

# Research & Considerations for LGBT Student Campus Climate & Retention at Riverside City College

Jessica Newman

## ABSTRACT

This document is a tool to assist Riverside City College to become a more LGBT-friendly institution. Jessica Newman developed this document while working closely with Nancy Jean Tubbs (Director of the LGBT Resource Center at the University of California, Riverside) and Debbie Whitaker (Riverside City College Associate Dean, Academic Support and RCC Ally Coordinator). After holding two student focus groups, researching other community colleges LGBT resources and resource centers, and talking with different professionals hopefully, this document will be beneficial for the Ally Committee at Riverside City College in developing an action plan to create institutional change. Most importantly, this document will shed light on the concerns of the students and how faculty and staff members could assist in the challenges LGBT students face.

## Ally Committee Website Statement

---

An ALLY is a visible member of the Riverside Community College District community (staff, faculty or students) who is willing to provide a safe haven and an empathetic ear to anyone concerned with sexual orientation or gender identity issues.

### Introduction

---

Community colleges serve extremely diverse student populations due to the open access policy. It is important that all underrepresented and underserved students of community colleges have the opportunity to succeed academically, professionally, and personally throughout their academic journey. However, when discussing retention, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) student population continues to go unrecognized in the challenges they face on college campus. In almost all research, the LGBT student population is the “invisible minority- not having presence in research.”

According to California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCC Chancellor’s office) 2013-2014 demographic report, Riverside City College has 26,265 student, with the racial breakdown as follows: 14,225 Latina@ students, 5,979 white students, 2,444 African American students, 1,451 Asian students, 1,076 Multi-Ethnicity students, 491 Filipino students, 426 Unknown, 94 Pacific Islander, and 79 American Indian/Alaskan Native students. Race is clearly depicted in this data. However, data on LGBT students is not mentioned.

Similarly, many authors have noted the lack of research, resources, and professional staffing at two-year institutions for the LGBT student population. For example, “Baker in 1991 first called attention to the ‘invisible minority’ of LGBT students at two year colleges. As a consequence, there may be far less attention on the needs of LBGT students at community colleges in contrast to four-year institutions” (Welcoming Community Colleges Initiative: Supporting Educational and Labor Market Success for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students Concept Paper, 2008).

It is also important to note that voluntary questions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity were added in May 2014 to the CCC online admissions application form. The data from these questions is held at the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. The application form committee recently opened discussion on the question of how to access the aggregate data, especially for research purposes. However, there has been no process formed to officially access the data in terms of our LGBT population's success.

Furthermore, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office developed the Student Success and Support Program in 2012 based off The Seymour – Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 “to increase California community college student access

and success by providing effective core matriculation services, including orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, and other educational planning services, and academic interventions' or follow-up services for at risk students. With proper documentation, community colleges might be able to make the case for SSSP funds to be used to support the success of LGBT students.

This report may act as a guiding document for Riverside City College to:

- 1) Increase awareness and build a baseline of knowledge of institutional policies, practices, and partnerships that promote or detract from LGBT students' educational success
- 2) Identify and address barriers for strengthening postsecondary outcomes for LGBT community college students
- 3) Develop technical assistance tools and guidance that will help to promote and sustain institutional change
- 4) Implement and evaluate a model of policies, practices, and partnerships that create a Welcoming Community College.

Lastly, when discussing academic success and retention of underrepresented students, the LGBT student population should be closely reviewed and mentioned in future research. LGBT students often deal with challenges of social integration and academic integration. Olivia Mancini, discussing attrition risk and resiliencies among sexual minority college students, stated:

In 2004, fewer than 10% of colleges and universities in the United States had sexual orientation specified in their nondiscrimination policies (Sanlo, 2004). This number has grown over the last several years as more schools have expanded their nondiscrimination policies to include sexual orientation; however, as of 2010, more than 33% of all transgender students and 13% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students report fearing for their physical safety while on campus (Rankin et al., 2010). (Mancini, 13)

These challenges can certainly affect the interactions of students in and outside of the classroom. Thus, challenges of LGBT students should be mentioned in all data concerning demographics, retention, and success of LGBT students for community colleges. If LGBT students are continuously tokenized, bullied, and feel unsafe on campus, these students are more than likely at risk to succeed in the classroom. Tinto, who discusses student social and academic integration, states, "Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that involve them as valued members of the institution" (Mancini, 14).

