Creating LGBTQ+ Inclusive Curriculum and Classroom Spaces at Colleges and Universities: A Guide for Faculty/Instructors
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www.rainbowcenter.uconn.edu

Mission: “The Rainbow Center serves the University of Connecticut’s diverse community of gender identities, gender expressions, and romantic and sexual orientations by fostering student personal growth, leadership development, community engagement; and providing resources, services, education, training and advocacy.”
Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the initiative to look for resources to make your curriculum and classroom more inclusive. This guide is meant to serve as a starting point for instructors and professors to create more welcoming and safe spaces at colleges and universities for LGBTQ+ students. LGBTQ+ is a common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer plus community. While LGBTQ+ is the acronym used in this guide, we know that some identities are not mentioned in the LGBTQ+ acronym such as asexual, intersex and pansexual, but this information is applicable to students of all SOGIE identities (sexuality and (romantic) orientation, gender identity and gender expressions). Please refer to the SOGIE dictionary at http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/sogie/ for more definitions.

Please keep in mind that LGBTQ/LGBTQ+/LGB/GL may be used throughout the guide to reflect the research that it is referring to. Each study focused on subsets of the larger LGBTQ+ community and therefore it is not generalizable. There are universal strategies and approaches in the guide, in addition to specific strategies for certain areas of study.

Additionally, language and strategies are fluid and dynamic, thus this guide will likely need to be updated to reflect the changes. Should you discover additional resources or have suggestions, please send them to rainbowcenter@uconn.edu. All submissions will be taken under consideration for future updates.

Sincerely,
Fleurette King, Director
She/Her/Hers or Per

P.S. Should a gender non-conforming or transgender student or colleague seek UConn resources, they can find the Gender Transition Guidelines on the UConn ODE website: http://ode.uconn.edu/diversity/.
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Why create an inclusive classroom environment and syllabi for SOGIE?

Colleges and universities, like other social institutions and society, can be very oppressive places. Connell (1996) found two problematic forms of injustice in schools: “oppression, which restricts the capacity for self-expression; and domination, which restricts participation in social decision-making... Harassment, homophobic abuse, the hierarchy of masculinities, bullying, racial vilification are examples” (pp. 223–224). Oppression and domination are premised on the exclusion of others; LGBTQ+ youth are often marginalized which impinges their self-expression and full participation in school (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014).

Greater awareness and training are essential parts of efforts to systemically challenge heterosexual privilege and address homophobic harassment and gender violence in school spaces (Adams, Cox, & Dunstan, 2004; Chaub, Laub, & Wall, 2004; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Walton, 2004).

If you think “my courses have nothing to do with diversity”, there are ways to bring inclusivity into your courses. Even if your course’s content does not directly link with issues of diversity and inclusivity, these topics and dialogues can still happen in those spaces. Students learn best when they are respected and safe (Armstrong, 2011).

Why?

- National Higher Education Survey found that only slightly more the 50% of respondents felt that classrooms were accepting of LGBT people and only 22% reported that course curricula adequately represented the contributions of LGBT people (Rankin, 2003).
- “Inclusion of LGBT content in college courses is also believed to increase students’ tolerance of diverse sexualities and gender presentations (Case, et al., 2009; Fletcher & Russell, 2001).
- “Inclusion of LGBTQ+ content in higher education may promote more accepting attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people and families, and help to reduce LGBTQ+ individual’s exposure to stigma, indeed, LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff disproportionately experience harassment at U.S. colleges and universities (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Fraser, 2010).”
- “Educators who lack knowledge about or are uncomfortable with LGBTQ+ issues may implicitly marginalize them in the classroom, for example, by relegating them to a single lecture in which LGBTQ+ individuals and families are simply described as alternatives to the norm (Allen, 1995; Campbell, 2012). (Kuvalanka, Goldberg, & Oswald, 2013, p. 700).”
- Content specific methods and strategies are needed to be the most effective in the classroom.
- Important definitions (for more visit: http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/sogie/):
  - LGBTQIA: A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual community.
- **Heterosexism**: Prejudice against individuals and groups who display nonheterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice – backed by institutional power– that subordinates people because of their sexual orientation.

- **heteronormativity**: The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

- **heterosexual privilege**: Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to people of other sexualities. Also, the benefits LGBTQIA people receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying their identity.

- **homophobia**: The irrational fear or hatred of those that identify as homosexual, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid binary sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

- **trans**: An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender variant person. This use allows a person to state a gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender variant community as a whole.

- **transgender**: A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on biological sex. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity.

