

The Experiences of LGBT Faculty at Western Washington University

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Introduction

Western Washington University, like most universities, has a goal of recruiting and retaining high quality faculty in order to offer students the best possible education and foster an environment of academic inquiry of the highest caliber. One of the approaches to recruiting and, then, retaining high quality faculty is by offering them a positive work environment. Generally, this means an environment that is intellectually stimulating, collegial, offers opportunities for both teaching and scholarship, and pays a living wage. Because Western Washington University salaries are relatively low,¹ one would expect that the university excels in providing the other above-listed advantages—a collegial and stimulating environment where faculty enjoy the ability to both teach engaged students and pursue intellectual endeavors. Western Washington University has an added advantage of being housed in a pleasant, mid-size college town that is surrounded by natural beauty and recreational opportunities. Many faculty members report that the quality of life in Bellingham is a deciding factor in their decision to come to or remain at the university. Western Washington University's ability to retain high quality faculty members, even in the face of relatively low salaries, suggests an enduring, positive environment for faculty employees.

Minority faculty members, whether racial/ethnic minorities or LGBT-identified, may have additional considerations relative to majority group members at Western Washington University. Although they may also appreciate the above listed advantages, they face the unique situation of being what I term "super minorities." I would define this term as a group making up less than 5 percent (and generally less than 2 percent) of the population. Not only are LGBT and racial/ethnic minority faculty members super minorities at Western Washington University, but also within the city of Bellingham thus they may face unique challenges simply due to their very small numbers. If the University wants to ensure a positive work environment, it is imperative that they protect minority individuals from discrimination and harassment, offer specific inducements and opportunities, acknowledge that these populations as *super minorities* might have unique needs, and create opportunities to signal a positive and supportive climate for minority faculty.

Unfortunately, this project only gathered data on the needs of LGBT faculty and not faculty who are members of minority ethnic and racial groups. Although I believe many of the general concepts may apply, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews with racial and ethnic minority faculty to better understand their experiences at Western and what appropriate steps could be taken to assure their retention. In addition, this study talked mainly with faculty members and does not address the needs of

¹ See <http://www.wwu.edu/president/documents/Faculty%20compensation%20comparison%20-%20WWU.pdf> for salary comparisons

LGBT staff or students. One could imagine that many of the recommendations that would improve the climate for LGBT faculty would improve the climate for LGBT individuals generally. Still, it is important to acknowledge that LGBT staff have unique experiences and needs that are not addressed here. A future project could collect data from LGBT staff and/or students to better understand their experiences and needs as members of the Western Washington University community.

On a personal note, I would like to reveal my motivations for this project. Often, universities implement strategies in an attempt to encourage diversity among both academic job applicants and faculty. Yet, there is little evidence that these strategies are (or are not) effective. For example, does creating a resource list for incoming faculty really matter to recruitment and retention? If so, how does it matter? Is it due to the provision of the resources themselves or is it that the provision of resources signals that LGBT individuals are on the “cultural map” of the university? This study is an attempt to gather data directly from sexual minority faculty at Western Washington University, in order to make evidence-based recommendations that will hopefully lead to policies and procedural change that can improve the lives and, one would expect, the retention of sexual minority faculty. I relied heavily on direct quotes from faculty members in this report, both because I did not want to be viewed as “interpreting” for my own purposes, and because the interviewees shared their moving stories in such a personal way that I thought their own words best captured their views and experiences.

Sample and Method

For this project, I interviewed tenured and tenure track faculty members from a variety of disciplines about their experiences working at Western. I also interviewed one non-tenure track instructor and one professional staff member. The interviews took place between March and June of 2012; it is important to note that interviewees discussed events spanning a number of years and, for some individuals, within a variety of positions at the university. The interview schedule (see Appendix A) consisted of a number of broad, open-ended questions, asking for basic demographic information, information about the hiring process, and about experiences, both negative and positive, while working at Western Washington University. Interviews took between 30 minutes and one hour and were conducted in a variety of locations including my office, the interviewees’ offices, and various cafes and coffee shops around campus. In addition, four interviews (two previous employees and two individuals who turned down job offers) were conducted by phone.

I approached 26 individuals; two declined to be interviewed, one did not respond to scheduling attempts, and 23 completed interviews.² Of the 23 respondents, 17 were current, tenured or tenure-track faculty members, 1 was a non-tenure track, full-time instructor, 1 was a professional staff member who moved to Bellingham for a position at Western (what I term “recruited staff”), 2 were former faculty members, and 2 were individuals who received job offers from Western Washington University, but turned them down. Just over half of the respondents were female. The respondents came from a limited number of LGBT identities—none identified as transgender and only one identified as bisexual. I was not successful in locating any other faculty members with these identities; in fact, to my knowledge, I am the only trans-identified faculty member on campus. Among the non-bisexual interviewees (that is, all but one interviewee), all of the males identified as gay, two females identified as queer, and the rest of the females identified as lesbians. It is notable that the female respondents were more likely to use more than one descriptor in defining their identities while the males universally responded, “gay” when asked to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity. Females used terms including butch, queer femme, queer, lesbian, gender queer, and female. The respondents were overwhelmingly white (approximately 80% of the sample) with only three non-white respondents among current employees. I use the term “non-white” strategically here, in order to protect the identities of the respondents. Respondents worked an average of 14 years at Western Washington University in a variety of colleges including Woodring College of Education, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Business and Economics, College of Fine and Performing Arts, Fairhaven College, and the College of Sciences and Technology.

Results

Campus Climate for Faculty

I would categorize just over three quarters of interviewees as generally satisfied at Western Washington University. Overall, faculty felt that the university was inclusive and several interviewees reported having opportunities for advancement:

Here I am the chair of the department, I just got to be full professor, and I've only been here nine years so I certainly can't complain about my opportunities for advancement. So personally, no, I don't think [being a sexual minority] has impacted me.

When I walk across the quad, the Old Main quad, I often look around and send a message to the cosmos, 'Thank you.' I really feel grateful for being here. Bellingham is great; the Northwest is marvelous.

² The response rate was 88%.

It says something that I don't even have a small list of what I think people could do.... I've carved out a little niche and it works for me and I suppose it will work for me unless I have some terrible experience where I feel discriminated against.... No one bats an eye with LGBT content and if students even get a whiff of homophobia, they are on it. I don't think this is typical to other parts of the country.

Besides the positive experience of designing and teaching [an LGBT course], I've found quite a few people on the campus who are pretty open and accepting. I served on the...LGBT Concerns Committee. There are some really good people, many of them allies, who served on the committee over the years. I always kind of liked that. I think over all, I've had a lot of really good experiences with students as well.

It is important to acknowledge that the sample consisted of individuals who had been employed at Western Washington University for an average of 14 years. One would expect that individuals who maintained employment for such a long period of time would be more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and the institution relative to a sample that included a greater number of individuals who had left the institution. In addition, a few interviewees were mindful of the fact that their success was due in part to their relatively mainstream lives. They acknowledged that individuals who are less typical (e.g., transgender or gender atypical), have other minority statuses (e.g., people of color), or are more politically or academically radical might have less success:

I would say yes, we have been [she and two colleagues were treated fairly]. But sometimes that's a reflection of the people and not of the institution. I think in each one of those cases, we are not people who make waves. We didn't push buttons....We just did our work and in most cases did it pretty well, so nobody cares.

I'm pretty middle of the road, middle class, and I fell in love with a woman....We have two kids, two cars, two cats, a house, I grow a garden I am assimilatable...

I think [discrimination] varies also according to our physical characteristics and the way we express our identities as well. If you're in people's faces, if you're dressing differently from the norm, if you're a butch type... I think it may vary whether you're staff or faculty as well. Faculty are in a privileged position.

One person who turned down a job offer confirmed that existing outside the dominant culture did make it more difficult to consider living in Bellingham and working at Western Washington University. As someone who was queer-identified, a person of color, and had a genderqueer partner³, she explained in

³ Queer-identified, in this sense, means a more radical approach (relative to mainstream LGBT identities and lifestyles) to sex and gender identities and politics, often including analyses of intersectional influences (e.g., social class, race, and ethnicity). Genderqueer means an individual who defies gender expectations for their sex, often combining masculine and feminine (or male and female) qualities and identities. They may identify as both, neither, or moving between genders.

an email, "Bellingham itself felt weirdly white and straight to me....It did mean something to me that there were out queers around (and queers of color) [among University faculty], but I was underwhelmed with that aspect of Bellingham. If I was living in Bellingham, I felt like my (queer) community would be almost entirely in Seattle/Vancouver."

