

Standards of practice: Core competencies for LGBTQIA+ directors and professionals in higher education

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These Standards of Practice inform the work of LGBTQIA+ directors and professionals and establish direction for the profession. Developed in conjunction with and approved by the Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Resource Professionals, these 12 competencies provide: (a) a resource for current and future LGBTQIA+ directors and professionals to enhance their work and professional development; (b) guidance for institutions about what is foundational and essential when creating new positions, expanding resources, hiring, developing, and supervising LGBTQIA+ directors and professionals; and (c) guidance for emerging professionals considering this path in higher education. Keeping in mind the constituencies served, the identities of the LGBTQIA+ community, and the wide and complex variations in higher education, these competencies were scaffolded by two frameworks: social justice through an intersectional lens and the gamut of institutional life. These competencies are built upon the work of those who have come before us and are both concrete and aspirational. They are intended to advance institutions of higher education in support of LGBTQIA+ people and enhance and strengthen the roles of LGBTQIA+ directors and professionals as institutional leaders in the academy. (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2020 APA, all rights reserved)

The Core Competencies for LGBTQIA+ Directors and Professionals in Higher Education

Excerpted from the full text, which is freely available here: <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000282>

Core Competency One:

Has the Ability to Envision and Execute a Strategic Direction for All Facets of LGBTQIA+ Campus Life

A critical role is thinking and acting strategically on behalf of all LGBTQIA+ constituencies (i.e., undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, faculty, alums, parents/families, and community members) who have varied, and sometimes competing, needs. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional is innovative, has strong political acumen¹, thinks and acts strategically,

¹ Pal and Clark (2015) note, political acumen is the “combination of understanding stakeholders and assessing political feasibility” (p. 254) and “successfully steering policies through organizations and systems” (p. 247). A person with political acumen operates in individual, organizational, and system dimensions (Pal & Clark, 2015). Political capacity and access is particularly challenging for those seeking to interrupt institutionalized power structures; at times, there is an institutional resistance to LGBTQIA+ directors and professionals (Edwards, 2019), which is often rooted in white, male, heterosexist, and cissexist norms.

and builds meaningful partnerships with colleagues across academic and administrative departments. In collaboration with senior leaders, the director/professional needs to ensure LGBTQIA+ campus life is fully addressed in any institutional strategic plans and assure that such plans employ deeply intersectional approaches. The director/professional needs to be able to customize messaging about the work to various campus stakeholders (e.g., cabinet members, trustees, student leaders, institutional committees, and faculty senate) to achieve institutional support for all constituents and their intersecting identities.

Core Competency Two:

Navigates Complex Campus Structures and Contexts with Political Acumen to Affect Institutional Change for LGBTQIA+ Communities

Colleges and universities are complex organizations with multiple layers of administrative structure, each encompassing their own mission, values, culture, and institutional priorities. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional interacts with each of these layers in their specific context, to affect and sustain institutional change toward a positive campus climate for LGBTQIA+ students, staff, faculty, alums, and other campus stakeholders. This navigation requires a political acumen in negotiation, communication, and managing power dynamics.

Core Competency Three:

Provides Administrative Leadership and Management of Human, Physical, and Financial Resources Dedicated to Supporting LGBTQIA+ Campus Populations

Whether located in a standalone unit (e.g., LGBTQIA+ center) or as part of a broader diversity and inclusion entity, the LGBTQIA+ director/professional actualizes the mission and provides vision and oversight for the leadership and management of financial resources, human resources (e.g., hiring, onboarding, supervising, and termination of staff), technology, facilities and equipment, programmatic initiatives, and overall assessment of programs, services, and issues of access and equity. They develop and maintain strong collaborative relationships with campus partners and community organizations to support stakeholders with varying needs. Additionally, they seek institutional and external support to expand financial resources.

