

Educating Student Affairs Professionals about Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues: An Evaluation of an Intervention

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In an effort to prepare student affairs professionals to effectively address gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns on their campuses, the American College Personnel Association developed a workshop entitled the "Beyond Tolerance Roadshow." Participants in six workshops reported the awareness, knowledge, and skills they gained and ways in which they intended to use the information.

Homophobia on college campuses is a major concern. Studies involving heterosexual college students indicate widespread hostile attitudes toward homosexuality and gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) individuals (D'Augelli, 1989; D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Eddy & Forney, 2000; Evans & Rankin, 1998; Rankin, 1998, 2003). LaSalle (1992) reported that faculty and staff, as well as students, hold negative attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. At one large university, 25% of the employees expressed explicitly negative responses in a survey about LGB issues (Eliason, 1996). Reflective of these attitudes, victimization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people is widespread (Berrill, 1990; Evans & Rankin, 1998). Lesbian and gay students are often the target of violence, verbal abuse, and harassment on college campuses (D'Augelli, 1992; Evans & Rankin, 1998) leading many of these students to evaluate the university climate negatively (Reynolds, 1989).

In a NASPA Forum article (Gay activism, 1991), Kevin Berrill was quoted as advocating that all student affairs staff receive training on gay and lesbian issues in order to educate effectively on these concerns. While Hogan and Rentz (1996) noted that student affairs professionals held less homophobic attitudes than faculty, Talbot (1996) found that students in student affairs preparation programs had less than a general knowledge about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and rated their skill and comfort levels with regard to gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues as low.

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That homophobia and heterosexism are concerns in student affairs was demonstrated in a study of the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual student affairs professionals (Croteau & Lark, 1995a). Sixty percent of a national sample of GLB professionals reported at least one experience of job-related homophobic discrimination. Croteau and von Destinon (1994) also reported that 42% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual student affairs professionals who disclosed their sexual orientation during job searches experienced discrimination. In addition, Croteau and Lark (1995b) identified many instances of biased student affairs practice.

Several strategies for educating students about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues have been presented in the literature (for example, Croteau & Kusek, 1992; Croteau & Morgan, 1989; Rudolph, 1989; Schneider & Tremble, 1986; Schreier, 1995; Wall, Washington, Evans, & Papish, 2000); however, none has been directed specifically to student affairs professionals. In addition, Stevenson (1988) was critical of evaluation methods used to assess the impact of sexual orientation educational efforts. Specifically, he stated, "the available evidence does not permit generalization beyond college-level courses or seminars on sexuality and those who choose to participate in them" (p. 508). No evidence is presented in the studies he cited concerning what individuals take away from training workshops or how they intend to use the information they receive.

Geasler, Croteau, Heineman, and Edlund (1995) used a qualitative design to examine student descriptions of their own changes after attending panel presentations by lesbian, gay, and bisexual speakers. This evaluation strategy has great potential for providing valuable information concerning the impact of GLB training workshops on student affairs professionals.

This article describes the "Beyond Tolerance Roadshow," a day-long workshop developed by the American College Personnel Association and delivered on demand around the country to student affairs professionals interested in learning more about issues facing gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals on college campuses. (It should be noted that at the time the workshop was developed, transgender issues were not included. Recently, this omission has been rectified.) The intent of the Roadshow was to educate student affairs professionals to better address sexual orientation issues. In an effort to determine the impact of the workshop, an evaluation was designed that gathered both quantitative and qualitative information concerning participants' learning and how they intended to use the information they had received in the workshop. Demographic information was also collected to determine who was attending the workshops. Results of this evaluation are presented.

Methods

The Beyond Tolerance Roadshow

The Beyond Tolerance Roadshow was developed by the American College Personnel Association under the leadership of a steering committee chaired by Vernon Wall. The Roadshow was an effort to bring low cost education and training related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues to student affairs professionals around the country under the sponsorship of state divisions of ACPA. The program ran for two years, 1993-95. In 2001, the Roadshow was updated and reintroduced using a format similar to the original one.

The following goals were developed for the day-long workshop: (a) help participants to develop strengths in four general content areas: awareness, knowledge, skills, and actions; (b) help participants to develop strategies and action plans to work on these issues on their campuses; and (c) provide an opportunity for participants to meet with other people who deal with these issues on campuses in the region and around the country.