Although most interviewees initially reported a generally positive feeling about the institution, they often followed with stories about personal experiences of discomfort and discrimination. Interestingly they tended to separate unpleasant interactions that were "ignorant" or "inappropriate" from feeling discriminated against. It was notable that most interviewees had made peace with the idea that these interactions are unavoidable and inevitable for sexual minorities. As one interviewee put it, "I do feel an extra burden here...at Western, but as a whole I feel I am being treated fairly." The following quotes demonstrate the different types of uncomfortable situations and experiences that faculty have experienced at the University:

I did have an incident in my office...I said, "Please excuse the mess in my office." And the person said, "Oh, it's fine," but said it in a lisp back to me. We exchanged a look....I said, "You know, I really need you to just do your job and then you can go." It's hard to know [what it means] I felt that it was personal, that I was being teased....Then I started thinking, "Gosh, I didn't realize I presented quite like that." But even if I did, it's nobody's business.

So, it seems like she's "the other one." We get lumped together and it seems like it's more about being lesbians than anything else. In fact, we are as dissimilar [in specialty] as we could be, which is a good thing, because we often end up teaching the same classes....[Also] when there are presentations of work in the department, we get lumped together and our work is completely different.

Every now and then when I'm in class as a guest lecturer, I just have this sense that some people, usually males, are looking at me with derision. It's nothing I can put my finger on, but we know when it happens and it's uncomfortable. I don't care how old I get, it's still uncomfortable and I recoil, I retreat.

I think there is this kind of *Will and Grace* phenomenon where people want to have a gay best friend. So I have run across that here at Western, where people are like, "Oh great you're gay. Now I can be inappropriate with you and grab your ass"Those types of things.

I think there are people who treat me differently but there are no material consequences. [A man in a leadership position] likes girly girls, so girly girls are there for him and non girly girls are invisible to him... He's not unique. There are a lot of them.

There have been times, and I'm thinking of one person in particular with whom I work in fairly close physical proximity—I think she's crossed the boundaries. She's taken liberties in terms of sexual banter that have made me feel uncomfortable....

I was in a faculty meeting a while ago...I said something about GLBT culture and a colleague turned to me and said, "What is GLBT culture?" I could see she didn't know the acronym, so I explained it to her and she said, "Oh, gay people have a culture?" It's the kind of thing where I would value someone knocking on my door and asking if I had suggestions about things to read, but to say something like that...and nobody said anything to her! Nobody took her to task. It made me feel like I didn't belong in the department.

We just got rid of a colleague; well, he found another job. He was off-the-wall, telling off-color, gay jokesThis colleague used to direct those jokes at me because he thought I would find them particularly funny because they were gay jokes. I think they want to be accepted by me and it's their clumsy way of saying "I'm liberal; I'm out there. I have gay friends."

If discrimination is an action against an individual, based on group membership, that has material consequences, it is unclear whether these experiences would qualify as discrimination. However, they certainly create an unwelcoming and even hostile climate in which LGBT faculty members must work. Experiences of being invisible or not seen as an individual, of being overly sexualized via gay jokes and overly-familiar behavior, or being made to feel self-conscious about mannerisms and dress makes for an uncomfortable work environment for gay and lesbian faculty members.

Other Climate Issues

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity can be conceptualized as assumptions and practices grounded in the belief that heterosexuality is the norm and that individuals' sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gendered social roles all naturally align. Heteronormativity asserts the primacy of certain lifestyles (e.g., being heterosexually married with children) and delineates expectations about appropriate gendered behavior (e.g. women solely exhibit behaviors, attitudes, and interests associated with females and femininity). As a result of naturalizing heterosexual lives and cultures, heteronormativity denies, derides, or stigmatizes any identity, behavior, community, or culture outside of the perceived heterosexual norm.

Heteronormative assumptions can affect both LGBT individuals and individuals who do not conform to the expected behavior for their sex or gender. Some interviewees mentioned the pressure they felt to conform to gendered expectations. "I think the gender conformity rules are much stricter here than I've experienced other places. I think there's a little more flexibility for LGBTQ women. I think there is a visibility with me here that I haven't experienced other places and so I don't know if I may be just a little bit gay than some people or if the numbers are just lower here than at other institutions."

One interviewee believed a number of lesbian and gay faculty (and also women in male dominated fields) had left the university due to a pervasive heteronormative climate: “That has been a tremendously sad thing for me, to see the gay and lesbian faculty members who have left. I think [a faculty member who left] said it best, ‘Western might say it wants diversity, but it wants diversity of body, not mind.’ Because it’s the PNW homogenous thing and if you’re too loud or too brash or too....”

Gendered expectations were also brought up by another interviewee who had several experiences of what I would call “gender policing.” In recounting one experience where his gender atypical behavior was noted by a colleague in a joking way, he said “[I] felt as though I was being singled out yet once again. Again that pointing out of differences sometimes makes you feel more alone—‘Real men don’t....’ It made me very self-conscious of how I present myself among colleagues.... I’ve actually given a lot of thought to this and also talking with my partner and other folks who maybe aren’t as out in their workplace.... Even though from a pretty early age you learn how to pass or at least you think you know how to pass.... When I hear statements like that, it’s ‘No, no, no. That behavior is outside of the gender norms here.’ And so pointing it out just reminds me there are certain gender expectations of me that I have to meet.”

On the other hand, individuals who were typically gendered encountered another set of heteronormative assumptions; two interviewees (one male and one female) mentioned that their gender typicality made them constantly have to “come out” because of the assumption that everyone who is not visibly gender atypical (e.g., butch women) is heterosexual. “I think Western is characterized by unreflective liberalism and that even among people who see themselves as liberal, many of them hold strongly to hetero norms and see us as weird. I have to teach the people around me to use gender inclusive pronouns and not assume I have a husband. Just because I look straight doesn’t mean I am straight....It’s been my whole life. Is Western any different than any place else? No.”

Another aspect of heteronormativity is the pressure to conform to dominant notions about gender (because they are viewed as “natural” outgrowths of biological sex) and a lack of recognition that LGBT individuals may have different cultures and lifestyles related to their gender and/or sexual orientation. Most notable is invisibility—that as members of a distinct culture(s), LGBT individuals may live outside the norms prescribed by heteronormativity. “I certainly felt a pressure, as an administrator, I felt certain pressure for how I dress, which to me gets into my identity as queer, to be more [straight], because of what people want out of leadership.” Another person reports, “I have not had a very good experience here in terms of being out and feeling supported and welcomed. I feel like I’ve experienced a variety of discriminations, from overt to subtle. I think the overt, the sort of ugliest harassment has

receded. I think campus has grown more progressive and now what I experience more often is either a cold climate or an ignorance about who I am and how I live.”

Although the following is rather lengthy, I am including it because it is such an excellent illustration of heteronormative assumptions that, although not intended to harm, can cause a great deal of stress for sexual minority employees:

I was at a meeting...we were all asked to introduce ourselves....The chair of this group asked us to say a little bit about our families. I know I was not the only gay person in the room....”Oh,” I thought, “Is that allowable?” ...I thought this was so strange... I can’t remember this happening before in my professional life.... So they started around the table, and people were talking about their lovely husband or lovely wife, darling children....I looked across the room to another man I knew was gay... All we did was exchange a look for a second or two and I knew exactly what he was thinking. “You are about as in shock as I am and you’re wondering what you’re going to say.” I knew there was another person in the room, in the administration, who was gay but not out publicly, but is known to be, within perhaps this college.... I wondered how that person was going to handle this. My turn came up first and I talked about my partner and how many years we’ve been together. That we have two lovely little [dogs]... and if I am ever allowed to get married, I think I probably would do so. So the next person who is not out, made no mention whatsoever of orientation, simply said their name and position and simply didn’t answer the rest of the question. Given this person is somewhat older and is way more established in many senses... I thought that was a quite sophisticated option....Then when it came to the other fellow’s time, he did about what I did. He made a humorous comment like I tried to, to put people at ease. He talked about his partner and how many years. I thought he did quite well and I was quite proud of us for hanging in there in slightly different ways, and I think we made our point as well.

