

# Supporting LGBT+ Physicists: A Best Practices Guide for Departments

LGBT+ Physicists, <http://lgbtphysicists.org>

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# Supporting LGBT+ Physicists: A Best Practices Guide for Departments

## General Recommendations

When physicists talk about issues related to diversity or broadening participation in the field, the focus, thus far, has typically been on creating support mechanisms for women or people of color. However, physicists who identify as LGBT+ are also a minority within the physics community and can also find themselves marginalized in certain ways. This document aims to highlight opportunities for making the physics workplace more inclusive for LGBT+ scientists.

Best practices for the inclusion of LGBT+ people on campus can be found in several places<sup>1,2,3</sup>. In the first portion, we limit ourselves to a set of recommendations that are particularly relevant to physicists and physics department chairs (as opposed to general university administrators). After a brief glossary of terms, we make both short-term and long-term department-level suggestions, followed by several recommendations for university-level policies that may guide conversations with institutional administrators. A list of useful external resources is available at the end of the document, along with the author list. Policies that can be implemented rapidly are flagged with stars.

**\* = Things you can do tomorrow**

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<sup>1</sup>W.J. Blumenfeld. 1993. *Making Colleges and Universities Safe for Gay and Lesbian Students: Report and Recommendations of the Massachusetts Governors Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth*. Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>2</sup>S. Rankin. 2003. *Campus Climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People: A National Perspective*. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

<sup>3</sup>S. Windmeyer, S. Rankin, G. Beemyn. 2009. *Campus Climate Index*. On-line. Available from Internet, <http://www.campusclimateindex.org>, accessed 12 March 2013.

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## GLOSSARY

*Some of the terms in this glossary may be unfamiliar; some familiar terms may have unfamiliar definitions. However, this use of language has evolved out of the literature and debates on gender and sexual diversity issues over the last few decades. The glossary's definitions are composites of widely used accepted forms. They can be used as a launching point for the reader to understand the differences that exist between "day-to-day" use of the terms and more inclusive and explanatory definitions.*

### **Ally**

Someone who is not part of the LGBT+ community but works to ensure equal rights and opportunities for LGBT+ people.

### **Bisexuality**

Sexual orientation characterized by attraction to both men and women.

### **Cisgender or Cis**

Term referring to a person who identifies their gender to be in line with the sex assigned to them at birth. For example, someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman is considered to be cisgender.

### **Gay**

Term referring to a homosexual person, frequently but not exclusively a homosexual man.

### **Gender**

Roles and identities that are socially constructed for men and women. Gender is not an inherent trait, but rather a fluid identity on the spectrum of socially defined femininity and masculinity.

### **Gender Identity**

An individual's feeling towards and experience of their personal gender. Gender identity does not have to be in line with the sex assigned at birth. For example, a person assigned female at birth can have a male gender identity.

### **Gender Minority**

An individual in a situation where their gender is not as widely represented

as others. For example, a woman in physics is a gender minority.

**Heterosexuality**

Sexual orientation characterized by attraction to members of another gender.

**Homosexuality**

Sexual orientation characterized by attraction to members of the same gender.

**Intersex**

A sex assigned at birth for persons exhibiting characteristics of both birth-assigned males and females, usually due to variations in prenatal development.

**Lesbian**

Term referring to a homosexual woman.

**LGBT+**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. The plus recognizes that not everyone fits their personal identity neatly into the LGBT constructs and may identify differently.

**oSTEM**

Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics is a national society dedicated to the organization and professional development of LGBT students in STEM. The group consists of affiliate chapters throughout the U.S. and is led by a governing board known as oSTEM Incorporated.

**Out (of the Closet)**

Openly identifying oneself as LGBT+. Someone may be out to some people but not to others (e.g. at school but not to family members, or vice versa). The decision to come out is highly personal. No one should be outed without their explicit prior agreement, as this can be harmful and even dangerous.

**Transgender or Trans**

Term referring to a person who identifies their gender with one not in line with the sex assigned to them at birth. For example, a trans woman is someone



who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female.

**WISE**

Women in Science and Engineering, a campus organization.

**Sex**

A category, such as male, female, or intersex, assigned at birth based on biological characteristics.

**Sexual Minority**

A person in a situation where their sexual orientation is not as widely represented as others. For example, a gay male in physics is a sexual minority.



## IMPROVING DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATE TODAY

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### **\* Include everyone in social events**

Department social events, whether on or off campus property, are important opportunities for faculty, staff and students not only to network, but also to form a real community. Ensure that LGBT+ department members and their spouses, partners, and children are explicitly and implicitly invited to and welcome at these events, in the same way as their heterosexual and cisgender peers. For example, instead of inviting “spouses”, **invite “spouses and partners” or “significant others”**. This practice is especially important for new department members and for newly out department members.

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### **\* Use gender-neutral and inclusive language**

While it is true that most people in our society are heterosexual and cisgender, not everyone is. The heterosexual and cisgender norm is often unwittingly reinforced through our use of language. This can leave LGBT+ people feeling excluded. Some suggestions for gender-neutral and inclusive language are:

- Remember that there is a difference between a person’s gender (culturally determined) and a person’s sex (biologically defined). Gender is

not a binary, but rather a continuum.

