

## **LGBTQIA+ Task Force 2021 Report on the Status of LGBTQIA+ Resources at the University of Pittsburgh Cover Letter**

Before providing any of these lived experiences that LGBT+ folks have had at the University, it's important for us to center certain narratives of members of the community, specifically those of Black LGBT+ folks, who have been systemically and covertly oppressed within and by the University. This is recognizable even within the LGBTQ+ Taskforce responsible for this proposal, which is comprised mainly of white LGBTQ+ members. These narratives presented here therefore will necessarily not be representative of all oppression felt at the University and this committee recommends that readers keep in mind that LGBTQ+ students with minoritized racial identities have likely had significantly worse outcomes than those described below.

Where lack of support has most been felt:

Max's narrative:

"I came to Pitt as an out, trans person in 2016. I had explicitly requested gender neutral housing, which was fortunately granted. But, I was housed in Sutherland hall in the athletes section of the dorm. So, my nextdoor neighbors were cis, football players. So, as an early-on-T, masculine person, it was quite frightening. I would often have friends who were queer-presenting when they were visiting in my dorm be heckled by me neighbors and by other members of the athlete section of the dorm. Not to say that this is all athletes, but this is my experience. I wish that from that area of housing, moving into student health and the housing center it had improved, but it really hadn't when you go into those areas.

Moving to the student health side of things, the care was really varied in that you didn't know if practitioners were going to deadname you and/or misgender you to everyone in the waiting room and/or every practitioner you would come into contact with. I have had both good and bad experiences being respected and then being misgendered/and deadnamed, I know it's a work in progress, but it happened through 2019 when I was a senior and still seeking in-person services at the health center. So, needless to say, these aggressions and microaggressions extended far beyond just the dorm and went into the health and wellness of all of this too.

A lot of responsibility for support has been foisted onto student organizations. From the time I arrived in 2016, one of the areas of support to LGBTQ folks that had been repeatedly touted by the University has been the support provided by student org like Rainbow, and I would just like to call attention to that. All of that support is entirely voluntary, uncompensated labor by undergraduate students who just want/wanted to have a more welcoming, supportive, accessible, etc, space for LGBTQ folks. This is because so frequently we do exist at intersections between minoritized groups. For example, I'm disabled and trans, so I'd go into these spaces and meet others like me who had not only required physical space and material things like food, supplies, resources like those in the larger PGH area b/c they themselves had put them together. Since 2016 to today in 2021, there continues not to be any explicitly paid and

dedicated LGBT initiatives by staff on campus. All initiatives are led by faculty or staff who are not paid to lead these initiatives, grad students, and undergrads. The quality of these resources and the space we are using to facilitate our community is always going to be subpar because we are lacking the institutional support because we don't have explicitly paid staff members for whom this is all they do.

Since 2016 Rainbow Alliance has expanded into different affinity groups that then went on to become their own individually-sanctioned clubs within the University. To name some, T is For (for trans, nb, non-conforming students), AQUARIUS (alliance of queer underrepresented asians in recognition of intersectionality to uphold solidarity), and O-STEM (Out in STEM). So, from this fracturing, we've been able to make more individualized spaces which cater more to our intersecting identities, but at the same time, it's weakened the larger group that was RA which at one point was trying to represent the LGBTQ community at Pitt at large. Therefore it doesn't reflect any longer all of these experiences since many of us have ultimately left. The creation of this large quantity and diversity of groups is a testament to the need for more institutional support, especially for racially minoritized LGBTQ folks at Pitt since people were having to create their own spaces for example through AQUARIUS and O-STEM.

LGBTQ faculty at the university are largely un-tenured (I can only think of one person who is). Historically this person has also not done a ton of mentoring. Most of the mentorship is done by adjunct, non-tenure stream faculty whose employment is often precarious and done on year-to-year contracts who are teaching 4-4 or 2-3 course loads on top of this mentorship and additional service. Of course this is something they opt to do, but they feel moved to do as some of the only staff on campus in these roles who are also openly LGBT. My perspective as a mentee, is that it's really frustrating and devastating to see my mentors become exhausted and burnt out because of the sheer amount of work they are tasked with (some voluntary and some required to represent LGBT people on campus without material compensation.) This doesn't look great to us undergrads at the university that our mentors are not being treated well. It also reinforces the cycle of institutional toxicity where people's work isn't being adequately accounted and compensated for. As a result, undergrads progress through their years at Pitt, this sense of obligation to overwork yourself, become the representative for the queer community at Pitt, becomes instilled in upperclass students. This can also be applied to queer staff as well since their appointments are, throughout the University, so anytime they are trying to do this mentorship it's always through the goodness of their heart, on their own time, and is not in any way structured, recognized, or compensated by the university.

Why we are asking:

We want to increase undergraduate retention, which is and will continue to be a problem with COVID-19 and the enrollment cliff in the near future. Retaining LGBTQ students is important for this reason, and we are experiencing a mental health crisis due to several cascading factors with COVID-19 and racialized violence and repeated institutional inequalities which are not being rectified by hiring more non-white LGBTQ folks, and specifically hiring people who are Black or Indigenous and LGBTQ. In order for a healthier institutional climate to emerge, there

needs to be this material method/investment/framework put in place within the existing institution to uplift and support LGBT folks specifically. This would create a more inclusive institution within the existing institution.

#### Benefits outside of Pitt:

Located right on Pitt's campus is the adolescent gender clinic at UPMC which patients will travel to from out of state explicitly for gender-affirming care. Having that in mind and our close proximity abroad and SisTers, Pitt has a great opportunity where it's located to create a physical hub for LGBTQ hub which serves the Pitt community primarily but also the Pittsburgh community at large could create a snowball effect for the general area. How accessible health care would be, PrEp and HIV prevention, but also thinking about mental health services accessibility.