

AALS Section on Student Services

Creating the Best Law School Environment for Minority and GLBT Students: The Role of Law School Student Services Professionals

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Identifying the Problem – Minority and GLBT students battle all of the problems that confront every law student – what makes them unique?

What

Before we can solve any problem, we must first identify it. According to the program, in addition to the problems of all law students, minority and GLBT students also suffer from (1) isolation, (2) racism – overt and subtle, and (3) homophobia, and more.

Identifying Solutions to the Problems

You can try to address each problem individually or as a group. Individually you can do the obvious, group the minority students together to try and prevent isolation, and/or create a discrimination policy that addresses racism, sexism, harassment and other problems for students, faculty and staff. These solutions may work to solve some problems, but there is more that you can do.

How

To prevent isolation, students must feel like they are not separate, but rather fit with the larger group, or even a smaller group and can talk to someone not only about problems, but also about successes. When students do have a problem with racism, or any form of discrimination, they must feel like the problem can be addressed and they must feel comfortable going to the Dean of Students or a minority faculty member or someone else to tell them about the problem, so that it may be solved.

(1) Reach out to students **BEFORE** a problem arises. Make students feel comfortable talking to you, as an administrator. This can be done by building a relationship, through informal means, such as, informal receptions, information/connections with alumni, information on local community, etc.), or more formal avenues, such as programs and events that promote you and your office to students, as well as direct counseling and advising.

(2) Specifically encourage participation in academic support programs. Use minority faculty and staff, as well as minority students and groups to encourage participation and eliminate stigma that may be attached to the program.

(3) Sponsor programs and events that encourage diversity and honest dialogue about discrimination and how to deal with it. If you can spark discussion and debate, students may be more encouraged talk to their peers when there is a problem or concern and may begin to solve problems among themselves.

Note(s)

(1) Reach out to students BEFORE a problem arises. Make students feel comfortable talking to you, as an administrator. This can be done by building a relationship, through informal means (informal receptions, information/connections with alumni, information on local community, etc.) or more formal avenues, programs and events that promote you and your office to students, as well as direct counseling and advising.

- Informal BBQ or reception for BLSA or minority students at your house (beginning of year welcome back, Thanksgiving potluck, end of year study break, etc.)
- Saying hi to students in the hallway
- Remembering their name and professors or something about them
- Connecting students with alumni - bringing in guest speakers for GLBT groups, in particular
- Go to student sponsored events - guest speakers, etc. when you can
- Provide information on local community for out of towners - i.e. black churches, gay friendly groups, etc.
- Provide funding for out of town job fairs, i.e. cook county minority job fair (nationally known)

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- Use student testimonials - get letters from presidents or other officers of minority student orgs who participated last year
- Have minority student orgs make announcement about ASP at first meeting
- Taut the successes of the program to reduce stigma

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- Diversity week - sample programs
- Racism in the Classroom: Problems & Solutions, BLSA Panel with 4 students/2 professors,
- If These Walls Could Talk, (BGLA & Fem. Jur.) Video with discussion
- What separates us - "What Brings us Together" Diversity: Who Cares" Faculty Panel
- Other programs - movies with discussion