A standard format was developed focusing on awareness, knowledge, skills, and action. In the first section, awareness, participants were provided with opportunities to take inventory of their own myths, missing information, and stereotypes about people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual and how their own actions or inactions contribute to creating and maintaining heterosexist environments. The knowledge section reviewed terminology, myths and facts about GLB people, manifestations of homophobia and heterosexism, GLB identity development, information about GLB lives and culture, heterosexual privilege, and what it means to be an ally. The skills section included assessing campus environments, recognizing and confronting homophobic behavior, and creating a supportive presence on campus. The final section, action, provided participants at different administrative levels or in similar campus roles the opportunity to share resources and discuss strategies to address specific campus concerns and develop action plans based on institutional assessments and available resources.

A panel of student affairs professionals experienced in presenting training on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues volunteered to serve as facilitators for the workshops. The facilitators were each provided with an outline of the workshop goals and format as well as a manual of information, exercises, and activities developed to address the stated goals. An interactive, experiential format was encouraged to engage the participants and allow for interaction and self-exploration. Depending on the number of participants, two or three trainers led each workshop. Although each team followed the workshop outline, trainers were free to choose specific exercises and activities to achieve the workshop goals.

At the completion of each workshop, participants were asked to complete an evaluation. Eighteen questions concerning development of awareness, knowledge, skills, and action were rated on a 7-point scale. In addition, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions: "What is the most significant learning you will take from this workshop?" and "In what ways do you intend to use the information you received in this workshop?"

Participants

Evaluation data were available from six workshops. A total of 204 participants completed questionnaires. Seventy-five men and 129 women were involved. They worked in the following areas of student affairs: residence life (84), counseling (36), student activities (13); 13 did not indicate the area in which they worked. Twenty-six were senior-level professionals, 73 were mid-level professionals, 38 were entry-level professionals, 51 were graduate students, 3 were undergraduate students, and 13 did not indicate their level.

Data Analysis

We conducted a factor analysis on the scaled section of the evaluation. This analysis indicated three factors: knowledge ($\alpha = .89$), awareness and expectation ($\alpha = .87$), and skills and action ($\alpha = .89$). We summed the items on each of the three factors and obtained means and standard deviations. In order to compare scores on each factor, we divided the means and standard deviations by the number of items per factor. We conducted *t*-tests and analyses of variance using each factor as the dependent variable to determine if any differences existed between men and women, between White and non-White participants, among those employed in different areas, and among those at different administrative levels.

We conducted a qualitative analysis of responses to the open-ended questions concerning learnings and intended uses of the information obtained. We analyzed the data by breaking each response into units, with each unit representing a discrete idea, aspect, or concept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, if a respondent indicated that she would use what she learned in programming, in advocating for change on her campus, and in her personal relationships with LGB students, we broke her response into three separate units. We identified each unit with a demographic tag indicating the workshop location and the respondent's gender, race, functional area, years in the field, and sexual orientation, if specified.

Initially, we examined all units and grouped together similar responses. We further examined units grouped together and developed more explicit sub-categorizations. We assigned each grouping a code indicating its category and sub-category. As the coding process continued, more logical and nuanced groupings became evident, and we reworked coding categories to

accommodate these developing understandings. Once one coder had categorized all units, a second person independently placed all units into the existing category structure. The two analysts then compared their coding schemes, discussed discrepancies in coding, and came to consensus as to the final placement of all units.

Findings

Quantitative Analysis

On a scale ranging from (1) *strongly agree* to (7) *strongly disagree*, participants' scores on each factor were as follows: awareness ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.20$), knowledge ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.15$), and skills ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.09$), indicating that they agreed with statements suggesting that they had gained specific benefits from the workshop.

Only one analysis of variance reached significance: residence life staff indicated that they gained more in the skill area than did staff listed as "other" (that is, those staff not in counseling, residence life, or student activities; $F = 2.71$, $df = 3$, $p = .045$). We found no differences in responses between men and women, Whites and non-Whites, or among staff at different administrative levels, nor did we find any differences with regard to changes in awareness or knowledge for any groups.

Qualitative Analysis

We analyzed two open-ended questions, focusing on what individuals learned from the workshop and how they planned to use the information.

Question 1. Answers to the first question, "What did you learn/gain from this workshop?" fell into six categories of responses, encompassing 369 discrete units. The first category addressed *benefits derived from contact with other workshop participants*. Responses in this category constituted approximately 10% of the total responses. Participants identified as valuable receiving and sharing ideas with student affairs professionals from other institutions, knowing that others were having the same problems and experiences, and gaining support from contact with other people working on the same issues. This category was typified by statements such as, "shared ideas are extremely helpful," "the knowledge that there are allies on this campus and support for reform to get things going," and "others are going through what I am."

The second category consisted of responses indicating an *increased acceptance of and comfort with, as well as negation of stereotypes about, people who were lesbian, bisexual, or gay*. While there were relatively few responses in this category (4 of 369), the comments were powerful. For example, one participant wrote of the power of "the presence of many gays, lesbians, and bisexuals who did not represent stereotypes – they destroyed myths."