Core Competency Four:

Creates a Culture of Belonging Within the Campus LGBTQIA+ Community Through Inclusive Practices That Embrace All LGBTQIA+ Identities and the Diverse Intersections of These Identities

The LGBTQIA+ community is diverse in the many identities that exist within and outside of gender and sexuality spectra. As a microcosm of society, the LGBTQIA+ community is not immune to the historical and current injustices within and outside of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly around race and ethnicity, and including but not limited to issues related to nationality, immigration status, gender, class, disability, religion, and spirituality. New and

emerging identities are a constant in the field and the LGBTQIA+ director/professional creates spaces for the entire campus, alums, and the local community to learn about and embrace the developing landscape for inclusion. Additionally, there are identities in the LGBTQIA+ community that experience marginalization from within the LGBTQIA+ community. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional must intentionally create spaces where the intersections of all LGBTQIA+ identities are respected, centered, and celebrated.

Core Competency Five:

Has Significant Knowledge of and Experience With Policy and Practice Related to LGBTQIA+ Communities in the Broader Context of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Equity, diversity, and inclusion issues are present throughout all campus structures. The ability to incorporate intersections of sexual and romantic orientation and gender identity and expression into ongoing diversity and inclusion conversations, practices, and policies requires both deep knowledge and significant interpersonal skills. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional must remain up-to-date and have knowledge about: (a) federal, state, and local laws that affect LGBTQIA+ people (i.e., both in terms of their LGBTQIA+ and intersecting identities) with an emphasis on continuously changing laws and ordinances, emerging legislation, and Title IX guidance; (b) related compliance reporting obligations; (c) harassment, bias, and violence intervention; and (d) national best practices and additional proactive measures on anti-harassment training and violence prevention. Because LGBTQIA+ issues have emerged more recently on many college and university campuses, the ability to have expertise in historical and existing equity, diversity, and inclusion issues—especially around race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, gender, class, disability, religion, and spirituality—requires practical knowledge, experience, and proficiency.

Core Competency Six:

Assesses Campus Climate and LGBTQIA+ Success Using Multiple Measurement Methods and Communicates the Impact of LGBTQIA+ Communities on Campus and the Impact of Campus on LGBTQIA+ Communities

The LGBTQIA+ director/professional must be knowledgeable about LGBTQIA+ research design, methods, data interpretation, and privacy concerns, so they can effectively consult their campuses (e.g., institutional research offices and data analysts, senior administrators, individual departments, and faculty and other campus researchers) on data collection. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional consults on setting standards for gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, name, relationship status, and structure categories in data collection and promotes comparable data sets for institutional research. Many campuses define institutional success through specific strategic goals (e.g., closing achievement gaps related to retention, GPA, graduation rates, and time to degree); and measurements are often cisnormative and heteronormative and based on national and state instruments that typically

have not considered LGBTQIA+ communities or their intersecting identities. Therefore, the LGBTQIA+ director/professional should have significant expertise to consult on inclusive instrument creation/enhancement, effectively measure campus success, clearly interpret data, and communicate findings to enact change in persuasive and meaningful ways. Additionally, program assessments (i.e., the most common evaluation used in this work) must align with broader constructs of institutional success and be tied to standards set by periodic institutional accreditation processes.

Core Competency Seven:

Participates in the Intellectual Life of the Institution and Contributes to its Academic Mission

The LGBTQIA+ director/professional partners with faculty, staff, students, and administrators in the mission of higher education—research, teaching, learning, and service. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional has the ability to anticipate educational needs based on local, regional, and national trends and proactively collaborates with faculty across disciplines in curricula transformation to: incorporate LGBTQIA+ issues into existing courses; develop curricula for courses focused on, or inclusive of, LGBTQIA+ content; and support the implementation of LGBTQIA+ studies or other formal academic programs focused on gender and sexuality. They provide learning opportunities, which complement academic curricula (e.g., organizing lecture series and colloquia, curating art exhibits and performance series, facilitating academic book clubs, and providing other educational offerings) and provide extensive information for faculty and those seeking coursework related to LGBTQIA+ identities. Moreover, the LGBTQIA+ director/professional supports faculty, staff, and students who engage in research, facilitates workshops, and assists instructors with the provision of supportive learning environments through shared best practices (e.g., inclusive pedagogy and andragogy, pronoun use in the classroom, and names on rosters).