- **Use gender-neutral pronouns and phrasing** such as “Bring your partner” instead of “Bring your wife”, or “All students should bring their laptops” instead of “Each student should bring his laptop”).
- **Always use the name and pronoun of a person’s choosing.** If you are unsure which pronoun a person prefers, try to avoid using one until you can ask the person in private, “How would you prefer to be addressed?” At the beginning of a semester, distribute a form to all students which asks for their preferred name and pronouns along with any other information that an instructor might need (such as whether the student is on a sports team).
- **Avoid terms that sustain gender biases when describing titles or professions.** For example, use “chair” instead of “chairman”, and “custodian” instead of “cleaning lady”.
- Avoid defaulting to umbrella terms like “gay” or “homosexual.” Use “LGBT” to refer to a broad community.
- **Do not assume all people have a heterosexual orientation.**
- Remember that the term “sexual orientation” is preferred over “sexual preference”; the latter suggests a degree of voluntary choice that is not necessarily the case.

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### **\* Invite LGBT+ speakers to campus**

One way to help those belonging to marginalized populations become more integrated into the academic community is to recognize them publicly for their professional accomplishments. This also provides other members of the community with role models with whom they can identify. The APS has, for years, publicized speakers’ lists of women and minority physicists in order to encourage departments to diversify their colloquium and seminar series. Similarly, if a department invites a speaker from the LGBT+ community to make a research presentation, this simultaneously showcases that individual’s work, provides them with networking opportunities in the department, and

offers local students (and even faculty) a role model. It also enables the department to publicly demonstrate its commitment to inclusive excellence.

When **inviting a speaker to campus**, it is always good practice to arrange for them to meet with individuals or groups with whom they have common interests. For example, an invited speaker who is an expert in instructional methods may wish to meet with fellow educators. If you are hosting someone whom you know to be a public advocate for LGBT+ concerns, take all dimensions of their portfolio into account in constructing their schedule but keep in mind that that outing a person can have serious consequences. With the speaker's permission, **provide a mini-bio that references their interest in LGBT+ issues** as well as their physics accomplishments; this will encourage a wider range of individuals to come to their talk or seek to meet with them. Ask the visitor if they are willing to meet with any interested student or faculty groups - sharing pizza and conversation with the condensed matter graduate students, a local chapter of oSTEM, or the campus WISE group may be a valuable experience for all concerned.

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### \* **Participate in surveys including LGBT+ experiences**

Data collection is a vital component of diversity efforts. For any individual department or organization, it is necessary to evaluate the effects of existing policies and identify areas where improvement is required. For the larger academic community, an extensive, reliable data set allows constructive comparisons between departments and institutions, which may guide policy-making or even career decisions. The inclusion of LGBT+ demographic information and LGBT+ experiences in data collection is thus an essential element of formulating policies that are friendly to LGBT+ students, faculty and staff.

An important aspect of being a supportive chair is helping with the dissemination of research surveys. No data currently exists on the numbers of LGBT+ physicists and their experiences within the academy. When you receive an email message asking you and your department members (students, faculty and/or staff) to participate in a survey, it is important that you widely distribute the email. This will help the greater community to collect the data necessary to truly understand what is happening and what issues need to be addressed.

Consider how **internal demographic information**, and/or demograph-

ics information from job applicants and prospective students, may be collected in an inclusive way. Does the department's demographic form include a question about sexual orientation and a question about gender identity? Can respondents list a domestic partnership as a marital status? Are respondents limited to a binary, male or female identification, or can they write in how they self-identify?

Suggested questions for inclusion on internal questionnaires are:

- What is your gender? Male / Female / Non-binary / Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you consider yourself a member of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community? Yes / No

You may wish to include definitions of terms with the survey.

As with other diversity questions, responses to such queries provide valuable statistical information, but can also pose risks for the respondent. Survey responses should be anonymized; forms with these questions should clearly indicate what will happen to the data so that respondents can feel confident about how their answers will be used. All such data should be **separated from any decision-making** related to hiring, awards, or promotions. Demographic data should be passed to Human Resources or to a designated collator, and kept separately from other materials. Do not collect this information on internal forms if you cannot prevent its misuse.

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### **\* Join an Out List as an LGBT+ physicist or as an ally**

Finding a mentor who is knowledgeable about and can address the concerns of an LGBT+ student can be a difficult process. When the LGBT+ Physicists group was created in 2010, one of the major concerns raised by attendees and members was networking and finding other LGBT+ people in the field. Before these conversations began, most LGBT+ physicists had not met another LGBT+ person in the field during their career.

In addition to creating safe spaces within a department, another way to raise visibility and provide targeted mentorship is to place one's name on a public Out List either as an LGBT+ physicist or as an ally. These lists allow students to find mentors and show leadership from allies. Some institutions already have such lists in place. There are also national lists, such as the

LGBT+ Physicists Out List (<http://lgbtphysicists.org/outlist.html>) and the Out List of LGBT Astronomers (<http://web.physics.ucsb.edu/~blaes/lgbtastro/>). Signatories to these lists have stated a commitment to working against bias and discrimination in the field of physics.