- **transphobia**: The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

**What you can do within your departments?** (adapted from Fordham’s “Creating LGBTQ Inclusive Curriculum and Classroom Climate)

- Promote new thinking about course offerings and course content
- Provide opportunity for discussion and faculty support
- Provide mentorship for teaching fellows, adjunct instructors and junior faculty
- Develop discipline-relevant resource lists
- Increase faculty and student awareness of LGBTQ+ resources at UConn

**Dealing with Potential Barriers**

- Addressing ignorant or negative viewpoints – rather than airing for live debate – can be appropriate and worthwhile (Kuvalanka, Goldberg, & Oswald, 2013)
  - Given that anti-LGBTQ+ views on the part of government and religious leaders and others are shared widely via media and continue to be institutionalized via social policies and laws
  - Instructors can help students identify different positions on different issues and can emphasize basis for differing views
Promote critical thinking

  - Dismissal is the most consistent form of resistance students have to learning about homophobia and heterosexism
  - Lack of experience with adult dialogues around SOGIE has not allowed many students to develop the skills to have mature conversations about these topics
  - Sometimes learning about hot topics is difficult and uncomfortable
  - See additional resources (Warren’s article has tips for turning “hot moments” into “teachable ones”)

Tools at the University of Connecticut
There are many tools offered by the Rainbow Center to use in educating your students and creating a safer and more inclusive classroom environment. Please feel free to visit http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/ or stop by the center (Student Union 4th floor room 403). http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/huskyally/ has a list of available dates and times for trainings.

- **Husky Safe Zone Training (2.5 hours):** The training session offers a highly interactive learning experience about how to create a safe space for UConn’s diverse community of gender identities, gender expressions, and sexualities. This could include, but is not limited to lesbian, bisexual, gay, asexual, aromantic, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, pansexual, two-spirit people. Please send an email to huskyally@uconn.edu for any further information on the Husky Safe Zone Training Program.

- **Husky D.O.G (Diversity of Gender) Training (2.0 hours):** This training session will offer specific strategies, tools, and model practices for creating safer classrooms and workplaces for UConn’s diverse community of gender identities and expressions. The interactive training aims to engage participants to allow for a thoughtful and productive learning experience that will contribute to a positive campus climate for those who may identify as trans*, gender non-conforming, agender, and many others along the gender spectrum. The facilitators will share information, experiences, positive ways of communicating, policies, procedures, and resources. Please send an email to huskyally@uconn.edu for any further information on the Husky D.O.G. Training Program.

- **Group/Staff training:** Husky Safe Zone Training and Husky D.O.G. Training are available outside of the scheduled dates. Also, if you would like staff/group training on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, a training session can be designed and facilitated. To schedule group/staff training, please contact huskyally@uconn.edu with the number of people (minimum of 12 participants is required), date, time allotment, and location. We will do our best to accommodate your group.
• **SOGIE Dictionary**: SOGIE is an acronym for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression. This dictionary serves to give one the vocabulary to learn about our community. It is available to download at: [http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/sogie/](http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/sogie/)

• **Gender Pronoun Etiquette Guide** which also includes the **Ask for Pronoun campaign**.

• **Additional resources**: Additional resources are available online and within the Rainbow Center. The Rainbow Center Library, which is the largest resource for LGBTQ+ media in the state of Connecticut, has VHS, DVDs, books, and magazines. If you are interested in accessing the library, please visit the center and ask a student at the front desk for assistance. Some online resources can be found here: [http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/resources](http://rainbowcenter.uconn.edu/resources)

**Universal Strategies/Approaches** (Kuvalanka, Goldberg, & Oswald, 2013, Fradella et al., 2009, Simoni, 1996, Fordham, 2013)

• **Ask students for pronouns and their chosen name** on the first day of class, and use those pronouns throughout ([https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/](https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/))
  - What are pronouns?: A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). Gender pronouns (like he and hers) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.
  - Why is it important to respect people’s pronouns?
    - You can’t always know what someone’s pronoun is by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone’s personal pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
  - When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above.)
  - Pronouns can be introduced during introductions (“Everyone say your name, pronouns, and where you are from”) or you can pass around an “intake form” and ask questions about the student and include an option for their pronoun.
  - Some examples of commonly used pronouns (See UConn’s Gender Pronoun Etiquette Guide)
Students may self-disclose their SOGIE status before you ask
- Some students may e-mail you prior to the semester or after an incident occurs to let you know their chosen name and/or gender pronouns. Please respect this information and use the correct and pronoun in class. Please maintain confidentiality and be sure to share student’s chosen name and pronouns with the TA. Some information that students share with you may be personal and unnecessary to share with the TA, specifically biological information.

