

VEILED DIVERSITIES

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Diversity does not immediately disclose all of its facets to the eye. Many significant aspects of diversity remain veiled beneath the surface of skin and other readily apparent physical attributes. For example, religion or social class does not always produce immediately obvious characteristics, although customary dress and manners may signal some of these "cloaked" diversities. In a nation founded on plurality of religion and in opposition to the stigma of class ("all [wo]men are created equal"), it is perhaps befitting that faculty and student colleagues alike are for the most part comfortable in settings where faith or patrimony are not polarizing elements.

What about those other cloaked diversities that make many feel uneasy? What about sexual orientation and gender identification? How do we handle diversity in the context of our Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender (LGBT) colleagues? Do we even know the climate for our LGBT students, faculty members, staff, and leadership in our schools?

Creating a climate of trust, civility, and safety resides at the foundation of the educational enterprise. These qualities are also primary tenets of diversity. You can't learn in an environment where trust is absent. You can't express your understanding of ideas where civility is cast away in favor of a tribal mentality. Most importantly, you can't live in an environment where your very essence is a threat to your own survival.

So, what is the climate in your school regarding its LGBT students? If you can't answer this question with clarity and conviction you have a problem -- a problem of leadership. As faculty members, staff, and administrators (the leaders), who we assume are the primary readers of ACSANews, you have a responsibility to know the diversity climate in your respective institutions and importantly you have the responsibility to ensure that learning environments engender trust, civility, and safety.

We recently heard a colleague vocalize, "But we are not diverse because our region is rather homogeneous. We resent ACSA's attempts to thrust a diversity agenda upon us." It is possible to imagine that as much as ten percent of your population falls into this particular category of a "veiled" diversity, even in a "red state." Many components of diversity remain veiled until trust, civility, and safety are ensured. Likewise other "hidden" diversities may exist that are being ignored to the detriment of your school's esprit de corps.

We recommend leadership reach out to our colleagues and broker discussions about the climate of diversity in our institutions. LGBT issues can be a real hot button because other veiled diversities, particularly religion, offer the tempting notion that homophobia is the last remaining acceptable prejudice.

Across the United States legislation has excluded our LGBT colleagues from basic civil rights that are granted to other Americans. The gay rights movement, from Harvey Milk to the present day, has largely focused on extending the same basic civil rights to LGBT citizens that other Americans take for granted. The reality of much governmental action has been to

single out the LGBT population and to exclude basic protections under the law. While some states have enacted laws that prohibit discrimination against sexual orientation and gender identity, others maintain legal definitions that deny protection to the LGBT community. While some states offer domestic partner benefits, the federal government taxes these benefits as "additional income," a concept that would be a political non-starter for married couples in America. Politicians who grand-stand their opposition to LGBT rights, often do so to garner votes, to polarize the opposition, and send signals that discrimination against LGBT citizens is socially and even legally acceptable.

While diversity may indeed resonate with a "New Sound" (see: Brett Roth's March 2010 Designing Diversity column in ACSANews), echoes of many discordant old sounds of diversity can still be heard throughout academia and across the country. In January 2010, an independent student newspaper at a prominent Midwestern university ran a cartoon featuring two figures in dialogue. The first figure asked, "What is the easiest way to turn a fruit into a vegetable?" The second character responded, "No idea." To which the first character countered "A baseball bat." Though the editors of the newspaper apologized for poor judgment and university administration admonished the newspaper's editorial board and cartoon authors, this incident is illustrative of the deep-rooted homophobia that remains even in a post-Matthew Shepherd America.

The undergraduate years are a time period of exploration when students try on new identities, new personas, and do deep soul searching asking questions that go to the very core of self-definition. These are vulnerable times for LGBT youth. Coupling a search for identity with the culture of design studio and the broader stresses of architectural education can produce unpredictable results. What happens both during and outside of class time can set the tone for either a supportive or hostile environment for LGBT students. Brokering regular roundtable discussions between LGBT students and school leadership can go a long way toward ensuring a culture of mutual respect and support. Likewise discussions with LGBT students about life outside of the academy can offer preparation for the uncertainties of the "real" world.

Some LGBT faculty colleagues elect to remain closeted while others are comfortable out of the closet. For tenure-track colleagues the decision to remain closeted can be an indicator of a lack of trust with the collegial environment. Even today, many institutions remain tentative about their attitudes toward discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Nineteen states offer no state-level protection for LGBT employees, while twelve states plus the District of Columbia offer both sexual orientation and gender identity full employment protection. This means in the majority of the states there is at best tentative commitment to LGBT employment protection. Tentative commitment or lack of commitment doesn't mean that institutional leadership needs to remain silent or uncommitted to support gay rights issues. A case in point is William English Kirwan, Chancellor of the University of Maryland, who publicly cham-

pioned partner benefits and LGBT employment protection in the state well before the Board of Regents, Legislature, and Governor came on board. The lesson is school and institutional leadership can create supportive climates for LGBT colleagues in spite of backward laws and policies. Institutions of higher learning are instruments of change and change requires leadership.

Finally, LGBT leadership within ACSA remains rather silent. At last year's National Conference in Portland, ACSA supported a breakfast roundtable to discuss LGBT issues. Perhaps it was the early hour, perhaps it was just circumstance of this being a late addition to the agenda, but only a handful of individuals showed up. We were delighted to find that the leadership of ACSA and AIAS were present in full-force and were great contributors to the discussion, but most of those present identified themselves as outsiders to the LGBT community. So where are the LGBT leaders in architectural education? Is there any necessity for LGBT leaders to call attention to themselves? Have we arrived at that point in history that Harvey Milk envisaged where, "all young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential[?]" We think that there is still serious work to be done and LGBT leadership in architectural education needs to come out.

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