

12 Keys to Creating an Inclusive Classroom Community for LGBTQ Students

Most faculty members want to be as supportive as possible to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) students but aren't sure how best to do so. Student Affairs research shows that the campus climate affects student experiences. How students experience their campus environment influences both learning and developmental outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Discriminatory environments have a negative effect on student learning (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedron, 1999). The unfortunate reality is that few campuses are safe spaces for LGBTQ students.

- Rankin's (2010) campus climate data in 2003 showed that 43% and 2010 31% of LGBTQ students felt their campus was homophobic.
- Challenging experiences with Campus Climate + Negative Perceptions of Campus Climate = Lack of Success for Students and faculty and staff → decrease in persistence and retention
- Rankin (2010) LGBTQ students have decreased rates of persistence. 33% of LGBQ respondents seriously considered leaving their institution due to the challenging climate and 38% of Trans students. However, it's important to consider how many students were not surveyed because they already left their institution of higher education because of the challenging climate.
- Rankin (2010) found that 13% of LGBQ students and 43% of Trans student feared for their physical safety on their college campuses. Rankin also found that 43% of LGBQ students and 63% of Trans students concealed their identity to avoid intimidation.
- Halpin & Allen (2004) found that during the sexual identity development stages the psychosocial well being of students drops significantly during the confusion, comparison and tolerance stages. College and high school is most often the time students are going through these stages.
- Marshal et al. (2008) found that LGB youth were 190% more likely then heterosexual student to use substances (drug use and abuse).
- Woodford, Howell, Silverschanz, & Yu (in review) found that hearing "that's so gay" negatively affected the students perception of being accepted on campus, increased the frequency of headaches and of having trouble eating.

As a result, more and more faculty members are looking for help in supporting their LGBTQ students, and college campuses are looking for proactive ways to create a safer environment for students of all sexual orientations. To try to offer support, I have compiled a list of 12 things faculty can do to create a more inclusive classroom environment for LGBTQ students. Though these can in no way be comprehensive, they are meant to be a starting place for better supporting our LGBTQ students in the classroom environment.



The Twelve Keys to Building an Inclusive Classroom Community: Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Students

1. **Use inclusive language**
 - Use precise terms like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) rather than homosexual or gay as an umbrella term.
 - Use terms like partner instead of boyfriend and girlfriend or husband and wife.
2. **Never tolerate abusive language in your classroom or in the halls**
 - Language like, “That’s so gay” or “You’re such a fag” is common in schools, and it actively creates an unsafe environment for LGBTQ students and LGBTQ Allies. We must respond to (and be sure not to ignore such language).
 - Don’t simply be punitive with hurtful language. Instead, explain why it is not welcome and is hurtful. This helps students understand why they shouldn’t use the language rather than just making them avoid using it around you.
3. **Never assume heterosexuality**
 - Building relationships with students is wonderful! Ask about students’ lives, but don’t assume heterosexuality in your language. A question like, “Are you seeing anybody these days?” goes a lot further than, “Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?”
4. **Maintain confidentiality within the confines of your professional responsibilities**
 - There are certain things like abuse that we cannot keep confidential, but outside of that, make sure students feel safe by always keeping what they share confidential.
 - Create a space in which students can talk to you about their struggles, helping all students to understand that you are someone they can talk to during free time.
 - Be careful never to “out” an LGBTQ student, meaning that if a student is not open in their sexual orientation and they share that with you, be careful not to share that information with others. Sometimes being out can be more dangerous than being closeted.
5. **Keep an eye out for bullying and act to stop it**
 - It’s tough to know the best way to respond to bullying. Sometimes it means interrupting bullying as it happens. Sometimes it means talking to the bullies or the bullied afterward.
 - In responding to bullying, be careful to not make the target out to be the weak one in the situation, as that can make bullying worse in the long run.
 - [ASU’s Policy on Harassment](#)
 - [ASU’s Procedure for Investigating Violations to the Harassment Policy](#)
6. **Respect the needs and wishes of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual students**
 - Support them in their decisions and their needs, helping them to make safe choices that will help them be happy and fully realized as a young person.
 - Questions like, “Are you sure?” “Could this be a phase?” are not helpful.



7. **Respect the needs and wishes of Transgender students**
 - Respect the names students wish to be called and the pronouns they prefer. When unsure, ask the individual one on one with empathy and respect.
 - Respect the clothing choices students make, supporting them as they figure out how they want to perform their gender.
 - Be aware of the usage of a class roster system (people soft for example) for attendance purposes or visibly displayed to the class, the name listed on the roster may not be the student's preferred name and could out the student to classmates. Transgender students often do not have the money to legally change their name.
8. **Encourage respectful disagreement on issues of sexual identity**
 - Dialogue and discussion inside and outside the classroom are helpful and healthy so long as respectful. Don't shut down conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity, but make sure to facilitate the conversation down inclusive roads and correct misconceptions.
9. **Don't ask people to speak for an entire group**
 - Minority students often report either feeling invisible in class, or sticking out like a sore thumb as the token minority. This experience is heightened when they are addressed as spokespeople for their whole group, and can have implications on performance (Lord & Saenz, 1985).
10. **Examine your curriculum**
 - Are certain perspectives systematically not represented in your course materials (e.g., a course on family focusing only on traditional families, or a course on public policy ignoring race issues)? Neglecting some issues implies a value judgment (hooks 1994), which can alienate certain groups of students. Please refer to the "Suggestions to Incorporate LGBT Subject Matter Into Class Curriculum" document.
11. **Recognize that you're not an expert. You will make mistakes and occasionally be insensitive**
 - Humble yourself and apologize where necessary; learn from your mistakes, and always try to broaden your understanding of LGBTQ issues so you can best support all of your students.
12. **Acknowledge that building an inclusive community is better for everyone, and fight to make it a school-wide priority**
 - Inclusive communities [experience less bullying and violence](#).
 - Inclusive communities are likely to boast higher achievement and stronger school spirit.
 - [ASU's Policy on Harassment](#)
 - [ASU's Procedure for Investigating Violations to the Harassment Policy](#)

For more ideas for building an inclusive community, [check out the recommendations for positive interventions and support from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network](#).

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LGBT Certificate Program and LGBTQA Services

Email: lgbtqa@asu.edu

Tx: **480.727.0840**

