instruction on the fly rather than attempting to incorporate inclusionary means before the student is forced to or chooses to self-identify as LGBTQ.

Class settings at the more positive end of the continuum, which implicitly or explicitly centralize LGB issues and students, are better at providing these inclusionary procedures preemptively. Implicit centralization can often include unplanned responses by the instructor (Connolly, 1999) such as challenging in-class comments from students that are openly or potentially derogating. Qualities of classroom experiences that demonstrate explicit centralization foreshadow the universal design characteristics that might be used as a gold

standard in the future. In these classroom experiences, there is an active effort to address the

LGBTQ perspective as something more than just the "other," or the non-straight perspective.

Connolly also suggests that these positive classroom experiences offer more than just succor for

LGBTQ students but also employ critical pedagogical practices which ask all of the students in

the classroom to critique and potentially challenge the privileged, typically heteronormative and

cisgender, point of view. In this way, there is an active incorporation of all of the students in the

class, whether they identify as LGBTQ or not.

Overview of UD as Applicable to LGBTQ Issues. At this point, it is necessary to

define some of the key components of universal design and how the intent of universal design

can be expanded when applying it to improve the experiences of LGBTQ students. Of particular

importance is the need to proactively create a welcoming and accepting environment for all

students in classrooms and within the university or college culture itself. This ideal environment

attests to the core goals of UD, as stated by Pliner and Johnson (2004): "UD addresses the

challenges and barriers [of universal inclusion of students into a higher education setting] by

extending the accommodation service model to transform the broader range of teaching practices

needed to create inclusive learning environments" (p. 106). There are currently nine primary

guiding principles for creating and implementing UD (Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003). Of these

nine, at least six are directly applicable to the needs of LGBTQ students on campus: equitable

use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive, tolerance for error, a community of learners, and

instructional climate. The remaining principles (perceptible information, low physical effort, and

size and space for approach and use) are meant to directly call for change and accommodation of

the physical environment for students that come to campus with physical disabilities or mobile

challenges. The six UD principles that are directly applicable to the needs of LGBTQ students are explained in detail in the following section.

Directly applicable principles.

1. Equitable use: Make classroom materials accessible to a diverse set of learning needs and styles.

As was described above, the explicitly centralized classroom experiences will actively incorporate examples, theories, and materials that will speak to the particular perspective of LGBTQ students. This can be done in a way that will still honor and respect the views and sensibilities of the heterosexual and cisgender students and may actually serve to sharpen their critical thinking skills in certain domains through encouragement of critical pedagogy. For example, one can create assignments and grading rubrics that will serve to separate critiques of writing style or content knowledge from student opinion. It may also be useful in a science-based class to make it clear that while one can present any personal opinion without fear of it affecting a grade (e.g., debating the accuracy of the science of evolution), the student will be assessed on how well they articulate *where* that opinion came from, encouraging students to differentiate among the sources of knowledge.

2. Flexibility in use: Employ a variety of instructional methods that accommodate a range of student preferences and abilities.

In some cases, simple awareness of the possibility for non-normative students in one's class will lead to suspension of previously automatic classroom practices. For example, the mechanical and often arbitrary division of one's class into male and female

groups may challenge students who are not cisgender. This can be particularly negative

if the instructor insists that a transgender student be a part of one group over another

(Case et al., 2009). In addition, the instructor may assume too much when calling on a

student in class with a particular gender pronoun (Sausa, 2002). This can also be

particularly negative if the student has directly requested that an alternative pronoun or

proper name be used in public settings. Admittedly, this will call for effort on the part of

the instructor, but when one recalls that a reduction of anxiety and an increase in

inclusion may result in improved student learning outcomes, it can be considered effort

well spent. Additionally, the instructor often serves as a model to other students for

behavior toward an outwardly identified LGBTQ student. If the instructor is seen calmly

and directly addressing a student in a particular manner (i.e., using a preferred gender

pronoun or preferred first name instead of what is listed on the class roster), the potential

social anxiety of the students in that class may be minimized and subsequently extend to

encounters outside of the classroom.

3. Simple and intuitive: Instruction that is straightforward, easy to understand, and
   predictable, regardless of the user's experience.