LGBT students experience a great deal of harassment and institutional discrimination. Without the support and the proper resources needed for these students to be successful at a two-year institution, they will have a hard time being successful academically, socially, and personally. Some of these challenges will be highlighted in the student focus group report. Then, the recommendations section will describe some ways in which the Ally

Committee of Riverside City College could mitigate these challenges and develop some institutional reform for their LGBT student population.

## Student Success & Support Programs Overview

---

### Student Success and Support Programs (SSSP) Mission

The mission of the SSSP is to increase community college student access and success by providing effective core services, including orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, academic advising, and early intervention. SSSP supports student equity in assessment, student services, and access to college resources and provides a foundation for students to achieve their educational goals. (SSP Handbook 2014)

All documents concerning SSSP discuss equity and “disproportionate impact” as a category used to evaluate assessment standards. The 2014 document, *Guidelines for Measuring Disproportionate Impact in Equity Plans*, defines “disproportionate impact” as:

The percentage of persons from a particular racial, ethnic, gender, age or disability group who are directed to a particular service or placement based on an assessment instrument, method, or procedure is significantly different from the representation of that group in the population of persons being assessed, and that discrepancy is not justified by empirical evidence demonstrating that the assessment instrument, method or procedure is valid and reliable predictor of performance in relevant educational setting.

SSSP categorizes this term into five subgroups; gender, ethnicity, age, disability status, and economically disadvantaged. However, LGBT student populations are not mentioned in the data collected on student success at community colleges in California. When discussing transfer rates and success rates, only male and female student populations are mentioned. Based on the 2014 SSSP Handbook, “\$181.7 million is available to be allocated to districts for SSSP credit and noncredit” (2014). SSSP funds should be used for core services only: orientation, assessment, counseling, advising, and other educational planning services to assist a student in making an informed decision about his or her education goal and course of study and to develop an educational plan; and follow up on at-risk students.

Since SSSP focuses on establishing equity, how can LGBT student populations be explicitly added to the subgroups of what they consider to be “disproportionate impacted” and “at-risk?” If LGBT student populations are added to this policy, SSSP funding could possibly be allocated to support LGBT students at community colleges.

## Student Focus Group Report

---

I conducted two student focus groups with a total of four students who attended or attend Riverside City College. Two students were in their second semester, one student in their second year, and one who completed their program of study this past June and hopes to transfer to the University of California, Riverside. Both focus groups were an hour-long discussion with guided questions and some follow-up questions to understand the students' experiences. All students identify as members of the LGBT community. Three students identified as being transgender and one student identified as being a gay male.

### Challenges

These students are facing many challenges that can truly have a negative affect on how they integrate academically and socially and gain a sense of belonging at Riverside Community College (RCC). Students described some of their main challenges to be the lack of gender-neutral restrooms, lack of resources, lack of support, lack of safe space, and tokenization in the classroom.

When asked, *“What are some challenges you face as an LGBTQ student at RCC?,* a student mentioned that they had to travel off campus to use the restroom to truly feel safe, *“It is really hard to feel safe for how many hours I am there. I am there from 6am-9pm at night. Sometimes I have to catch the mall (Galleria at Tyler, 30 minutes away from RCC) to go to the bathroom.”*

All students mentioned that gender-neutral bathrooms are hard to find on campus and the one they do have is inaccessible due to students who smoke in the restroom or it is locked. All trans students who participated in the study noted they did not feel safe using the restroom at RCC. One student mentioned,

*“It hurts every time I have to go to a female bathroom because that hurts my self concept a little bit more because that’s not how I identify. But that’s what I’m most safe with, because I feel like people won’t attack me or have questions for who I am with going into a female bathroom because I do have the acceptable body type to go into that bathroom. However, I do not have the acceptable body type to go into the males’ restroom.”*

These students also made it very clear that the idea of space and visibility are very important to them to feel a sense of belonging. They highlighted the importance of space and visibility in two ways: the Gender and Sexualities Association (GSA) and the Ally Committee. One student who was President of the Gender and Sexualities Association discussed his role of engaging his peers as extremely hard. Other students who stated they were members of the GSA mentioned they initially had a hard time finding where GSA meets because it has little to no publicity and outreach and there is no central and consistent location.