The third category encompassed responses addressing *the acquisition of specific ideas, materials, and plans for implementing change*. These included acquiring training ideas, programming ideas, and action plans and strategies to create change on their own campuses. This category accounted for the greatest number of responses (76, or 21%). Representative statements included: "I learned about how to do large group in-service training on the topic," increased "possibilities for programs expanding on different aspects of GLB issues," "methods and ways to share information," "strategies to try changing the campus environment from heterosexist to more inclusive" and numerous comments appreciative of the book and training manual.

The fourth category covered some of the *intangible renewing aspects* of the workshop. Units in this category included the gaining of support, pushing oneself to take the next step and senses of renewal, empowerment, commitment, and motivation. Participants identified this type of benefit from the workshop 25 times, accounting for about 7% of the responses. Typical statements in this category included: "I was reminded how much one person can make a difference, especially someone in a position of power," "I am not alone," and "to encourage myself to move one step further toward being more 'out' as an ally."

The fifth category covered an *increase in a variety of different forms of awareness*, particularly around affective issues. Responses in this category constituted roughly 10% of the total ($n=39$). Participants noted greater awareness of their own homophobia, heterosexism, socialization, and campus climate; greater understanding of what lesbian, bisexual, and gay students' experiences are like, and the importance of addressing lesbian, bisexual, and gay issues. This category is different from the second grouping in that responses in the second category dealt with changes in attitude rather than in awareness of the issues. Comments included, "somewhat of a better idea of what it is like to be gay on a campus which is homophobic," "that it is important for those of us who are not gay, lesbian or bisexual to see the importance of these issues, to concern oneself with them," and "understanding of my institution's position on g/l/b issues."

The sixth category reflected participants' gain of a range of *content knowledge*. This category included 64 separate responses, or 17% of the total. Participants described gaining knowledge of definitions, symbols, connection between various forms of oppression, models of identity development, the existence and impact of internalized homophobia, the roles of allies, the experiences of people who are bisexual, and the impact of heterosexism. Comments included statements such as, "the connection between sexism and homophobia," "the privileges I take for granted as a heterosexual," "the idea of being an ally," and

“the understanding of identity development for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and for allies!”

Question 2. Responses to the question, “How will you use this information?” totaled approximately 350 units. While there were many specific areas and uses identified, participants’ responses to this question were much less specific than their answers to the first question. Specific audiences were less often mentioned, and respondents used terms such as “programming,” “training,” and “workshops” seemingly interchangeably. The response that stood out most clearly was that many participants planned to return to their campus and act as trainers on lesbian, bisexual, and gay issues.

Responses fell into the general categories of being an ally/developing an ally program; presenting the material learned in the Roadshow in various formats (training, programming, workshops, teaching) to various audiences (students, other staff); in counseling or in working with lesbian/bisexual/gay student groups, starting or supporting an existing lesbian/bisexual/gay support group (for students or staff); influencing policy development through policy makers; expanding definitions of diversity to include lesbian/bisexual/gay issues and working to create a more affirming campus or department; in responding to incidents of homophobia; in general interactions and discussions with peers; in continuing one’s own learning; in one’s personal life; and in direct action and social activism. Additionally, numerous less specific comments were offered, including statements to the effect of “I will use this in working with students.”

Discussion

The results of this evaluation suggest that training related to LGB issues on campus can be successful in increasing participants’ self-reported awareness, knowledge, and skills related to this topic. In all of these areas, respondents indicated that they have made positive gains as a result of their participation in the Beyond Tolerance Roadshow. These results are encouraging and suggest that the resources that go into the development of such workshops are worthwhile. Individuals who report that they have made gains in awareness, knowledge, and skills do not necessarily use what they have learned but the likelihood that they will do so is greater.

Residence life staff, more than individuals working in areas other than residence life, student activities, and counseling, felt that they had gained skills for addressing lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in their work sites. Because residence life staff engage in so many types of activities and are involved in so many aspects of students’ lives, it may be easier to identify specific ways in which they can address LGB issues than it is in other areas of student affairs. Staff in specialized areas included in the “other” category might have more limited interactions with students or fewer opportunities to address LGB

issues. In developing training programs, it is important to ensure that specific examples and skills applicable to a variety of settings are included.

The majority of answers to the question asking what participants found most useful about the workshop dealt with gains in knowledge about particular content issues, specific training and programming ideas, as well as action plans. It appears that participants found valuable both the more theoretical and the more practical aspects of the program. Designing balanced workshops addressing both of these components is important. Participants want and need to understand both the rationale for interventions and how to develop strategies that actually work in practice.