While there is the ability for concerned instructors to manage the experiences of

LGBTQ students when in their classroom, it takes a more concerted effort to ensure

similar experiences occur for LGBTQ students who are not taught by such thoughtful

instructors. Lopez and Chism (1993) found that when LGB students have some

classroom experiences that are positive and affirming of their identities, the drastic shifts

from classes where they are free to express themselves to classes where they must

monitor each word can lead to less successful academic outcomes. The automatic

response of a university need not be one of regulating the classroom behavior of every

individual instructor, something that threatens the core of academic freedom. If an

individual class is of particular concern for LGBTQ students, the only remaining

potential support may come from a welcoming climate in the rest of the campus to

highlight that class experience as an anomaly rather than a norm (Connolly, 1999).

  4. Tolerance for error: Including diversity for different paces of learning.

  Even if an instructor's personal views do not allow for a complete and honest

inclusion of LGBTQ students in one's classroom, it may be possible to accept the very

real impact of the stresses that LGBTQ students face on a daily basis. These stresses can

lead to a reduction in the ability for a student to effectively engage with course materials

and potentially interfere with performance on course assessments. Thus, a student's

performance may reflect more about the stresses and anxieties one was under at the time

(e.g., harassment on campus or rejection from family) than a true assessment of gained

knowledge and skills. To uphold this UD ideal, it may be possible for an instructor to

allow for some flexibility in timing of turning in assignments or even for students to opt

out of (or complete alternatives to) course activities that may be threatening because of

one's identity.

  5. A community of learners: Emphasis and encouragement of sustained and supportive

    interaction among students and between students, staff, and faculty.

  On a campus setting, it can be important to encourage interaction within a social

group (e.g., student to student) as well as between social groups (e.g., student to faculty).

Thus, it can be important to allow for a wide variety of student groups to meet and be

equally supported in their growth. In addition, the presence of a concerned and involved

faculty advisor can help sustain those groups that may face potential derogation, such as a campus LGBTQ pride alliance. It may also be important to encourage structured contact among campus groups that may support diverse points of view, perhaps seen between campus religious groups and LGBTQ groups.

6. Instructional climate: Encourage students to meet high expectations as they are welcomed into the course.

Creating a welcoming atmosphere can happen in many ways. In the next section the authors will present data that speaks to the kinds of characteristics that have been identified by students and faculty in the LGBTQ community to be particularly important in indicating inclusivity.

Analysis

While each of the above principles is worded to primarily apply to in-class experiences, the authors have used existing ratings of LGBTQ campus climates to estimate how well these UD ideals are being applied in relation to inclusivity at the highest and lowest rated schools. The specific rating items are directed at the presence or absence of certain characteristics that these separate raters have deemed essential for earning the status of an LGBTQ friendly campus. The first goal of the authors was to examine the extent to which these characteristics would map onto the UD principles. To the authors' knowledge, these items were in no way derived from UD ideals. However, the prediction is that the schools that have been rated as friendlier or more inclusive will already encompass characteristics that look like UD; that is, they are increasing acceptance of, access for, and opportunities for LGBTQ students. The included rating systems were the Princeton Review (2009), the Campus Climate Index (2009) and the Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students (Windmeyer, 2006). The 20 most highly rated schools and the lowest

rated schools for each list were gathered and the characteristics that were rated for each list was

catalogued in order to be placed under the headings of the UD principles. At this point of

categorization, the Princeton Review ratings were dropped because there was insufficient

information about how the inclusivity of schools was rated. Only one item could be clearly

identified: "Students, faculty, and administrators treat all persons equally regardless of their

sexual orientation and gender identity/expression," which was not enough to constitute the entire

ratings being included for the authors' purpose.

There was a fair amount of overlap in the Campus Climate and the Advocate rating

systems. These items are organized by their application to each of the six key UD principles (see

Appendix A for Campus Climate survey items; see Appendix B for the Advocate survey items).

The authors have allowed for the characteristics to be listed under more than one principle as it is

possible that each characteristic could support inclusion in multiple ways. In the following

sections, Tables 1-6 present information about the percentages that each characteristic is evident

in the highest and lowest rated schools in each rating system. Overall, there were some

differences in the way that each rating system approached the process of rating LGBTQ

"friendliness" on campus. For example, the distance between the top and bottom rated schools

in the Advocate is less distant than those in the Campus Climate Index. The Advocate ratings

offered a range of schools that were all considered primarily inclusive of LGBTQ students,

although some were more inclusive than others. In the Campus Climate Index, the bottom rated

schools might be characterized as schools that would be ones for LGBTQ students to avoid,

possibly appearing even as hostile rather than merely unsupportive. However, comparing the top

schools against the bottom schools will still be informative as a general sense of what the most

welcoming schools are actively doing to support the universal access of all of their students.

