

# Counseling and Recruiting LGBT Students at the “201” Level

by David T. Weinberg

More LGBT law students are coming out well before they even enroll in law school. Many of these students plan to be out both personally and professionally. In last month’s issue of the *NALP Bulletin*, Lorri Olan and Jaclyn Vargo thoughtfully outlined important ways in which CSOs can engage and encourage LGBT students to flourish. If we take their suggestions to heart, we will find ourselves more commonly working with thriving LGBT law students, with job offers in hand, trying to conduct due diligence about their prospective employers’ LGBT-friendliness.

For CSO professionals, it is important that we ramp up our counseling techniques to encourage successful LGBT students to take control over their own decision-making process. Employer-side recruitment professionals also play an important role in providing LGBT students with the information they need to make an informed choice. Many of us on both the school-side and employer-side are already providing solid “101” level advice. Here are some suggestions on how you can take your LGBT counseling or recruitment efforts to the “201” level.

## Firm Climate

Encouraging LGBT law students to reach out to members of firm-created LGBT affinity groups is commonsense advice and should always be part of a counseling or recruiting strategy. Nevertheless, the overall comfort level for LGBT attorneys at a firm often comes from the top down. Encourage prospective LGBT associates to ask questions about the degree to which non-LGBT firm leadership participates in or encourages dialogue about

firm climate and culture. As more firms embrace the importance of diversity-related affinity groups as part of their recruitment and associate development strategies, asking more critical questions about their effectiveness will help to make clearer distinctions between law firms.

## Diversity-related Training

LGBT students are often interested in knowing whether a legal employer is offering employees diversity-related training and workshops. Students should be encouraged to ask whether these opportunities are mandatory or required among staff, associates, and partners. But why stop there? That a training program is offered does not necessarily speak to the effectiveness and acceptance of the opportunity by the firm’s culture. Encourage LGBT students to ask for more specifics, such as whether diversity training effectiveness is measured as part of the firm’s annual review of performance and linked to benchmark measurements such as attrition and promotions both among staff and associates. Asking questions about curriculum and whether diversity training is linked to mentorship and staff development will also provide better perspective on the depth of the diversity initiatives that may improve professional development opportunities for LGBT hires.

## Client Attitudes Toward Diversity

While LGBT lawyers may experience hostile workplace situations, the hostility may not actually come from their firm but rather from interaction with a client’s employees. These tricky situa-

tions might be mitigated by a law firm, but at the end of the day even the most supportive law firm environments will be hard-pressed in this challenging economy to risk the loss of a source of business from a valued client company. While we would obviously encourage LGBT students to examine the practices of their prospective employer, it may be just as important, when possible, to further scrutinize who are the clients of that firm and how the client companies' values and perspectives on LGBT diversity are expressed and achieved. This might not stop acts of homophobia, sexism, or bias in the workplace, but it may give LGBT students a better sense of the chances of encountering such hostility.

## Alumni Connections

Talking with employees and members of the firm will assist in assessing an LGBT-friendly environment. However, strongly encourage students to make a concerted effort to reach out to alumni of the firm whose professional distance from the day-to-day environment may result in more honesty and objectivity. While recruitment professionals may provide some suggested contacts, there is no reason to be limited to those resources. The continued popularity of LinkedIn, as well as Facebook's new "Graph Search" feature, make it

easier than ever for a prospective associate to conduct his or her own due diligence by finding LGBT lawyers (including those who might be "off-ramping") whose career paths match the associate's own personal expectations or aspirations.

## Conclusion

Last month's column emphasized that CSOs and recruitment professionals may be at different places on the awareness spectrum in our work with LGBT students. Notwithstanding the work we may need to do to improve our outreach efforts, the continued increase in the number of self-aware and self-actualized LGBT law students may require both schools and employers to step up our counseling, coaching, and marketing efforts.

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