Also, these students often discussed the lack of visibility and outreach of the Ally Committee as a challenge. Students conveyed a desire to have a stronger relationship with the Ally Committee to obtain more resources and support for their identity development. One student even mentioned that they would be a resource to the Ally Committee at RCC to assist in educating faculty and staff on different LGBT identities. One student mentioned,

*“When it comes to Ally, There is no like room or no resource center like, UCR. The only way to know professors are a part of Ally is if they themselves have a sticker on their board. A lot of students do not go to the professors’ offices. How are students going to know unless they themselves state at the beginning of classes that they are an Ally for the LGBTQ community?”*

Two students directly mentioned being tokenized in the classroom setting. Other students mentioned being “mispronounced” or “misgendered” and being called queer derogatory terms, when asked, *“Have you ever felt discriminated against or harassed (even subtly) on this campus based on your LGBTQ identity or other identities?”* Students connected tokenizing as a form of attack in the classroom, which would make them shut down and in turn had an affect on their participation in that class. A student elaborated, “And then there is also the issues of tokenizing. Once I stood up and called someone out on misgendering and trans issues. This certain teacher continued to use me as her token trans student.” All students discussed how tokenization could lead to feeling isolated in the classroom setting.

Also at RCC, students are getting their resources and support for their identity development everywhere else but RCC. When asked, *“Where do you receive LGBTQ information/resources?”* Students stated;

- Tumblr
- Interacting with other Queer Kids
- Social Media
- Tuesday Talks @ UCR
- Research Articles
- UCR
- Human Rights Campaign Palm Springs
- Clubs
- Netflix (movies)

## Successes

Most of the students stated that they have had very good interactions with faculty and staff. Overall, these four students believe that the Ally Committee is certainly trying and that faculty and staff are accommodating. They all would agree that faculty members could use more education but students do feel supported by professors and believe that the Ally Committee is doing a great job providing education. One student commented on the support they received from a professor,

*“I came out to two of my professors last semester and they were on top of gender pronouns and identity. One of them were my sociology professor and he managed to bring in more things about transgender visibility and rights as far as it goes with race and ethnicity. He managed to bring those things up in class. You will find some instructors who are willing to put in that extra research and go that extra mile.”*

Despite feeling tokenized in some classes, when asked, *“Do you feel supported as an LGBTQ student at RCC? If so, in what ways? If not, please share why.”* these students mentioned that most professors validate and accept their identity. It seems that professors do a great job of addressing people with their preferred name despite the birth name provided on the roster.

## Recommendations

The students were asked, *“What do you wish to see from RCC in an ideal world?”* and the ideas flowed so easily. All students stated that they spend most of their time on campus. One student mentioned that they could be on campus from 7am-9pm daily. Due to the time spent on campus, there was resounding interest for a physical safe space dedicated to the LGBT student population only. A lot of students mentioned spending a great deal of time at UCR because they have a space along with friendlier students.

*“Something like the UCR’s LGBT Resource Center, I come here instead of going to their GSA. It is better here. They have more resources and more staff. In a perfect world I propose they had more resources and more staff. More people that actually cared about the community and its students.”*

*“I mean RCC is a commuter school so it would make sense to have places around campus, especially for LGBT students to have one safe place you can hang out between classes just in case you are there for an extended period of time.”*

Students also discussed the need for RCC to address mental health issues, in the LGBT Community. One student also recollected their experience at health services and wanted to see health services at RCC to provide more education on the trans identity because he did not feel comfortable in that space.

“The Health services at RCC, it would be nice if they were more educated about trans issues. Perhaps provided more resources and more information talking about obtaining hormones or therapy for LGBT students; trans kids. When I went in there, they didn’t really know much about being trans, I felt uncomfortable going to Health services.”

In an ideal world:

- LGBT Resource Center likes UCR
- More resources
- A Safe Space where the LGBT Community can lounge, do homework, eat, and have meetings
- Staff specifically for the LGBT Community
- Mental Illness and Health & Wellness as in regards to the LGBT community
- Discussions about intersectionalities
- Discussion about Intersex
- Health Services to get more educated on Trans community
- Smoother process to use preferred name with Admissions on applications and IDs
- Online peer connections discussions
- Faculty members should identify as an ally on their syllabus
- Ally Committee should get a bigger sign to identify as an ally of the LGBT Community
- Faculty members should connect LGBT issues and current events to coursework
- More partnership with UCR (Conference, Peer Connections, and Tuesday Talks)
- GSA and Ally Committee meetings