- **Use “real-life” LGBTQ+ stories**
  - Show movies, TV clips, documentaries
  - Show videos of LGBTQ+ people
  - Bring in guest speakers/panels

- **Discuss in “matter-of-fact” manner**
  - Emphasize importance of understanding research/facts as opposed to beliefs/opinions
  - Model openness and acceptance
  - Emphasize relation of content to students’ future work as family professionals

- **Integrate LGBTQ+ issues throughout**
  - Weave LGBTQ+ content and materials throughout the course curriculum
  - Use LGBTQ+ people and families in practical, general examples
  - Use examples of LGBTQ+ people in neutral contexts (e.g., in test items that pertain to general topics)

- **Use experiential activities/assignments**
  - Role plays, conducting interviews
  - Push students beyond comfort zone
  - Way to deconstruct social categories
  - Keep all students (including LGBTQ+ individuals) in mind when developing

- **Create comfortable classroom climate**
  - Administer anonymous survey to exhibit students’ range of viewpoints/knowledge
  - Make asking questions/showing of ignorance ok and use them as teachable moments, not as moments of embarrassment or shame
Master the art of “bumbling”

- Rather than avoiding LGBTQ+ topics for fear of saying the wrong thing, acknowledge misstatements, commit to educating yourself and address student misconceptions/discomforts the following week

Work to surrender your “privilege of unknowing” (Armstrong, 2011)

- Power has the luxury of not seeing what surrounds it (Sedgewich, 123)
- Example: if you say “when you and your spouse file a joint tax return…” you are excluding many LGBTQ+ individuals
- Experiences that you may cite as universal may vary with economic status, social privilege, and cultural context

Challenge heterosexist assumptions

- Stop perpetuating the heterosexism is the norm
- Develop inclusive rather than “us/them” terminology
  - Instead of saying “Even though it is outside our experience, we need to try and understand the life challenges of persons who are LGBTQ+”, say “All student benefit from understanding the life challenges of persons who are LGBTQ+”

Create a classroom climate in which the perspectives of LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students are valued

- Requires both the continued affirmation of LGBTQ+ human rights and dignity as well as sensitivity to heterosexual students who may be struggling with societal and personal biases and misconceptions

- Increase visibility of LGBTQ role models and allies
  - “Whether or not one identifies as LGBTQ, all faculty can be visible as LGBTQ allies (participating in LGBTQ programming, bringing in openly LGBTQ speakers or using articles by openly LGBTQ authors)”

- Be proactive in demonstrating values around inclusivity (Armstrong, 2011)
  - Syllabi statements that require respectful behavior
  - Rules for group project work that discuss challenging stereotyped behavior (ex: men typically report for groups, while women tend to act as notetakers)

- Ask for feedback
  - Provide students with an anonymous opportunity to provide feedback about the climate of your course

- Never assume
  - Don’t make assumptions about the identities of your students
  - Focus on creating an inclusive classroom for everybody

- Add your pronouns to your e-mail
  - By adding your pronouns to your e-mail, it shows students that you are aware that pronouns are important and provides them evidence of how you identify.
  - Example:
Strategies for Specific Areas of Study

Strategies for Human Development Courses (including: family studies, sociology, psychology, education, marriage and family therapy, social work, etc.)

- Abroad there have been a great deal of advances in the development of appropriate LGBTQ+ teach education and the U.S is behind (Szalacha, 2004)
- Important for students to understand “especially if they are aiming to become professionals who can competently provide services to a diverse range of individuals and families” (Kuvalanka, Goldberg, & Oswald, 2013, p. 700)
- Ideal opportunity to foster awareness, understanding and support for LGBT use in schools (Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007)
- **Education specific:** A school in Canada has two mandatory courses for education majors that are LGBTQ+ training courses and the “focus is to provide teachers with the opportunity to explore LGBTQ+ realities and examine terminology and marginalization and consider ways to be responsive and responsible in schools” (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner, & Thompkins, 2014, p. 3).
  - Including: how to interrupt stereotypes, consider LGBTQ+ representation in curricula and intervene when they witness homophobia and transphobia in their workplace or community
  - “Pre-service and in-service trainings are associated with greater knowledge and more positive attitudes regarding LGBTQ+ individuals” (Szalacha, 2004, pg. 71)
  - “Despite some students who voiced resistance, 62% of students reported ways that they were beginning to wear the mantle of advocate for LG youth and began to understand and own their ‘duty’ to be inclusive of LG youth (Szalacha, 2014, pg. 72).”
  - Students who were preparing to teach the sciences, math and technology, saw themselves as teachers of discipline, not people and assume the heterosexuality of their students and are concerned with teaching to the “majority” culture (Szalacha, 2014)
  - Because there is an absence of institutional support, “teachers must educate themselves about diverse gay, lesbian and bi communities and explore their own attitudes and feelings before attempting to teach (Loutzenheiser, 1996, pg. 62).”
  - In structured courses, “they can receive training on how to effectively intervene in the harassment and abuse of students, identify, and help counter risk behaviors, and to handle the discomfort of colleagues, students, and parents (Lipkin, 1999)."
Teacher education is presently being asked to demonstrate leadership in LGBTQ+ awareness and ally building (Dyck, 2012; GLSEN, 2007; Taylor et al., 2009, 2011). This is critical, as many future teachers are not prepared to address “issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the classroom” (Stiegler, 2008, p. 117).

