

Supporting Success for LGBTQ+ Students: Tools for Inclusive Campus Practice

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“Now what? If as educators, we are committed to the success of all students, how will we use the tools highlighted within this text to create tangible, long-lasting, and inclusive change for queer and trans college students?” (Kilgo, 2020, p. 67). In *Supporting Success for LGBTQ+ Students: Tools for Inclusive Campus Practice*, Cindy Ann Kilgo (they/them) ends with this call to action for educators. Higher education institutions play a critical role in LGBTQ+ student success, and this book provides multiple strategies for improving campus climate and supporting the identity development of LGBTQ+ students. It also focuses on policies and practices that can assist higher education professionals who want to create inclusive campus environments for their LGBTQ+ students.

Kilgo opens with a vulnerable preface that gives the reader insight into the personal relevance of this work. Being outed by a student affairs practitioner during college fueled their passion for this work. Kilgo understands the needs of LGBTQ+ students at a personal level and is driven to make sure other students do not experience what they did. The primary goal is to offer insight into the overall needs of LGBTQ+ students and the conditions supporting their success in college. The book provides an incredible introduction for beginner practitioners and others who need to be or have not been educated on basic terminology, definitions, and acronyms. The work provides a baseline and a catalyst for identifying and dismantling the ways that higher education institutions oppress and minoritize LGBTQ+ students.

Kilgo hopes the “book provides the impetus to push higher education toward

creating more affirming and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ collegians” (p. 27). And they foster reflection to drive this change by concluding Chapters 3-5 with guiding questions grouped by postsecondary functional areas. The questions are designed to prompt faculty, staff, and administrators to examine their practice and make necessary recommendations for action.

The layout of the book is purposeful, starting by defining the problem and articulating the state of higher education for the LGBTQ+ student population. The middle chapters (3-5) analyze and discuss interactions in various postsecondary functional areas and consider the needs and challenges of LGBTQ+ students at different points in the college journey (i.e., the transition into college, experiences in the classroom and cocurricular spaces, the transition out of college). The book concludes with Kilgo issuing a call to action, asking readers to commit to creating change in their own spaces on campus.

The strength of this book is its grounding in the research and practice literature, which Kilgo presents across five categories: (a) visibility, (b) campus climate, (c) identity and experience, (d) outcomes for queer and trans college students, and (e) LGBTQ+ campus education programs. Kilgo does a phenomenal job of providing specific strategies for improving campus climate and supporting the identity development of LGBTQ+ students, leaving the reader with actionable steps to take. They also highlight Squire and Becks’ (2016) model for trans inclusion, which calls for educators and practitioners to examine development across three levels: (a) education, (b) personal action, and (c) advocacy.

I envision that orientation, retention, and transition (OTR) professionals will find multiple beneficial takeaways across a range of roles and functional areas. There are explicit connections to recruitment and orientation, transition and first-year experience, and retention and assessment efforts. Critical information about LGBTQ+ student experiences in the classroom and interaction with faculty and staff is also provided.

With respect to recruitment and orientation, Kilgo identifies the need for institutions to be intentional about recruiting LGBTQ+ students. For example, websites can be positive tools in establishing an inclusive environment as can the forms students are required to complete at every stage of the recruitment, admission, and enrollment process. When, for example, forms move beyond binary choices for gender, trans students are more likely to see themselves represented at the institution and believe the institution values them. Practitioners working in the recruitment and admissions group can collaborate with existing campus resources for LGBTQ+ students in auditing and updating recruitment processes and material

to make them more inclusive. OTR professionals need to discover to what extent their institutions are including LGBTQ+ identities and initiatives in institutional onboarding policies and activities as a crucial first step.

This book is a great tool for identifying ways to make the admissions process more queer-friendly. Kilgo suggests designing admissions materials to represent more diverse student populations. What boxes are students asked to check on application materials? Who is represented in those boxes? Those two questions will initiate another call to action for readers to attend to whether LGBTQ+ identities are invited and made visible to current and prospective student populations and to decide what changes, if any, need to be made. Kilgo also discusses the importance of inclusive post-enrollment forms that give students the ability to edit their demographic data. Knowing they have the opportunity to change information later could make the admissions process easier for LGBTQ+ students and may ultimately help in retaining these students.

For orientation professionals specifically, Kilgo highlights detailed strategies that have assisted the LGBTQ+ student population adjust to college. They suggest adopting a first-year experience program for minoritized populations, using The One Project at the University of Maryland as an example. Another takeaway for orientation and residence life professionals are the five possible configurations of gender-inclusive housing discussed in Chapter 3. These configurations can be evaluated or implemented at respective institutions and then used as a successful recruitment tool at orientation to show representation and inclusion in on-campus housing. In addition to gender-inclusive housing, Kilgo suggests that the housing staff receive more education on LGBTQ+ and trans issues specifically to be able to appropriately respond to student concerns. The guiding questions for practice at the end of Chapter 3 provide an actionable checklist to establish areas for improvement to ensure the campus environment is accepting of the LGBTQ+ student population.

Transition professionals can gain multiple tools from this book due to its focus on the adjustment to college and the need for engagement opportunities with LGBTQ+ student organizations. The discussion regarding transition and first-year experience is a great opportunity for transition professionals to evaluate what psychoeducational resources they have at their institutions for the LGBTQ+ student population. Kilgo does note, however, that there is limited research on transition and adjustment for this student population, indicating an area for future research. Guiding questions for practice related to the first-year experience at the end of Chapter 3 and those focused on cocurricular involvement at the end of Chapter 4 would be useful assessment tools and possible action items for transition professionals.

Kilgo's discussion of the role of supportive and affirming faculty in LGBTQ+ student success will be of special interest to retention professionals. They offer an abundance of guidance and discussion points regarding LGBTQ+ individuals in the classroom, drawing on multiple studies that discuss students' classroom experience based on the curricular context and their identities. Ways to improve the classroom environment for LGBTQ+ students include normalizing students' chosen names and pronouns, as well as promoting inclusive pedagogical praxis. Practitioners should be able to assess how what they are doing on their campuses contributes to an improved classroom environment. Where deficiencies exist, this book provides examples of suggested practice. The classroom environment and faculty support are crucial to the retention of the LGBTQ+ student population, and this book provides insight on how to improve those areas.

Overall, Kilgo does an excellent job of articulating multiple strategies for creating, improving, and supporting LGBTQ+ student initiatives across campus. They focus on a range of functional areas and rely on applicable research and data systems to back their claims. Takeaways from this book benefit all OTR professionals, including numerous guiding questions for practice. This is a quick but important read for any higher education practitioner working to create a more inclusive environment for their LGBTQ+ student population. This book provides pertinent resources to initiate needed change at all higher education institutions and delivers on its promise of providing tools for inclusive campus practice. I believe that *Supporting Success for LGBTQ+ Students: Tools for Inclusive Campus Practice* would make a great addition to the OTR bookshelf to enhance practice in these areas.

Reference

Squire, D., & Beck, B. (2016). *Developmental pathways to trans inclusion on college campuses*. ACPA-College Student Educators International.