UD principle #1: Equitable use. The application of this principle is of particular importance for at least two reasons. First, it perhaps most closely parallels the original intentions of UD because it deals with making sure that all students have proper and working access to the physical campus. What is perhaps most surprising is the way in which sex has been used as a means of dividing both housing and bathrooms. For the schools rated as less friendly, there is a distinctive lack of equal access to both of these campus features. In many situations, it is placed in the hands of the individual student to negotiate and self-advocate for access that meets their needs. This adds an unfair level of responsibility and anxiety for students who often must come out to a larger number of people on campus than they would otherwise feel comfortable doing as well as creating the opportunity for these students to be judged as having a status that does not warrant immediate action. In the case of campuses without gender-neutral bathrooms, students whose gender expression is ambiguous or which could be perceived as conflicting with their assigned sex may have to bear the burden of assessing the extent to which they are "passing" for one gender or the other when deciding on which facility to use. Even if there are a few gender-neutral bathrooms on campus, they may not be easily accessible to the students that need them throughout the day, causing them to have to leave one building to go to another just to use the facilities.

Second, having these characteristics represents supporting students' abilities to express themselves in manners that represent who they really are. Beyond sustaining self-expression, allowing for email and roster software to display a student's acquired name (rather than birth name only) can ease some of the stresses of perpetually having to explain and even justify who they are upon entering a new class or when dealing with the different support staff on campus.

For an instructor, this kind of system can also provide some concrete information for a student's preferred reference without asking questions that are simply too personal.

It should be noted that gender-neutral bathrooms are ranked as "N/A," or "not applicable" in the Advocate because that rating system was keenly focused on the support that was available for non-heterosexual students, rather than for students who did not identify as cisgender. In addition, the Advocate rating system is not as new as others, such as the Campus Climate Index, therefore not taking into account that increased numbers of students who are coming to college who are in the process of transitioning their gender on campus or who do not identify as cisgender (Tilsley, 2010).

Table 1.

Percentages of Top and Bottom Schools' Rating Items That Fall Under UD Principle #1.

	Campus Climate: Top 20 Schools	The Advocate: Top 20 Schools	Campus Climate: Bottom 20 Schools	The Advocate: Bottom 19 Schools
UD Principle #1: Equitable Use	**93.9%**	**85.8%**	**25.7%**	**50.8%**
LGBTQ/Ally Scholarships	70%	80%	0%	11%
Non-discrimination Act Includes Sexual Orientation	100%	100%	75%	100%
Non-discrimination Act Includes Gender Identity/Expression	100%	70%	10%	26%
LGBTQ Resource Center	100%	95%	5%	63%
LGBTQ/Gender-neutral Housing	87.5%	70%	7.5%	5%
LGBTQ Student Organizations	100%	100%	70%	100%
Gender-neutral Bathrooms	100%	N/A	12.5%	N/A

Note. The characteristics that are listed in bold show the largest differences between the top and bottom schools.

UD principle #2: Flexibility in use. For this UD principle, the lowest percentages are for the bottom 20 schools in the Campus Climate Index that fail to proactively offer public displays of safe locations and/or people to come out to or to seek out for help if harassment becomes an issue, which, according to recent research, remains something about which campus communities must remain vigilant (Lipka, 2010).

Table 2.

Percentages of Top and Bottom Schools' Rating Items That Fall Under UD Principle #2.

	Campus Climate: Top 20 Schools	The Advocate: Top 20 Schools	Campus Climate: Bottom 20 Schools	The Advocate: Bottom 19 Schools
UD Principle #2: Flexibility in Use	**96.3%**	**87.5%**	**9.4%**	**52.5%**
Safe Space/Safe Zones	100%	90%	5%	79%
Gender-neutral Bathrooms	100%	N/A	12.5%	N/A
LGBTQ Student Recruitment	90%	85%	0%	26%
Name/Gender ID Is Easy To Change	95%	N/A	20%	N/A

Note. The characteristics that are listed in bold show the largest differences between the top and bottom schools.

