2007-2008

LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER (LGBT) RESOURCE CENTER

ASSESSMENT FOR IMPROVING PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

by

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In spring 2008, Vincent Vigil, the Director of the LGBT Resource Center at the University of Southern California (USC) commissioned a graduate student in the Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs (PASA) Program within the USC Rossier School of Education to conduct assessments of the 2007-2008 programs and services of the LGBT Resource Center. This assessment was similar to a previous plan initiated a year before in spring 2007 that assessed the 2006-2007 programs and services in that focus groups were coordinated to gather recommendation on how the center can continue to improve and expand their programs and services for university constituencies.

**PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Resource Center at USC developed an assessment plan with a graduate student to assess the center’s programs and services for the 2007-2008 academic school year. The focus of this assessment was to learn methods in which the center can improve existing programs and services even though the center has excelled nationally with recognition from the “The Advocate College Guide” (Alyson Books, 2006) as a Top 20 “Best of the Best” LGBT Student Services and most recently honored with a City of Los Angeles “Resolution” from the City of Los Angeles Pride Month Celebration. For the assessment, Zach Helsper, a second year graduate student in the PASA Program conducted focus groups with campus stakeholders (e.g., undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty and staff members).

This summary report highlights improvement recommendations given about the existent programs and services, but neglects to highlight the positive opinions given purposefully to keep the focus on improvements.
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The center’s programs and services address three of the USC Division of Student Affairs Strategic Initiatives, which are:

- Foster an Intellectually Centered Student Culture
  
  Provide students with opportunities for meaningful intellectual interactions through co-curricular experiences.

- Preserve and Advance the Unique USC Student Experience
  
  Maintain and advance what is unique about the USC student experience (leadership; community; pride; tradition; spirit; networking) through the strategic investment of fiscal and human resources in facilities and staff.

This assessment will address the following strategic initiative.

- Invent the Future of Student Services
  
  Deliver and coordinate excellent student service across the institution and taking the leadership role in coordinating student services to meet the needs of diverse learners in a technologically sophisticated academic environment while maintaining the personal touch, which currently characterizes our work.

GOAL FOR THE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

As the director and graduate student put together this performance assessment, the primary goal was to become the “learners” throughout this assessment and understand the perspectives from the different communities involved with the focus groups. From these commentaries, we wanted to learn what we can do to improve the center and become a better department for these communities.
DEVELOP A PLAN

Define the Problem and Clarify the Objective

To help define the problem of the center and clarify the goals for the assessment, the Director answered the following questions to assist the graduate student with the formation of questions for the focus groups.

- It is evident that the problems with your program and/or service appear when your program and/or service unsuccessfully meet the specific needs of your stakeholders. Therefore, it is important to analyze what it is your program and/or service is lacking. Ask yourself, what needs are your program and/or service not fulfilling? Why are your program and/or service not meeting these needs?

  *A need that the center is most likely not fulfilling is creating better inclusion for transgender students. The center along with the GLBTA student leaders have created additional transgender awareness events but we should create broader and better intervention strategies to ensure transgender students feel included within the campus community. Such advocacy can include advocating for more gender neutral bathrooms on campus or providing additional transgender-inclusive language on university web resources or applications. I do not think we are not currently meeting the needs of transgender students due to conversations I have had with current transgender students on campus or students who are currently questioning their gender roles.*

- Generate a general idea as to why your program and/or service are having these needs-base related problems. You may want to write down the needs your program and/or service is not fulfilling along with your assumptions as to why your program and/or service is not meeting
these needs. In addition, you may create questions for your program and/or service asking why and how to improve the program and/or service.

*I believe the center can do a better job fulfilling the needs of transgender students by working with the current transgender students to understand how the center can better service them.*

*Although there are a few transgender students on our campus, the center, for example, can gather ideas from current student leaders or faculty familiar with transgender advocacy. As Director, I have initiated such conversations and as result students have mentioned situations where they felt disclosure of their gender identity was being compromised. In reaction, I have began to take note of these concerns on a case by case basis, but more can be done to make certain the campus is inclusive to them.*

*In addition, more can be done to create an easier process to change one’s gender with the university.*

- The unfulfilled needs should be areas of learning your program and/or service is not promoting to your stakeholders. You may want to ask yourself, what aspects of learning are your programs and/or services suppose to incorporate and teach but are not? How can you guarantee that this learning takes place in your program and/or service?

