SECTION 5: CLIMATE AND WELL-BEING

5.1: MICROAGGRESSIONS, HARASS-MENT, AND DISCRIMINATION

It is well established that LGBTQ+ people in the United States continue to experience microaggressions, harassment, and discrimination related to their nonconformity in gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. In a 2017 national probability sample, experiences of interpersonal discrimination were common for LGBTQ+ adults, including slurs (57 percent), microaggressions (53 percent), sexual harassment (51 percent), violence (51 percent), and harassment regarding bathroom use (34 percent) (Casey et al. 2019). These experiences contribute to decreased physical and emotional well-being and negative job outcomes (DeSouza et al. 2017; Cech et al. 2017). In contrast, policies that affirm LGBTQ+ inclusion and prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are associated with positive outcomes, such as greater job commitment, improved workplace relationships, increased job satisfaction, and improved health outcomes among LGBTQ+ employees (Badgett et al. 2013).

Campus climate has been shown to predict retention of LGBTQ+ faculty (Garvey and Rankin 2016). In STEM, LGBTQ+ scientists appear underrepresented, encounter nonsupportive environments, and leave STEM at an alarming rate (Freeman 2020). LGBTQ+ faculty of color may experience bullying as a result of their racial and sexual orientation identities (Misawa 2015), and their increasing visibility on campus may result in tokenism and scrutiny (LaSala and colleagues 2008), which may impact issues related to tenure and promotion (Morales-Diaz 2014). The literature indicates that climate and the fear of further marginalization, tokenization, and scrutiny also may affect LGBTQ+ faculty decisions regarding whether to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity (see Section 6.3 below).

The Columbia Student Well-Being Survey grew out of Columbia's commitment to student well-being across all the University's schools and campuses. We know, from data and experience, that a strong sense of well-being is a key contributor to students thriving at Columbia, both academically and socially. The 2018 survey asked students about community and feelings of belonging at Columbia; awareness and use of Columbia resources and services; financial well-being; mental health, including stress; knowledge about sexual respect resources; and experience with sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-based misconduct. More than 8,300 students responded to the 2018 survey, which was about 28 percent of the full-time student population at that time.

Although results specific to LGBTQ+ students have not been reported, findings included information about student interactions with people who are different from them in a variety of ways. The majority of students reported often or very often interacting in meaningful ways with people who are different from them in sexual orientation and gender, but also in race/ethnicity, nationality, economic background, and religious beliefs. We encourage future survey reports to include findings from LGBTQ+ students. For further information, visit universitylife.columbia.edu/wellbeingsurvey.

In 2018, the Queer and Trans Advisory Board, a Columbia College and Columbia Engineering undergraduate advocacy group through the Office of Multicultural Affairs, surveyed a total of 985 undergraduate students, of whom 52.5 percent identified as queer and 10.6 percent as trans. Four out of 10 of these students reported feeling alone in their classes, which was twice the rate reported by their cisgender and straight counterparts. About a third felt not understood by their friend group (twice the rate of cisgender and straight students) and not adequately supported emotionally (three times the rate of cisgender and straight students). One out of three LGBTQ+ students reported sexual violence, and one out of four reported physical assault while at Columbia.

A 2019 **Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation** ([SHIFT) study](#) used a community-based participatory research approach to examine the individual, interpersonal, and structural (cultural, community, and institutional) factors that shape sexual assault and sexual health among undergraduates at Columbia University (CU) and Barnard College (BC). This study found that nearly one in four (22 percent) Columbia University and Barnard College students had experienced sexual assault (defined as unwanted/nonconsensual sexual contact) since matriculation. These rates are similar to those found at other universities. Higher rates of assault victimization were found among women; students outside the gender binary (hence referred to as gender nonconforming); and lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer students.

Focus groups of Columbia graduate and undergraduate students reported instances of being misgendered by faculty and classmates, the assumption of heteronormativity

in discussions about relationships, and an insufficient or unskilled response to microaggressions when they occur.

For transgender and nonbinary students, institutional challenges include a lack of trans- or gender-inclusive bathrooms, housing, healthcare, documentation, and policies; and they report the highest level of harassment and discrimination and lowest level of belonging (Goldberg et al. 2020). Nondiscrimination policies inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation, offering a for-credit LGBTQ+ studies course, and the presence of LGBTQ+ student organizations are associated with less discrimination and distress and increased feelings of self-acceptance (Woodford et al. 2018).

"I'm not sure all faculty know how to avoid microaggressions. And so I think anything that we could do to help faculty be less likely to commit those microaggressions would surely be helpful, because, in my experience, it's never intentional." (Senior faculty member, Medical Center)

5.2: INTERNALIZED STIGMA AND DISCLOSURE

Self-Disclosure in the Classroom
Amanda Irvin, Senior Director, Faculty Programs and Services, Center for Teaching and Learning

There are many facets to the conversation about the role of self-disclosure in the classroom, and while the research around how pedagogically effective it is to share personal information with students is not fully explored, one thing is certain: the choice faculty make about whether or not to come out as LGBTQ+ to their students is deeply personal and inherently individual.

If faculty feel comfortable coming out to their students, there is scholarship that points to potential positive outcomes for the classroom learning community (Mazer 2009; Henry and Thorsen 2018). In general, when faculty share information about themselves, it signals to students a stronger sense of investment in the collective learning community and may inspire a stronger motivation for students to contribute to the course both intellectually and personally. "Behaviors where teachers talk about who they are, tell stories about themselves and share personal values and beliefs have been found to be associated with increases in students' understanding of subject knowledge (Wambach and Brothen 1997), increased levels of attention (Webb 2014), and greater enjoyment of the learning situation (Sorensen 1989)" (Henry and Thorsen 2018). The operative element, though, is individual comfort in sharing personal information with students.

