

LGBTQIA+ @ MiraCosta College, Action Plan

Through academic research, site visits to California community colleges and national universities that are ranked on “best of” lists as the most LGBT-friendly in the United States, and conversations with students and employees of California community colleges, I recommend the following be done at MiraCosta College:

1. Create a professionally-staffed LGBTQIA+ Resource Center at MiraCosta College.
2. Make significant changes to the LGBTQIA+ Safe Space Program.
3. Create and charge an LGBTQIA+ Equity Task Force with identifying and developing solutions to the historic, systemic, and negligent institutional homophobia that is endemic at colleges and universities and which is present at MiraCosta College.

1. Create a professionally-staffed LGBTQIA+ Resource Center at MiraCosta College.

LGBT Resource Centers, located in both communities and institutions of higher education, provide much-needed space for sexual minorities for a multitude of reasons. While the missions between each type of center may vary in specifics, the general goal of providing a “safe space” for people of a shared community to come together and build and fortify connections is the same. As succinctly stated in UCSD’s [successful 1998 proposal](#) to establish their center, these spaces in higher education provide “a place to gain a reprieve from attacks to self-esteem, to build social and intellectual connections and to gain and maintain a healthy sense of self-identity. It will provide a secure and easily identifiable place to consult resources about LGBT concerns, address questions to professionals, explore LGBT history and study.” ***20 years after that successful UCSD proposal was written, an LGBT Center at MiraCosta College in 2018 would serve the same exact purposes.***

There are presently only **7 out of 114** California Community Colleges (CCCs) that have LGBT centers which represents **6%** of the system. By comparison, nearly half of the CSU campuses (**11 out of 23**) and all but a single UC campus (**9 out of 10**) have LGBT centers. Considering that the CCCs serve more than 2,000,000 students, an estimated *90,000+ students* would benefit from LGBT centers (see data in number 3 below). Susan B. Marine in *Stonewall’s Legacy* emphasizes this, “Although centers provide “invaluable services” the “current dearth of centers at more than 90% of America’s colleges and universities means that very few students are benefiting developmentally from their presence.” In North San Diego County, MiraCosta

College is the only institution of higher education not to have an LGBT Center on campus (Palomar College and CSUSM both have centers).

It cannot be emphasized enough that there are currently no private, safe spaces for sexual and gender minorities to engage in identity-building at MiraCosta. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge and support, especially, of sexual and gender minorities of color. A professionally-staffed LGBT Center would serve the needs of all students, but would be uniquely tasked with supporting and advocating for LGBTQIA+ students of color. The person hired to run the center would, ideally, have a background in pedagogy and queer theory, student development, and strategies for supporting LGBTQIA+ students in higher education. Folks running centers at the “best of” universities I visited *consistently* mentioned ensuring that LGBT centers and their staff constantly and visibly affirm and support LGBTQIA+ students of color who are trying to navigate educational systems that have historically privileged White, cisgender, heterosexual students.

Jen Self, Director of the Q Center at the University of Washington, speaks to this when they bring up their focus on running the UW center from an intersectional perspective: “Biggest challenge for the Q Center has been operating from an intersectional perspective with racial and gender justice at the center. Not allowing racist language. Actively trying to make it a space *deconstructing whiteness and ongoing problematic social privileges*. Pushback from white and queer communities on campus. Pushback IN center when asking students to think about what they’re saying and how they’re acting. “I’m okay losing white people,” “I’m not willing to lose people who have historically been underrepresented, underserved, marginalized over and over.”

J Gibbons at Portland Community College also spoke to the necessity and benefits of having a LGBT center. They stated that having a “physical space, dedicated, is so critical. “ And added that, “having coffee and snacks - with so many of our students having food insecurity - is essential to knocking barriers down. We have found that coffee or snacks is an incentive to help people come in the door; it gives them something to do - a reason to walk in the door.” This brings up the idea that a LGBT Center at MiraCosta should have a budget for snacks and food, and should work with other food access services on campus, potentially, such as the food pantry.

