

COMMITTEE ON GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES REPORT FOR 2013–2014

I. Statement of the Committee Function or Charge

The Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues was created in 1994 by the Faculty Senate as the Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues and was charged with reporting to the Senate on the state of the curriculum and campus climate for LGB students, faculty, and staff. Although in subsequent years the committee was reorganized as a joint-governance committee and renamed to explicitly encompass the concerns of transgenderⁱ community members, its core mission remains the same. By recommendation of a previous assessment, the committee offers a formal report at least every three years. The last report (Faculty Document 2289) was presented to the Senate in 2011.

II. Current and Past Year's Activities

During the 2013–2014 academic year, the committee met on a monthly basis, focusing on the following issues: (1) Improving the visibility of and climate for trans students, staff, and faculty on campus; (2) Establishing metrics to assess the climate for the LGBTQ community at UW–Madison; (3) Supporting the activities of the LGBTQ Campus Center, the LGBTQ Studies Certificate Program, and the new Open House Learning Community; and (4) Connecting with existing campus-wide efforts to improve diversity and climate at UW–Madison. The committee met with Interim Vice Provost Patrick Sims along with Carl Hampton and Ruby Paredes to expand the working relationship between the Office of Diversity and Climate and the LGBTQ community. The committee also drafted a statement of support for trans-identified students for circulation among the faculty; the statement now has 175 signatures and is available online (<http://go.wisc.edu/76f135>).

III + IV. Current and Future Issues

Upon reviewing past reports from this committee to the Faculty Senate, it is clear that the university has a strong commitment to improving the climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. Campus efforts toward this broad objective have been substantial. Particularly notable are the many significant accomplishments that have been realized during the past five years. These include (1) the extension of health care and retirement benefits to same-sex domestic partners of UW employees; (2) the establishment of Open House, University Housing's first residential learning community designed to explore issues of gender and sexuality; and (3) the increase of LGBTQ-inclusive programming in the campus' annual Diversity Forum. These are important and significant accomplishments, and we commend the University for its efforts to foster an environment that is more inclusive of LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty.

Our examination also suggests, however, that the campus LGBTQ community remains significantly undercounted, underserved, and inadequately represented in campus-level diversity planning efforts. Many of the most critical concerns of the campus LGBTQ community are systemic, long-standing issues that have been raised in multiple iterations this committee's reports to the Faculty Senate.

Major, long-standing unaddressed concerns from previous reports include the following.

A. Campus Climate Survey. In each of its past three reports, beginning in 2008,ⁱⁱ this committee has recommended that the University conduct campus surveys to assess the climate for LGBTQ students,

staff, and faculty. The availability of data on members of the LGBTQ community depends upon self-identification; other mechanisms that can often be used to study climate issues of concern for other minority groups cannot similarly be used to collect tracking data for the LGBTQ community.

No comprehensive climate survey has ever been conducted to measure climate for LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty at UW–Madison. When the UW System commissioned a system-wide inclusivity survey for this purpose from 2009–2011, UW–Madison opted out of campus-wide participation and instead surveyed only students, faculty, and staff from CALS, as well as employees from the Division of Student Life. From this limited data set, a clear differential in climate becomes visible: only 66% of LGBTQ-identified students in CALS reported feeling comfortable with the climate at UW–Madison, compared to 85% of heterosexual students. The degree to which such feelings of alienation are shared in other colleges and divisions of the University has not been measured.

- *Recommendation:* The clear need for regular, comprehensive studies of campus climate for LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty continues to be a critical unaddressed concern. We once again call upon the university to commission regular longitudinal surveys to assess the climate for the campus LGBTQ population. This is the only reasonable mechanism available to estimate the size of the LGBTQ-identified community at UW–Madison, to determine whether their needs are being adequately met by campus services, and to assess the results of diversity and inclusivity efforts targeted towards the LGBTQ campus community over time.

B. The LGBT Campus Center (LGBTCC). Starting as a student organization in 1992, the LGBTCC has grown into an office of the Dean of Students and has become the most visible resource available to LGBTQ students on campus. It provides a safe space for students at all stages of their self-awareness to socialize, study, and access information about LGBTQ identities. It also organizes, develops, and hosts important programming aimed at fostering community and support among LGBTQ students, and it empowers students through a range of leadership development programs. The LGBTCC is a critical voice on campus advocating for the unique needs of LGBTQ students by educating the campus community on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The mission of the LGBTCC is, appropriately, centered on providing services to the student body. Increasingly, because of the visibility of the LGBTCC and because of the lack of any office specifically tasked with providing similar services for UW–Madison employees, the LGBTCC has also become the de facto center for information and support for LGBTQ-identified faculty and staff. To the extent that services for UW–Madison employees exist, they are being offered as an overload by the staff members (currently 2.65 FTE) of the LGBTCC.

