Recommendations For Making Campus Inclusive for Transgender Community

The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals held its summer institute at UAlbany and examined a holistic look at policies, practices and facilities that impact the transgender community.

For clarity, the transgender community includes a wide variety of identities, said Demere Woolway, Consortium past co-chair and director of LGBTQ Life at Johns Hopkins University.

“Generally, we use the term transgender (or trans) to mean individuals whose gender identity or gender expression challenges traditional notions of female and male,” Woolway said. “Under this umbrella term are trans men (FTM), trans women (MTF), crossdressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueer individuals, agender people, and people with other nonbinary gender identities.”

Transgender students, faculty, and staff often feel excluded or forgotten and universities have to examine how to embrace this group and make them part of the university community, Woolway said.

Since 2010, the University at Albany has had a committee consisting of faculty, staff and students dedicated to working on improving the campus climate for LGBTQ members of our university community. This group, known as the LGBTQ Concerns Advisory Committee, is co-chaired by Carol Stenger and Dana Peterson. In order to provide an inclusive environment so that transgender students, faculty and staff feel more connected to the campus community, this Committee has discussed a variety of ways to address the topic, including:

- Encourage bathrooms open to people of all genders.
As someone who has crossed between the social and biological sciences and finally wound up in administration, I think that the world of what I call “research facts” has changed since I started this journey long ago. Let’s consider three of these facts.

First, let’s examine the work of sociology scholar Claude Steele, who has served as provost at Columbia and UC Berkeley. Steele has shown that social identity, e.g. race, can depress SAT scores in the test situation. This phenomenon is called, “self-handicapping.” Back in the day, we worried that SAT and other similar tests were culturally biased. Now, we know that these differences between us are built into the interaction between us as people and any such test.

Second, Derald Wing Sue, a Columbia University professor has examined microaggression - the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. Many social interactions are filled with small, unpleasant put-downs that are delivered to non-majority groups at the lower end of the social power structure, he says. Some of this seems obvious, but it is not until you live it on a daily basis that you begin to feel the power it exerts on your life. We even know that these microaggressions can appear spontaneously when power asymmetries develop, such in game playing in a psychology lab where the game is rigged to favor one person.

And finally, the most famous of the three facts may well be “implicit racial bias,” which was discovered by Mahzarin Banaji from Harvard University and two of his colleagues. Using simple reaction time measures that you can take on-line (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/research/) it shows that most of us carry hidden attitudes toward other groups that have developed naturally. One recent study shows that when identical resumes were sent to a job application, the one where the application had a name that sounded like an African-American name got few call backs.

I think all of this is tied up in a 2013 book by Joshoua Greene from Harvard, called Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them. In this lay-person book, he argues that while we have evolved to have powerful hidden decision mechanisms for our in-groups that help promote group function such as detecting and forming reciprocal altruism arrangements, we have an opposite instinct for those identified as the out-group.

It is known, for example, that taking the hormone oxytocin produces a deeper affiliation with the in-group and a stronger hostility toward the perceived out-group. Since we humans are so adept at figuring out who is in and who is out in our ever changing groups (just watch reality TV if you do not get that point), we have to guard against the development of our own implicit bias when making judgments about people who do not speak our language, look like us, or have other group-bonding attributes.

What are we to do about all of these facts and ideas that could divide us? The answer is simple and as old as universities – teach them. We have done this for centuries. We put in the hands of people the knowledge they need to make more informed judgments about the world. This is the primary charge of the President’s Council on Diversity and Inclusion, a group with which I have been privileged to sit in the nearly nine months since I arrived at the UAlbany last February. Let’s do this to ourselves. Let’s study, teach each other, be intellectual and social colleagues. This problem may well be the problem of our time. Let us work on it together.
Student Association Expands Inclusive Excellence Efforts

Making sure students of all cultures feel accepted and part of the UAlbany campus is part of the work of the Student Association and the organization is working to make sure all students feel engaged and welcome, said Larry Ginsburg, director of Intercultural Affairs of the Student Association. As a result, the office has expanded and implanted changes designed to address student needs and concerns.

“We listened to the students and we are working to do those things that ensure they are part of UAlbany,” Ginsburg said. “We want to make sure students see UAlbany as a place where they can live, learn and thrive.”

Although it might seem like a small gesture, Ginsburg has initiated an open door policy. So even if he’s in class or out of the office, students still have access.

“We will be better able to serve student representatives if we are interacting with and hearing from students,” said Ginsburg, who previously worked as the associate director of Multicultural Affairs. “It is unacceptable for students to feel marginalized or uncomfortable on campus.”

Ginsburg is also working with other campus and non-campus groups and organizations all designed to support student growth and development. He also encourages all students to stop by the Campus Center office and share their ideas and concerns.