Mark Piper, the faculty advisor of San Francisco City College’s Queer Resource Center highlights the important of a center as having privacy: “The privacy factor is beneficial. A lot of students are excluded by their family so this [center and its inhabitants] becomes their family.”

Isaiah Merriweather, the president of the student Pride Club at San Joaquin Delta College, stated “A pride center is integral to a community college... people need a space to be themselves. They need support. Emotional health, mental health, and physical health. Students have to feel safe and the school needs to stand in solidarity and say ‘we don’t stand for this, all are welcome here.’ Having a pride center helps with this messaging. Provides a safe space for folks to *be themselves and grow* [emphasis mine] and they’ll appreciate the college more.”

Brayan Astorga, a MiraCosta alum, former Gay Straight Alliance student club president, and former Associated Student Government president feels the same way. He benefited from the LGBT Center at UCLA after transferring and wishes for the same type of center at MiraCosta College: “Having a center at MiraCosta would’ve helped the GSA have a centralized location with support to carry out their events. At UCLA their Queer Alliance (similar to the GSA) would constantly collaborate with the LGBT Center. This made sure we had consistent and well supported programming throughout the year. The LGBT Center also helped promote resources and services on campus. Having a center at MiraCosta would increase Queer visibility on campus which is much needed. The LGBT Center at UCLA has career counselors, therapists, and a case manager that do open office hours. These services would be great at MiraCosta since the mental health of students is important so they can thrive.”

Many of our LGBTQIA+ students are unable to be out at home for fear of the very real possibility of being kicked out and facing homelessness. In fact, studies show that between 20% to 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+ (Forge et. al, 2018). An LGBT Center at MiraCosta College would provide a consistent and safe space for students to be, explore, and develop their authentic selves. The professional staff would also be able to help, assist, and refer students (and community members) when issues arise.

The benefits of having professionally-staffed centers are enormous. Continuity and institutional memory as well as breadth and depth of knowledge of campus culture and idiosyncrasies results in better service assisting, helping, and referring students. Centers at the mercy of volunteers run the risk of not being able to maintain consistent operating hours or providing the same level of service to students as volunteer staffing changes through the day or term. Even less desirable, though, are wholly unstaffed centers that fall short of meeting the specific help and referral needs of sexual and gender minorities.

This is the case at Macalaster College where the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center is student led and run. According to the director, they do not have the foundational knowledge to be able to facilitate conversations, trainings and student development. The Multicultural Office oversees it, but as student leadership comes and goes, they have different levels of engagement and interest with their Center. The staff director of the center *advises* the students who run the center on what to push for, but he really has to push them to advocate for the *right* things.

LGBT community centers have existed since 1966 when the first LGBT community center was founded by The Society for Individual Rights (SIR) in San Francisco. Since then, these centers have become ubiquitous and integral in communities and on college and university campuses. [CenterLink](#), a online directory of LGBT centers, currently lists **212** community LGBT centers in the United States. The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals - an organization that maintains a online directory of higher education LGBT centers in higher education - provides an [incomplete list](#) numbering **245**. One reason the Consortium's list is incomplete is due to the restrictive criteria for being included; another is lack of proactive updating by members of the Consortium who all participate voluntarily. To be officially listed on the listed an LGBT Center must satisfy the following requirements:

- The center must be staffed by someone at least 20 hours/ week (50% time).
- The staff person must be either a professional staff person OR a graduate assistant.
- Staff person's primarily responsible for providing LGBT services.
- Graduate assistants' job descriptions must be solely dedicated to LGBT services.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, none of the 7 LGBT centers at California Community Colleges are listed on the Consortium's directory and a number of these do, in fact, satisfy the requirements to be listed. The LGBT Centers at San Francisco City College, Sierra College, and San Joaquin Delta College employ professional staff to oversee their centers. Palomar College, Mount San Jacinto College, Norco College, and Los Medanos College have LGBT Centers but they are either unstaffed or volunteer-run.