UD principle #3: Simple and intuitive. This principle explicitly shows how the benefits and protections for an LGBTQ person and that person's partner are universally applied. For example, are the students expected to have to teach the support staff on campus about their needs or are the residential staff members and security teams already trained and prepared for their presence on campus? The characteristic of having Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) covered by the school insurance company is still a very low percentage even in the schools rated as the highest in LGBTQ inclusivity. This number is representative of the extent to which transgender students on campus, especially those that are transitioning from one end of the gender spectrum to another while on campus, is a developing concept that is not as well

established on many campuses. This could reflect the fact that there are fewer numbers of

students who are requesting these resources or that these students do not yet feel comfortable

being "out" in this way. This may be important to consider if campus representatives and

decision-makers falsely believe that there is no call for these kinds of student support.

Table 3.

Percentages of Top and Bottom Schools' Rating Items That Fall Under UD Principle #3.

	Campus Climate: Top 20 Schools	The Advocate: Top 20 Schools	Campus Climate: Bottom 20 Schools	The Advocate: Bottom 19 Schools
UD Principle #3: Simple and Intuitive	**92.5%**	**97.5%**	**20.3%**	**67.0%**
Domestic Partner Benefits for Same-sex Couples	100%	100%	25%	63%
LGBTQ Bias/Hate Crime Reporting Procedure	90%	95%	35%	84%
LGBTQ-friendly Health Services/Testing	100%	100%	45%	79%
Campus Police Trained in LGBTQ Issues	95%	95%	5%	42%
Student Health Insurance Covers HRT	60%	N/A	0%	N/A
Residential Staff Trained in LGBTQ Issues	100%	N/A	20%	N/A
Name/Gender ID Is Easy To Change	95%	N/A	20%	N/A
Gender-neutral Bathrooms	100%	N/A	12.5%	N/A

Note. The characteristics that are listed in bold show the largest differences between the top and bottom schools.

UD principle #4: Tolerance for error. The characteristics aligned with this principle

indicate whether heterosexual and/or cisgender members of the community are united in

continued, proactive, and tangible support for the quality of campus life for LGBTQ students.

These characteristics also reflect the extent to which LGBTQ individuals are active members in

defining their own identity in the campus community. This active avoidance of paternalistic

support encourages empowerment for students that are part of a group that is potentially

disempowered in many settings. In this way, they can also contribute firsthand information

about the most effective ways to provide students with an optimal learning environment

Table 4.

Percentages of Top and Bottom Schools' Rating Items That Fall Under UD Principle #4.

	Campus Climate: Top 20 Schools	The Advocate: Top 20 Schools	Campus Climate: Bottom 20 Schools	The Advocate: Bottom 19 Schools
UD Principle #4: Tolerance for Error	**98.0%**	**95.0%**	**7.5%**	**73.7%**
Safe Space/Safe Zones	100%	90%	5%	79%
Campus Police Trained in LGBTQ Issues	95%	95%	5%	42%
LGBTQ Educational Events	100%	100%	7.5%	100%
LGBTQ Advisory Committee	95%	N/A	0%	N/A
Residential Staff Trained in LGBTQ Issues	100%	N/A	20%	N/A

Note. The characteristics that are listed in bold show the largest differences between the top and bottom schools.

UD principle #5: Community of learners. For this principle, there is some positive

information for LGBTQ students: nearly all of the schools (high and low rated) had LGBTQ

student organizations. This offers the possibility that on many campuses, no matter their external

rating, harbor pockets of students who have the resources to self-advocate and have found a way

to rally together in mutual support. The visibility of these students and the campus community

members that support them will serve as examples for other students who come onto campus

after them, each at different stages of their coming out process. There are also less obvious ways

of directly supporting the community through alumni organizations, mentoring, coming out

week, support groups, or rainbow graduation ceremonies. Rainbow or lavender graduation

ceremonies, which are often separate from overall graduation ceremonies, are where LGBTQ

students are recognized for their achievements and contributions to the university. These

ceremonies serve as a way to acknowledge all LGBTQ students and congratulate them on

successfully completing the college experience (Sanlo, 1999). These schools have gone above

and beyond tolerating the LGBTQ community with restrained silence and moved to recognize

and nurture.

Table 5.