As a potential mentor and ally, familiarize yourself with societies and organizations that work on behalf of LGBT+ people, both on your campus and in general, so that you may recommend them to students, staff and faculty members who ask.

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## Pay attention to course climate

**Course climate** refers to how welcoming a course as a whole is to students of all backgrounds and identities<sup>1</sup>: it is created by a number of factors, including choice of subject matter, attitude and language used by the instructor and TAs, as well as the nature of interactions among students. Each student may perceive the climate differently, experiencing anything from overt hostility or discrimination to implicit marginalization to an explicitly welcoming environment<sup>2</sup>. A student who identifies as a minority (interpreted broadly to include race, gender, class, LGBT+ status, religion, nationality) is particularly likely to experience a negative climate due to the use of stereotypes<sup>3</sup> and prior assumptions on the part of the instructor(s) about the students in the classroom. For instance, the student may overhear classmates using sexist, racist, or homophobic language, be the direct target of such remarks, or feel excluded by classmates during team projects or group work. Over time, these experiences can have a corrosive effect. In contrast, an instructor who promotes professional behavior in the classroom regularly calls on all students to ask or answer questions, creates opportunities for each student to discuss their work with members of the course staff, and encourages all

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<sup>1</sup>A highly recommended review is to be found in Chapter 6 of S.A. Ambrose, et al. 2010. *Why do student development and course climate matter for student learning*. In **How Learning Works**. 1st ed. Jossey-Bass.

<sup>2</sup>C. DeSurra, K.A. Church. 1994. *Unlocking the classroom closet: Privileging the marginalized voices of gay/lesbian college students*. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association.

<sup>3</sup>C.M. Steele, J.R. Aronson. 1995. *Stereotype threat and the intellectual performance of African Americans*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69 (5): 797-811.

team members to work together to create a climate where every student feels intellectually valued.

Minority-identifying students may face additional hurdles to successful learning in a negative climate because their emotional reactions can disrupt their cognitive processes. If the classroom climate is hostile, they will be less likely to ask questions, join study groups, or attend faculty office hours and more likely to skip class sessions altogether; these patterns can lead students to lag behind and underachieve in the course. This can be exacerbated if the student has been experiencing rejection outside the classroom as well (e.g. lack of support from family or friends). Ultimately, affected students may lose their motivation to continue with their chosen discipline and switch to one where they perceive the climate to be more congenial<sup>4</sup>. Particular challenges exist for improving climate for LGBT+ students because they are less likely to be visible than other minorities, discrimination against LGBT+ individuals is still pervasive, and relatively few role models of LGBT+ physicists are presently available.

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## **Train faculty and TAs to be inclusive**

The department should encourage faculty and TAs to educate themselves about the impact of course climate on minority students, and to make their classrooms more welcoming for them. Possible ways to raise awareness of this include: discussing the issue at a department meeting or teaching seminar, including a suitable book or article into journal clubs, or inviting an education researcher to give a colloquium. Some topics to discuss are the language used in the classroom, breadth of role models available to students, inclusion of welcoming language in course syllabi, and prior assumptions implicit in questions.

Instructors can create an inclusive learning environment within individual courses using a variety of research-based techniques. Some of these, such as interactive pedagogical methods, both increase the degree to which all students learn and also have been found to alleviate gender gaps in student

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<sup>4</sup>B. Major, S. Spencer, T. Schmader, C. Wolfe, J. Crocker. 1998. *Coping with negative stereotypes about intellectual performance: The role of psychological disengagement*. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 24 (1): 34-50



performance in introductory physics classes<sup>5</sup>. Others are more specifically aimed at countering stereotype threats and other barriers to the success of students from under-represented groups. University Teaching Centers or LGBT+ Resource Centers may be able to provide suitable training sessions (e.g. for Safe Zone programs) or even fellowship programs to help instructors learn these techniques.

Encourage faculty to share examples with their colleagues and TAs of how they use these research-based methods to integrate positive diverse role models of physicists into their classes. This can help build a more inclusive teaching culture in the department as a whole.

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### **Seek feedback on classroom climate**

To identify possible issues, provide anonymous feedback mechanisms for students to report climatic issues arising in the classroom. These should be in place and announced early in each term. It is helpful to have a standard slide for use on the first day of all classes in the department, identifying classroom standards and contact information for feedback or complaints. A departmental diversity liaison may facilitate this. If you believe there is a broader problem, consider having your institution's Diversity Office, Women's Resource Center, or LGBT+ Resource Center conduct a climate survey.