Another aspect of a heteronormative environment is the lack of acknowledgement that, for some LGBT individuals, living in a place with a small LGBT population is very difficult. Although there is acknowledgement in some departments that racial and ethnic minority faculty members might need to live in a more diverse area such as Seattle, this has not translated as easily to LGBT faculty members. Interviewees who live in Seattle and those who have considered it believe that living in Seattle would allow them to be part of a queer community, avoid scrutiny, and exist within a less heteronormative culture. When a department acknowledges this need among minority faculty members, they work to accommodate them by clustering their courses, scheduling faculty meetings mid-week, and/or encouraging commuters to call in for key meetings.

In another illustration of the pervasiveness of heteronormative culture, images of same sex couples or atypically gendered individuals are absent in materials representing Western Washington University. One interviewee explained “It used to bug me... the PR that Western put out. And now they do a very nice job of emphasizing the ethnic and racial diversity of the community, which I think is

great....Yet at the same time, it's very easy for gay people to be invisible. Here's my little example: I used to teach in Old Main...and outside of University Relations they had all these very glossy posters and one was emphasizing how green the campus was. This faculty member and his wife had bought near the campus so they could bicycle to work.... There was something about it that irritated me. Again, the straight couple serves as a symbol of the University.”

Being invisible or trying to conform to heteronormative cultural standards takes a toll on faculty. As well, needing to police behavior and dress for signs of gender non-conformity can be exhausting, taking resources away from their teaching, scholarship, and service to the university. It appeared from the interviews that LGBT individuals who are more gender atypical and/or have queer rather than lesbian or gay identities are more likely to feel discomfort and encounter mistreatment, limiting the diversity of the LGBT population on campus.

Diversity: Being counted

A few interviewees mentioned their frustration with the approach to building diversity at Western Washington University. While being mindful not to pit racial/ethnic minorities against LGBT individuals (especially since some individuals are both) in the quest for equal opportunity, some interviewees felt they were not recognized as an important and valued aspect of diversity. “Whenever there was talk of diversity, to this very day, usually what comes to mind with most people when it’s mentioned is racial and cultural. Gay people are rarely mentioned.” In addition, because LGBT students and employees are never “counted” in an effort to gauge campus diversity efforts, there is an impression that they aren’t a vital piece of diversity. “Administrators pat themselves on the back and brag about it in brag sheets when they have women in science faculty, as well they should. I felt like we have more of a ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy for [LGBT] faculty. I have never seen a brag sheet that says, ‘Good news- we have this great high number of LGBT faculty.’ We are not a celebrated part of diversity.”

A few interviewees reported experiences in diversity-related meetings where the tone was dismissive when the needs of LGBT individuals were raised. “There have been a few statements around gay marriage and those types of issues...and whether or not sexual orientation is a legitimate aspect of diversity in the college. I’ve had a couple of people... where we’ve had a conversation where it comes across as condescending...implying that it’s somehow a second tier, lower tier. But usually I take... them as teachable moments. I am comfortable enough here where I can say, “Let’s have a conversation. I didn’t feel particularly privileged when I was getting my ass kicked in high school, thanks.”

A couple of interviewees mentioned a diversity-focused group whose purpose was to rank the needs of minority employees on campus. Because there were very few lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals in the room, their needs were not ranked as important. “And the way they did that committee... was that if the majority of us have felt this, we prioritized it. And I had raised the issue, I said, ‘If we're looking to deal with issues of diversity, to say the majority of the diverse people of the room feel it...’ It was just kind of the weirdest thing. As it turned out, the issues that were prioritized were mainly issues for heterosexual people of color. I was surprised that they weren’t more savvy than that.”

Interviewees pointed to the lack of targeted recruitment and retention efforts toward students, the lack of documentation that explicitly includes reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals, and the lack of action on recommendations previously made in committees or meetings (e.g., focus groups, conversations with administration) that were intended to address the needs of LGBT employees.

Queer studies

The Queer Studies minor⁴ is housed in the Department of American Cultural Studies along with several other minors that concentrate on racial/ethnic minorities including American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, African American Studies and Raza Latina Studies. The minor was developed in 1998 by a group of interested faculty members from a variety of disciplines. Although the minor remains relatively small, it is viewed as a potentially important signal of climate for students and employees. One of the original founders of the minor explains, “Having the minor has been a good thing. I don't how many students go through it, but it created a set of classes that didn't exist before. Lots of students take those classes.” The minor was viewed both positively and negatively by interviewees. While faculty feel positively about the existence of an LGBT-focused minor and especially enjoy teaching in it, they also feel the program has been marginalized with few resources invested in its success.

Faculty who teach in the Queer Studies minor report that it is very important to their satisfaction at Western. “It's definitely something I want to keep doing. It's satisfying. It's a way of serving the students directly, I think. All students—but it's also a way for me to work with the queer students as a mentor in a way that isn't about personal connection, but about an academic connection.” Another interviewee reported, “The one thing that has been the biggest positive is getting to teach [a Queer

⁴ In the interest of full disclosure, I am the current advisor for the Queer Studies minor

Studies class]... It's a great mix of students, from freshmen who didn't even know what it was when they signed up for it to seniors who were part of the queer studies minor and knew more than me."

While enjoying teaching in the minor, lesbian and gay faculty had mixed feelings about the assumption that they would teach in the minor when it was not their area of expertise. This assumption minimized queer studies as a legitimate academic discipline, instead focusing on the role of professors and instructors as support persons for LGBT students. "I don't consider this a bad thing, but my own research and scholarship interests aren't necessarily in queer issues. That's not where my curiosities are, but I'm teaching this class in the queer minor because I'm the one that can do it. I feel an obligation to serve students." In addition, faculty who do have some expertise feel obligated to serve students that are not being served elsewhere. One interviewee structured an independent study course for five students because they had no other opportunity to take a course on the topic: "I had five students who really wanted this class and asked if I could teach it....Basically, I don't get credit for it. I don't get paid for it, but I wrote a syllabus and it was like 5 extra students. I was advising 20 page projects and it was like teaching a course. Honestly, I couldn't do them justice. I already teach full time."

Faculty who discussed the Queer Studies minor, whether or not they taught in it, generally viewed the program as "on the fringe." The minor has only one class dedicated to it in its home department, American Cultural Studies,⁵ and no required upper division courses focused on LGBT content. In addition, there are no dedicated faculty or faculty who teach in the program whose area of expertise is queer studies or a closely related field. "I always feel a little bit tokenized, like 'Oh, you did something on queer theory ten years ago, can you do this because we don't have anyone else to do it?' Or 'We can hire someone for a year to do it, but we're not thinking long term.'"

It's important to note that similar minors focusing on racial and ethnic minorities and the Women's Studies program also suffer from a lack of resources. "In a lot of historically marginalized subject matters you don't have that [resources and expertise]. In women's studies you might have someone who has never studied women's literature or women in history but who identifies maybe as a feminist and so goes into the field. I think it's a problem."

While an LGBT-focused minor can signal a welcoming climate for LGBT students, faculty and staff (and their allies), the lack of planning, resources, and expertise devoted to the Queer Studies minor can also signal that the discipline is not to be taken seriously and that LGBT content is not important to the university's educational offerings. Faculty felt strongly that the lack of resources for the Queer Studies

⁵ AMST 242 The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Experience

minor was a climate issue—it made them feel marginalized and a better supported program could improve the climate for LGBT faculty, staff, and students at Western Washington University:

Another very important thing is to develop queer studies on campus as a stand-alone field, not just a field where people get to teach a class once a year or every other year, including people who maybe don't have any qualifications in this particular field, but just happen to be queer or take an interest in it. Hire people who have been trained in queer studies, who know the field. Hire them to teach in queer studies and develop a program. If that program exists, I think it is something that will necessarily generate more respect. It will be harder for people to say little ugly things if it's a program that's recognized and validated by the university. We will have more students taking those classes. There will be less ignorance, and we'll probably have queer people who...come to Western because they think, "Oh, I'm a queer person. I'll probably be comfortable here because they have a queer studies department or program."

Faculty suggested a number of approaches to create a more respectable queer studies program including upgrading the program to a major, hiring dedicated faculty, or merging Queer Studies with another program such as Women's Studies⁶ in order to increase the possibility of hiring a dedicated faculty member or, at the least, doing some program development.