Percentages of Top and Bottom Schools' Rating Items That Fall Under UD Principle #5.

	Campus Climate: Top 20 Schools	The Advocate: Top 20 Schools	Campus Climate: Bottom 20 Schools	The Advocate: Bottom 19 Schools
UD Principle #5: Community of Learners	**90.3%**	**92.5%**	**20.3%**	**54.2%**
LGBTQ/Ally Scholarships	70%	80%	0%	11%
LGBTQ Resource Center	100%	95%	5%	63%
LGBTQ/Gender-neutral Housing	87.5%	70%	7.5%	5%
LGBTQ Counseling/Support Groups	100%	100%	40%	95%
Transgender Support Services	N/A	85%	N/A	42%
LGBTQ Student Organizations	100%	100%	70%	100%
Faculty/Staff Trained in LGBTQ Issues/Safe Zone	100%	N/A	10%	N/A
LGBTQ Alumni Organization	80%	95%	5%	26%
Lavender/Rainbow Graduation Ceremony	100%	100%	0%	5%

LGBTQ Mentoring	65%	N/A	5%	N/A
LGBTQ Pride/Coming Out Week	N/A	100%	N/A	95%
LGBTQ Social Activities	100%	100%	60%	100%

Note. The characteristics that are listed in bold show the largest differences between the top and bottom schools.

UD principle #6: Instructional climate. By extending LGBTQ topics into the

curriculum, LGBTQ individuals' voices and perspectives are further legitimized. This shows that

this is a perspective and a story that is worth telling and that is worthy of sustained academic

study both within and outside of the community. This is one way of indicating that these topics

are not just the domain of a minority of interested parties but merit being included in the

complete education of non-LGBTQ students as well.

Table 6.

Percentages of Top and Bottom Schools' Rating Items That Fall Under UD Principle #6.

	Campus Climate: Top 20 Schools	The Advocate: Top 20 Schools	Campus Climate: Bottom 20 Schools	The Advocate: Bottom 19 Schools
UD Principle #6: Instructional Climate	**98.6%**	**92.0%**	**16.1%**	**69.4%**
LGBTQ Studies	90%	100%	0%	42%
LGBTQ Courses	100%	N/A	5%	N/A
Non-discrimination Act Includes Sexual Orientation	100%	100%	75%	100%
Non-discrimination Act Includes Gender Identity/Expression	100%	70%	10%	26%
Faculty/Staff Trained in LGBTQ Issues/Safe Zone	100%	N/A	10%	N/A
LGBTQ Educational Events	100%	100%	7.5%	100%

Note. The characteristics that are listed in bold show the largest differences between the top and bottom schools.

Conclusion

Understanding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, or LGBTQ issues, through the framework of universal design is an important way of removing moral questions or an unfriendly campus climate in order to be proactive and inclusive of all student types. By utilizing universal design, schools will be prepared for current and future students who identify as LGBTQ, who might be in a stage of questioning their gender or sexual orientation, or who might be transitioning from one identity to another, all while in the midst of earning a postsecondary degree. Colleges and universities should begin to provide concrete examples of ways that universal design can be implemented in all classrooms and learning environments for all faculty and staff. Administrators can gradually incorporate such aspects of universal design into the framework of the university or college, thus creating a more inclusive campus environment.

Combining LGBTQ issues and the ideals of UD. Higher education faculty and staff need to recognize the potential importance of the college experience in a young LGBTQ person's life. Attending a college or university might be the first time that a student has the ability to meet other students, faculty, or staff members that identify as LGBTQ, or understand possible conflicting or confusing emotions or feelings for the first time. Therefore, in order to ensure academic success for LGBTQ students, it should be the role of the faculty or staff members to create an environment that does not impede a student's personal growth.

There are benefits of an inclusionary environment for student learning outcomes for all students, whether they identity as LGBTQ, are a part of the LGBTQ community, or neither. Of

course, there are specific benefits for LGBTQ students regardless of how public their chosen

identity is. Many studies show that LGBTQ students, sometimes beginning as early as middle

school, often experience more harassment, have more negative or self-injurious thoughts,

manage more stress, and have an overall lower quality of life than their non-LGBTQ peers (e.g.,

Wells, 2009), which can lead to increased anxiety and mental exhaustion. This can negatively

affect performance on class assignments and activities, and therefore overall college experience.

