

Supporting Our Transgender Students

Developed by the team at Montclair State University
Team Leader: Christopher Trautman

Points of Pride

An internal evaluation of Centrist College's support for its LGBTQ community revealed three major strengths, henceforth referred to as Points of Pride. These include:

1. Ongoing institutional commitment to its LGBTQ community
2. Campus Safety - including outreach and training for public safety officers
3. Academic Life - including support and direction for all LGBTQ students

Institutional Commitment and Support

Centrist College, under the leadership of Pres. Fogg, has redoubled its commitment to support its LGBTQ community, especially its transgender population, in the following ways:

- **Advisory committee for LGBTQ issues**
 - Includes paid staff with responsibilities regarding LGBTQ support
 - Increased awareness and promotions of transgender student issues & potential concerns
- **Seeks to employ diverse faculty & staff, including those from LGBTQ community**
- **Ally program & on-campus Safe Zone**
 - Includes Tier I & Tier II level training for Allies (Kearns, et al., 2014)
 - Training for faculty encourages ties to LGBTQ issues in relevant course content
 - Established Safe Zones on campus with trained faculty and staff

Campus Safety

In an effort to better protect and serve LGBTQ students on campus, the following are standard operating procedure at Centrist College (Campus Pride Index, 2016)

- Procedure for reporting LGBTQ hate crimes
- Training for public safety officers to help prevent & address hate crimes
- Ongoing outreach to LGBTQ community and organizations on campus
 - A redoubled effort will be made regarding outreach & partnerships based upon the recommendations of this training
- Sensitivity & awareness training for public safety officers in regards to LGBTQ identity, expression, etc.

At Risk Academically

According to Kerr & Multon (2015), academic high-achievers who identify as LGBTQ can lead to a sense of being ‘twice-different’

- ‘Gifted’ students (i.e. those in advanced or honors courses) are at high risk of experiencing difficulty fitting in with social groups, especially in primary and secondary school
- LGBTQ students often feel like they are on the outside looking in, hence the concept of feeling ‘twice-different’
- As they reach the tertiary level (i.e. Centrist College), gifted LGBTQ students are more prone to search for social acceptance and safety, prioritizing these needs above their academic potential
- Being ‘twice-different’ leads some to shy away from rigorous academics in an attempt to ‘fit in’
- As a result, many sacrifice career goals, potentially abandoning them altogether - essentially, many fear living up to their true potential

Academic Rigor & Support

In an attempt to combat these risks, Centrist College engages its LGBTQ community through training its faculty and staff

In particular, Career Services and Academic Advising professionals are trained to:

- Recognize LGBTQ students at risk of sacrificing academic potential
- Encourage students to pursue coursework that they find appealing and most interesting, not only 'safe' or 'gender-appropriate' majors, minors, etc.
- Support students who feel 'twice-different' based upon their LGBTQ identity and academic prowess

Challenge Areas

A similar internal evaluation revealed several key areas where faculty and staff at Centrist College could make broad improvements to better support students, henceforth referred to as Challenge Areas. These include:

1. Residence Life
2. Student Activities
3. Counseling and Psychological Services

Residence Life

[The Campus Pride Index](#) offers “best practices” for Residence Life programs to ensure that they meet this mission. Some of those metrics where Centrist falls short are:

- Establishing LGBTQ living learning communities, as further supported by Pasque and Murphy (2005)
 - provides students with safe space, connections to others experiencing similar gender identity-related challenges
- Offering transgender student-friendly matching options in random roommate/suitemate pairings
 - helps to curb potential for transphobic matching, which could have negative developmental consequences for all students involved, but specifically for our transgender students

Student Activities

Transgender college students develop in ways different from their cisgender peers. Bilodeau (2005) adapted D'Augelli's LGB identity development model for transgender students, demonstrating the need to give this population special considerations. Since we do not have an LGBTQ coordinator, many of these responsibilities fall to our Office of Student Activities. They currently face challenges in:

- Offering workshops on transgender identity development for our faculty/staff
 - especially important for our “helping” professionals who interact with many students, and should do so with an understanding of those students' experiences
- Programming in ways that support transgender students and meaningfully educate the community

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

According to McKinney (2005), many LGBTQ students report to researchers that they are dissatisfied with the inclusive competencies of university counselors. Centrist College currently does not assess student satisfaction with CAPS using this metric; as such we do not know how supported our transgender students feel when they utilize CAPS. They currently face challenges in:

- Providing counselor-specific training to CAPS staff to address the needs of transgender students in these settings
- Facilitating support groups for transgender students (both undergraduate and graduate)
- Collaborating with other departments (such as Health Services, Residence Life, and Student Activities) to provide educational and engaging transgender/ally-friendly events to the community

Prescribed Action Plan

- Engage with and improve Campus Ecology
 - Gender Inclusive Housing
 - Gender Inclusive Bathrooms
- Enhance Health Services
- Resources for Transgender Students
 - University Healthcare
 - Options for personally identified name/pronoun/gender recognition

Campus Ecology

The relationship between a student and their environment is essential for their success (Evans et. al, 2010). With LGBTQ students, having gender inclusive housing will create an environment that is welcome to all students.

- Gender-Inclusive Housing (GIH): when students of “different legal sexes” live in the same space (Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013).
- A study of 18 college GIH housing policies found that transgender students take GIH options into account when deciding to attend a university (Krum, Davis, and Galupo, 2013)
- To support the implementation of GIH at a university, policies and procedures should include:
 - Sensitivity to the needs of residents, an “opting in” policy, an orientation for housing, as well as signing an appropriate agreement (Krum, Davis, and Galupo, 2013)

Enhance Health Services

- University Healthcare coverage for transition costs
- Offer counseling services with trained counselors who are aware of the needs and experiences of transgender students
- Healthcare professionals at colleges and universities will: educate themselves on “transgender health care needs, which include health promotion, health prevention, chronic medication monitoring, adverse effects monitoring, and surveillance screening” (Hicks, Schafersman, Schmotzer, Spencer, & Tyler-Simonson, 2014)

Enhance Support Resources

- Hire a LGBTQ Coordinator within the Student Activities Office
 - Include transgender education in programming efforts
- Create a mentoring program for transgender students adjusting to college
 - Program is option for students comfortable with self-disclosing
 - Mentors are trained Allies or members of the LGBTQ community
- Enhance systems and procedures to recognize more than two genders (Seelman, 2014)
 - Name change/preference for students
 - Allow students to fill in their gender on forms to identify themselves
 - Encourage the use of pronoun identification

Final Thoughts

Supporting our transgender students benefits both them and the larger Centrist College Community. As our culture progresses and shifts to become more inclusive to students of all identities, so must we as a leading institution of higher education.

Questions?

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