Core Competency Eight:

Provides Institutional Partners With Support and Consultation, Through a Holistic Approach, to Enhance Individual and Community Success

The LGBTQIA+ director/professional intentionally collaborates with campus partners (e.g., admission and enrollment management, centers for teaching and learning, human resources, academic affairs, student affairs, health and counseling centers, public safety, athletics, and alumni affairs) and community organizations to holistically support—in mind, body, and spirit—LGBTQIA+ people and all of their intersecting identities. They consult with colleagues on the development of training, curricula, resource materials, and outreach strategies with the goal of building capacity among a network of institutional partners who share the responsibility in developing an intersectional lens for cultural competence that includes programs, services, advocacy, and resources.

Core Competency Nine:

Collaborates With Institutional Partners to Increase Access, Recruitment, and Retention of LGBTQIA+ Students, Staff, and Faculty

The LGBTQIA+ director/professional understands what training, services, resources, and initiatives make success possible and draws upon institutional knowledge to advocate for increased access, recruitment, and retention. Using a variety of institutional tools and data sources (e.g., campus climate surveys, national health and engagement surveys, human resources exit interviews, and focus groups), they assess the state of the LGBTQIA+ community at the institution. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional consults with campus partners in the creation of effective data collection and maintenance mechanisms for student and human resource databases. They interpret data to discern issues that may positively or negatively impact individual and community access, outreach, conditions of success, and barriers to achievement. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional proactively collaborates with campus partners (e.g., admission and enrollment management, human resources, faculty senate, academic affairs, student affairs, alumni affairs, athletics, identity-based centers, and institutional diversity, inclusion, and equity offices) to improve recruitment and retention of LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and faculty.

Core Competency Ten:

Supports the LGBTQIA+ Community Through Strong Crisis Management Skills and Collaboration With Key Campus Partners

LGBTQIA+ people frequently first seek support from the LGBTQIA+ director/professional for (a) mental health (e.g., depression, self-injury, and suicidal ideation), (b) sexual harassment and assault (e.g., sexual and physical violence and intimate partner violence); and (c) bias-related incidents (e.g., overt discrimination, hate crimes, and implicit bias). The LGBTQIA+ director/professional must be proactive, execute excellent judgment, and have established collaborative relationships with colleagues across campus to effectively respond to situations. This includes serving on and/or engaging with crisis response, bias response, threat management, and case management teams. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional ministers to the campus community and provides support, guidance, and programming around national and local events that deeply affect them (e.g., legislation and supreme court rulings, sexual harassment and assault cases, hate crimes, suicides, and responses to national violence, such as the Pulse shooting and police brutality). In addition to crises, all constituents seek out support for interpersonal issues (e.g., adjustment to campus, relationships and family, academic distress, and workplace and campus climate concerns) and identity-based topics (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, other intersecting identities, transitioning, and coming out). These require a comfort with providing support, guidance, and referral services as appropriate.

Core Competency Eleven:

Engages LGBTQIA+ and Allied Alums and Supports Institutional Goals Around Fundraising and Advancement

The LGBTQIA+ director/professional brings alums back to campus—sometimes for the first time—and provides opportunities for active engagement and participation. Alumni affairs and development colleagues rely on the LGBTQIA+ director/professional to help identify and recruit LGBTQIA+ and allied alums and family members, organize events, and collaborate across affinity groups (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander alum groups) to co-develop programmatic and other opportunities for networking, engagement, and giving. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional engages alums, families, and community members in fundraising for both LGBTQIA+ services and overall institutional giving. They also support alumni affairs and development officers in a multitude of ways, including training around best practices, record keeping, and collaboration with other colleagues who serve these constituencies (e.g., career services, financial aid, parent and family programs, academic programs, and student affairs).

Core Competency Twelve:

Utilizes Knowledge of Research, Theory, and History of LGBTQIA+ Communities, Grounded in Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion

The LGBTQIA+ director/professional is designated as the campus expert on LGBTQIA+ communities. Distinct from faculty, researchers, and other educators who create and transmit knowledge in specific areas and domains, the LGBTQIA+ director/professional relies on integrated community knowledge and history, coupled with significant and emerging research, to provide immediate, practical advice and direction on policy, practice, and informed action. Theory (e.g., social justice theories; identity development and student development theories; and critical race, feminist, queer, economic justice, and crip theories), as well as the legacies of community activism and current civil rights and social movements, inform the inclusive and intersectional practice of the LGBTQIA+ director/professional and the profession.