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### **Talk about climate with advisees**

Students and junior scientists who face a hostile climate – in the classroom, in the laboratory, or in the department as a whole – are often hesitant to raise the problem with an authority figure. They may worry that the climate is somehow their fault; that even terrible harassment is not bad enough to justify involving a busy, more powerful person; or that there is no possibility for positive change. They may feel pressure, external or internal, not to get a labmate or classmate into trouble, or they may believe that it's up to them to manage any harassment they face on their own. This type of problem

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<sup>5</sup>M. Lorenzo, et al. *Reducing the gender gap in the physics classroom*. American Journal of Physics 74 (2)

almost never goes away by itself, however, and an instructor, supervisor, or department chair, or other identified liaison is a natural person to intervene in an unhealthy climate.

Encourage instructors, advisors, supervisors, and mentors to ask about climate in their regular meetings with students, trainees, or other junior scientists. Helpful questions may include: Do they feel welcomed in the department or lab group? Is the climate at homework-help sessions conducive to their learning? Have they or others experienced harassment or belittlement by peers or by more junior or senior individuals? What kind of changes are needed? It is important to ask questions like these of everyone, since people may be targeted on many different grounds – sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, disability, religion, etc. By expressing a sincere interest in junior scientists’ experiences, mentors can indicate that they will listen sympathetically and are willing to take active steps to solve any problems that arise. Complaints must be taken seriously and a complainant should be able to expect an improvement in their circumstances. A harasser may or may not intend to harm, but that does not make their actions less damaging. No one should feel that they have to hide their identity in order to study or work in physics.

Ensure that there are also avenues for complaints outside the normal advising hierarchy. Undergraduate- and graduate-student liaisons are natural candidates for this role, as are university trainers in diversity and ethics. Many departments have annual or semi-annual orientations, social events, or mailers, which are good opportunities to remind students, faculty and staff of the expectations of the department, and the resources that are available to them.

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CHAPTER  
**TWO**

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IMPROVING DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATE  
TOMORROW

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**Increase visibility within the department**

Visibility and awareness are important aspects of promoting a positive departmental climate for LGBT+ people. Visibility and awareness of LGBT+ policies and even department members fosters an atmosphere of inclusion. This is particularly useful for students and faculty who worry about disclosure of their identities within the department. Visibility and awareness set the department's tone to be one of acceptance, encouragement, and focus on intellectual growth, regardless of identity and biology. There are many easy ways to increase visibility and awareness within departments.

The most important step is distributing university anti-discrimination policies early, often, and widely. This can be done through postings in faculty lounges and in student common areas, as well as notes in graduate student and faculty offer letters, and other correspondence. In the syllabi for physics courses, the instructors can include both information on academic integrity and links to the non-discrimination policies of the university. A visiting weekend for graduate students is a great time to have a representative talk about diversity issues within the department and the larger community while also addressing the department's commitment to inclusion. Faculty candidate interviews are an appropriate time to include handouts about inclusionary policies such as health care policies, same-sex partner hiring, and

gender-neutral bathroom options.

If your university does not have official inclusionary policies, the department can draft its own statement to explain its stance and approach to diversity and inclusion. This will help to attract the best candidates by showing a strong and supportive community.

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## Create safe spaces within the department

Navigating campus life poses at least some difficulties for most students, but is often even more fraught for those who also identify as members of sexual and gender minorities. Having a safe space for support and advice can make a big difference; just having such spaces available sends a powerful message of welcome and inclusion. On the other side, many well-meaning heterosexual, cisgender faculty and staff members are interested in assisting LGBT+ students and colleagues, but worry about saying or doing the wrong thing.

To address these concerns, many colleges and universities operate **Safe Zone** programs. These vary from institution to institution, but participants typically receive diversity training, a briefing on university resources available for LGBT+ students, and a sticker with which to prominently mark their offices as safe areas for people wishing to discuss LGBT+ issues. If a Safe Zone program is available on your campus, encourage faculty and staff – especially those with administrative responsibilities, such as the department chair and student liaisons – to undergo training and work to make their offices safe spaces.

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## Increase networking opportunities

The importance of forming effective networks for minorities and women in physics is well understood. Scientific networks provide access to mentoring, job opportunities, material and emotional resources to support people faced with a challenging circumstance, potential collaborators and also recognition and dissemination of work. They can also be catalysts for instituting beneficial changes in policy. These same benefits hold true for LGBT+ people.

While many institutions have valuable assets such as a Gay-Straight Alliance or an LGBT center, these groups are rarely able to support an individual simultaneously as a sexual/gender minority and also as a scientist. Moreover, these organizations do not always cater to graduate students, postdocs and faculty. There's a need, therefore, for networks that explicitly address all aspects of identity at an appropriate level for a person's career stage.

Supportive heads of department should reach out to the Gay-Straight Alliance or LGBT Center, if these exist at their institutions, to identify resources and networks that may already exist, and should suggest to leaders of those groups that it's necessary to make LGBT+ people feel welcome and supported explicitly in their scientific context. Students and faculty should be made aware of national networking organizations such as Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (**oSTEM**)<sup>1</sup> and the National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals (**NOGLSTP**)<sup>2</sup>. Provide travel support for LGBT+ students to attend relevant networking meetings such as OUT for Work<sup>3</sup>, NOGLSTP's OUT to Innovate, and oSTEM's national meeting, as is already common for networking conferences focused on physicists who are female, African-American, and/or Hispanic. Finally, if your school lacks an oSTEM chapter, encourage the formation of such a group<sup>4</sup>.

