"Out"ward Thinking: LGBTQ Outreach in an Enrollment Management Context

Christopher W Tremblay, Ed.D, Western Michigan University
PROFILES IN DIVERSITY
Becoming an Ally
by Rachel Wiley

14

“Out”ward Thinking: LGBTQ Outreach in an Enrollment Management Context
by Christopher W. Tremblay

17

INTERNATIONAL LEARNING
Higher Education: What the US Can Learn from Brazil
by Timothy B. Loomer

23
LGBTQ OUTREACH IN AN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CONTEXT by Christopher W. Tremblay

The recruitment and enrollment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) students continues to evolve as colleges and universities strive to reach out to this growing population and identify appropriate and respectful ways of connecting with them. Over the last decade, research has emerged, actions at the college level have been taken, and trails have been blazed. This group of students deserves the right to be recognized and served.

AACRAO’S EFFORTS
The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) is striving to become a leader in nationally recognized LGBT recruitment and enrollment efforts. As such, it provides a variety of resources in that regard, including a book chapter in a guide, a recognized LGBT Caucus, published LGBT articles and national conference presentations.

In 2008, AACRAO published a chapter entitled, “Recruiting LGBT Students” in its The College Admissions Officer’s Guide. The purpose of the chapter was to officially establish the “coming out” (if you will) of the direct recruitment of this specific population. Authors Einhaus, Viento and Croteau (2008) address a variety of issues and make the point that until the early 2000s, LGBTQ recruitment was fairly non-existent. In a section labeled “Diversity Issues in a New Context,” the three authors discuss how LGBTQ students enrich the diversity on a college campus. For example, they cite the need for “diversity-oriented admission practices,” one of which includes practices inclusive of LGBT students. Additionally, results of a national survey of admission directors are shared and described, revealing only four percent of colleges at the time targeting LGBTQ students in their direct recruitment efforts. Now would be the time to repeat this survey to further understand the changing nature of this enrollment landscape.

LGBTQ CAUCUS
This caucus emerged within AACRAO in the 1990s to meet the needs of the growing LGBTQ population. The goal of the caucus is to unite LGBTQ and ally professionals who are interested in supporting organizational initiatives that invite and assist LGBTQ students in enrolling in and being successful and safe in college. Each year, this caucus ensures that LGBTQ-themed sessions are present at the annual AACRAO meetings and conferences to assure representation in support of diversity and inclusion. Most importantly, this caucus (like all AACRAO caucuses) advocates for the needs of the LGBT population. At the more recent annual meetings, student panelists have shared their personal testimonials as a way to more fully understand and appreciate the challenges, barriers and opportunities from the eyes of an LGBTQ student.

INSIDE THE PRIDE GUIDES
In 2007, I conducted research with Einhaus on the types of tools available to LGBTQ students during their college search and presented it at the 2008 AACRAO Annual Meeting. It showcased the print and electronic resources, including The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students, the Campus Climate Index and publications by the Princeton Review and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. Together, these tools are used by prospective college-bound LGBTQ students to navigate the college admissions process through their context and to evaluate the LGBT students and resources on college campuses. Colleges and universities should benchmark themselves against these resources to see how a prospective LGBT student would view them based on these criteria.

PRIDE ON THE OTHER SIDE
Two years later, inspired by the Inside the Pride Guides’ presentation and research efforts, I co-authored an article with Daniel Mathis in which we explored the emergence of targeted websites for prospective students. We conducted an environmental scan of colleges nationwide and offered a continuum on which many of the websites resided, depending on the type of model they were. This article appeared in AACRAO’s College & University journal and was designed to demonstrate how colleges and universities
were using the digital landscape to showcase their LGBTQ population and provide information during the college search process. These types of targeted microsites are expected to increase as more colleges and universities become more responsive and intentional in these efforts.

**CAMPUS PRIDE**
In addition to AACRAO, Campus Pride is the dominant advocate and facilitator of LGBTQ college-bound initiatives, especially at the national level. Launched in 2002, Campus Pride is a national non-profit organization designed to be a resource for college-bound students and colleges/universities. Campus Pride launched two LGBTQ-Friendly College Admission Fairs in 2008. That has now expanded to six national fairs planned for Fall 2012. Through these efforts, colleges can now target their recruitment to this focused audience. In fact, more than 120 colleges and universities invest in this venue as a part of their outreach.

Campus Pride also launched a national LGBTQ-Friendly Campus Climate Index in 2008, which now includes information from more than 200 college campuses. This Index is described by Campus Pride as “a vital tool for assisting campuses in learning ways to improve their LGBTQ campus life and ultimately shape the educational experience to be more inclusive, welcoming and respectful of LGBT and Ally people.” Prospective college-bound LGBTQ students can use this index and website to educate themselves and evaluate the “friendliness” of a campus based on eight primary factors.

**NACAC**
In its Spring 2012 issue of the Journal of College Admission, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) featured an article by Cegler on the targeted recruitment efforts of LGBTQ students. As Cegler cites, best practices in LGBTQ student recruitment are still in their infancy stage, an indication that not much has changed in the last decade. Cegler introduces the notion of passive versus active recruitment and uses the LGBT Campus Pride college fair program as an example of active recruitment; he calls for intentional execution with a concern for ethics.\textsuperscript{5} In addition, he suggests more research, evaluation, and assessment are needed in order to further advance efforts.

**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**
In 2011, Elmhurst College became the first known college/university to add a specific LGBT question to its application for admission. The question reads, “Would you consider yourself to be a member of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community?”\textsuperscript{7} According to a Chicago Tribune January 2012 report, five percent of Elmhurst’s applicants indicated they were a member of the LGBT community.\textsuperscript{8} Many college professionals are watching to see if other campuses will follow suit and add a similar question on their application. Elmhurst College has opened that door and become a role model in the identification of and support of the LGBT population.

**ON THE HORIZON**
A current LGBT issue facing enrollment managers involves how to respect transgender students in student information systems (SIS). Many such systems only permit a male or female gender code, thus excluding this part of the LGBT population. This is a dilemma that registrars are attempting to address, especially since transgender students seek to have a “preferred” name in the system, especially on class rosters. Another complicating factor is the protection of confidentiality to avoid negative attention. While the transgender population is not large, that should not dictate an appropriate response, especially for campuses striving for full inclusion and respect of the individual. Many schools should follow the lead of the University of Vermont, who modified their SIS back in 2009.
An opportunity for further exploration is the current status of all types of scholarships and financial aid targeted at the LGBTQ population. Since financial aid is a part of most enrollment management operations, this falls within the scope for consideration. LGBTQ students may be drawn to a particular school if funds are dedicated to support them specifically because of their sexual orientation.

Focusing on LGBTQ students is a part of most colleges’ direct effort to be inclusive and welcoming. In the last decade, educators have begun discovering and exploring how to include this population in recruitment and enrollment initiatives. This article was designed to provide insight into the LGBTQ recruitment landscape to showcase some efforts within the last decade that all types of enrollment management professionals are making to advance the knowledge, thinking, advocacy and actions in support of LGBTQ students enrolling in college. It may be challenging to predict what’s on the horizon for the recruitment and enrollment of LGBT students, but one set of themes will continue to evolve—access, outreach and expansion of efforts. All it takes is some outward thinking.

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