## Recommendations

---

Obtain data on LGBT student population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educate the Ally Committee of RCC current policies that discuss discrimination</li><li>• Contact California Community College Office of the Chancellor to obtain LGBT data from applications</li></ul>
Enhance Online Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update Online Resources for Allies (For example: the terminology)</li><li>• Develop online resources for students to know how to identify Allies, campus resources, community resources, and other LGBT students</li><li>• Provide a link to blog that can be updated with current campus events and GSA meeting times and locations</li></ul>
Develop Campus Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct joint Ally &amp; GSA meetings</li><li>• Do tabling at campuswide welcome events</li><li>• Provide resourceful pamphlets or brochures about the Ally Committee, GSA organization, and gender and sexual identity</li></ul>
Interact with LGBT student leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a time and space for student leaders to be a resource to the Ally Committee</li><li>• Allow time for student leaders to present to the Ally Committee about LGBT identities and hot topics</li><li>• Provide mentorship opportunities for LGBT student leaders</li></ul>
Strengthen relationship with UCR LGBT Resource Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sponsor students to attend regional LGBT conferences</li><li>• List UCR LGBT Resource Center as a resource online</li></ul>
Provide a consistent safe space for LGBT students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consult with RCC facilities and higher level administration to provide LGBT students an on-campus physical safe space</li><li>• List UCR LGBT Resource Center as a safe space online</li></ul>

## Implications for Future Research

---

As mentioned in the introduction, LGBT students are truly the invisible minority when it comes to community college data and resources. It is important that further research bring forth qualitative and quantitative data on why supporting the LGBT student population on the community college level is so important. Researchers should also focus on campus climate, institutional policies, LGBT student integration and retention rates, preferred name process, and matriculation of LGBT students to four-year institutions and those students who obtain baccalaureate degrees.

The students in this report shed light on how they feel as LGBT students at a community college and hoped for more education for the student population and institutional reform. When asked, *“Do you feel supported by faculty and staff? If so, in what ways? If not, please share why?”* One student stated,

“You don’t get those connections with other students. You don’t feel that great talking about you authentically without having to educate others first. And even participation because every time I talk I feel pressure on. Especially when teachers put more emphasis on participation.”

The students made it evident that they feel supported by the faculty members and the Ally Committee. However, the students seem to desire reform on the institutional level with bathroom policies, admissions policies, and so forth. In order to create this change it is important that higher-level administration are involved in these discussions of change.

Karp, M.M., Hughes, K.L., & O’Gara, L. (2010) state, “Tinto posits that students are more likely to remain enrolled in an institution if they become connected to the social and academic life of that institution.” How are LGBT students creating community and a sense of belonging at community colleges? Students clearly stated that they attend events at UCR, build a community online, connect with other individuals they may have met in class, and very few talked about having continuous relationships with faculty and staff. The lack of connection and sense of belonging can be detrimental to the success of LGBT students in the classroom. How can student affairs professionals create a safe environment where LGBT students can thrive inside and outside of the classroom?

Questions future research should address:

- Where is the LGBT student population data? Where can faculty and staff access it to create institutional change on campus?
- Does LGBT students ability to integrate smoothly in the social and academic campus environment of community colleges affect their retention rate?
- How many LGBT students complete their community college education and matriculate into a four-year institution?
- How many community college students that identify with the LGBT community graduate with a bachelor’s degree?
- How many community colleges provide students the option to change their preferred names on school documents, faculty rosters, applications, and IDs?
- In what ways are other community colleges supporting the LGBT student population?

## References

---

Guidelines for measuring "disproportionate impact" in equity plans 2014  
<http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/TRIS/Research/Accountability/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20MEASURING%20DISPROPORTIONATE%20IMPACT%20IN%20EQUITY%20PLANS.pdf>

Ivory, B.T. (2005). *LGBT Students in Community College: Characteristics, Challenges, and Recommendations. Gender identity and sexual orientation: research, policy, and personal perspectives. 2005(111)*, 61-69.

Karp, M.M., Hughes, K.L., & O'Gara, L. (2010). [An exploration of Tinto's integration framework for community college students.](#) *Journal of College student retention*, 12(1), 69-86.

Mancini, O. (2011). *Attrition risk and resilience among sexual minority college students.* Columbia Social Work review.

SSSP Handbook 2014:  
<http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/SSSP/Matriculation/SSSP%20Handbook%202014/2014%20Handbook.pdf>

SSSP Funding Guidelines 2014:  
[http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/SSSP/Matriculation/SSSP\\_Funding\\_Guidelines\\_Final\\_3-12-14.pdf](http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/SSSP/Matriculation/SSSP_Funding_Guidelines_Final_3-12-14.pdf)

Statement Regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) students 2008:  
<http://www.cpec.ca.gov/completereports/2008reports/op08-03.pdf>

Student Focus Group June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Student Focus Group July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Student Success Final Report 2012:  
[http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/StudentSuccessTaskForce/SSTF\\_FinalReport\\_Web\\_010312.pdf](http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/StudentSuccessTaskForce/SSTF_FinalReport_Web_010312.pdf)