



BUILDING LGBTQ COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

INTRODUCTION

[A joint report](#) with Point Foundation and the Williams Institute at UCLA found that many LGBTQ students did not find the welcoming and supportive environment they may have been hoping for when seeking a new place to express themselves and learn in higher education.

Nearly one-third of LGBTQ people (32.6%) experienced bullying, harassment, or assault at college, compared to 18.9% of non-LGBTQ people. Specific forms of adversity were experienced by twice as many or more LGBTQ than non-LGBTQ people.

The negative experiences that LGBTQ students have in places of higher education have implications for LGBTQ students' mental health, academic functioning, and retention. Harassment has been linked to academic disengagement and lower GPA. A lack of acceptance or social integration within the university may reduce academic intentions and increase risk for withdrawal, including transferring to another school. ([Garvey, 2020](#))

Community is a powerful tool for belonging – building an LGBTQ group at your school can help you find your community, and make sure that fellow LGBTQ students feel supported and empowered to make necessary changes. Point Scholars and LGBTQ activists suggested the four tips below to help guide your community-building journey. Discover how you can be a steward by learning about your community, uniting advocates, finding allies, and checking in.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

- The LGBTQ community is vast and diverse, with folks who have so many different life experiences. Being a community member doesn't make you an expert on every other LGBTQ+ person's experience. Take some time to read about different LGBTQ identities and experiences to help you create a safe space for all LGBTQ students to enjoy.
- Many LGBTQ Centers do not talk about race or racism as aspects of some LGBTQ students' experiences, creating presumptively queer spaces. Rather than assuming everyone who shares your identity shares your worldview, enjoy the insight and enrichment to be gained from people who are unlike ourselves.



“There are endless, endless books, accounts and reports from around the globe on topics such as bisexuality, asexuality, intersex, non-binary and transgender life, written by bisexuals, asexuals, non-binary, intersex and transgender individuals. Take your time and make sure that you remember that empathy and knowledge are not inherent or built overnight.” - Kimberly Hill, Point Community College Scholar

- Importantly, make sure you’re listening to the issues that matter to the LGBTQ community at your school. If possible, find out the queer history of the school or community you attend. When in doubt, start by asking a librarian!

BRING TOGETHER LGBTQ STUDENT ADVOCATES

- Identify gaps in your campus's existing LGBTQ resources and community – what do you think the community at your school needs?
- Build a team that is passionate about LGBTQ advocacy and shares your goals, whether this is starting/leading an LGBTQ student club or just connecting with other student advocates. It is essential to make this a safe space for LGBTQ students at your school.
 - For more information about building a Gender & Sexualities Alliance club, visit [the GSA Network](#)

“I try my best to build as many safe spaces as possible that can be replicated simply through pronoun respect, being as gender-neutral as possible with your wording, and offering a lot of opportunities to ask for resources or even just a place where people can ask questions.” - Samuel Ton, Point BIPOC Scholar

- Your group can act as powerful change-makers for LGBTQ inclusion on campus by creating an environment where all LGBTQ students, with any intersecting identity, feel seen and supported. Fewer LGBTQ people experienced a sense of belonging at their college (71.9%) compared to non-LGBTQ people (83.5%). Students with intersecting marginalized identities (e.g., LGBTQ students of color; students with disabilities) may face enhanced stigma and identity-based stressors, including an intensified sense of not belonging ([source](#)).
 - GLSEN has specific resources to ensure that your LGBTQ student group is inclusive of [trans](#) and [Black](#) students. See also GSA Network’s [Two-Spirit Initiative](#).



FIND ALLIES

- Build coalitions on campus with student organizations that may have different identities but hold the same values. Not only does this reflect the intersecting identities in the LGBTQ community, but the more bonds with other student organizations, the more influence you'll have when taking action for equity on campus.
 - See GSA Network's guide to [coalition building](#) and Campus Pride's student leader guides to [queer coalition building with communities of color](#) and [disability rights activism](#).
- Find teachers/faculty in your corner who can help you advocate and possibly serve as advisors to an LGBTQ group; together, organize campaigns/wider community outreach efforts.
 - Getting faculty support for your efforts to build LGBTQ community helps build a long-term community, outlasting your time as a student. It also shows university leadership that change is important to their employees, not just students.
 - See Point's "Challenging School Policies and Decisions" resource for more information about connecting with faculty around advocacy efforts
- Bring LGBTQ issues into your classes and everyday campus life when relevant as an opportunity to address stigmas and misunderstandings with well-intentioned folks who may be misinformed.

"Whenever we have class discussions, I also try to connect the LGBTQ community to the conversation. I believe that the more we can educate people, the more allies we can create." - Taliyah Murphy, Point Community College Scholar

CHECK IN

- As you check in with your new community, be thoughtful in engaging them with questions, openings, closings and activities that connect to all aspects of their humanity.
 - One communication process you can use is the Circle Process - an indigenous tool used over thousands of years to facilitate communication, community and relationship building, decision making and conflict resolution. Involves a talking piece, an opening and closing, and a series of questions to facilitate dialogue. [Read how a Circle Process meeting works via Suffolk University](#)



- Another effective and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue is a World Café. This technique brings together individual ideas into one comprehensive message. [Find out how to host a World Café here.](#)

"We need tons of kindness. Learning to listen to and be supportive is probably the most unique and necessary learning process I have faced during these years at college. Be that person to talk to. Peer-to-peer is the most powerful dynamic in our colleges." - Pau Brunet-Fuertes, Point Community College Scholar

- Don't forget to check-in with yourself too! More LGBTQ people reported mental health struggles in college compared to non-LGBTQ people ([source](#)). Take care of your mental health and make sure you are spending time in spaces and with people who are healthy for you. Organizing meet-ups, communicating with faculty, and educating people can be extremely draining. To avoid burnout and be able to continue to do your essential community building work, you must set aside time to take care of yourself. Find mental health resources for LGBTQ folks at [NAMI](#) and [The Trevor Project](#).