

Queer Connections

GVSU's LGBT Mentorship Program Proposal

Purpose

While data on LGBTQIA college students remains difficult to capture and track for a variety of reasons, recent years have shown a marked increase in the number of students openly identifying within the queer community. Several studies have documented the success of mentoring programs for supporting and developing students of color, but relatively less energy has yet been devoted to developing and assessing similar programs for LGBTQIA+ people on campus. However, GVSU's 2015 campus climate survey documented that queer, trans, and non-binary people are the most likely to experience campus as unwelcoming.

While much progress has been made, LGBTQIA+ students still need to navigate institutional, educational, and cultural spaces and systems that were not necessarily designed with them in mind. These conditions contribute to LGBTQIA+ people experiencing a range of both overt and subtle stigmas. As researchers have noted, "students and professionals who identify as LGBT face not only the usual challenges of personal and professional development, but also the additional stresses created by the need to manage stigma" (Russell, 2009, p. 195). These stigmas are both specific to the LGBTQIA+ community and compounded by intersecting forms of marginalization. To address these needs, this intentionally non-assimilationist mentoring program will strive to match self-identified mentees with graduate students, faculty, and staff who share at least one major aspect of their identities.

GVSU's LGBT Mentorship Program provides students, faculty, and staff with a means of building productive relationships and developmental connections while enhancing the climate for queer and trans people on campus. This plan for an LGBT-specific student-to-faculty/staff/grad mentoring program at GVSU draws on both extant research on mentoring in higher education and personal interviews conducted with coordinators at six universities where similar programs are in some stage of maintenance or development. Furthermore, because of the diversity of identity and experience within the LGBTQIA+ community, mentors and mentees will mutually benefit from an interpersonal relationship in which they can be their whole selves. The mentoring relationship is both personal and professional. Mentors support and develop student mentees while helping them build meaningful connections to the queer and allied campus community. Mentees set their own goals and receive guidance and encouragement from their mentors.

"When someone with the authority of a teacher. . . describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing (Adrienne Rich, 1986, p. 199)"

Goals of the program:

- ** Increase the number and depth of meaningful “connections” between students and faculty/staff/graduate students.
- ** Enhance student satisfaction with their experience at GVSU. Mentor/mentee interactions should allow for sharing general feedback about campus climate and resources with the goal of constantly improving.
- ** Positively impact retention. Mentors connect students with resources for improving their academic and personal development.

Ownership

The program is jointly run by the LGBT Faculty/Staff Association (FSA) and the Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center.

Counseling

The mentor program is not a substitute for counseling services and is not directly affiliated with or staffed by the University Counseling Center. Mentees who are struggling with mental health problems, including but not limited to depression, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, or abuse, are encouraged to contact the Counseling Center.

Time commitment

At minimum, mentors and mentees must be willing to commit to monthly, in-person meetings for a period of six months. Weekly or bi-weekly communication via phone or email is also highly encouraged. Additional meetings are up to the mentor and mentee to determine. The mentor/mentee relationship is co-created and flexible to the needs of mentoring pairs within this required time commitment.

Requirements for Mentors

- Mentors must be faculty, staff, or graduate students currently employed by or enrolled at GVSU
- Mentors must have the time, energy, and desire to commit to a substantive mentoring relationship for a period of six months
- Mentors must either be familiar with campus and community LGBTQIA+ resources or possess a willingness and capacity to become familiar with them
- Mentors must respond to requests for updates and feedback from the LGBT FSA and the LGBT Resource Center
- Mentors must be out (not in the closet) to themselves and their community

Additional qualifications desirable in mentors include previous experience in any form of mentorship program, experience advising or working with students in a developmental capacity, and an understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues and identities.

Becoming a mentor

Interested parties who meet the requirements above should fill out a short questionnaire to indicate their interest. The data gathered from the questionnaire will be used to determine potential mentee matches. If a potential match is identified, mentors will be asked to participate in a short, informal interview with a representative from the LGBT FSA and a representative from the LGBT Resource Center. The purpose of the interview is to identify the best possible mentor-mentee pairing as well as to provide potential mentors with resources and information to support their mentoring relationship.

Mentors and mentees are expressly prohibited from dating or engaging in any kind of romantic or sexual activity. Additionally, while the mentor may be a faculty member, the mentoring relationship is not intended to substitute for any tutoring or academic assistance the mentee may require. In those situations, mentors should refer mentees to appropriate sources of support.

Mentors are matched based on availability of a suitable mentee. If a suitable mentee is not available, mentors may not be matched, but their information can be kept on file.

Expectations for Mentors:

Mentors are responsible for initiating contact and setting up the first meeting with the mentee within two weeks of receiving the assignment.

Upon making initial contact with their mentee, the mentor should complete a brief online form to indicate that the mentoring relationship has begun. Thereafter, mentors should respond promptly to periodic email requests from the FSA or the center for updates about how things are progressing.

Mentors should help the mentee set at least one goal to be accomplished over the next 4-6 months. Additional short-term or longer-term (more than six months) goals can be set if the mentee desires. Mentors will be asked to evaluate both progress toward mentee goals and general satisfaction with the program in an exit survey distributed to them at the end of the six-month period. At that time, mentors will also be able to indicate whether they wish to continue in the program.

Mentors should respect the privacy of mentees by keeping anything the mentee discloses private, including the mentee's participation in the program, if desired. If the mentor determines that the mentee is in danger and needs intervention by the Counseling Center, the mentor should refer the student or seek immediate assistance, whichever is appropriate.

Requirements for Mentees

- Mentees must be currently enrolled LGBTQIA+ or questioning GVSU graduate or undergraduate students.
- Mentees must be willing to commit to a substantive mentoring relationship for a period of at least six months
- Mentees must respond to requests for updates and feedback from the LGBT Resource Center

Requesting a Mentor

Potential mentees can request a mentor by submitting a short questionnaire to the LGBT Resource Center and participating in a brief, in-person interview. The data from the questionnaire and interview are used to help match mentees to potential appropriate mentors.

Expectations for Mentees

Mentees should meet with their mentor within two weeks of notification of assignment.

Mentees should respond promptly to periodic email requests from the LGBT center for updates about how things are progressing.

During the first few meetings, the mentor and mentee need to agree on at least one goal, to be accomplished within roughly six months. While there is no limit to the number of goals mentees can set, they are encouraged to be realistic.

Mentees will be asked to evaluate their progress toward their goals and overall satisfaction with the program in an exit survey that will be distributed to them at the end of the six-month period. At that point, mentees will also have the opportunity to indicate whether they wish to continue in the program.

Reassignment/Opt Out

Mentees can request a different mentor at any time, for any reason. They can also opt out of the program at any time by emailing the LGBT center mentoring coordinator.

Intake process

Mentee fills out a questionnaire indicating interest in being matched with a mentor. Mentors fill out a questionnaire indicating interest in being matched with a mentee.

Mentee comes into the center for a brief interview to determine goals and mentor preference. Mentor questionnaires are reviewed to identify potential matches. Selected prospective mentors

meet with LGBT Resource Center representative and LGBT FSA representative to determine the best possible pairing and identify needed resources.

If a match is determined, both mentor and mentee will be notified and provided with contact information for the other person. If no suitable mentor is available, mentee is notified. The mentee can opt to keep the application open for review for up to 6 months.

After initial contact is made, mentors are asked to fill out and submit a brief check-in form. Thereafter, mentors and mentees will be asked for brief updates every two or three months to ensure that a productive working relationship has been established. At the end of the six-month period, both mentor and mentee will be asked to complete an exit survey.

Please note: Mentor and mentee questionnaires may be submitted at any time during the year.