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## Help department members find resources

As a chair, one of your primary roles is to help faculty and students in your department obtain local information and resources they need to be effective. This is especially important in supporting individuals belonging to populations (including LGBT+) that are traditionally under-represented in physics. Research shows that these physicists are less likely to be part of the informal information-sharing networks through which those in the majority gain much of their information about how to survive and thrive in

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.ostem.org>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.noglstp.org>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.outforwork.com>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.ostem.org/chapters>

the profession<sup>5</sup>.

Your mission, then, is to **learn what resources are available** on your campus and then to publicize them in a way that helps other faculty become part of the effort to be inclusive. As a starting point, consult the website of your local LGBT+ Resource Center (if one exists) or of the campus Diversity Office. Arrange to meet with the director of the center or office to learn more about how your campus is working to support LGBT+ faculty and students and how your department can join these efforts. Then bring this information back into your department by inviting the director to make a brief presentation at a faculty meeting or meet with interested student groups such as oSTEM or WISE<sup>6</sup>. Publicize campus resources that would be of use to your students and faculty by referring to them in a prominent section of the departmental website or graduate student handbook - one visible to prospective as well as current department members.

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### Appoint a diversity liaison or committee

It can be valuable for a department to appoint a faculty member, or a small committee of faculty members, as a climate/diversity liaison, to be a confidential advisor and listener for faculty and students who may be having inclusionary issues within the department. These liaisons could be listed alongside policy postings and in syllabi, and be introduced at student gatherings and welcome events. The liaison should receive training for the role, e.g. through the local LGBT+ Center or Women's Resource Center, to ensure that they know how to be effective, how to maintain confidentiality, and how to steer people to appropriate campus or community resources.

Such a diversity liaison needs to be seen as available and approachable for department members. They should initially introduce themselves to faculty and students and let people know how to contact them, and also renew these conversations over time so people remain mindful of their role. They should also send out regular communications (e.g. via e-mail or department newsletter) that emphasize the department's ongoing commitment to inclusion and share useful campus resources. Moreover, they should be proactive in seeking

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<sup>5</sup>e.g. U. Sandström, M. Hällsten. 2008. *Persistent nepotism in peer-review*. *Scientometrics* 74 (2): 175-189.

<sup>6</sup> Women in Science and Engineering

input on diversity issues from the faculty and students, and in communicating general trends or concerns to the chair to ensure that these issues receive timely attention. The diversity liaison should keep conversations confidential, except where the law or university policy require disclosure; when speaking with a student, staff member, or faculty member, the liaison should always make the limits of their confidentiality promise clear.

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### **Allow name changes on departmental records**

Students, faculty members, and staff members sometimes change their names from those originally given at enrollment or hiring, for reasons including gender transition and marriage. This may not entail a legal name change for various reasons, including (but not limited to) concerns about family disclosure. Ensuring that an up-to-date, preferred name<sup>7</sup> is used for departmental records – including directories, awards, office nameplates, and letters of reference – is an especially vital practical concern for transgender department members, who may face discrimination in applications for employment or for further education. Establish a simple way for individuals to change their names in departmental files, and stress to faculty members that they should confidentially check with the student to determine which name and pronoun to use in reference letters. Always check with an individual before changing a name on any record, especially those that are publicly accessible.

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### **Recognize and award significant achievements**

Recognizing significant achievements of LGBT+ department members communicates that their contributions are valued equally along with those of others. Such recognition might include mention in a departmental newsletter or on a college or institutional website, nomination for a university or external prize, or an invitation to present a departmental colloquium.

The key point here is that one needs to make sure LGBT+ department members are fairly considered for such recognitions, alongside all other de-

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<sup>7</sup>See <http://www.itcs.umich.edu/itcsdocs/r1461/> for an example of a preferred name policy.

partment members. For example, one might ask the departmental salary review committee to suggest nominees for various recognitions after reading everyone’s files each year. Another possibility is to seek nominees from among current or recent candidates for reappointment, promotion, or tenure; each tenure-system faculty member will therefore be considered several times during their career. In the case of an award aimed at graduate teaching assistants, the graduate chair might look over the teaching evaluations of all TAs or contact supervisors of all more experienced TAs to get suggestions.

When considering a faculty member’s service portfolio, work towards improving diversity or making the department climate more inclusive – including for LGBT+ students, staff and faculty – should be counted in the same way as any other service to the professional community.

