

Tips for Allies to the Florida State University LGBTQ+ Community

Make yourself known. If you are LGBTQ+ yourself, or if you are a straight ally, come out! You can tell stories about yourself or friends or acquaintances that will let students know you are a safe person. Brainstorm ways to promote yourself. As an LGBTQ+ friendly faculty, staff, or student, you can be an asset to others, but they need to be able to find you. You can find LGBTQ+ related signs and posters for your dorm or office; be present at LGBTQ+ related events; give your name to counselors and academic advisors for referrals.

Take it seriously. Violence and harassment happen to LGBTQ+ people every day. Please take these issues seriously. They are people, and they have a right to a safe educational environment where they can learn without being burdened by others' prejudices. They deserve safety and acceptance on campus.

Educate yourself. You should think of this in terms of personal and professional development, not as a casual pursuit. Ongoing education is important. As the LGBTQ+ community makes strides towards equality, terminology is reclaimed, etc.

Include us in your curriculum. Heterosexual parents and family members typically cannot or do not teach or affirm LGBTQ+ history, culture and traditions. These things can be powerful sources of affirmation, identity and pride for our students. Schools can play a vital role in providing these histories to LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues and history signifies to others that this group is an important member of the learning community.

Evaluate our institution for equity. Continually assess FSU for LGBTQ+ inclusion. How many courses cover LGBTQ+ history, culture and issues? Are our students entering all fields prepared to encounter people of diverse sexual identities and orientations, and treat them respectfully? The dominant perception that a campus is "safe and accepting" may not be shared by minority groups that are actually being targeted. Listen to student feedback; validate their concerns, and follow up on them. Know the procedures for reporting bias incidents.

Think about how you will recognize proper names and pronouns. If you are faculty or staff, you can address students by last names only, and ask students to respond with their preferred first name, making sure to note this. You can have a sign-in sheet, and follow the same procedure. You can ask every student for their preferred gender pronoun (PGP). You can approach *individual* students, asking "I noticed that one student in class addressed you as 'he' and another as 'she.' May I ask how you would like to be addressed?" or "I made an assumption about your gender identity and I just wanted to check in with you and ask what gender pronoun you prefer." If you are a student, introduce yourself with your name and your PGP.

Transgender people are well aware that many cisgender people are uncomfortable with ambiguity about gender, and most will appreciate your honesty and respectful attempt to find out how they would like to be identified. Prior to learning someone's pronouns, try to stay away from gendered language: you can say "this student" or "this individual" or if possible, use their name.

Put a non-discrimination policy in your syllabus. You can copy FSU's policy (http://www.hr.fsu.edu/PDF/Publications/diversity/EEO_Statement.pdf) or create your own, but please state outright the types of behaviors and expectations you have for the class. This also gives you a set of standards to refer back to when biased statements come up.

Take care of yourself. Being an ally is not a simple or easy endeavor. Think about finding support resources for yourself. Mistakes are inevitable, and you need to be able to process the resulting emotions using your own resources.

Steer students towards resources. Pass your knowledge about our campus along to others. Announce where the closest gender neutral or single occupancy, locking bathroom is. Using the restroom may be a situation that is frightening, uncomfortable, or even dangerous for LGBTQ+ people. Many report harassment in public restrooms. Tell them about the PRIDE Center, our Seminole Allies and Safe Zones Program, and our vast community network.

Call out bias when you see it, and offer assistance to the victim. Faculty and staff have ultimate power over the campus environment. Back up LGBTQ students when people make discriminatory, hurtful, or ignorant comments. Don't make the victim be the only one to speak up! If a student is LGBTQ+ and doesn't speak up in response to an attack, realize that they may be overwhelmed and panicking. Step up without attempting to speak for them. Realize that a single biased comment or an incident of mis-gendering can prevent an LGBTQ+ student from fully participating in the collegiate experience. LGBTQ+ students are resilient, but they need strong, vocal support from their allies.

Don't tolerate hate speech or slurs in your classroom or office. Your silence implies that you condone or accept the slurs. Within the LGBTQ+ community, some people use the word "queer" proudly while others don't like it at all; some people use "homo" while others consider this term a slur. The same basic etiquette applies to the LGBTQ+ community as to others: let people identify themselves. If they identify themselves as queer (for example), that does not give every member of the classroom permission to call the person "A queer".

Avoid gendered language and broad generalizations based on gender.

Generalizations about gender in your stories, jokes, anecdotes and explanations may appeal very strongly to the situations of your cisgender, heterosexual students, but many LGBTQ+ students are excluded from the joke and from the discussion. Gendered examples and gendered cases in foreign language classes can be very problematic for some students—try not to make assumptions, and offer alternative phrasings if possible.

Avoid leaning too hard on students. Once a student builds trust with you, they may be willing to serve as a resource. However, it often falls on LGBTQ+ students to be the sole or primary source of education for their teachers, counselors, families, peers, etc. Please don't make a student your "token or go-to -gay". Students may seem resilient, outspoken, even angry, but they may also be vulnerable and exhausted. Help *them*—don't make them help you.

Admit when you don't know something! You don't have to be an expert on everything. It's okay to make mistakes as long as you take responsibility for them. A brief, heartfelt apology is always accepted. Offer to continue to educate yourself.