

LGBTQ+ campus centers 'more important than ever' argue scholars

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Credit: Lehigh University

'Essential services' is a phrase that has become commonplace in the era of COVID-19. In a new commentary piece, scholars from Lehigh University and Ohio State University argue that LGBTQ+ college and university campus resource centers are essential to the health, well-being and academic achievement of LGBTQ+ students. These centers, they write, are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of these students during COVID-19 and, as such, must continue to receive support and funding.

"Why LGBTQ+ Campus Resource Centers are Essential" has been published by *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, a publication of the American Psychological Association and is authored by Chelsea Gilbert, Ph.D. [student](#) in Educational Studies at Ohio State University; Nicole L. Johnson, a faculty member in Counseling Psychology at Lehigh University; Claire Siepser, Master of Education student in Counseling Psychology at Lehigh University; and, Ann E. Fink, a faculty member in the Department of Biological Sciences at Lehigh University.

"LGBTQ+ populations are particularly vulnerable to

certain stressors and risks at play during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly if they also belong to other marginalized social groups," says Fink. "LGBTQ+ Campus Centers are essential resources for LGBTQ+ students and require adequate funding and institutional support."

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) and other marginalized genders and sexualities (+) face well-documented health disparities, according to information distributed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These disparities have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The authors specifically cite research which finds significantly higher risk for COVID-19 among the houseless and the fact that LGBTQ+ youth have higher rates of houselessness than the general population. In addition, they write that "The current administration's reversal of non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ individuals within healthcare settings has likely exacerbated these concerns around [negative experiences](#)...For those who do access care for COVID-19-related symptoms, a lack of LGBTQ+-competent providers may increase their vulnerability within healthcare settings..."

College students often experience marginalization and discrimination, according to a 2014 study that found that more than 25% of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual [college students](#) either witnessed or experienced some form of harassment which correlated with increased reports of anxiety and depression.

"College students' experiences shifted dramatically as a result of COVID-19, often to the detriment of their health and well-being. For example, many LGBTQ+ students returned to unsafe and/or unsupportive homes when they were unable to remain on-campus; the abrupt and unexpected shift into these harmful and traumatic environments has exacerbated the need for additional support services..." they write.

"These are challenging times within higher education, and tough budgetary decisions are being made daily," says Gilbert, who for five years served as the Director of the Pride Center for Sexual Orientation & Gender Diversity at Lehigh. "It is my hope that decision-makers for these budgets might read our piece and consider the ways that LGBTQ+ student services provide invaluable resources to campus communities in light of COVID-19."

According to the Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory, there are over 275 LGBTQ+ campus resource centers in the U.S. Research demonstrates that the presence of these centers is correlated with lower levels of discrimination, less distress and increased self-acceptance among LGBTQ+ students. The core functions of these campus resource centers fall into three categories, the authors write: counseling, support and student sense of belonging; education and training; and, advocacy for LGBTQ+ students.

"It is my hope that the individuals who are in charge of making challenging decisions about what is considered essential during times of crisis will read this piece and see the true need for LGBTQ+ student services, especially in the midst of a pandemic," says Johnson.

Adds Siepser: "It is difficult to assess the depth and longevity of the psychological impact of this crisis and thus it is important to continue to support the LGBTQ+ students who are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19."

The authors call on administrators, faculty and students to undertake efforts to ensure that "institutional leaders and [decision-makers](#) understand the gravity of LGBTQ+ student needs under COVID-19 and then act to meet those needs."

"Students, faculty, and staff who may not have direct control over these decisions, can use their voices to advocate for such important decisions," says Johnson "This article includes a section dedicated to suggestions for action that we hope inspires many to do just that. Take action!"

More information: Chelsea Gilbert et al, Why LGBTQ+ campus resource centers are essential., *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* (2020). [DOI: 10.1037/sgd0000451](https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000451)

Provided by Lehigh University

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