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## Include LGBT+ people in positions of power

As with other under-represented groups in physics, LGBT+ physicists may encounter barriers to their academic or career advancement by virtue of exclusion from positions of power or opportunities for recognition - a phenomenon known as the “lavender ceiling”. While an atmosphere of “tolerance” or friendliness may exist on an individual or interpersonal level, full inclusivity can only occur when LGBT+ persons have **equal representation in structures** that provide access to power, resources, and recognition. Indeed, it has been documented that the experience or observation of exclusionary behavior within a department is significantly correlated with an LGBT+ faculty member’s likelihood to leave their institution for an appointment elsewhere<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, an important “best practice” closely related to visibility is the inclusion of openly LGBT+ members of a department in positions of authority and power. Such positions include department chair, assistant chair, or chairs of key committees that affect departmental governance (e.g., hiring, strategic planning, graduate admissions) as well as other ad hoc roles that could enable LGBT+ persons to have equal voices within the department.

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<sup>8</sup>R.S. Barthelemy, E.V. Patridge, S.R. Rankin, *The Experience and Persistence of LGB STEM Faculty*. (article in preparation)



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### **Actively recruit LGBT+ students**

Departments should actively recruit and open communications with LGBT+ students. Not only could this build a more diverse body of students within the department by including those who are traditionally under-represented, but it could also add numbers to undergraduate physics majors by inviting in students who might not otherwise think of physics as having a hospitable climate. Steps to consider include sending fliers to the LGBT+ center on campus, making physics department representatives visible at LGBT+ student events, and having a simple line at the bottom of physics major fliers that welcomes LGBT+ persons.

Invite willing and out students, faculty and staff to take on mentoring roles at recruiting events. Information on inclusiveness and resources available to LGBT+ students can also be added to materials for prospective graduate students, broadening your department's reach.

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### **Create opportunities for faculty and staff to receive diversity training**

In seeking to develop an inclusive and supportive climate for LGBT+ members of one's department, it may be helpful to seek the assistance of a diversity training professional. This individual may provide specific sensitivity training for members of the department or offer other helpful resources. While members of one's department may have the best intentions regarding inclusivity, some may not be fully aware of unconscious assumptions or biases that, when inadvertently expressed, can contribute to an adverse or exclusionary climate. A diversity training session or workshop can help alert department members to such potentially unconscious biases and signals, provide a forum for educating department members about best practices, and offer an opportunity for discussion regarding LGBT+ inclusivity.

In some universities, there exists professional diversity training expertise on campus. Alternatively, a LGBT+ community center in the local community may provide contacts. These centers can be located through Center Link (<http://www.lgbtcenters.org>). Webinars are also available through Campus Pride (<http://www.campuspride.org/webinarseries/>).

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CHAPTER  
**THREE**

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PERSONNEL ISSUES

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**\* Include non-discrimination statements in job  
announcements**

Including a brief statement on the EEO policy of the employer in the job announcement serves several goals. It clarifies the legal situation that a potential employee enters, but it also serves to signal potential employees that the employer is aware of the issues facing LGBT+ people. If competing institutions lack protections or partner benefits for LGBT+ people, qualified LGBT+ applicants may be attracted to a non-discriminating institution they might otherwise have overlooked.

Employers can include a brief EEO statement stating that “this employer prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.” In individual job postings, employers can include language to point out that they “encourage applications from eligible candidates regardless of gender, race, national origin, age, religion, marital status, political views, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or disability.”

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**\* Avoid assumptions**

It is always embarrassing to use the wrong title, name, nickname or pronoun to address or refer to someone. When the individual in question is LGBT+, this type of mistake can be particularly hurtful.

To avoid such errors, beware of assigning pronouns to people you have not met. In conversations and deliberations, consider each applicant by name until as late as possible in the process. This precaution also helps reduce potential gender bias in the hiring process. When you make direct contact with an applicant for the first time (e.g. in a telephone or in-person interview), ask “How would you prefer to be addressed?” and then communicate this information to other department members involved in the hiring process. This simple question accommodates a wide range of situations, from gender expression to nicknames.

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**\* Be open to name changes for job and tenure applicants**

Anyone who has changed names may encounter challenges when applying for employment, awards, or promotions. Employers are increasingly likely to require a background check as part of the application process; this entails providing all of the legal names one has held to the agency doing the background check. Evaluation committees typically require that one submit a list of publications as part of a job, award, or promotion application. It is conventional to provide the names of the authors so that the evaluators can note their relative seniority and/or ordering as part of assessing the candidate’s relative contributions to the work. People change their names for many personal reasons, including witness protection, entering a life partnership (usually a change of last name) or undergoing a gender transition (usually a change of first name). Since these reasons are not generally relevant to job qualifications, and tend to reveal information that the employee may prefer to keep private, employers should minimize the instances in which employees must reveal the history of their names.

Departments can take steps to balance employees’ reasonable privacy concerns against the requirements of employment and evaluation processes. In the case of background checks, the department should already be ensuring

that only those directly involved in performing the check see any information that the individual submits. In the case of evaluations for awards or tenure, the department could explicitly establish a convention of including only the last (family) names of all authors on publication lists. This would still enable experts in the field to evaluate the author ordering and seniority of collaborators, while protecting transgender individuals from being forced to out themselves. Since this would still show where an individual has changed their family name, raising issues of gender bias, the department could issue a statement such as:

*In publication lists for award or tenure applications, please list all authors' last names only and put your own last name in bold type to make it easy for the readers to find. **Name changes are not relevant to our decision and will not be considered in the evaluation.** Please also include a brief statement at the start of the publication list that notes the author ordering convention in your sub-field (e.g., alphabetical, students first, primary author first, etc.).*

This establishes that the department will only consider professionally relevant information and offers a practical way for individuals to handle several name-related issues that frequently arise.

