

Tips for Informed Outreach to LGBTQ Students

by Lorri Olan and Jaclyn Vargo

Identifying and serving LGBTQ students can be a challenge, regardless of law school location. This article explores how career services can create a welcoming environment for LGBTQ students, suggests ways to connect with students, identifies some job search challenges students face, and shares tips on how CSOs can stay on top of a quickly changing legal landscape.

From your first outreach to admitted students, CSOs can establish credibility with the LGBTQ community by demonstrating sensitivity and understanding for a diverse student body and their particular needs. CSOs must provide both a safe and inclusive environment and informed counseling to LGBTQ students.

Creating a safe and inclusive CSO environment begins by educating administrators and counselors. Safe Zone training is a 3-hour program that provides school administrators and counselors with the language and skills to create a safe space for LGBTQ students — a “Safe Zone.” After the training, individuals receive a Safe Zone sticker to display so that students know they have a foundation of knowledge about the LGBTQ community. One of the extended workshops on the morning of Saturday, April 27, during the Annual Education Conference in Tampa will provide training of this nature.

OUT For Work’s LGBTQ Career Center Certification Program is another resource that raises CSOs’ awareness “around specific workplace challenges and career specific resources” for LGBTQ students. In addition to assessing its services to LGBTQ students, OUT For Work offers staff development training workshops.

CSOs can also create a culture of inclusion by speaking at OUTlaw meetings and attending

sponsored events. Not all LGBTQ students choose to participate in the student LGBTQ group or are out of the closet. To reach those students and for NALP reporting purposes, consider adding LGBTQ as a self-selection option in Symplify. Students are more likely to answer this question when they know the selection helps with targeted outreach for LGBTQ-specific job postings and conferences. Other options include participating in the planning of LGBTQ events, co-sponsoring programs, coordinating with the campus LGBTQ resource center, frequently including LGBTQ staff, faculty, alumni, and student speakers in programming, and using examples including LGBTQ students or highlighting employers that serve the LGBTQ community.

We tell our students time and again that networking forges new professional relationships. While students are often hesitant to attend firm diversity receptions and local bar association events, these occasions provide essential opportunities to interface with lawyers who can speak directly to their experiences as LGBTQ attorneys or allies. The CSO’s participation in LGBTQ bar association events sends the message that CSOs are inclusive and enables counselors to educate themselves about the landscape of the LGBTQ legal community. Additionally, the National LGBT Bar Association hosts Lavender Law, an annual conference and career fair which allows candidates to speak with LGBTQ-friendly employers while discussing emerging legal issues in the LGBTQ community.

CSOs can also direct LGBTQ students to the *NALP Directory of Legal Employers*, which lists the number of diverse and openly LGBT lawyers employed by each firm. Other factors students should analyze when considering an employer’s commitment to diversity include whether the em-

ployer attends diversity events, uses inclusive language on its website, sponsors LGBTQ causes and organizations, includes supporting the LGBTQ community in its mission, includes sexual orientation and gender identity in its nondiscrimination policy, or whether its internal diversity program aligns with its business model, e.g., does it work with clients publicly or passively hostile to the LGBTQ community.

Addressing when during the interview process, including on the résumé, a student should come out will be a very individual consideration based upon the student's aspirations and the employer's LGBTQ friendliness. For some students the best advice is to be out throughout the process and for others it may be best to wait until an offer is in hand. Job applicants might benefit from NALP's 2005 brochure, "To Be Out or Not to Be Out?" Also, do not presume that an LGBTQ student wants to work for an LGBTQ organization. Many do not.

No matter where your CSO falls on the awareness and preparedness spectrum, here are a few tips for enhancing services to LGBTQ students: Train

staff and faculty on workplace issues affecting LGBTQ students, provide students with membership information for local or national LGBTQ bar associations, host diversity in the workplace programs, refer students to NALP's Member Diversity Initiatives, and connect students with alumni and other LGBTQ professionals. To keep current on LGBTQ issues, CSO staff should work with the LGBTQ bar associations on educational programming and support services for its students, attend LGBTQ conferences and events, subscribe to relevant publications, and visit LGBTQ websites on a regular basis.

Lorri Olan is Director of Career Planning and Professional Development at Washington and Lee University School of Law, and Jaclyn Vargo is Associate Director of Career Services at Brooklyn Law School Career Center. This article was submitted on behalf of the NALP LGBT Section.