The opportunity to interact with others interested in LGB issues was also important. Participants looked to other participants as well as the presenters for ideas, support, and feedback. LGB topics are often invisible and not discussed on college campuses. Providing a “safe space” in which to openly explore these issues with others is a critical component of LGB training initiatives.

Addressing the affective components of the subject is as critical in LGB workshops as providing cognitively focused material. Many participants indicated that they became more accepting of and more comfortable with LGB issues as a result of their attendance at the workshop. Others suggested that they became more aware of affective issues or more motivated and supported to continue their work in this area. Often it seems having information about LGB concerns on campus is not enough to propel individuals to action; they must also be emotionally prepared to engage in the demanding and stressful work it entails.

The question addressing how participants intended to use their learning elicited a great variety of responses, including plans both to take specific actions and to engage in more personally reflective activity. Participants indicated that they would take action both in the immediate program areas they supervised and on the level of the entire campus, both with students and with faculty, staff, and people in the personal lives of the participants. The sheer variety of ways in which participants planned to use the training is remarkable. The Roadshow clearly contributed to their desire to make a difference on their campuses both programmatically and as an ally supporting LGB individuals in personal and individualized ways. It also motivated participants to learn more and to challenge themselves to become more active and vocal about LGB issues.

Implications and Next Steps

While much has changed since the early days of “gay awareness” programs on college and university campuses, it seems that some things remain the same. There is still a level of discomfort in discussing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender issues. Homophobia and heterosexism continue to impact campus communities. Verbal and physical harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals are still commonplace on many campuses (Rankin, 2003). Based on these issues and the results of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Student affairs divisions should offer in-depth training sessions for staff to enable them to effectively address lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in their areas of responsibility. Literature (for example, Talbot, 1996) suggests that student affairs professionals are not well prepared to address lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues. The popularity of the Beyond Tolerance Roadshows, as well as the comments made by participants, indicates that student affairs professionals recognize that they need more training and information about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues to be effective in their positions. For instance, participants stated that the Roadshow had helped them learn. “how to program for students to raise awareness,” provided “practical applications for educating on campus,” suggested “what the counseling center can do to support a G/L/B affirming environment,” raised awareness about “the need for and possibility of developing GLB-sensitive campus workshops,” and provided information on “how to train staff to raise awareness.” It is not unreasonable to expect student affairs divisions to provide education to prepare their staff in these areas. Student affairs divisions have a responsibility to ensure that their staff are prepared to work with all students and to build communities where each person feels welcome and included.

2. Institutions should continue to offer general gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender awareness programs for students, faculty, and staff. Participants in our study indicated that programs related to lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues are still far too infrequent on college campuses. For many participants, the workshop offered an opportunity to “develop specific strategies to deal with GLB concerns,” ways to “educate others,” and suggestions to “encourage expansion of diversity issues to include GLB issues.” Programs that allow participants to identify feelings and gain knowledge related to this topic will aid in developing a more supportive university community. Recently, transgender issues have also been included in the Beyond Tolerance Roadshows. The needs of transgender students, as well as students with multiple oppressed identities, must also be addressed in campus-based programs.

3. Institutions should provide “action” and “strategy development” sessions and programs in relation to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues for faculty, students, and staff. Our data suggested that participants were particularly appreciative of suggestions for specific actions and strategies that could be implemented on their campuses. Participants noted that “it was good

to have new materials and exercises to use,” that they appreciated learning “about how to do large group in-service training on the topic,” and that the “action plans” developed in the workshop were the most helpful aspect of the Roadshow. Many campus communities are asking the question: “After knowledge and awareness, what’s next?” Action and strategies are next. Facilitated discussions on change management will move participants toward developing interventions that foster inclusion.

4. Professional associations should provide professional development opportunities for student affairs practitioners, faculty, and graduate students to develop needed skills in order to better support transgender, bisexual, gay, and lesbian students. Participants who attended the ACPA Roadshow programs asked for additional offerings in the area of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender awareness. In particular, participants wanted more in-depth training and longer workshops to cover more material. Participants also asked that workshops be offered in additional sites so that more professionals can participate in awareness building and skill development. Our professional associations have a responsibility to address these felt needs of their members.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students have made strides on our college and university campuses toward having their voices be heard. As a profession, we should work to provide opportunities for practitioners, faculty, and graduate students to gain skills and a sense of renewal along with providing support for students. The Beyond Tolerance Roadshow has been a start. It is now time for the next step – increased initiatives to train and support professionals on individual campuses and greater recognition of the importance of these efforts.

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