Finally, it should be noted that addressing naming issues in one's CV or publication list does not cover all eventualities. Evaluators who look up a journal article may still discover that someone has changed their name. Individuals may wish to contact their publishers to investigate the possibility of updating their name on past publications.

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## Provide help for all dual-career couples

For any dual-career partners, decisions about employment opportunities can be affected by uncertainty about the career prospects for the partner who is not the one primarily being recruited. In the case of same-sex dual-career partners these problems can be amplified, especially in states or at institutions where the couple's relationship might not be recognized.

Discussing dual career issues before an offer of employment has been made is challenging. The potential employer is legally barred from inquiring

about the personal life of the job candidate. Additionally, the candidate may not wish to raise these issues, lest they influence the likelihood of receiving an offer. Therefore, the department chair should make it standard practice to inform all job candidates or finalists about general university resources related to work-life balance; the chair should state clearly that this one-way flow of information (from chair to candidate) is standard practice. For instance, the chair might provide a copy of a university work-life resource guide, links to the local HERC<sup>1</sup> website, or the contact information of the university's point person for dual career issues.

Note that even when a potential employee is comfortable discussing dual-career issues with potential employers (e.g., after a formal offer is in hand), a satisfactory solution may be impeded or precluded by legal barriers.

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<sup>1</sup>Higher Education Recruitment Consortium; <http://hercjobs.org>

## ADVOCACY AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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### **Provide inclusive health insurance**

LGBT+ students, faculty and staff are often unable to take full advantage of university or college health benefits. Many health plans do not extend coverage to domestic partners, although the Human Rights Campaign reports that 58% of Fortune 500 companies now offer such coverage to their employees<sup>1</sup>. Others exclude “procedures related to being transgender.” As documented by the Transgender Law Center<sup>2</sup>, this exclusion applies not only to medical services that are vital for the transitioning process - such as hormone treatments, transition surgery, or therapy for those who require it - but also has been used to deny treatment for pathologies associated with the sex assigned at birth (e.g. uterine cancer in a transgender man) and for such non-gendered problems as the flu or a broken arm. The impact of such policies on an individual’s physical and mental health cannot be overstated. Offering inclusive health insurance is a competitive advantage in hiring candidates who are LGBT+ or who have LGBT+ beneficiaries.

In states where health coverage for domestic partners is permitted, **advocate with the administration to include domestic partners**, regardless of gender, as possible insurance beneficiaries. If state law prohibits such an arrangement, it may be possible to pursue an alternative insurance structure

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/lgbt-equality-at-the-fortune-500>

<sup>2</sup><http://transgenderlawcenter.org>

subsidized by sympathetic donors. Advocate for removing the transgender exclusion from your college or university's health plan, as has been done successfully by the University of California System; as a smaller step, advocate for including specific coverage for certain procedures (such as therapy, hormone treatments, and sexual reassignment surgery) for transgender students, faculty, staff and family members.

This is an example of language for defining domestic partners for the purpose of benefits, used by the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility: "a non-married cohabiting couple, sharing a common legal residence, for a minimum of twelve months prior; and intending to cohabit indefinitely, sharing the common necessities of life." <sup>3</sup>

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## Provide restroom accessibility

For many people, especially transgender, intersex or gender-nonconforming people, the availability of restroom space is a frequent and stressful concern. It is important to be able to use the restroom in peace, without being harassed or interrogated about whether it's the "right" one. To mitigate this worry, express a clear policy that students, faculty and staff may use any restrooms appropriate to their gender identities, and designate some restrooms as gender-neutral. Usually, gender-neutral restrooms are single-stall; new ones may be added in a building renovation or existing ones may be re-labeled with an inclusive sign. These restrooms also provide critical infrastructure for people with disabilities, family needs, and people with privacy or medical needs.

Some universities, such as American University and Kent State University, now require newly built and significantly renovated structures to include at least one gender-neutral restroom each. These restrooms have signs that only read "Restroom" and/or contain both male and female symbols. Elsewhere, individual departments may keep this concern in mind when contemplating changes to the department's space.

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.jlab.org/div\\_dept/admin/HR/benefits/forms2008/DomesticPartnerAffidavit.pdf](https://www.jlab.org/div_dept/admin/HR/benefits/forms2008/DomesticPartnerAffidavit.pdf)

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### **Appoint a contact person for dual-career couples**

For any potential employee, it may be important to be able to acquire information about dual-career resources in confidence and without affecting the search. As noted earlier, the issues can be even more complex for same-sex dual career couples. The university should provide means for job candidates to acquire this information as early as possible in the process, to ensure that there is clarity about the prospects when an offer of employment is made. Having a visible, comprehensive web page where resources related to dual-career issues and work-life balance are collected is helpful. Best of all is for the university to appoint a **single contact person for all dual-career issues, regardless of gender**. This person (e.g., a vice-provost for academic human resources), who is far removed from the search committee, can assist in assessing the situation while the hiring process is on-going. Having a well-informed person to contact for advice about the details of a dual-career situation can help make all job candidates feel welcome.