2. Make significant changes to the LGBTQIA+ Safe Space Program.

The MiraCosta College LGBTQIA+ Safe Space Program has given many district employees, and to a lesser extent students, the opportunity to engage in trainings focusing on the lived

experiences and needs of sexual and gender minorities. However, for a number of reasons, the program should be significantly changed.

First, the name “Safe Space” is a misnomer and consideration should be given to a possible name change. The intimation by the current name is that any office, workspace or building bearing the MiraCosta LGBTQIA+ Safe Space decal is decidedly a safe, welcoming, and affirming environment for *all* sexual and gender minorities *all* the time. Unfortunately, due to a lack of work space across the district, many offices become shared spaces that multiple employees inhabit throughout the week (if not day). Furthermore, if there are outside department employees using or visiting the space, they may or may not have attended the training. Finally, while there are a number of programs or departments whose entire employee group has been trained, this is uncommon. The University of Washington changed their program to “Safer Spaces” and the Macalaster College program (more on this program below) changed their program to the “Allies Project.”

Second, the nature of the training - that employees attend a single training and are immediately declared a “safe” go-to resource for any students to approach is problematic. To be effective, trainings should be ongoing and updated regularly, and employees with the Safe Space designee should avail themselves of all campus Safe Space trainings as well as continually pursue outside professional development opportunities. At minimum, individuals displaying a decal should participate in LGBTQIA+ trainings yearly, if not semesterly. Poynter and Tubbs urge this, “While a mandatory training provides a strong foundation, ongoing educational opportunities are required to better understand and provide appropriate resources for a complex and diverse LGBT community” (2007).

Third, but no less importantly, the employees who most need Safe Space training have not attended. Because the training is voluntary, the tendency is to “preach to the choir” and do not reach those who are in most need of awareness and sensitivity training (Ellis, 2009). Ideally, a training for all district employees would be mandatory; an online module requiring active participation such as those produced by the [Kognito](#) health simulation company may be a viable and scalable option.

The [CCC Student Mental Health Program](#), a partnership between the Chancellor's Office and the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC) presently funds the following 6 Kognito trainings through a grant from the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA): At Risk for Faculty & Staff, LGBTQ on Campus for Faculty & Staff, Veterans on

Campus for Faculty & Staff, At Risk Students, LGBTQ on Campus for Students, and Veterans on Campus for Students.

As far models I came across during my research, the “allies in progress” program at U of Massachusetts Amherst, which replaced their LGBT Safe Space program a few years ago has promising language. As stated on the [program website](#), “‘Allies in progress’ are professional and student staff and faculty at UMass Amherst who have attended an LGBTQIA workshop facilitated by the Stonewall Center. We say “allies in progress,” rather than simply “allies,” because allyship is an ongoing learning process, even for members of LGBTQIA communities (as an LGBTQIA individual is only a member of some of these communities). One does not become an ally through attending a single training or even multiple trainings. To be allied to LGBTQIA communities means continually educating and challenging oneself to be a better supporter.”

Another good model may be the Allies Project at Macalaster U in St. Paul, Minnesota. From the [Allies Project webpage](#): “Mission Statement: Created in 2003, the mission of the Allies Project at Macalester College is to form a group of staff, students, faculty and alumni who are committed to creating safer and supportive environments and communities through education for all people - taking into consideration multiple social identities such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, class, age, or ability. The Allies Project Workshop participants will have the opportunity to connect personal experiences and social identities, to better understand (in)abilities to act in resisting forms of oppression.

Learning Objectives:

- Connect personal experience and social identities, to better understand (in)abilities to act in resisting forms of oppression.
- Participants will be able to express ideas, identify behaviors, and actualize practices that promote action towards social justice and equity.
- Utilize real life scenarios to practice interrupting microaggressions and oppressive behaviors that adversely impact marginalized people and communities.
- Self-reflect on and self assess the concepts on best social justice practices and values.”