- *Recommendations:* Many previous reports of the committee have found that the Center requires increased financial resources in order to stabilize and grow its operations. We renew our call by recommending that staffing in the LGBTCC be increased by one full-time academic staff member in order to increase student access to the services provided by the Center. We also recommend that the funding and resources of the Center be increased in order to formalize its de facto role as the only campus unit currently providing support services for LGBTQ-identified faculty and staff.

C. The LGBT Studies Certificate. The LGBT Studies Certificate Program is an autonomous interdisciplinary program now in its twelfth year. It is among the largest certificate programs in L&S, with over 40 faculty from over 15 departments contributing to the certificate and an average of 35 students receiving a certificate each year; the program reaches over 1,200 students a year through its courses. The LGBT Studies Certificate Program critically serves UW's mission of educational equity and diversity by offering an intellectual and academic home for engagement with a vibrant body of scholarship, and by maintaining outreach and connection among faculty, staff, and students alongside the LGBT Campus Center, the Multicultural Student Center, and the Disability Studies Cluster through joint programming and co-sponsorship.

The LGBT Studies Certificate program has no budget or funds, and it receives no financial support from the university; Gender and Women's Studies shares 15% of its undergraduate advisor's

appointment with LGBT Studies to help administer the certificate. LGBT studies on campus depends on the generous commitment of already-overcommitted faculty to maintain not only the certificate's curriculum but also its structure as an academic program.

- *Recommendations:* Many of the committee's past reports to the Faculty Senate have recommended that the university secure the operations of the LGBT Studies Certificate by providing permanent staffing. We renew our appeal by calling on the university to provide (1) a permanent TA/Lecturer line to stabilize course offerings in the Certificate program, and (2) an academic staff position to provide advising services for students, increase outreach to the broader campus community, and administer the future academic development of the program.

In addition to these long-standing issues, we would also like to raise awareness about the following emerging issues.

D. University Housing. This academic year marked the establishment of Open House, a new residential learning community based in Phillips Hall in the Lakeshore residence halls. Open House currently serves 48 undergraduate residents with a variety of programming and resources related to gender, sexuality, and identity. Open House plays a unique role in the University Housing system. Like all residential learning communities, it provides an academically enriching experience for a community of students interested in exploring a common intellectual theme. In the case of Open House, the centerpiece of the academic programming is a seminar course currently led by Prof. Julie D'Acci on "Gender and Sexuality in the Media." Additionally, Open House provides a safe housing alternative to a community of students who might be vulnerable to harassment in other residence halls.

The response to the creation of Open House has been very positive. In the first Learning Community Room Selection process in which Open House was an option (Apr 24–May 3, 2013), a total of 35 students selected a room in Open House: 16 students ranked Open House as their #1 choice, and 19 students gave up another hall choice to select a room in Open House. All but one of the 13 remaining students who were assigned during the May housing assignment process had preferred Open House as their #1 choice. Students' enthusiasm for the inaugural year of the Open House learning community indicates that the need for LGBTQ-supportive housing options at UW–Madison is significant.

- *Recommendations:* Given the importance of Open House's role in providing a safer and more supportive housing option for LGBTQ students on campus, we recommend that the university recognize the important ways in which Open House differs from other residential learning communities. In particular, University Housing should determine whether its staffing (currently one half-time program coordinator) is sufficient to adequately meet the needs of Open House residents. It should also seek strategies to better connect Open House's physical location in the Lakeshore residence halls to services such as the LGBTCC, UHS, and other diversity programs.

More broadly, University Housing should continue to increase the visibility of housing accommodations available on campus for LGBTQ-identified students, including Open House, residence halls with single-occupancy rooms, and better roommate matching services. We urge the campus to continue developing innovative strategies to serve this population.

E. LGBTQ Health and Benefits. Health care and benefits for LGBTQ employees is an area of marked distress for the committee. Our concerns are centered around three specific issues.

