



PREVENTION UPDATE

Violence Prevention among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students

Overview

A 2010 report from [Campus Pride](#) called *State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender People* is the most comprehensive national research study of its kind to date. It documents experiences of more than 5,000 students, faculty members, staff members, and administrators who identify as LGBTQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer) at colleges and universities across the United States. It says that “two decades of limited research suggests that academe has been unwelcoming of LGBT students, faculty members, and staff members.” In a 2001 unpublished study by Sue Rankin (Penn State College of Education) called “National Campus Climate for Underrepresented People” that included 30 campuses and more than 17,000 participants, respondents indicated that of all the various constituent groups on campus, the climate was “least accepting” of people who are LGBT. Further, 42 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) respondents indicated they were the target of harassment based on their sexual orientation, compared to 30 percent of persons of color who reported harassment based on their race, and 28 percent of women who reported harassment based on their gender. Key findings of the *State of Higher Education* report indicate that “the overwhelming majority of LGBTQQ students, of every race, color and ethnicity, report harassment, isolation and fear on campus. Transmasculine, transfeminine and gender non-conforming students are the most likely to experience overt and blatant oppression and hostility.”

The report points out that academic communities expend a great deal of effort fostering campus climates that nurture their institutional mission with the understanding that climate has a profound effect on the academic community’s ability to excel in teaching, research, and scholarship. Campus climate also influences access and retention, students’ academic success and healthy development, as well as faculty and staff productivity.

Events such as the tragic suicide of Rutgers freshman Tyler Clementi in September 2010 have focused college administrators on the issues of the climate for LGBT students on campus and the possible links between hostile climates and suicide. According to a 2008 report from the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) called *Suicide Risk and Prevention for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth*, LGB youth as a group experience more suicidal behavior than other youth. A variety of studies indicate that LGB youth are nearly one and a half to three times more likely to have reported suicidal ideation than non-LGB youth. Research from several sources also revealed that LGB youth are nearly one and a half to seven times more likely than non-LGB youth to have reported attempting suicide. These studies do not include transgender youth.

What the Evidence Tells Us

According to an [Education Resources Information Center \(ERIC\) Digest](#), on community colleges, “a number of problems complicate the study of the LGBT student population. First, since there are no data available on the number of LGBT students in American higher education, it is impossible to determine the size or prevalence of the LGBT student population on community college campuses. Current numbers are grounded in sociological studies dating back more than 50 years. Second, an obstacle to be understood when studying LGBT students is the identification of a population that, due to social stigma, may not wish to be identified. Any study of sexual minorities relies on self-reporting because, by definition, the ‘coming out’ process is a form of self-selection; those who do not come out are never included in research efforts. Finally, this research is being conducted across a disparate set of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, political science, law, and education, making comparisons difficult.”



What Campuses Are Doing

The [REACH program](#) at The Ohio State University has developed a brochure on suicide prevention for GLBT students. The brochure includes both on- and off-campus resources. It points out that “GLBT students, like all college student populations, are at risk for suicide. Research has found that GLBT college students are one of the groups at highest risk for suicide. Different studies have found that “GLBT students have a 2–3 times greater risk of completing suicide than their heterosexual peers; 25 percent of the gay/bisexual identified male college-aged population has made suicidal actions; Lesbian/bisexual identified college students were 3–4 times more likely to consider suicide than their heterosexual peers; and GLBT individuals who are ‘coming out’ are at increased risk for depression, substance abuse, and suicide.”

Campus Pride

[Campus Pride](#) is a national nonprofit organization for student leaders and campus groups working to create a safer college environment for LGBT students. The organization is a volunteer-driven network “for” and “by” student leaders. The primary objective of Campus Pride is to develop necessary resources, programs, and services to support LGBT and ally students (those who support LGBT students) on college campuses across the United States. The [Lambda 10 Project for LGBT Fraternity & Sorority Issues](#) is an educational initiative of Campus Pride.

Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals

The combined vision and mission of the [consortium](#) is to achieve higher education environments in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni have equity in every respect. Its goals are to support colleagues and develop curriculum to professionally enhance this work; to seek climate improvement on campuses; and to advocate for policy change, program development, and establishment of LGBT offices or centers.

According to the consortium, a number of college and universities have implemented educational interventions with names such as Safe Zone, Safe Space, Safe Harbor, and Safe On Campus. The hallmark of these “Safe” programs is the public identification of allies by placing a “Safe” symbol, usually incorporating a pink triangle or rainbow, on office doors or within living spaces. The consortium has a partial list of [campuses that offer some sort of safe zone program](#). “Student affairs professionals, administrators, and faculty only recently have begun to recognize the potential the development of heterosexual allies has for making the culture of a college or university campus more tolerant towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students. Typical components of these ally programs consist of a resource manual and sticker or sign. Some programs go as far as to require an orientation or training session(s) of varying length. Other components may include a listserv, advisory board/committee, web page resources, assessment, periodic socials, and identifying objects such as key chains, buttons, and pens.”

Higher Education Center Resources

- [“Meeting the Prevention Needs of a Diverse Population” \(Catalyst Spring 2007 Vol. 8 No. 3\)](#)
- [Interpersonal Violence and Alcohol and Other Drug Use](#)

Federal Resources

- [President Obama: It Gets Better](#)
- [Sexual Harassment Resources](#)

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