

Helping Queer Students Thrive at Trinity

Mellon Foundation Inclusive Teaching and Advising Proposal

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Overview

As openly queer faculty and members of Trinity's LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff affinity group, we have been privy to anecdotal evidence of the struggles our queer students face both in and out of the classroom. We are also aware of the particular challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students who encounter impediments to their learning based upon other aspects of their identity such as race, disability, and social class. Our proposal aims to understand their concerns, to identify key areas in which our campus learning environment could be improved, to develop a list of recommendations based upon our findings, and to share them along with our data through a campus event. The long-term goals of this project are to foster connections between faculty and LGBTQ+ students, maximize student learning, and thereby increase retention and overall satisfaction.

Proposed Project

During Phase I, we plan to review the existing literature on questions related to the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and faculty in the classroom, particularly in higher education, including relevant research on the experiences of queer students of color. Additionally, we will explore how other colleges and universities have tackled these concerns and consider existing programs established by Trinity's Queer Resource Center that aim to address and improve the classroom and campus experience of LGBTQ+ students. Furthermore, we plan to gather quantitative data about the number of LGBTQ+ related courses offered at Trinity in the past decade. Lastly, we will research and develop a list of interview questions to ask students.

For Phase II, we aim to employ research strategies that will produce quantitative data that are supported richly by qualitative interpretations of lived experiences. In order to do so, we have formed a research team that draws on both the social sciences (Grubb and Moskowitz) and the humanities (Landry and Provitola). In this phase, we would conduct structured and unstructured interviews with queer-identifying students about their experiences in the classroom and beyond. We have already begun to work with the Queer Resource Center to establish a listserv for queer students. To reach as many students as possible, we would draw on this listserv, the growing number of students who have sought us out individually, and snow-ball sampling. Lastly, we also plan to interview other LGBTQ+ faculty (past or present) who have taught at Trinity to gain increased insights as we prepare for our own research project.

In these interviews we would assess the following:

- To what extent have queer voices been supported (or stifled) in the classroom?
- How has the inclusion or exclusion of these voices affected student education?
- How have students' pronouns been respected (or dismissed) in the classroom?
- What are some unique challenges LGBTQ+ students experience on campus?
- How does the classroom environment both support and hinder those challenges?
- What would students like faculty and staff to know being a queer student at Trinity?
- How might the classroom experience be made more accessible to LGBTQ+ students?

The primary goal of phase three will be to synthesize, summarize, and disseminate the main findings from our interviews. We expect to devise a list of supportive practices for faculty, which will address how to provide inclusivity and respect for LGBTQ+ students at Trinity. To foster peer-to-peer inclusivity, we may also create a similar document intended for fellow students, should the data emerge in our interviews. To continue to promote the visibility of Trinity's LGBTQ+ faculty, we hope to arrange a panel discussion or other such public presentation of our findings, possibly in conjunction with the QRC.