How to Ensure Your University is LGBTQI-Friendly

Description

Universities have a responsibility to promote an environment of inclusivity, and to protect the rights of all students.Â

LGBTQI is an initialism that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,Â and intersex.Â Â

Throughout history, the LGBTQI community has faced discrimination in a variety of ways.Â Â

DespiteÂ an incredibleÂ amountÂ of progressÂ having beenÂ made to dismantle prejudiceÂ towardsÂ LGBTQIÂ people,Â it unfortunatelyÂ still existsÂ today.Â Â

UniversityÂ oftenÂ comes at a crucial time in a young personâ??s life, when new experiences can help form their identity.Â Â Â

However,Â some LGBTQI students feel unable to freely explore their identity due to the discrimination they faceÂ at university.Â

WhileÂ a universityâ??s main goal is to provide quality higher education, they cannot successfully do so in an environment that does not allow its students to be themselves.Â Â

[A report conducted by Student Minds](#)Â found that, â??young LGBTQ+ people have higher rates of poor mental health, self-harm, and suicide than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts.â?Â

This is reflected in research conducted byÂ [Beijing Normal University](#)Â which showsÂ 85% of LGBTQI students in China are struggling with depression with a further 40% considering suicide.Â Â

The higher rate of mental health issues in LGBTQI is linked to the discrimination these students face,Â such as exclusion and violent or verbal abuse, which still occurs at universities today.Â

[A report intoÂ UKÂ universities by Stonewall](#)Â revealed that three in fiveÂ transsexualÂ students (60 per cent) have been the target of negative comments or conduct from other students.Â

Universities have a responsibility to protectÂ theirÂ LGBTQI students from abuse in all forms, and to provide them with an environment that is completely free from discrimination.Â Â

What messaging are youÂ sending?Â

It is important that your university's LGBTQI-friendly status is clearly visible toÂ bothÂ prospectiveÂ and current students.Â Â

If there is no indicationÂ or messagingÂ that your institution is LGBTQI-friendly, then you create an uncertain environment for those who identify in this way.Â Â

The same report by Stonewall revealed that,Â â??two in five LGBT students (42 per cent) have hidden their identity at university for fear of discrimination.â?Â

If it is clear to these students that their identity is not only accepted but celebrated by the institution, this wouldÂ helpÂ project a message of inclusivity and acceptance.Â Â

One way to do so is by publicizing your support for LGBTQI events such as Pride.Â

Equally, any LGBTQI clubs or societies that are formed by students at your universityÂ must be given the same treatment as other societies; promoted and supported with just as much enthusiasm.Â Â

If a student has taken it upon themselves to speak out on behalf of the LGBTQI community inÂ theÂ form of non-violent activism, then the university should recognize and celebrate these efforts.Â Â

In January of this year, theÂ [University of Cincinnati publicly celebrated](#)Â the work of its studentÂ Haidn Â Foster, a second-year medical student who created an online publication to provide up-to-date information on the state of LGBTQIÂ healthcare.Â Â

Actions speak louder than wordsÂ Â

Although these actionsÂ can contribute to a feeling of inclusiveness atÂ university, it is not enough to simply celebrate and publicize the work of others.Â Â

Historically, certain brands have received criticism for their utilization of Pride imagery for marketing purposes, when a closer look into company activity revealed very little action to help progress the movement.Â Â

Your university is a platform that when utilized effectively can positively affect the LGBTQI cause.Â

Funding or conducting research into LGBTQI–related issues is one way of utilizing the tool of higher education to help contributeÂ to the cause.Â

Integrating LGBTQIÂ history and current issues into the curriculum is another way of maintaining and encouraging aÂ dialogue on the movement.Â Â

Universities can also host events and welcomeÂ speakersÂ to increase the visibility of LGBTQI issues.Â Â

For example, as part of LGBTQI history month, theÂ [University of Southamptonâ??s](#)Â Modern Language and Linguistics department held a viewing of the French film â??Tomboyâ??.Â

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The screening was open to all staff and students and was followed by an open discussion on the filmâ??s subject matter. Â Â

Keeping your studentsÂ safeÂ

WhileÂ every effort should be made to encourage an LGBTQI-friendly environment, itâ??s also necessaryÂ to put in placeÂ systems to handle any issues that might still occur. Â Â

According to research by theÂ [National Union ofStudents](),Â almost one in fourÂ studentsÂ have feared for their safety because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Â

It is vital that your university has a system in place to handle these instances. Â Â

Victims of abuse must know where to turn to report any instances and must receive immediate care to help them with any concerns they may have. Â Â

ThoseÂ responsible forÂ the abuse must be disciplinedÂ accordingly, sending outÂ a message ofÂ zeroÂ toleranceÂ to other students. Â Â

With LGBTQI students particularly vulnerable when it comes to mental health issues, a strong mental health initiative should exist at your university. Â

For advice on how to provide mental health support to students,Â please see our blog:Â *â??*
*[Mental Health in Higher Education: What Role Should Universities Play?â??]()*Â

Itâ??s important thatÂ the needs of all students from all backgrounds are considered when maintaining and publicizing theÂ LGBTQIÂ support networksÂ your university provides. Â Â Â