First, for 2013, the Group Insurance Board decided to create a new higher payment tier for 120 prescription medications ("Level 4"). Of these, 49 (the largest group) are antiretroviral medications used in the treatment of HIV. Contrary to the literature justifying the increase in cost to these drugs, almost all of these antiretrovirals are room-temperature-stable pills, rather than "injectables, or requiring special handling." As a result, the out-of-pocket costs for critical HIV medications increased from a \$15/month copay with a \$410/year maximum for all medications, to \$50/month and a \$1000/year maximum separate from other medications.ⁱⁱⁱ This represents a substantial increase in medical costs for a group of employees that is disproportionately populated by gay and bisexual men. Whether this was the unfortunate

unintended consequence of a higher-order funding decision or a deliberate strategy to shift medical costs onto an already disenfranchised group of state employees, the impact on employees remains the same. We regard this as both a climate and financial issue of great concern to the LGBTQ community.

Second, we find that the medical needs of transgender community members are largely unaddressed at UW–Madison. The employer-sponsored health care plans available to UW–Madison faculty and staff as Wisconsin state employees specifically exclude any coverage for care related to gender reassignment. This includes hormonal, surgical, and counseling treatments. Consequently, transgender employees of the university who require this care must either carry separate personal health insurance or pay costs out-of-pocket in order to obtain the basic, medically necessary care that they require to maintain their wellbeing as transgender persons.

Third, same-sex couples and their families continue to face inequitable financial penalties from Wisconsin’s constitutional prohibition of marriage equality, in combination with a Wisconsin law that prohibits residents from marrying out-of-state when such a marriage would not be recognized in state. In such cases, the estimated value of the employer’s financial contribution towards health insurance coverage for non-dependent same-sex partners must be reported as wages earned. This “imputed income” is fully taxable. For employees, the tax burden represents a de facto cut in income.

Recommendation: Many of the policy changes needed to address each of these issues will require action by authorities outside of the UW–Madison system. We urge the university and its administration to advocate actively for LGBTQ-inclusive reforms with these decision-making bodies.

Meanwhile, we recommend that the Vice Provost for Diversity and Climate, in partnership with the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff and the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, appoint a task force to study how to provide independent funding for the health needs of underserved LGBTQ community members. We also call on the university and its administration to incorporate a policy of “truing up” salaries for LGBTQ families penalized by imputed income rules in the new Human Resources redesign process.

Finally, the lack of clear, readily available informational resources related to LGBTQ healthcare and benefits is a significant challenge for this community. We recommend that the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement work with Office of Human Resources and the LGBTCC to develop a comprehensive online resource about LGBTQ healthcare and benefits for staff and students. We further recommend that OHR dedicate resources and personnel for providing information specific to LGBTQ concerns, including but not limited to the issues cited above.

V. Summary/Recommendations

UW–Madison’s dedication to improving the quality of life for all of its community members, regardless of gender expression or sexual orientation, has remained strong and consistent during the period since this committee’s last report to the Faculty Senate. Several new and continuing areas of concern for the campus LGBTQ community have been identified in the preceding sections, and our specific recommendations to address these concerns have been incorporated throughout the text of this report.

Our general recommendation is that the university reaffirm its commitment to its LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty at the highest level. The Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity and Climate should continue building its relationship with the LGBTQ community. We recommend the appointment of a staff member in the Vice Provost’s office charged with advocating for LGBTQ issues within the administration. We further recommend that this staff member interface with the LGBTQ community through multiple mechanisms, including annual meetings with the joint governance Committee for LGBTQ Issues. Finally, we recommend that the Diversity Plan currently under development for UW–Madison be shaped to fully embrace LGBTQ identity as an axis of diversity that should be monitored and nurtured as an important component of the campus’ inclusive landscape.

VI. Committee Membership

Faculty

Severino Albuquerque

A. Finn Enke

B. Venkat Mani

Claire Wendland

Tehshik Yoon (chair)

Academic Staff

Joseph Halaas

Lauren Szafranski

Students

R. Spencer Atkinson

Danny Levandoski

CNCS Liaison

Dennis Reece

Member ex officio

Gabriel Javier

Consultants

Coco O'Connor

Lindsey Stoddard Cameron

ⁱ For the purposes of this report, we adopt a broad understanding of the term “transgender” to apply to a spectrum of individuals whose gender expression or gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. This definition is intended to embrace people along a continuum of gender identities.

ⁱⁱ UW-Madison Faculty Document 2056 (May 5, 2008), 2177 (Feb 1, 2010), 2289 (Oct 3, 2011)

ⁱⁱⁱ The lower monthly co-pay continues to be available via a mail-order option; however, the new Level 4 prescription medications are still separated from others in calculating out-of-pocket maxima by either mechanism.