Creating an inclusionary environment will be beneficial to all students, including LGBTQ

students, and allow everyone to succeed to the best of their abilities.

        This inclusionary environment should extend beyond specialized classes or fields that

might be more likely to cover topics of sexual orientation and/or gender, such as psychology,

sociology, social work, or women's studies. There are countless ways that gender is insinuated

or unconsciously mandated by instructors in the classroom (i.e., using a student's given name,

e.g., "Alexandra" if biologically female instead of seeing what gendered or more androgynous

name a student prefers ,e.g., "Alex"), classmates (e.g., do students have respect for one another

and their opinions regarding the potentially controversial topics of sexual orientation and gender

expression), facilities (e.g., the availability, or lack thereof, or unisex or gender-neutral

bathrooms), and campus/community culture (e.g., presence of physical space or student

organizations for LGBTQ students, "out" individuals, climate of acceptance). The consequences

of an inclusionary environment could be incredibly profound (i.e., contributing to lower rates of

student depression, reducing the possibility that students would feel disconnected from the

university), thus increasing the quality of life and educational experience for all students, but

specifically those who identify as LGBTQ. Changes to create such an inclusionary environment

can be very subtle yet would still allow for a welcoming atmosphere to operate without

highlighting students that might fall into a "minority," or stigmatized, category.

Because of the reliance of universal design for a framework, it is important to clarify and

emphasize that being an LGBTQ student does *not* constitute a disability in the literal sense that

universal design was based on, which was "the design of products and environments to be usable

by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation of specialized

design" (The Center for Universal Design, 1997a, p. 1, as cited in Burgstahler & Cory, 2008). It

is particularly important to note this because identifying outside of the traditional gender binary

is often pathologized in both psychology literature *and* textbooks.

One can incorporate universal design components in a way that honors all students,

regardless of the way they identify or are perceived, without stilting or negatively affecting

classroom activities or assignments. A key point is that awareness, forward thinking, and

proactive behavior are some of the most important skills to learn and utilize when incorporating

UD principles. A main facet of universal design is the idea of equitable use, which is when "the

design [of a given environment, tool, etc.] is useful and marketable to people with diverse

abilities" (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008, p. 7). To ensure equitable use for LGBTQ students, it

should be a priority to guarantee that the in-class learning environment is safe, that assignments

are fairly designed, and that assessments are measuring students' abilities to meet a course goal,

rather than the instructor's preferred opinion. In this way, students of all opinions, abilities, and

identities are protected and no individual student feels persecuted. This can be done in a

multitude of ways, such as making an outright statement that all students are valued and that no

hate speech of any kind will be tolerated.

Universal design is also a particularly useful framework for this discussion because it applies a proactive approach to solving LGBTQ-related concerns in a way that will prepare a classroom for a *potential* student, rather than reacting to a particular student in a particular course, major, or semester with a problem. This is again important because faculty and staff should be open-minded and understanding of all genders and sexualities rather than either directly or indirectly broadcasting their own assumptions about the genders and sexualities of their students. Oftentimes faculty members' and staff's actions, thoughts, assumptions, or reactions that are meant with the best of intentions might have the end result of making a student feel even more singled out and isolated than before (Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008), and such words or actions could even be construed as discrimination.

These applications of universal design might be manifested in a variety of ways in different university or college settings, such as at small residential colleges, which might have smaller ranges of diversity, or larger public universities, which could have broader ranges of diversity but perhaps more scattered resources, or commuter and community colleges, which are less likely to have a cohesive campus culture or student organizations. In addition, the public policy of some schools may openly prohibit the discussion of topics relating to sexuality and gender identity/expression, so the role of faculty and staff, and therefore facets of universal design, may be much more crucial in aiding LGBTQ students.

Significance of the Argument for Higher Education

On an individual level, the universal design approach can have a significant impact for each and every student in their educational journey. Student success, including persistence and retention, can easily be increased through utilizing aspects of universal design since more students will find comfort and acceptance in an open and welcoming campus climate. On an

overarching level, the implementation of universal design practices can bring diverse student subpopulations (i.e., different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, abilities, ages, etc.) together and promote an environment of overall respect and acceptance.   By bringing such groups together and working on superordinate goals, such as cooperating on projects that will serve to support the *entire* student body and thus increasing a different sense of group level identity, students will learn that they are not as different from one another as outside appearances, assumptions, or stereotypes may indicate. Targeting sexual orientation and gender identity/expression concerns through utilizing the universal design approach will foster an equitable safe learning environment that will serve educational goals as well as potentially foster true understanding and acceptance of different student subpopulations.