I would caution that Macalaster’s program is framed more as a general social justice advocacy and training program. If implemented at MiraCosta College, this type of program would need wide buy-in from campus constituents who have been doing social justice and advocacy work for specific communities for many years.

There could be good momentum for this type of program, though. Current programs that could fold into this type of Allies Project could include LGBTQIA Safe Space, Military Ally, and Dreamer Ally. The Macalaster program requires folks attend foundational social justice allies training (2 two-hour trainings) before selecting additional “niche” trainings. Upcoming Fall 2018 “niche” trainings include Multiculturalism and Internationalism: From Culture to Liberation, Naming Whiteness, and Listening as a Tool for Liberation.

Interestingly, UW Madison has purposely taken the word “safe” out of their LGBT training to avoid any perception that a person could ever be trained thoroughly enough to be “safe.” They don’t produce or distribute Safe Zone stickers; they don’t label their trainings with “safe” at all. Their justification is that once you give a sticker to someone, you don’t actually know what’s happening - or going to happen - in a space. They also stopped using the word “ally or ally training” because they feel that language and ensuing expectations were too static. For example, after an ally took the training, they might have a false perception of achievement such as: “Great. Now that I’ve completed this training I’m an ally, I’m good to go.” The employees at the UW Madison center want to break folks from an “ally mindset” and ask folks to actually start practicing (verbally, physically, mentally) solidarity. “What action have you taken to practice solidarity in this moment?”

3. Create and charge an LGBTQIA+ Equity Task Force with identifying and developing solutions to the historic, systemic, and negligent institutional homophobia that is endemic at colleges and universities and which is present at MiraCosta College.

[California Education Code Section 66271.3](#) makes recommendations to “conduct an assessment of the California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California systems with respect to the quality of life at those campuses for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender faculty, staff, and students at the campuses of each of those institutions.”

I believe the University of California may be the only entity to do this. In 2012 the UC Task Force and Implementation Team on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Climate & Inclusion underwent a comprehensive 2-year assessment of the campus climate for LGBT people across the entire University of California system. In Spring 2014, the task force made the [following recommendations](#) to UC President Janet Napolitano. Some of these could - and should - be

implemented at MiraCosta College, and across the California Community Colleges system more generally. The task force recommendations include:

- Allowing voluntary collection of data on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression for students, faculty and staff.
- Adjusting student record systems to enable students to self-identify with a preferred name.
- Developing and implementing a systemwide gender-inclusive restroom policy.
- Convening a subcommittee on bisexual community issues.
- Establishing an LGBT resource center at UC Merced and having each campus dedicate funding for an LGBT cultural competency specialist who provides awareness training to students, faculty and staff.
- Having each campus dedicate funding and infrastructure to support hiring a full-time counselor to provide psychological, education and prevention services to LGBT students.
- Enhancing academic initiatives on gender and sexuality.
- Implementing a tax equalization program for employees in domestic partnerships who receive health benefits through UC's health and wellness plans.

The first recommendation, to collect data on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression has [since led to](#) “decisions such as allocating resources and developing programs as part of the university's ongoing commitment to ensure campuses are welcoming and inclusive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, faculty, and staff.” For this and other reasons, data collection will be a primary focus of this task force (more below).

Such task forces are not unique to the University of California system. In 2014 Santa Rosa Junior College District Superintendent-President Frank Chong, [upon receiving negligible marks on their Campus Pride Index assessment tool](#), created a task force to prioritize the 22 recommendations that came out of the index tool. The LGBTQ-Presidential Advisory Committee is still in existence today ([committee homepage with meeting minutes](#), [information page](#)).

Suggested starting points for the MiraCosta College *LGBTQIA+ Equity Task Force* include:

- Examine, and develop solutions to address, the less than favorable data metrics for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and especially transgender individuals at MiraCosta College ([MiraCosta College Employee Climate and Diversity Survey Spring 2013](#)).