Fear of sexual allegations

Climate for minority groups can be influenced by actions taken at the institutional level and also by interpersonal interactions. Yet it is important to note that the experience of minority individuals can also be influenced by historical discrimination and persistent stereotypes. LGBT interviewees were affected by the pervasive stereotype of LGBT individuals, especially gay men, as sexual predators. The great majority of gay interviewees were mindful of the potential for students to make sexual allegations against them and, as a result, took extra precautions with students including meeting with the door open, using the stall instead of the urinal, not touching students, and not socializing with students. One faculty member explains, "I'm especially sensitive. You know a coach might come up to a football student and hug them or tap them on the back or do their familiar gestures, and I think, 'No way.' The minute I do something like that, even if it's a genuine expression, there's going to be one person who misconstrues that."

Faculty members saw the vulnerability to sexual allegations as particular to gay men. One faculty member explained, "I don't meet with students with the door closed. I'm always aware of potential allegations coming out of that. When it comes to male students...I am just so careful.... I do use the

⁶ Suggestions included a women, gender, and sexuality studies major, a gender and sexuality studies major, and a women, gender, and queer studies major.

urinal, but I will not if there's someone else there.... I don't want people being uncomfortable because they may think I'm looking. It's a gay thing. I would never want anyone to feel...you know, people have stereotypes."

Far fewer female faculty members reported feeling vulnerable to sexual allegations due to their sexual orientation; interestingly, two of the three who did had "atypical" statuses—one was masculine (i.e., identified as butch) and one was bisexual and felt that stereotypes of bisexuals as hypersexual made her vulnerable.

Some interviewees believed it was more common for heterosexual male faculty members to have relationships with students yet they were less likely to be scrutinized. One interviewee described a previous case on campus: "There is a double standard. I've seen it over the years that I have known this faculty. There are at least five [heterosexual] males who have had sexual relationships with their students. And one male...he's gone now, had such a relationship with a male student who was no longer in his class. These [heterosexual] males—they [the students] were their TA's, their assistants, or kids [involved in other related activities]. But this [gay] guy got dragged before a tribunal. The parents of this student, even though it was consensual, went ape. They went to the president, the chair. They wanted to sue; they wanted him fired."

The concern about unfair scrutiny can also affect the social lives of faculty who in addition to being professors are gay men (and lesbians) living in a small town. "I have to have a line that I cannot cross, but they also cannot cross... I don't socialize with them; I try to avoid the places where I know they will be. I have been [to the one gay bar in town]. It is terrible, but it's the only one, and I have been there with friends and I've seen my students. [As a result,] I haven't been there in 3 or 4 years."

In addition to affecting the social lives of faculty members, it may also affect the quality of relationships between faculty members and their students. One lesbian interviewee explained, "...it represents a level of caution most heterosexual faculty wouldn't take...I felt afraid to give her the kind of detailed advice I might give a male student, lest it be perceived as too personal. In this way she lost out on important mentoring from me, and I lost out on a chance to pass along knowledge."

Beyond Climate—Unequal Opportunities

Lesbian and gay faculty members had mixed views about whether they had experienced discrimination at Western Washington University. Primarily, interviewees spoke about the topic of

discrimination in reference to four areas: internal research funding, being taxed on partner health benefits, unequal treatment with regard to dual career assistance, and opportunities for advancement.

Summer research grants

When asked whether they had experienced discrimination at Western Washington University, several individuals spontaneously brought up summer research grants. There was a general feeling that summer research grants were not awarded for projects with LGBT content⁷ even though faculty had success gaining other internal funding such as mini-grants. "I've always applied for many grants. I'm desperate for money. I'm one of the lowest paid faculty in my department. I apply constantly, but never receive more than \$1500 or \$2000. It seems that there has been a different mechanism for awarding summer research grants relative to other monies.... Usually if it's a public [funding source], they will give you feedback...regardless of whether you get it or not. I asked for feedback for 10 years, never an ounce of feedback for the summer research grant." It is notable that this interviewee has received a great deal of external funding including a Fulbright scholarship. He finally received his first summer research grant in 2012. In addition, another interviewee received a summer research grant for a proposal without LGBT content, but not for his proposal with LGBT content.

Another interviewee reports, "I had a summer teaching grant turned down years ago.... [and more recently a summer research grant with LGBT content was denied funding]. It was not the first time that I had an LGBT-related summer grant application turned down....So I initiated an informal investigation, which didn't really show anything other than it did raise questions about the process by which those grant applications are reviewed."

Although the intent of this report is not to lay blame or single out individuals, it's important to note the widely held belief that one individual was responsible for the discriminatory treatment of summer research grant proposals with LGBT content. Although it is unclear whether one individual's actions could be responsible for the denial of funding, it is a widely-held belief among LGBT faculty, leading them not to apply for summer research grants for projects with LGBT content. Evidence suggests that opportunities for research with LGBT content have increased with a recent change in staff at the Office for Research and Sponsored Programs. To the best of my knowledge, there have been no summer research grants awarded to proposals with LGBT content in the last ten years. However, in this first year

⁷ This appeared to change in 2012 when there were several summer research grants awarded to proposals with LGBT content.

after the change in leadership, at least three summer research grants were awarded to proposals with LGBT content.

One interviewee commented, "It wasn't clear to me whether or not his ideas about people and sexuality influenced the committee or not. I'm not sure that any of the faculty members who were on that committee were thinking about that at all, but...they didn't have a very clear, transparent set of guidelines for how they should rate these proposals." Regardless of the reason for the past negative outcomes for summer research grant proposals, it is clear that the process is vulnerable to bias if there is not a written, transparent set of guidelines for awarding research funding. In addition, many grantmaking bodies give feedback to applicants who are denied funding; this may be a useful exercise in helping individuals improve their proposals and gain confidence in the funding process at Western Washington University.

Taxes on benefits

When asked if they believed they had experienced discrimination at Western Washington University, several faculty members immediately noted the federal taxation of their partners' health insurance. Although they acknowledged that "it's a federal issue Western doesn't have control over," they still found it a regular reminder of their unequal status. One individual realized that it was cheaper to remove her partner from her health insurance and have the partner access her own insurance. "I had my partner on my health insurance and the insurance is quite good in comparison to private sector insurance, but then we figured out we were getting taxed about \$280 a month for her insurance..."

When asked about recommendations to improve the climate for LGBT faculty at the university, several faculty members suggested a rebate for the cost of this federal taxation. "My partner has health insurance through Western and I am taxed on her benefits as income. If the university were to acknowledge that this is unfair, it would go a long way with me. It would signify to heterosexuals who have no idea that I am having to pay an economic penalty because of my sexual orientation. I think some heterosexuals would be very surprised and saddened by that. They would probably support me."

Compensating for the tax penalty on benefits for same-sex partners is becoming increasingly common both at higher education institutions and in the private sector. Termed a "gross-up benefit," it increases salaries by the amount lost to federal taxation, eliminating the penalty incurred by same sex couples. Universities such as Yale University and University of Pennsylvania⁸ provide gross-up benefits to

⁸ <http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/current/2012-05-24/latest-news/penn-extends-tax-offset-same-sex-couples>
<http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2012/jan/09/yale-to-provide-tax-relief-for-same-sex-couples/>

same sex couples. In addition, a growing number of private companies—the number has more than tripled in the last year—are compensating same sex couples for this inequity. One employee explains, “There’s a huge sense of pride that the firm has taken an opportunity to put its money where its mouth is. I don’t know that there’s any monetary figure that could match that.”⁹

Dual career policy

A few faculty members also mentioned difficulties around spousal hires, presently termed “dual career assistance.” The University’s dual career policy appears to include same sex couples by employing the term “spouse/partner,” but faculty were concerned about the equitable distribution of assistance. Faculty members felt that not having career opportunities for their partners made Western Washington University a difficult place to stay in the long term: “It is extraordinarily hard to find jobs here.” Some mentioned that they imagined this was an issue for heterosexual couples too.

However, others believed that LGBT individuals might have unique challenges. “In my department, there are many, many spousal hires. They are all heterosexuals who are married.... I’ve never seen any indication that it would be acceptable for a homosexual couple.”

Although dual career assistance is seen as a recruitment tool, it could also be viewed as a retention strategy. For minority individuals, a new partner is especially likely to live somewhere outside of Whatcom County thus increasing the likelihood of needing employment opportunities when moving here. “I think in some ways it’s true of anybody who takes a faculty position in a small town—the issue of partner hire and work is salient, but I think in some ways it is differently salient for us as queer people. I think the space of home and community has a different kind of meaning.” One individual recounted the difficulty of finding work for his partner:

[My partner] applied for jobs [at Western] and I will say in most instances... he never even got a call back.... He was on unemployment for a year and a half.... He is now managing the men's and children's departments at [a department store].... I never saw [dual career assistance] as a possibility and I never wanted to push the limits of my friendships with central administrators to ask for some kind of special favor. It's hard. [He] is making half of what he made, and that's a problem. He's underemployed....It's easier when you're going through a [new] hire; I had already been here 4 years, so then what? The whole idea of dual career assistance seems to be using it as a recruiting tool, but if you have someone who's already here, you don't have that lever anymore.