“My team and I love to meet with student groups and individuals, and talk about their experiences on campus and how it can be improved from a cultural point of view,” he added.

Chrisel Martinez has also joined the Student Association staff as associate director. This is a promotion for Martinez and will allow her to use knowledge gained last year to help the office ramp up its efforts.

In cooperation with other campus groups, the Student Association will also host a session on microaggressions. The session will be held this spring.

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

Ginsburg asks students, faculty and staff to continue to look for ways he and his staff can work to support students.

“We are committed to maintain and foster an inclusive and diverse campus environment,” he said. “I have surrounded myself with a talented team and we will make this vision a reality.”

Transgender Inclusive (from Page 1)

and call them “gender-inclusive” bathrooms (not “gender-neutral”). Title IX requires that colleges allow transgender people to use the restroom facilities that correspond to their gender identity without regard to transition status.

- To find more information on UAlbany locations of gender-inclusive bathrooms go to: http://www.albany.edu/housing/gih.shtml
- If there are no gender-inclusive bathrooms in your space, work with staff in

- Facilities to explore options.
- Acknowledge that names and pronouns in offices and classrooms matter.
- Pronoun examples: he/him; she/her, they/them, ze/hir (not “male” or “female” pronouns). Call students and others by the name and pronoun they wish to be called.
- Enable students to have a name other than their legal first name on class rosters and to make the changes themselves online.
- Have more than male and female as choices on forms, and surveys.
- Seek opportunities to raise your awareness and education about the LGBTQ community.
- Take part in our Safe Space training offered by our Gender and Sexuality Resource Center. More information can be found at: www.albany.edu/lgbt/38103.php
- Consider the role of traditionally sex-segregated groups such as sororities, fraternities and athletic teams; these organizations can work to identify ways to respect gender identities regardless of legal sex.
Who is Professor Daniel Wulff and what do you do at UAlbany?
“I’m a professor of biological sciences. I teach large introductory classes in biology and nutrition, and I also teach an upper-division elective course in immunology. I came to UAlbany in 1980 from the University of California – Irvine. Next year I’ll be 79, and I am preparing for retirement.”

How have you seen this campus change since you first arrived?
“When I first arrived, the campus had little diversity in students or faculty and staff. During my time here I’ve seen the diversity increase for all groups and we have made great improvements in how we attract and retain a diverse campus environment.”

You have a reputation for being the kind of faculty member that students seek out, and you have a special bond with students. How did you get this reputation?
“I make a point to arrive at the lecture center before class so that I can circulate among the students. I use this time to have conversations with the students. For example, two of my immunology students last year were identical twins of African ancestry named Max and Vladimir. When I ask how a black student could come to be named “Vladimir,” I learn that their father is from Benin, a tiny sliver of a country adjacent to Nigeria. This country was formerly under Soviet influence, and the father had spent some time being educated in Moscow before immigrating to the United States, where he now teaches mathematics in middle school on Long Island. Without asking about the name origin, I would have continued to wonder about the names, but now I know. It might seem like a little thing, but it makes a difference to know your students as people and not just students we see for a short period.”

So you spend time getting to know your students. Is it dangerous to ask certain questions?
“It’s not dangerous but there may be questions you should not ask, particularly personal questions. You have to use your judgement and be cautious and aware that probing too deeply could backfire.

Why is it important to get to know your students in the classroom?
“I am frequently asked to write letters of recommenda-
tion, and I always interview the student before I write the letter. This is when I ask lots of questions. I want to know their plans. What they do during the summer or on school breaks. If they have had a bad semester, I ask why. One student told me about his father committing suicide and instead of taking a leave he came back to school. His grades suffered as a result. I need to know this information so I can advocate for the students. I try to say something about the student that they couldn’t say themselves.”

Can you give us an example of how you are inspired by your students?
“I get inspired by their struggle and their story and they help me to learn that despite many odds, they desire the same thing as most other students. They want to be successful and graduate. They have dreams and desires, and they struggle against the odds to succeed.

I often think about Joy. Her mother abused drugs and alcohol and crack cocaine while she was pregnant with Joy. And for a while Joy lived with other relatives. Her mother subsequently became clean, and they were reunited, but she had a mild stroke about six years ago. Joy now lives with her disabled mother, unemployed stepfather, whom she loves like a father, and five foster and adopted siblings in a small apartment. She talked about how hard it is to study at home and finds that she has to get to Albany to study.

Joy, who has made many trips to the hospital because of her mother’s medical condition, used to spend a lot of time asking questions of the medical professionals. As a result, she knew she wanted to work as a healthcare professional, and had settled on being a physician’s assistant. Last summer she was one of 11 stu-
Part of the reason UAlbany launched its Inclusive Excellence Initiative UACCESS - UAlbany Collaboratively Creating Excellence, Scholarship, and Success - is because we wanted to integrate diversity and quality efforts. When President Robert Jones launched UACCESS during his inaugural week of activities, he did so knowing that infusing diversity into an institution’s recruiting, admissions and hiring processes; into its curriculum and co-curriculum; and into its administrative structure and practices was necessary to alter the campus climate into one that is more inclusive of all people, sexual orientations, physical and mental abilities, gender, and military status.