*I believe the GLBTA and LGBT Resource Center has began to created a consciousness amongst the LGBT and Ally community about transgender student concerns through recent programming, especially with the GLBTA’s Gender Justice Week. A week filled with transgender speakers, lectures, movies and entertainment. These programs initiate awareness about the issues; however, now that awareness has been created the real advocacy must begin.*
• Use your areas where lack of learning takes place and identify them as the problems within your program and/or service.

*Increase awareness and learning about transgender student concerns.*

**ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES**

*Formation of Questions*

Based upon the responses from the above section, the Director and the graduate student created focus group questions for each target audience (e.g., undergraduate students and faculty and staff members), each of the questions explored how stakeholders utilized the existent services and addressed possibilities for improvement (see Appendix B). In addition, questions were developed that addressed transgender awareness and the inclusion to the transgender identity within the LGBT programs and services. The graduate student created a format for the focus groups with the questions that serves as the script used to conduct the sessions (see Appendix A).

*Data Collection*

The center Director and the graduate student formulated a plan to implement focus groups for specific stakeholders that included LGBT-identified undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty and staff members as well as supportive Ally faculty and staff members affiliated with the center’s Allies Program. The strategy was to attend a few already existent LGBT undergraduate organization meetings and also create separate meeting times.

Promotion for the focus groups were done with flyers around campus, announcements a month prior on the USC LGBT community list-serves for undergraduate and graduate students, and an announcement on the LGBTQ and Ally faculty and staff list-serves. Only faculty and
staff were required to reserve their attendance, but not students. As an incentive food and refreshments were provided for all the sessions. A student worker from the center attended every focus group to serve as a written recorder in addition to an electronic tape recorder.

The following are the dates and LGBT organizations involved with the focus groups:

- On April 21, 2008 at the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Assembly (GLBTA) at 6 pm
- On April 22, 2008 for LGBT and Ally Faculty and Staff at 12 pm
- On April 22, 2008 at the OutReach Meeting at 7 pm
- On April 27, 2008 at the Rainbow Floor Meeting at 9 pm

**RESOURCES**

The center Director worked with the graduate student to develop a list of resources needed for the focus group sessions (e.g., expenses for food, staff support hours, scheduling meeting venues, etc.). These resources were expected expenses because this was the second time initiating such sessions. In addition, work-study staff members assisted with the sessions.

*Financial, Meeting Rooms and Staff Support*

The Director allocated funds for food and refreshments for the sessions that totaled about $125. Participants were provided pizza and sodas. The sessions were in venues that are assessable to students and did not cost to reserve, such as residential hall programming rooms, conference rooms in the Student Union and classrooms.

*Existing Data*

To assist with the creation of the assessment plan, the graduate student reviewed the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) for LGBT programs and services (CAS Standards and Guidelines for LGBT Programs and Services, 2006). The CAS
standards served as guidelines in the assessment plan and when creating recommendations for the final report. In addition, the previous year assessment report entitled, “2006-2007 LGBT Resource Center Assessment for Improving Program Performance” was used to serve as a basis and guideline for the assessment.

LGBT ASSESSMENT FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following findings and recommendations are the result of several focus groups and meeting observations. The findings are categorized into 2 sections: undergraduate students and staff and faculty. Each section includes feedback and recommendations. A general synopsis from all the stakeholders involved with the focus groups is in the next section that provides feedback and recommendations for the programming and services that the center provides.

Undergraduate Students

Since undergraduate students make up the majority of the participants in the center’s programs and services, a majority of the focus groups were coordinated for undergraduate students. Three undergraduate focus groups were held with targeted populations including the Rainbow Floor, GLBTA, and URAP participants. Below is a culmination of their feedback and recommendations.

Feedback

- Students generally enjoyed larger scale social programs
- Several students enjoyed how outside organizations (e.g., non LGBT) were involved in large scale programs like Gender Justice Week
- The structure of the programs were appreciated with the exception of National Coming Out Week

Recommendations
Find a 50/50 balance between cultural and non-cultural programming

Incorporate more supportive Allies into programming

Continue mentoring activities for new students (e.g., Freshman Advocacy Board)

Bring in more outside speakers and faculty to enhance programs

Staff and Faculty

The staff and faculty are a pivotal part of both the LGBT and Ally community. A focus group was held in which LGBT and Ally faculty and staff members were invited to provide feedback on the programs and services that LGBT Resource Center sponsors.