⁹ <http://management.fortune.cnn.com/2012/03/26/same-sex-couple-benefits/>

One individual has been pursuing employment opportunities for his partner for over ten years and faced, by his accounts, unfair treatment and a disordered process that is vulnerable to discrimination. These are only three of the several incidents he reported in his protracted struggle:

Since my arrival here in 2000, I was given the impression that there would be a dual career position for my spouse....my big mistake was I did this with a handshake and not on paper. [In another incident] either in or around the same time [as his tenure process], they put out a ballot to the faculty, like a straw poll asking, "Do you want ___ to have a position here at Western?" Yes or no. They never reviewed his application; they never reviewed his dossier; it was not based on merit. It was like do you like him?...There was absolutely no review process.... [In another, more recent incident] When [he] went up for the...position here, I went to EOO and [they] seemed very concerned about the process. She said that the process is done...through our office not through the department... [He] was a finalist for the position but with absolutely no indication of him as being an internal candidate. He just did it on his own. He submitted his application and he made it as a finalist.

Although a finalist, his partner was not offered the position. Although the interviewee likes Western Washington University and, especially, his students, because he and his partner have "adult bills," he remains on the job market. Even though the interviewee recounted remarkable experiences of discrimination related to tenure and other areas, when asked if he would consider staying at Western Washington University if his partner was offered a position, he replied without hesitation, "Of course."

Among interviewees, there was some concern about the transparency of the dual career assistance policy. It appears that, recently, it has been used primarily for administrative hires. If Western Washington University is no longer offering dual career assistance to prospective faculty, that should be made clear. Although Western Washington University has a clear, written dual career assistance policy, faculty reported that assistance seems unfairly distributed: "When Catherine was hired, a position was created for her husband. I don't think it's as common anymore.... [Right now] we are doing an outside search. I was told that Catherine has said there is no money for dual career assistance. But even when that was in play [her husband was hired]."

Another faculty member believed the policy to be of great value: "On its face it's a great policy. I mean we're in the middle of nowhere so if you have two spouses who work in the field of study that you can capitalize, it's really to the institution's benefit. It's a moneymaker; it's a 2-for-1 and you get the loyalty of a family. I'm not making this up off the top of my head. There are several institutions that recognize this, especially in rural institutions.... Obviously the policy works because the Provost's husband was hired on a dual career position, and [a] dean's wife was, to the best of my knowledge, not even interviewed and went from associate to full professor through the process of dual career...." As

stated succinctly by one interviewee, “If you're truly going to do dual career, do it for everyone not just for administrators.”

Opportunities for advancement

Generally, when faculty members mentioned opportunities for advancement, they felt that they had not experienced discrimination. Not surprisingly, faculty who hold or have previously held administrative positions (e.g., dean, chair, or associate dean) tended not to report discrimination in opportunities for advancement. “On the whole I feel I've lived a pretty easy path....I've gotten research awards; I've gotten sabbaticals; the president made me [a key administrative position] knowing I was an out lesbian.” Another individual reports, “Here I am the chair of the department. I just got to be full professor, and I've only been here nine years, so I certainly can't complain about my opportunities for advancement.”

Individuals who have not held administrative positions tended not to mention opportunities for advancement either positively or negatively. It is likely that these individuals are not interested in pursuing administrative positions. One interviewee who currently holds an administrative position, did report on a past negative experience: “I allowed myself to become nominated for the department chair ...and I lost in election. I think that had something to do with [being gay]. I don't know that it was entirely that, but the person the department thought would be a better chair had been in the department for three years.... I suspect that, especially some of the older male colleagues in my department, were very threatened by the idea of having a gay man as chair.” Overall, then, the majority of individuals did not report feeling discriminated against in opportunities for advancement.

Discrimination—always wondering...

One aspect of being a minority who is vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice is the uncertainty around whether perceived mistreatment is due to minority status—that is, whether it is borne out of discrimination or attributable to other factors. This can lead to a state of low level anxiety for sexual minority individuals; several interviewees recounted unpleasant incidents then wondered whether they were due to their sexual orientation:

When I was hired ... my salary was a couple thousand less than my peers. There was a statement made about my being single and that's a good salary. I'm not sure that's the reason [my sexual orientation], but I have to say it was on my mind.

We've been to dinner at several different presidents' houses many times, but did the other deans invite us? No. And I didn't invite them either. It's crazy making because I don't know if it's because of being queer or not.

Some of my friends say this is why I lost the vote to be chair—because of the conflict with this woman who was on the faculty. Because you are talented and you do great stuff. Frankly, because you are gay and they are out to put you in your place.

One of my concerns, right or wrong, was that they already had one of me....I thought, "They are not going to hire another one." I do happen to know that the first offer went to a married man and he turned it down. So I wonder if there was anything to that worry. He could have just had better publications, I have no idea. But I wondered. I had some anxiety.

Although there may be no concrete action that can be taken in order to allay minority fears that their treatment is due to their minority status, it is important to be mindful of this possibility. These comments about perceived discrimination and the concerns about summer research grants suggest that the university should work to maintain policies and mechanisms that assure standardization and transparency of processes. In addition, it seems important to acknowledge the potential role of departmental policies and behaviors. As the university increasingly gives power to departments, it may make minorities more vulnerable to discriminatory treatment. Many of the hardships described by individuals were incurred at the departmental level.

Departmental Influence on LGBT Experience

Satisfaction with work and with the University was highly influenced by departmental experiences. This was particularly notable among individuals who were extremely dissatisfied. Extremely dissatisfied individuals had very difficult experiences within their departments including what they felt were severe issues of discrimination—unequal pay, severe harassment with a lack of action from a higher administrative level, profound isolation, and hostile attempts to block tenure and promotion. One interviewee reported his struggles with tenure, "I got my tenure...the chair's letter was nasty; it was horrible... And the Dean intervened and said, 'You can't do this.' When you're under the lens and then getting that letter....the tone was unbelievable."

One individual who had been demoted from a coordinating position reports that he was essentially told by the former chair, "...if I didn't criticize and didn't speak up, that if I was a good boy, someday I would get it back...False blame is hard to take. I have to really let it go and just say, 'I'm the only senior faculty member who doesn't get to run their area.' And yet the area attracts a lot of attention and sometimes I feel like I'm ghost running it."

Another faculty member who left Western Washington University after a much-publicized harassment case reports, “My [harassment] case was, in the middle of a hallway of students, he called me a stupid faggot. And then professionally, he started referring to me as ‘precious,’ to where the nickname started to follow me in my professional circles. And literally 10 years after the first offense, he re-offended with a student and was finally dismissed.... It was 10 years fighting this harassment thing.... That, along with some other local events in my department, caused me to leave Western. And I left Western without another teaching job, I just had enough. I never felt like I was an important member of a family...I wasn't important enough to protect.”

When generally satisfied faculty members recounted negative experiences, they were most often at the departmental level. One faculty member explained, “It seems every gay faculty has been targeted for something in this department at one time or another, by a particular chair. One who left, another who was demoted from a position..., and me for some curricular action I took. It would be really hard to prove that, but why is it the same chair has picked on all the gay faculty in the department?”

Faculty members who were satisfied also tended to speak about departmental-level experiences, although they also mentioned opportunities for advancement, especially into administration. Generally, a good department is defined as one where faculty experience personal support, explicit valuing of diversity, other LGBT faculty members within the department, respect for difference in approach to their discipline, and opportunities for advancement. Here are some illustrative comments about the influences of departments in making positive work environments for lesbian and gay faculty members:

I think the most positive thing has been the general acceptance by the faculty I worked directly with in what was my department at that time...

Probably because there are a number of people who identify on various spectrums of queer or lesbian, it's been more of a non-issue than other departments.... And that was actually something that attracted me to the department. When I came I was like, “There are a lot of people of color in this department.” I knew there was at least one person who identified as gay or lesbian and there were also a number of women in the department. And that was, for [my discipline], really unusual.

When I went over to Fairhaven; Fairhaven is a very different environment. They knew I was a lesbian when they hired me and it was a very different experience to feel like I was in a place where I was completely integrated.