- **Psychology specific**: work in LGBTQ+-specific topics into courses, i.e. “coming out as a developmental process (Simoni, 1996, p. 701).”

**Strategies for STEM courses** (including, medicine, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)

- The field of sciences and queer studies typically fall into different realms and philosophies (Toynton, 2007)
  - “Queer science students, in addition to feeling marginalized by a heteronormative environment, may therefore feel that their intellectual passions are misrepresented by the various agencies involved in the queer discourse from which they deserve support (Toynton, 2007, pg. 597).”
  - Ideology that gender and sexuality are social constructs devalues science as a field and can make it difficult for science students to identify both within their field and as a member of the LGBTQ community
  - Lack of awareness by students and faculty contribute to feeling of “other” by LGBTQIA students, which creates feelings of vulnerability and isolation
    - Also causes students to monitor thoughts and actions and to regulate behavior
    - This marginalization can become self-marginalization, which can create low self-esteem and undermine confidence in learning
  - The field has a “classification culture” and can exacerbate stereotypes

- Some potential issues in medical curriculum that can be applied to other STEM areas (Cheng & Yang, 2015):
  - Gendered stereotypes of physiological knowledge
  - Biased treatment of women
  - Stereotyped gender-based division of labor (sexism)
  - Heterosexual masculinity as dominant culture

- Potential strategies to create a more inclusive environment (Cheng & Yang, 2015):
  - Separating physiological knowledge from gender stereotyping in teaching
    - Do not use anecdotes at the expense of LGBTQ and female identities
  - Highlighting the importance of gender sensitivity in the language used within and outside the classroom by teachers and students
    - Pointing out inappropriate language and stereotyping
  - Broaden the horizons of both teachers and students by recounting examples of the lived experiences of marginalized populations, including LGBTQ
    - Using examples with women and LGBTQ individuals
    - Use inclusive language that is not male-centric
Strategies for Business/Law courses

- Nearly ¼ of law students witnessed or experienced discrimination in law school because of their sexual orientation or identity (Strader et al, 2008)

  - Offers practical strategies to make the tax curriculum more inclusive

  - Offers best practices for improving law school climate (including: course offerings, coverage of GLBT legal issues, classroom climate, GLBT student organizations and activities, admission, retention efforts, financial aid, career services, and alumni relations)
Policies in Place at the University of Connecticut

All syllabi must contain a statement about the policy against discrimination, harassment and inappropriate romantic relationships:

“The University is committed to maintaining an environment free of discrimination or discriminatory harassment directed toward any person or group within its community – students, employees, or visitors. Academic and professional excellence can flourish only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. All members of the University community are responsible for the maintenance of an academic and work environment in which people are free to learn and work without fear of discrimination or discriminatory harassment. In addition, inappropriate Romantic relationships can undermine the University’s mission when those in positions of authority abuse or appear to abuse their authority. To that end, and in accordance with federal and state law, the University prohibits discrimination and discriminatory harassment, as well as inappropriate Romantic relationships, and such behavior will be met with appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the University.” (Found at http://itl.uconn.edu/syllabus-design/. More information is available at http://policy.uconn.edu/?p=2884.)

The full policy can be found here: http://policy.uconn.edu/2013/08/07/policy-against-discrimination-harassment-and-inappropriate-romantic-relationships/

Where to Direct Students if they Experience Discrimination

The Office of Diversity and Equity - http://ode.uconn.edu/discrimination/
Additional Resources


Creating Inclusive Classrooms

- Creating Inclusive College Classrooms: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1

Dealing with Resistance to Learning

- Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html
References