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Appendix A: Individual items scored by the Campus Climate Index of LGBT friendly campuses organized by universal design principle

Note: Items in italics appear under more than one principle.

Survey Items

Equitable use (make classroom materials accessible to a diverse set of learning needs and styles)
      LGBTQ/ally scholarships
      Non-discrimination act includes sexual orientation
      Non-discrimination act includes gender identity/expression
      LGBTQ Resource Center
      LGBTQ/Gender neutral housing
      LGBTQ student organizations
      Gender neutral bathrooms

Flexibility in use (employ a variety of instructional methods that accommodate a range of student preferences and abilities)
      Safe space/Safe Zones
      LGBTQ/Gender neutral housing
      LGBTQ admission fairs
      Name/gender ID is easy to change

Simple and intuitive (instruction that is straightforward, easy to understand, and predictable, regardless of the user's experience)
      LGBTQ bias/hate crime reporting procedure
      LGBTQ health services/testing
      Health insurance includes same-sex coverage
      Student health insurance covers HRT
      Campus police trained in LGBTQ issues
      Residential staff trained in LGBTQ issues
      Name/gender ID is easy to change
      Gender neutral bathrooms

Tolerance for error (including diversity for different paces of learning)
      Safe space/Safe Zones
      LGBTQ Advisory Committee
      Campus police trained in LGBTQ issues
      Residential staff trained in LGBTQ issues
      Sexual orientation issues events
      Transgender issues events

Community of learners (emphasis and encouragement of sustained and supportive interaction among students and between students, staff, and faculty)
      LGBTQ/ally scholarships
      Faculty/staff trained in LGBTQ issues/SafeZone
      LGBTQ Resource Center

LGBTQ/Gender neutral housing
LGBTQ counseling/support groups
LGBTQ student organizations
LGBTQ social activities
LGBTQ mentoring
LGBTQ alumni organization
Lavender/rainbow graduation ceremonies

Instructional climate (encourage students to meet high expectations as they are welcomed into the course)
LGBTQ Studies
LGBTQ Courses
Faculty/staff trained in LGBTQ issues/SafeZone
Non-discrimination act includes sexual orientation
Non-discrimination act includes gender identity/expression
Safe space/Safe Zones
Sexual orientation issues events
Transgender issues events

Appendix B: Individual items scored by the Advocate of LGBT friendly campuses organized by universal design principle

Note: Items in italics appear under more than one principle.

Survey Items

Equitable use (make classroom materials accessible to a diverse set of learning needs and styles)
    LGBTQ scholarships
    Non-discrimination act includes sexual orientation
    Non-discrimination act includes gender identity/expression
    LGBTQ Resource Center
    LGBTQ/gender neutral housing
    LGBTQ student organizations

Flexibility in use (employ a variety of instructional methods that accommodate a range of student preferences and abilities)
    Safe space/Safe Zones
    LGBTQ student recruitment

Simple and intuitive (instruction that is straightforward, easy to understand, and predictable, regardless of the user's experience)
    Extends domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples
    LGBTQ bias/hate crime reporting procedure
    LGBTQ health services/testing
    Campus police trained in LGBTQ issues

Tolerance for error (including diversity for different paces of learning)
    Safe space/Safe Zones
    Campus police trained in LGBTQ issues
    LGBTQ educational events

Community of learners (emphasis and encouragement of sustained and supportive interaction among students and between students, staff, and faculty)
    LGBTQ scholarships
    LGBTQ Resource Center
    LGBTQ/gender neutral housing
    LGBTQ counseling/support groups
    Transgender support services
    LGBTQ student organizations
    LGBTQ alumni organization
    Lavender/rainbow graduation ceremonies
    LGBTQ Pride/Coming Out week
    LGBTQ social activities

Instructional climate (encourage students to meet high expectations as they are welcomed into
the course)

      LGBTQ Studies/courses
      Non-discrimination act includes sexual orientation
      Non-discrimination act includes gender identity/expression
      Safe space/Safe Zones
      LGBTQ educational events