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### **\* Participate in surveys that include LGBT+ experiences**

Encourage participation in **national or regional surveys** that address LGBT+ issues. For example, Campus Pride produces the LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index<sup>4</sup>, a valuable resource for students and administrators. An official authorized to represent the college or university on LGBT+ issues may contact Campus Pride in order to take part in the assessments for the Index.

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### **Use gender-neutral and inclusive language**

To indicate a welcoming environment a department will want to use gender-neutral and inclusive language in its internal and external communications.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.campusprideindex.org/>



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See the corresponding section under “Improving Departmental Climate Today” on page 1 for specific suggestions. However, many communications that may reference gender or partners originate in other university departments (human resources, benefits office, public relations). Your department can take an active role in improving the language that is used by pointing out instances of discrimination through language and work with the other department to find gender-neutral and inclusive wording.

## RESOURCES

### **LGBT+ Physicists**

<http://lgbtphysicists.org>

This website was created to collect resources for and address the issues of LGBT+ people in physics. It contains information on joining LGBT+ Physicists, an Out List, current and past events, and links to other resources.

### **GLAAD Media Reference Guide**

<http://www.glaad.org/reference>

Although created for journalists, this guide provides information on terminology used with LGBT+ communities as well as a list of current national issues in the United States faced by the community.

### **CampusPride**

<http://www.campuspride.org>

CampusPride is a leading organization in research on LGBT+ people in colleges and universities. They put together the 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People, organize LGBT+ job fairs, and compile lists of those colleges and universities that excel in LGBT+ issues.

### **Campus Climate Index**

<http://www.campusprideindex.org>

This index was put together by CampusPride and ranks colleges and universities by how friendly they are to LGBT+ students. It contains information on how ranking is done, as well as how you can add your institution to the list.

**Gay, Lesbian, and Straight  
Education Network**<http://www.glsen.org>

Although geared for education from K-12, GLSEN's research provides many insights into LGBT+ students including those soon to become college freshmen. Every year, GLSEN puts together a National School Climate Survey. In 2011, GLSEN found that 81.9% of LGBT+ middle and high school students experienced harassment in the previous year. They've also done studies specifically on transgender students, such as their Harsh Realities report, and on LGBT+ people of color, such as their Shared Differences report. All of their publications can be found at <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/research/index.html> with both an executive summary and a full report.

**NOGLSTP**<http://www.noglstp.org>

The National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals, Inc., is a national professional society. It educates STEM communities about the needs of their LGBT+ members and supports lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in STEM fields, especially via mentoring, networking, and advocacy.

**oSTEM**<http://www.ostem.org>

Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics is a national society dedicated to the organization and professional development of LGBT students in STEM. The group consists of affiliate chapters throughout the U.S. and is led by a governing board known as oSTEM Incorporated.

**The TONI Project**<http://transstudents.org>

Organized by the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), the TONI Project is a student-oriented space for sharing college and university practices and policies of particular interest to trans students. Campus-by-campus information may be useful to prospective students choosing a school, or to people hoping to improve policies at their own institutions.

**The Transgender Law and  
Policy Institute**<http://www.transgenderlaw.org>

This institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to engaging in effective advocacy for transgender people in society. The TLPI brings experts and advocates together to work on law and policy initiatives designed to advance

transgender equality. Of particular interest to colleges and universities, this institute has put together a list of policies that affect transgender students and the institutions which implemented them (<http://www.transgenderlaw.org/college/index.htm>).

**Post-DOMA Fact Sheet**

<http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/after-doma-what-it-means-you>

The American Civil Liberties Union has joined with several other organizations to compile a very useful set of fact sheets, describing the legal situation of married same-sex couples after the US Supreme Court struck down the so-called "Defense of Marriage Act" (DOMA). This decision requires the US federal government to recognize legal same-sex marriages, but does not require individual states to do so, resulting in a confusing patchwork of protections and obligations that depend on the state where your institution is located and the state where the couple was married. The fact sheets are an educational resource for same-sex couples, students whose parents have a same-sex marriage, human resources departments, and other administrators, covering employment benefits, taxes, immigration, federal student aid, and more.

**Immigration Equality**

<http://immigrationequality.org>

This is a nonprofit advocacy group focused on U.S. immigration issues as applied to members of the LGBT+ community. Their website provides up-to-date resources for issues frequently faced by transgender immigrants, binational same-sex couples, other LGB+ individuals, and people who are HIV-positive. They are also sometimes able to provide legal help or recommend a private attorney.

## AUTHORS

This guide was prepared by a subcommittee of the LGBT+ Physicists organization. The authors include physicists from several points on the LGBT+ spectrum, as well as allies. We are listed here in alphabetical order:

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