It is notable that female faculty members were far more likely to report being satisfied than male faculty members. Not all lesbian and bisexual females had positive experiences within their department and those with negative experiences reported that they were due to both their sexual

orientation and being a woman. Gay men were far more likely to report negative experiences, both personally and institutionally, relative to lesbian or queer women. One faculty member noted, "I'm being cautious because I think it's too easy to say that lesbians are less threatening than gay men. And at the same time it seems like there are fewer out gay men among the faculty." Many gay men dealt with explicit comments sexualizing them or stereotyped assumptions about them because of their sexual orientation. One man described it as adolescent: "The adolescent things that I described to you like the faculty member saying, 'I know what you're doing in the men's bathroom,' ... and faculty members dividing up the [specialty] students when one of my colleagues says, 'You'll like working with him because he's cute and he has a ponytail.'" Another man described the overfamiliarity assumed by some females (this was common and often included sexual banter) as the, "Hey, girlfriend" thing.

A Sense that Climate is Improving

Overall, faculty members felt that, over time, the climate had improved at Western Washington University, especially with recent administrative transitions. Both the President and the Provost are relatively new and many faculty members believed the climate had improved since their arrival. Interviewees pointed to the LGBT social at the President's house, a greater feeling of respect in personal interactions, and speedy, personal replies from the President to emails. Interviewees also mentioned the proactive stance taken by President Shepard, especially when it was viewed as beyond the call of duty:

I was moved and wrote back to him both times¹⁰ and he wrote back to me. I felt it was such a change from the previous administration and I remember getting tears in my eyes when I read the one about the gay bashing. I couldn't even believe I was reading the president of my university supporting me and my students. Honestly I think that was part of why I didn't go on the job market. I think he is changing things and I feel really excited about that.

Another interviewee reported that President Shepard sought feedback before posting his blog about Liberty University. During their conversation the interviewee admitted he was "very, very aware of his surroundings" when his partner drops him off at work. "I told [Bruce] about it and he wrote in the blog, without identifying me, that when I mentioned that to him it was tragic for him. He said he never has to think about that when he comes to campus with Cyndie they each go their separate ways....He seems to go out of his way [to support LGBT individuals] and I appreciate that. It makes a difference here at Western."

¹⁰ President Shepard sent a campus email regarding anti-LGBT violence at Washington State University and posted on his blog about the decision to ban Liberty University, a university with anti-LGBT policies, from the law school fair. The communications are available in Appendix B.

Overwhelmingly, faculty members mentioned actions taken by President Shepard. “I think Bruce has led the way on those kinds of stands. It would help for other administrators to take to their pen or their email or their verbals and say similar things, to be taking their cue from him. I think he’s been an amazing shift in sending a different message.” The positive feelings extend beyond the President to the Provost, and to upper administration generally. “I’ve always felt that [about] the administration, and Catherine, our provost, as well. I feel they are very supportive and are doing what they can. I think it came with our new administration, with Shepard and Riordan.”

In addition to recent changes in upper administration, faculty also believed that students have changed over time, becoming not only more tolerant, but often outspoken advocates for LGBT individuals and interests. “In the beginning, I wouldn't identify myself in lecture, but some students would drop my class or not take my class because they identified me as gay...then this amazing switch happened as society switched. The kids were sort of the first who didn't care and/or a lot of the kids would seek me out because I was such an out teacher and sexuality didn't matter to me and didn't matter in my teaching. I sort of became an icon or a hero to them.”¹¹

The only negative comments about recent administrative action involved the Chik-a-Filet incident. Not only did faculty take the behavior of administrators personally, but they were also concerned that policy weaknesses have not been adequately addressed. “The whole Chik-a-Filet thing was unfortunate. The university has anti-discrimination policies with vendors, but they didn't extend to sub-vendors. It's unfortunate that things fall between the cracks. Bruce met with the committee at the time and we were pretty forceful that all contracts need to reflect the values of the university. One of the things that would be good for us to do is to review contracts and make sure they all have an anti-discrimination clause in them, whether they are with a vendor or a vendor that has a contract with a sub-vendor.”

Some wished for a more principled response from upper administration once Chik-a-Filet's discriminatory practices came to light. “You'd never see President Shepard in the line getting his chicken sandwich. I don't think he ate Chik-a-Filet the whole damn time. But then when you see administrators sitting in the VU over their chicken...having no sensitivity to the fact that that's going on right around them.... The sense I got as a queer was that they were saying, 'We're not getting rid of Sodexo because it had anything to do with Chik-a-Filet.' But couldn't somebody say, 'Isn't it lovely that Chik-a-Filet is moving on too, as a result?'" Generally, faculty who mentioned the Chik-a-Filet incident were unclear

¹¹ When asked to clarify, the interviewee reported this student behavior was across sexual orientations and identities.

whether policy around sub-contractors had changed or whether the burden remained on LGBT employees and students (and their allies) to monitor contractors and their subcontractors for compliance.

Summary

The interviews find that approximately three quarters of LGBT faculty are generally satisfied at Western Washington University although almost two thirds also reported that they had experienced discrimination. At an institutional level, faculty members mainly raised concerns about the unfair federal taxation of partner health benefits, discrimination in the award of summer research grants, and the uneven distribution of dual career assistance. Much of what predicts the experience of sexual minority faculty is at the departmental level with negative experiences generally including discriminatory treatment by chairs and uncomfortable, hostile, or inappropriate actions or comments by colleagues. A positive perception of Western Washington University was also often predicted at the department level; indicators included experiencing personal support—especially during times of crisis, explicit valuing of diversity that included LGBT individuals, other LGBT faculty members and racial/ethnic diversity within the department, respect for difference in approach to academic work, and opportunities for advancement.

Being a super minority was difficult for some faculty who grappled with feeling culturally invisible, not acknowledged as a legitimate aspect of diversity, isolated because of the lack of an LGBT community in Bellingham, and acutely aware of their vulnerability to potential sexual allegations and discriminatory treatment (i.e., frequently wondering whether they were experiencing discrimination). Others felt that they had never experienced discrimination, had opportunities for advancement, and were grateful for the opportunity to work in a positive and inclusive environment. It is important to note this was far more likely for lesbians than gay men and that being visibly gay (e.g., less gender typical) may influence this experience.

Several interviewees believed that the campus climate for LGBT individuals had improved over the years and, especially, with recent changes in upper administration. They appreciated the administration's renewed interest in the environment for LGBT faculty, staff, and students and especially noted President Shepard's letter about anti-gay violence and blog about banning Liberty University from the law school fair.

Recommendations

During my conversations with lesbian, gay, and bisexual faculty¹², I became aware of two important points. First, faculty had concrete suggestions for actions that could be taken at the university level that would be relatively simple, not prohibitively expensive, and could improve the climate for LGBT individuals. Second, negative experiences were often at the departmental and/or interpersonal level—a discriminatory chair or an ignorant or menacing colleague can profoundly change the satisfaction of the LGBT faculty member. Admittedly, these experiences can be very difficult to protect employees from unless they contain concrete discriminatory actions such as denial of tenure to qualified individuals. Negative attitudes or inappropriate comments from colleagues are almost impossible to monitor, sanction, or change.

As I listened to interviewees, I started to believe that individual and institutional “signaling” could improve the experience of LGBT faculty, staff, and students as well as establish a particular climate at the University level. Signaling theory has been used to describe how employers might signal certain aspects of an organization to prospective employees (Backes-Gellner & Tuor, 2010; Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002). In addition, signaling theory explains why employees and job seekers value characteristics that do not directly benefit them—because the characteristics signal a certain type of work environment. For example, LGBT anti-discrimination policies can signal an inclusive climate—one that is associated with diversity, a welcoming learning community, and a stimulating intellectual environment. Diversity initiatives are important in signaling quality workplaces and particularly attract skilled workers (Joyce, 2003). Human resource practices are also often used to draw conclusions about the general climate and working conditions of an organization (Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989; Joo & McClean, 2006). As a result, a positive climate for LGBT faculty, staff, and students contributes to the recruitment and retention of quality faculty across sexual orientations and gender identities.

At Western Washington University, several individuals mentioned the “signaling” by President Shepard since his arrival (see Appendices for examples) and others mentioned that, for example, rebating the federal penalty on health insurance would send a strong message to LGBT employees and the broader campus community about the place of LGBT individuals at Western Washington University.

