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Universities need to do more to prevent heterosexism to support LGB students' academic success

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Universities need to do more to prevent heterosexism to support LGB students' academic success

What is this research about?

The researchers explored how an anti-gay campus climate can affect the academic outcomes of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students. A heterosexist climate exists when sexual minorities face discrimination and perceive the campus to be hostile. In other words, LGB students are often marginalized, which can affect their academic performance and integration on campus.

What did the researchers find?

Woodford and Kulick found that overall LGB students are more likely to have lower grades and skip classes and be less involved in their academic studies if they experience heterosexist harassment.

35% of the students reported experiencing at least one event of heterosexist harassment in the past year. Instructor relations and LGB friends can support students' academic development and social integration, but they did not protect students from the effects of a hostile climate.

In terms of grades, students who experienced 10 or more heterosexist incidences in a year tended to do less well, specifically by half of a letter grade, than their peers who did not experience harassment.

What you need to know:

Heterosexism can affect lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students' academic success. Peer-group support and general faculty support do not protect students from the impacts of heterosexism, but is still important. To prevent poor academic outcomes, campuses must have spaces in which students feel safe to come out and heterosexism needs to be eliminated on campus.

How can you use this research?

- **Campus Administrators** can use this research to shape campus diversity and anti-discrimination policies and practices, and build academic supports for LGB students.
- **Post-Secondary Education Associations** can use this research to highlight the importance of inclusive campus climates and the need to address the consequences of heterosexism.
- **LGB students** can use this research to know that harassment can have negative academic effects. Seeking out academic, as well as social supports, on campus is important.
- **Diversity and Equity Officers** can use this research to shape campus policy to eliminate heterosexism and support LGB students.

What did the researchers do?

Michael Woodford, a faculty member at Laurier's Faculty of Social Work and his collaborator Alex Kulick, surveyed students at a large university in the United States Midwest. They examined three questions:

- Does a heterosexist campus climate negatively affect LGB students' academic performance and social integration?
- Can respectful relationships with instructors and having LGB friends foster students' performance and integration?
- Can these factors protect students from the negative effects of heterosexism?

To answer these questions they examined data across six categories: psychological campus climate, experiential campus climate, academic engagement, grade point average, institutional satisfaction, and acceptance on campus.

About the researchers:

Michael Woodford is an Associate Professor with the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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This summary is part of a project between the **Knowledge Mobilization Unit** and **Scholars Commons** at Wilfrid Laurier University, and the **Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University**.

Laurier promotes the use of knowledge mobilization to maximize the impact of Laurier research on professional practice, public policy, and community engagement. Written by S. Reibling.

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