Feedback

- The center’s publicity was high quality and attracted more people to the events
- Faculty and staff have seen an overall increase in awareness for general LGBT issues at the university
- The programs were well publicized and displays advanced planning
- The center has improved greatly over the years, especially most recently

Recommendations

- Continue to provide social activities with staff, faculty, and students
- Increase communication among interested groups by creating a committee to brainstorm new ideas
- Outreach more to the straight community
- Include educational efforts in programs for staff and faculty

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND FEEDBACK

Programming
• Students would like to see a continued dedication to social programs (not academic)
• Focus educational programming on transgender issues
• Bring high profile speakers to speak to students, staff, and faculty
• Outreach and implement programming for allies

Services
• Branch out to other LGBT Resource Center across the nation to network
• Partner with other departments to reach out to other communities
• Maintain mentoring efforts for new students both to campus and the LGBT community
• Target programming towards international students
• Continue to make safe spaces and branch out to include housing spaces

SYNOPSIS

From the above findings and recommendation section, it is clear the focus group participants felt that transgender and Ally inclusion needed to be improved. The students enjoyed the social events and the coordination of the events overall was praised. Participants also mentioned how include additional departments or aspects of the USC community into the different programs and services. Programming suggestions included more about transgender issues and the coordination of programs for Allies.

These recommendations along with the other ideas for improvement will be taken into consideration for the upcoming school year and hopefully many of the ideas will be implemented.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP FACILITATION

Introduction
1. Facilitator
2. Education/ Professional Goals
3. Student Recorder

Purpose
1. Assess LGBT programs/services at USC
2. Develop new initiatives/programs/services for the LGBT community at USC

Confidentiality/Guidelines
1. All information discussed will remain confidential
2. Safe environment where everyone has the right to be heard equally
3. This is not a forum for debate but rather discussion
4. Be honest and constructive

LGBT Resource Center
1. Assist student organizations with leadership development, program opportunities and collaborate with additional campus departments
2. Explain LGBT community concerns with faculty, staff and student allies through monthly discussions with campus allies
3. Offer leadership opportunities and support services like the LGBT Mentoring Program, "Generation Queer" Leadership Retreat, and Lavender Commencement Celebration
4. Network with neighboring LGBT-friendly resources

GLBTA
1. Cultural assembly housed in Program Board, a division of USG
2. Umbrella organization for several student organizations
3. Annual programs include National Coming Out Week, Pridefest, World AIDS Day

Questions/Discussion
1. Series of 4-6 questions to fuel the conversation
2. After questions have all been answered, are there any final comments, thoughts, or information participants want to share

Wrap-Up
1. Thank participants for their feedback and honesty.
2. Give them a timeline as to when project will be completed and to look for the implementation of their ideas for next year.

APPENDIX B
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Undergraduate/Graduate Students Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your experience utilizing LGBT student services (e.g., URAP, Mentoring Program, Student Organizations, etc.) at the LGBT Resource Center. Were the services beneficial? Why or why not?

2. Do you like the structure of the LGBT events (e.g., the month of events for National Coming Out “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the week for Pridefest: Color Me Queer)? What can we do to improve these events? What should be incorporated into the events?

3. What has been the best/most beneficial program/service offered by the LGBT Resource Center/GLBTA? If you didn’t find any one program beneficial/outstanding, what would be your ideal program/service?

4. What programs/services were the least beneficial? How could they be improved?

5. What do you think the needs are for transgender students at USC? How are they being met or not met?

6. What can the LGBT Resource Center do to better serve transgender students? Closeted students? Students of color? Graduate students? Staff/faculty?

Staff/Faculty Focus Group Questions

1. As a staff/faculty member at USC, do you feel included in the USC LGBT community? What strategies do you suggest for the inclusion of LGBT staff/faculty in the LGBT community? Additional services/programs?

2. Describe your participation in LGBT programs offered by the LGBT Resource Center/GLBTA. Do the programs meet your personal/community needs? If not, how can be tailored to better include Faculty/Staff?

3. Do you like the structure of the LGBT events (e.g., the month of events for National Coming Out “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the week for Pridefest: Color Me Queer)? What can we do to improve these events? What should be incorporated into the events?

4. What do you think the needs are for transgender students at USC? How are they being met or not met?

5. What can the LGBT Resource Center do to better serve transgender students? Closeted students? Students of color? Graduate students?