Policy changes that address issues faced by LGBT faculty provide two potential benefits. First, they address shortcomings in the treatment of LGBT faculty and, second, they can serve as a powerful form of signaling at the institutional level. I believe that the process of signaling can broadly influence the climate and culture of the university. When policies apply to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals, it is important to explicitly note the policies in a variety of venues if the institution is to have

¹² I was unable to locate any transgender faculty members and only one bisexual faculty member.

a potentially broad influence on climate. That is, not only should there be a special webpage or site devoted to LGBT resources and supports, but the information should also be visible and available in the appropriate content area. For example, on the appropriate webpage or within the applicable handbook/manual—if a policy addresses dual career couples (e.g., dual career assistance appointment of opportunity policy and procedures), then it should explicitly note that the policy applies to same-sex couples instead of simply stating it's, “for a spouse/partner of a primary candidate selected by a department or an incumbent employee.”¹³ By explicitly stating, “These policies apply to same sex couples,” LGBT faculty are assured that the university has their interests in mind and all faculty, staff, and students are reminded that Western Washington University is an inclusive institution. With this approach, I hope some of the recommendations below are considered in order to provide the best possible environment for LGBT faculty, staff, and students and to further support a diverse campus climate.

Curriculum and Research

Although there is some evidence that inequities have recently decreased, it would be helpful to have a clear and transparent policy for the distribution of summer research grants and some sort of oversight to reduce the possibility of discrimination. Although there is some risk when standardizing a process designed to reward innovation and intellectual inquiry because it can potentially restrict methods of inquiry deemed “acceptable,”¹⁴ it would increase confidence in the process and reduce the likelihood of discrimination.

In addition to assuring a non-discriminatory funding process, the university could consider offering special grants to support the incorporation of LGBT content into courses and research. Perhaps the university could offer a summer research grant that is earmarked for projects incorporating LGBT content, identity politics, or minority content generally. In addition, the university could offer mini-grants for faculty to incorporate LGBT content into existing classes and/or a summer teaching grant that supports development of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender-focused course.

Currently, the LGBT Advocacy Council plans to offer a small grant for LGBT-focused research through their diversity monies, but it is unclear whether this funding will be available for the long term. A similar process could be used to offer opportunities to increase the presence of racial and ethnic

¹³ Policy# [POL-U1600.01](http://www.wvu.edu/policies/) at <http://www.wvu.edu/policies/>

¹⁴ Three summer research grants in 2012 were awarded to projects with LGBT content, so the process may have improved.

minority content in courses across disciplines and areas of study. Again, it is important that these monies are explicitly earmarked, and that they are available within the general sources that describe grants and funding opportunities.

The university should consider providing more support for the Queer Studies minor or, perhaps, making it a major that has a dedicated faculty member with expertise and offers courses consistently that address transgender and bisexual individuals and upper division courses that address topics such as queer theory. Although it may not be feasible to hire faculty for the Minor, it might be possible to combine forces with Women's Studies or some other program, moving these programs from the margins and signaling their value as legitimate modes of academic inquiry at Western Washington University. Many universities now have a "women, gender, and sexuality studies" or a "gender and sexuality studies" program. Perhaps an individual or committee can study the feasibility of modifying and/or expanding offerings in queer studies.

Health Care and Benefits

The University should consider reimbursing same sex couples for the federal taxation on same sex partners' health and wellness benefits. The process, termed a "gross-up benefit," increases salaries by the amount taxed by the federal government plus the amount taxes would increase due to the increased income, effectively eliminating the penalty incurred by same sex couples.

Although this study did not include any transgender individuals, I believe the university could explicitly signal their support of transgender employees by acknowledging some of their particular needs. The university should consider paying the costs for sex reassignment that are not covered by health insurance and explicitly stating this on the health benefits page. Typically, health insurance does not cover the costs of sex reassignment and individuals must pay out of pocket for chest surgery, genital surgery, and/or hormone treatment. This policy would be relatively inexpensive because of the very few (if any) individuals who would seek assistance, yet it would send a powerful message that the institution stands for equity, understands the unique needs of transgender employees, and is actively engaged in supporting the diversity of minority employees.

In addition, the university should make information about which benefits are available for same sex couples clear and easily accessible. As one interviewee explains, "The other thing is making it very clear about things like parental leave, health insurance for partners.... There is a way in which it's just not clear enough what my benefits are, where I stand. I'm always having to seek that out in a way that's not as transparent as I would like it to be." By explicitly describing what benefits are available to same

sex partners and assuring that human resource employees understand how policies apply to same sex partners, LGBT faculty and staff will gain confidence in the University's ability to address their unique situations.

Other Suggestions to Improve Climate

Dual career assistance

Create a clear policy for dual career assistance and explicitly state that the policy includes same sex couples. Lesbian and gay faculty were unclear who actually received assistance from the program and were concerned sexual orientation came into play when considering dual career assistance. In addition, several faculty members mentioned the unique position of LGBT and racial/ethnic minority faculty in that they were especially unlikely to find a local partner after accepting a position at Western Washington University. It would be viewed as especially supportive if there was some sort of process that acknowledged this reality and provided preference for or assistance to qualified individuals who have partnered with a minority faculty member, even after the initial hire. Although this would not support recruitment, I believe it would facilitate retention of minority faculty members.

Self-identifying: Name, gender, and sexual orientation

It is important that Western Washington University facilitates the ability for faculty, staff, and students to change their gender marker and preferred name without going through the time and expense of legally changing their name and/or gender with other governing bodies. Ideally, this process would be easy and seamless so that an individual in the process of transitioning from one gender to the other would not have to divulge their personal information repeatedly in a number of settings. Even when not transitioning, making it easy for a person to be referred to by their preferred rather than their legal name would not only reduce stress for LGBT employees and advantage a number of different types of employees, but would be another form of signaling that the unique needs of individuals with LGBT identities are taken into account at Western Washington University.¹⁵

Although there were mixed views on it, I believe it would be worth exploring whether individuals should be allowed to voluntarily self-identify their sexual orientation and/or gender identity on applicable paperwork. Although I know that this can create a fear of being "found out" among some employees, it can allow others to feel visible and that their identities count in Western Washington University's vision of diversity.

¹⁵ Some individuals and offices are already working on this process.

In addition to being allowed to self-identify, the university could consider creating an affirmative action plan for sexual minorities, mainly as a way to begin to get a sense of the number of employees who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and to assess whether the university is meeting their unique needs. Although a plan is not required by federal law, it is also not prohibited. In the spirit of using affirmative action plans to measure progress on diversity and hold the institution accountable to diversity goals, an explicit plan could further these ambitions. In addition, it would make Western Washington University perhaps the only institution in the country to officially “count” LGBT individuals, affirming the view that they are an important aspect of diversity.

The role of upper administration

Upper administration should continue to consistently make statements relating to the status and needs of their LGBT faculty, staff, and students. Several interviewees mentioned President Shepard’s statements over the last few years. In particular, his open letter about the anti-gay violence on Washington State University’s campus (and his timely and compassionate responses to the emails several LGBT faculty sent him in response) and his blog about the banning of Liberty University from the law fair (see Appendix B). It would be helpful if other individuals in addition to the President made these types of public statements when the opportunity arose.

Increase LGBT images and presence in campus materials

The last two recommendations focus on visibility. First, consider creating promotional materials that feature same-sex couples or families in order to send the message, “This is what WWU looks like” and to signal the core values of the institution to both students and employees. In addition, assure that materials explicitly targeting LGBT employees are distributed in new hire packets and possibly in recruitment packets. This approach provides information without the burden being on the new hire to “out” themselves, but, also, in the spirit of “signaling,” it allows the institution to publicly position itself in relation to its LGBT students and employees.

And finally, although some of the experiences in this report may be difficult and even painful to consider and other aspects may seem accusatory, I would like to close with a statement from an employee who reported some of the most egregious discriminatory experiences. After recounting several disturbing experiences, his final words were, “I would love to be able to help; I don't just want to complain. If there's something I can do strategically to help, that's what I would like to do.” The LGBT faculty members interviewed for this project, for the most part, shared this view. They value Western Washington University, the administration, their like-minded colleagues, and, especially, their students.

In an effort to further their excellent teaching, continued intellectual inquiry, and service to the university, this report is respectfully submitted.

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Appendix A Interview Questions

Demographics

- 1.How long have you been at Western?
- 2.What is your title?
- 3.What college do you work in?
- 4.Can you tell me what words you use to identify your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender presentation?
- 5.How about your race/ethnicity?
- 6.How would you describe your relationship status
- 7.Do you have children? If so, what ages?
- 8.Where do you live?