Using this Inclusive Excellence model reflects the understanding that diversity and inclusion are not isolated initiatives but are a catalyst for institutional and educational excellence, which are to be invited and integrated into the very core of the educational enterprise.

In short, it’s not about a program or a building, an activity or an event. It’s a complete overhaul in our way of approaching difference. Instead of seeing different as less than, we see different as an additional way of examining how we do things.

UACCESS is entering its third year and we have developed initiatives designed to allow people the opportunity to listen and learn. These initiatives examine how we conduct business, seek to allow us to explore additional ways of moving forward, and were designed to have impact on the curriculum, making it more inclusive.

At the heart of all of these initiatives is the requirement that these movements will push us toward excellence.

Are we insulated from an upheaval? No. However, we are taking the necessary steps to minimize the possibility. We believe that changes can be done in a productive, non-confrontational manner all designed to move us toward a more inclusive excellence environment.

Wulff Q & A (from Page 4)

Students selected throughout the country to participate in a summer research program in public health. As part of the program, she traveled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This was a life-altering experience for her, and she has set her sights on becoming a medical doctor.

Here is a person who could have given up, yet she’s focused and making sure she gives back.

Joy is just one student. There is Frank, who was raised by his Dominican grandparents and is now a medical student with a full, four-year scholarship. There’s Natasha, who came from Guinea, one of the poorest countries in West Africa, who knows that if she were still in her country she would be married and probably in a polygamous marriage and have children. Instead, she wants to become a medical doctor and go back home and work in the health care system.

This is what keeps me going and keeps me focused on helping our students become successful.”

Would you say that by engaging with your students you have a great appreciation of diversity and its value?

“Yes, of course. These are just a few examples of what I have learned from interviewing students. It is a great privilege to have been an instructor for these students and others like them.”

Upcoming Diversity Transformation Event Date: February 2, 2016—Campus Center Ballroom, 6 p.m. – Our Bodies, Our Histories – Coming Home to Ourselves

Please keep looking for additional upcoming Diversity Transformation Events!

Also, please look for future announcements regarding the 2015-2016 Diversity Transformation Fund Awards.
During a recent workshop, Simi Linton, and Christian von Tippelskirch, directors of the film, “Invitation to Dance,” shared practical tips which faculty can use to make their classroom instruction more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The workshop was held prior to the showing of the film, which focused on Linton and her personal journey to achieve rights and freedom and her work on behalf of individuals with disabilities.

Linton, who has a Ph.D. in counseling psychology from NYU, demonstrated how disability studies can be incorporated into a variety of courses from multiple disciplines and fields, including history, art, social work, education, biology, psychology, theater, dance, women’s and gender studies, race and ethnicity studies.

She offered faculty the following tips:

- Always include oral descriptions of visual aids, slides and actions being performed.
- Offer multiple ways of how students can participate in class.
- Always put the captions on video clips and films.
- Provide students the option to receive large print handouts and quizzes and provide electronic copies whenever possible.

The film presentation and workshop were organized by Dr. Sami Schalk, an assistant professor of English and a disabilities studies scholar. Schalk is willing to work with faculty members interested in incorporating disability rights and awareness into their research and/or teaching.

Schalk was awarded one of the university’s 2015-16 Diversity Transformation Fund Awards to bring the story of disability rights activist Simi Linton to campus. The award, which supports the campus Inclusive Excellence Initiative UACCESS, showcases faculty and staff efforts to discover ways to enhance student success and academic excellence. These awards exemplify departments using their creativity to move the university toward greater diversity and inclusion.

“Invitation to Dance” was shown in October during National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the 25th Anniversary of the American’s With Disabilities Act (ADA). Linton and von Tippelskirch chronicled Linton’s journey.

Linton, the subject of the film, was injured at 23 while hitchhiking to Washington to protest the war in Vietnam. Her young husband and her best friend died in the car accident that left her in a wheelchair, her legs paralyzed. Her story is closely intertwined with the progress made by individuals with disabilities to achieve rights and freedom.

After teaching a few classes in disability studies, Schalk said she has found that many students at UAlbany have little awareness about disability rights as a social justice issue, whereas most have at least heard about racial and gender equality concerns.

Schalk said she hoped the film and workshop would help faculty, staff and students increase disability awareness rights.

“I believe that continued programming around disability for all members of the UAlbany community will help make the campus a better space for individuals with disabilities and allow our students to enter the world with increased knowledge and understanding of social justice for individuals with disabilities,” she said.