Recruitment and Retention of LGBTIQ Astronomers

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Our Goal

- To build a community in which members' contributions are valued regardless of their sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity.
Definitions

- LGBTIQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, or Questioning

- Lesbian: Sexual or romantic desire between women.
- Gay: Sexual or romantic desire between men.
- Bisexual: Sexual or romantic attraction to both men and women.
Definitions, cont.

- **Transgender**: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.

- **Gender Identity**: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

- **Gender Expression**: How a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.
Definitions, cont.

- **Intersex**: A term used for people who are born with external genitalia, chromosomes, or internal reproductive systems that are not traditionally associated with either a “standard” male or female.

- **Questioning**: The questioning of one's gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation, or all three is a process of exploration by people who may be unsure, still exploring, or concerned about applying a social label to themselves for various reasons.

Definitions from the National Center for Transgender Equality (transequality.org)
Legal Challenges: Employment

- No federal laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

- Only 21 states and the District of Columbia prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Of these, 16 states and D.C. also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity.

- An additional nine states have executive orders prohibiting discrimination against public employees based on sexual orientation and gender identity, three states based on sexual orientation only.

- Many institutions that have anti-discrimination policies do not include LGBTIQ as protected classes.

From the Human Rights Campaign (hrc.org)
Legal Challenges: Marriage

- Six states and D.C. issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Nine states provide the equivalent of state-level spousal rights to same-sex couples; three offer some spousal rights.
- 29 states have constitutional amendments and 12 states have laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman.
- The Defense of Marriage Act forbids the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages. As a result, married same-sex couples
  - are ineligible for the federal Family Medical Leave Act,
  - cannot sponsor their partner for visas or immigration, and
  - must pay taxes on health-care benefits.

The GAO has identified over 1100 federal benefits, rights, and privileges in which marital status is a factor.

From the Human Rights Campaign (hrc.org)
The Peculiar Sociology of the Physical Sciences

- Sexuality is assumed to be irrelevant in the scientific workplace, so is not discussed.

- Scientists and engineers don’t study social phenomena, so are unaware of recent research and theory on sexuality and identity.

- Once homosexuality is realized, there can be pressure to tone it down. Social interactions can become so awkward that LGBTIQ folks avoid them.

- To combat this conspiracy of silence, an explicit commitment to inclusion is required.

Bilimoria & Stewart 2009, NWSA Journal, 21, 85
Campus-Wide Policies

• Include the words “sexual orientation” and “gender identity or expression” in your institution's non-discrimination policy.

• Include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in public written statements about diversity and multiculturalism.

• Include LGBTIQ issues and concerns in
  ◦ Grievance procedures
  ◦ Housing guidelines
  ◦ Admission application materials
  ◦ Health-care forms
  ◦ Alumni materials/publications

… and include representations of LGBTIQ people in these publications.
Employee Benefits

- Offer health insurance coverage to employees’ same-sex partners or cash compensation to employees to purchase their own health insurance for same-sex partners.
- “Gross up” wages for employees who enroll for same-sex partner health benefits to cover the added tax burden from this benefit.
- Offer other benefits equally to both opposite-sex and same-sex spouses/partners of employees.
Transgender Inclusion

- Policies: Include “Gender Identity or Expression” as a protected category
- Process: Establish gender-transition guidelines
- Education & Compliance: Provide information and training
- Documentation: Update personnel records
- Facilities: Grant restroom and locker room access according to an employee's full-time gender presentation
- Benefits: Remove discriminatory health insurance exclusions

From the Human Rights Campaign (hrc.org)
Within Your Department

Recruitment

- Before recruiting, educate yourself about workplace climate, partner benefits, and applicable state and federal laws.
- If your institution has inclusive policies, tell all applicants about them. Use commitment to inclusion as a recruiting tool.
- If your institution’s policies are not inclusive, lobby to change them.
- If you lose existing staff, prospective students, or employees over LGBTIQ issues, notify your top administrators, especially if they take grant money with them.
Within Your Department, cont.

Language

- Become comfortable using the words gay, lesbian, transgender, and LGBTIQ.
- Don’t assume that your colleagues are straight.
- Listen. Point out offensive and/or homophobic language, and ask that it stop. Make clear that such language is unprofessional and unwelcome in your department.
Within Your Department, cont.

- When developing family-friendly policies, be mindful of non-traditional families. For example, explicitly include:
  - adoption in parental-leave policies;
  - domestic partners in family leave and insurance;
  - LGBTIQ couples in dual-career accommodation practices;
  - partners in invitations to departmental events.
The AAS Working Group on LGBTIQ Equality (WGLE) is tasked with promoting the equality of LGBTIQ individuals within our profession. To that end, WGLE will work to

- end hiring and workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression;
- eliminate inequalities in pay and benefits experienced by LGBTIQ individuals;
- create a professional climate that respects and values diversity;
- serve as a conduit for communication between the AAS Council and the LGBTIQ community;
- support networking and peer mentoring among LGBTIQ individuals; and
- provide resources to support LGBTIQ equality within the astronomical profession.
WGLE Executive Committee

For 2012, the members of the executive committee are
- Rolf Danner, Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems
- Van Dixon, STScI
- Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, MIT
- Jane Rigby, GSFC
- Kris Sellgren, OSU

Please join us!
We’ll be on the web shortly.
More Resources

- LGBT Astronomer Outlist: physics.ucsb.edu/~blaes/lgbtastro
- The Astrodyke Blog: astrodyke.blogspot.com
- Human Rights Campaign: hrc.org
- National Center for Transgender Equality: transequality.org
- Intersex Society of North America: isna.org
- National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals: noglsttp.org
- LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index: campusclimateindex.org