- Look at, and develop solutions to address, the 1.5 out of 5 star rating that MiraCosta College received from the nationally recognized LGBT benchmarking organization Campus Pride Index ([MiraCosta College Campus Pride Index Results April 2016](#)). Continue the conversations alluded to in Dr. Cooke's Spring 2016 campuswide [President's Update on Equity & Inclusion at MiraCosta College](#): "Painfully, our college scored a 1.5 out of 5 stars. However, this is a starting point for conversations, which began in that room, regarding campus improvement solutions."
- Work with campus constituents to inform, educate, and develop solutions to address micro- and macro-aggressions experienced by sexual and gender minorities at MiraCosta College.
- Work with Student Services, Academic Information Systems, and the Office for Research and Planning to devise and *swiftly* implement local systems of data collection for sexual and gender minorities.
 - Slow pace of change and reactive - rather than proactive - efforts are not good enough. A matriculation survey asking students for LGBTQIA+ status should have been implemented 10+ years ago. In Fall 2018 the Chancellor's Office was forced to turnover sexual orientation and gender identity information that it had been collecting via the ASSIST generic CCC application since 2013. But this information proved limited. Given that sexual orientation and gender identity are fluid and evolving, students should be queried regularly. This tool was developed in Fall 2017, but has *yet to be implemented*.
 - Given the lack of local data, national data metrics need to be consulted and used. A [May 2018 Gallup poll and article](#) reveals that **4.5% of Americans identify as LGBT** (5.1% of women, 3.9% of men). Furthermore, people of color identify as LGBT in higher percentages than White folks. **6.1% of Hispanic, 5.0% of Black, and 4.9% of Asians, and 4.0% of White Americans identified as LGBT.** Applying these numbers to MiraCosta College's population reveals extremely high numbers of LGBT students. Based on [Office of the President](#) data (14,773 credit students, 57% female, 43% male, 45% White, 34% Hispanic, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% African American) we currently have the following numbers of LGBT students at MiraCosta:
 - **664 LGBT credit students** including:

- 306 Hispanic LGBT students, 29 Black LGBT students, 57 Asian/Pacific Islander LGBT students and 265 White LGBT students.
- I want to include a very important caveat here. Even when queried semesterly (via a matriculation survey) it's important to articulate that the data picture for sexual and gender minorities will never be a complete picture. Unlike for other demographic categories (race/ethnicity, gender, Veterans status, etc.) sexual and gender minorities may - for very good reasons - not reveal true identity on any official forms or questionnaires. Or, since identity discovery is a lifelong process, folks may not identify - at the beginning of their college journey AS a sexual or gender minority. This does not mitigate the fact that we need the services, resources, and support to allow students to explore who they are in a safe and affirming college environment.
- Ensure that there are inclusive, single-user restrooms available for students to *easily* access (e.g., centrally located) and use while classes are in session. Realistically, these restrooms should be available 60 minutes before and after classes are in session. A cursory glance of the class schedule shows that classes are in session from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm so there needs to be single-user restrooms available from **6 am - 11 pm**.
- Make recommendations to the President/Superintendent on which programs, initiatives, and miscellany should be institutionalized with dedicated (ongoing, permanent) funding. Many of the events, programs, initiatives currently in place for LGBTQIA+ students and employees are student or volunteer-driven and very few have dedicated financial resources to ensure continuation. Most, if not all, of the GSA Club events that have been occurring annually (some since 2012) require the students to scrounge around for funds from various pockets of money.
- Work with Student Services and Office of Instruction to extend academic interventions (e.g., [MiraCosta College Academic Success and Equity Programs](#)) to sexual and gender minorities.
- Work with Student Services and Office of Instruction to include discussions of specific and unique needs of Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC). To my knowledge, current efforts to support and affirm historically marginalized communities do not consistently include sexual and gender minorities in those communities.

References

When possible, references have been hyperlinked in text. Non-hyperlinked references may be found in the [Academic Research list](#).