Hiring and Retention

- 1.Can you tell me a little about how you ended up at Western?
- 2.How was the hiring process for you?
- 3.Can you tell me a little bit about your experience working at Western as a sexual minority?

Follow up:

- Anything else that is positive for you here at Western?
- Anything else that is difficult for you?

- 4.How about in Bellingham, generally, how has your experience been as a sexual minority?
- 5.Have you considered leaving Western? If so, why?
- 6.What has made you stay?
- 7.Do you have any possible solutions to some of the difficulties you have faced?
- 8.Do you have any ideas how Western could be more supportive of LGBT faculty?
- 9.Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience as an LGBT faculty or recruited staff member?

Interview Questions - Cont'd

Follow up from Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) campus climate survey

1. Do you remember if you responded to the HERI campus climate survey?
2. Do you feel that LGBT faculty are treated fairly at Western?
 - Follow up: In what ways?
3. Do you feel that you have experienced discrimination, either subtle or direct, here at Western?
 - Follow up: Can you tell me a little about that?
4. Almost one quarter of LGBO respondents reported sexual harassment. Do you have any perspective on why the proportion is so high?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your perceptions of the climate for LGBT individuals on campus?

Bruce's Blog

Nov. 15, 2011

<http://www.wvu.edu/president/blog/posts/15.shtm>

Why did you decide to ban Liberty University's School of Law from participating in Western's Law School Information Fair?

Short answer would be: "I did not, you who are the university did so decide – in the policies previously established."

What do I mean by that? Really just this: my job is never to impose my own preferences on decisions about such matters. Nor is my job to be swayed by however many emails, petitions, letters, and calls I may get on a pending decision.

My job as Western's president, serving you, is to make sure we are very clear on what we, together, have established as the university's policies and then to adhere to them.

Here, the decision was straightforward: [our policies prohibit illegal discrimination in operation of all university programs and activities](#); Liberty University's School of Law states explicitly that they discriminate in employment and admissions on the basis of homosexual conduct; and we formed the view that including Liberty would cause Western to violate its own policies.

Looks pretty straightforward. And, it is as far as following university policy is concerned.

But, we also must follow the law and, here, the questions are more complicated. Western's policy is backed by provisions and directions set in Washington law and an Executive Order. Liberty University's right to discrimination is, just as clearly, protected in case law. When those come into conflict, what should prevail?

We cannot wait on the courts to settle a matter we must decide upon today. For Western, we decided that our university policies take precedence.

So, there is the background. I wanted you to have that. But, I use these blogs for other purposes: to explore questions that may take us – me included – outside of comfort zones. And, to get personal, as well – to try to share a bit about me and my thinking. It's no better than anybody else's thinking, but the title I carry can create a gulf and you deserve to be able to get behind the title and know me at other than formal levels. So, in the spirit of "Bruce's Blog," here goes.

When it comes to protecting Western as a place for the civil yet passionate consideration of controversial subjects, I am pretty much an absolutist. [In an earlier blog on the topic](#), I gave my

reasons in support of that position, including pointing out four or five areas where I think we potentially fall short.

When it comes to the role of a university worthy of the name, there is likely no more important matter than that addressed in the earlier blog: how we protect unfettered pursuit of truths, no matter how controversial. The Liberty University matter caused me to further ponder the topic.

When I say "absolutist," I really am; I think there should be few restrictions on controversial speech. Consider the case many decades ago concerning the right of the American Nazi Party to march through a Jewish neighborhood. They wanted a parade permit. Should they get it?

Absolutely, seems to me. We don't need principles for the easy calls, we need them for the tough calls. This is a tough call, certainly, but my overriding intuition is if I want that First Amendment right available to me when I need it, I better endorse its protection for others.

Now, assuredly, I mean in no way to draw a connection between groups like the American Nazi Party and a respected School of Law fully exercising the religious freedom guaranteed to all. I go to a far extreme only to make the point that, for me, even at such a far extreme, we cannot duck considering our commitments to unfettered speech.

I tend toward the absolute for more pragmatic reasons as well, because I believe that a free "marketplace of ideas" does a pretty good job of sifting those worthy of continued debate from those that aren't. Worst possible approach would be to try to suppress concepts I might abhor, keeping them below the radar where who knows what dangers might develop. And of course, suppressing views not only increases resistance and insularity among those who hold them, it can sometimes raise suspicions that what is being suppressed may be dangerously true rather than dangerously dumb. I sometimes go so far as to wonder: would any effort on my part to suppress that with which I fundamentally disagree constitute a tacit admission of the lack of confidence I have in my own position?

So, not thinking about Liberty University per se, I imagine, hypothetically, an organization that wanted to participate in a university-sponsored event and that had policies and practices that discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation. What is the better approach, what is truer to our commitments as a university, what is "safer" when it comes to protecting our society from the real damage done by homophobia? Is it to ban the participation? Or, is it to bring it into the open, along with countervailing participation, discussion, protest, and dialogue based upon facts and reason?

My initial inclinations would be toward full openness, rigorous dialogue, passionate debate, civil protest. But, I thought on—always a danger for an academic, I suppose. :)

Are my personal tendencies toward free speech absolutism the far too convenient luxury of a member of the privileged majority? How often have I been the intended target of ugly but free speech? Suppose I was a person of Jewish faith living in that neighborhood several decades ago, seeing goose-stepping Jack Boots and Swastikas coming by my front yard. Suppose I was one of

Western's many, and much-valued gay and lesbian colleagues and students, seeing recruiters on our campus for a university that explicitly discriminates against homosexual conduct?

Just how privileged am I? Sometimes it is easy to forget. I do not—and this brought tears to my eyes when a gay colleague mentioned the concern he faces every day on our campus—have to worry about who is watching when I give my loved one a kiss in the morning as, after arriving on campus, we then go our separate ways.

A hostile environment is real, ugly, and damaging. It is another and very real limitation on our effectiveness as a place for inquiry and learning.

Here are competing commitments of high priority. Our commitment to be unafraid of the controversial. Our commitment to respect, empathize with, and protect each other.

For me as your president, the answer is simple. To trust you who are the university to define, for Western, what our policies and practices are to be. I believe it important to always question. But, that having been done, my role is then to see that we live up to our established policies. And, that is what has been done in the current case.

And, where am I personally? Your policies put us on the side of protecting against a hostile learning environment. Having now gone through the reasoning just offered, I am with you entirely.



From: Bruce.Shepard@wwu.edu [Bruce.Shepard@wwu.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, October 28, 2008 12:21 PM
To: Undisclosed Recipients
Subject: Message to the Campus Community

Campus Community Members:

I wish to share with you several thoughts prompted by the recent assaults at Washington State University in Pullman. These were reported as possible hate crimes toward members of their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.

I can think of nothing more fundamental to what a university is about than is our collectively assuring an environment in which difference and diversity are actively sought, passionately (but civilly) considered, and fully protected. That goes for differences and diversity in the intellectual realm. And, applies as strongly as regards the many people who are Western Washington University. It is critical that we demonstrate our support of LGBT students, faculty, and staff as we take responsibility to assure a safe campus culture grounded firmly upon mutual respect.

I stand with WSU President Elson Floyd in his statement that "it is important that we respond to all acts of hatred by unifying as a community to stand against any type of hatred crime or violence."

Western's commitment to diversity is a core tenet of the University. Without exception, we value all students, faculty, and staff as important members of our campus community. Diversity makes us stronger. Open acceptance of differing viewpoints and perspectives is integral to higher education and is at the center of learning and knowledge.

Together, we can participate in responding to the news of these reported assaults by working to ensure the personal safety of our community. We must also take the extra step to support one another in walking together, both physically and emotionally. I am asking each of us to reaffirm our commitment to one another in this regard.

There is no indication that there is any link between these particular crimes in Pullman and the safety of Western's campus. However, we would be foolish to assume that our generally safe campus is free of the bigotry and prejudice that have too often violently risen to the surface, poisoning other communities. It is my hope that we will all do whatever we can to make Western a place where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported. I encourage you to report any behavior that you see as threatening to our community by calling the WWU Police Department, at 3-911 (from a campus phone) or 650-3911, or the Safe Campus hotline at 650-SAFE (7233). Western students also should make use of the "Green Coat" personal safety escort services during the evening and late night hours (650-3555).

Thank you for all you do to assure a campus and a community of which we all can be proud, Bruce