If faculty do not feel comfortable or safe disclosing personal information to students, they should not feel any obligation to do so. LGBTQ+ instructors in the United States have long struggled with the decision of whether or not to make their sexual orientations public, and the country's long history of discrimination toward LGBTQ+ individuals—and teachers, specifically—certainly explains why that might be the case (Machado 2014).

Classrooms are not neutral spaces, and it is important to remember that instructors and students "are not only intellectual but also social and emotional beings, and that these dimensions interact within the classroom climate to influence learning and performance" (Ambrose et al. 2010). If a faculty member feels uncomfortable or unsafe disclosing information to students, that discomfort would likely counteract any positive affordances cited above.

While Columbia has many supportive policies in place, faculty face the decision of coming out in the classroom, to students, or to supervisors, with diverging viewpoints. Some faculty do not feel safe to come out; others feel that they have to in order to establish credibility. Though the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is one resource for faculty to broach these conversations, it is a largely personal decision.

Experiences of coming out may vary by discipline:

"In humanities disciplines or languages there is usually a content focus that includes aspects of one's identity. They have a much easier time because it's part of the curriculum. [In contrast], our colleagues in the sciences often consider themselves content agnostic or identity agnostic. They teach numbers, and numbers don't have genders or sexualities or races. And so why do they need to talk about these things? It's in those disciplines that I have encountered faculty most vexed about coming out." (Administrative staff, Morningside)

Finally, there is a question about how much faculty should open up to students about their identities and related vulnerabilities. Here, guidance and support from mentors could be especially helpful:

"I still am navigating this idea of how much to advertise my own minority-ness to my students. I have to leave myself in a certain position of authority. I can't appear too vulnerable to students. There is that potential for me to be a role model, but I don't know where that line is." (Junior faculty member, Morningside)

5.3: CREATING SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

Columbia provides opportunities to be part of a community of LGBTQ+-identified scholars. However, the presence and visibility of LGBTQ+ faculty members may vary by department or school. While visibility and support for LGBTQ+ faculty is a priority for every corner of Columbia, certain disciplines may have greater representation than others and/or lend themselves more toward faculty whose work includes LGBTQ+ scholarship. Section 3 features a number of examples where LGBTQ+ scholarship is thriving at Columbia.

LGBTQ+ in STEM

The STEM sciences are an area where LGBTQ+ visibility and climate need improvement (Freeman, 2018). Estimates suggest that LGBTQ+ people are 17–21 percent less represented in STEM fields than expected (Freeman 2018; Freeman 2020). LGBTQ+ people in STEM fields report more negative experiences in the workplace than those working in other fields (Cech and Pham 2017). Forty percent of LGBTQ workers in STEM are not out to colleagues; and 69 percent of sexual-minority STEM faculty who are out at work, report feeling uncomfortable in their department (Partridge et al. 2013). Most faculty do not know of another LGBTQ faculty member from the universities where they got their degrees (Yoder 2016).

Potential factors driving LGBTQ+ disparities in STEM include bias and discrimination, misalignments of occupational interests with STEM stereotypes, and STEM norms of impersonality that isolate LGBTQ+ people (Freeman, 2020). LGBTQ+ retention shares common psychological processes with female and racial minority retention such as STEM identification and belonging (Freeman, 2020). LGBTQ scientists are also less likely to be open at institutions that do not offer same-sex partner benefits or support name changes during a gender transition (Yoder and Mattheis 2016).

Advocacy groups such as Out in STEM and the US National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals are doing important work to connect LGBTQ scientists. Expanding diversity initiatives to include those who identify as LGBTQ would increase visibility in the greater scientific community (Cech et al. 2017; Hughes, 2018; Patridge, Barthelemy, and Rankin 2014; Yoder and Mattheis 2016). Other recommendations include broadening survey measures in the federal STEM census to include sexual orientation and gender identity and including LGBTQ+ status when considering underrepresented groups for diversity programs.

Strategies to enhance networking and support

The following strategies have proven successful in enhancing opportunities for professional networking and support.

1. ***Connect with LGBTQ+ faculty across departments and schools.*** Beyond one's own department and school, Columbia offers opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to connect across disciplines and workplaces, such as shared interest groups (organized by CUIMC HR), events (such as Queer Disruptions), or other programming from interdisciplinary centers (IRWGS, WGSSC, BCRW, and others). See the Appendix for more information.

2. ***Connect with LGBTQ+ faculty and scholars across universities and in your field.*** Many professional organizations have LGBTQ+ interest groups, and interuniversity initiatives can bring people together from across the country and the world. For example, in 2019, the Columbia School of Nursing hosted a summit bringing together leaders from nursing schools and organizations (e.g., American Academy of Nursing, American Association of Colleges of Nursing) to create a national health action plan to raise awareness of and improve LGBTQ+ health.

3. ***Join or create an Out List***. Many institutions have "out lists" that faculty can join to indicate that they are available for mentorship and networking with other LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, students, and other trainees. The Mailman School of Public Health has recently launched an OutList as part of its LGBTQ+ Resources.

Support for faculty, staff, and students who are changing their gender expression or are transitioning

Transgender and nonbinary members of the Columbia community may change their gender expression and/or transition to using different names and pronouns. They may also embark on gender-affirming medical interventions, such as hormones and surgery. Columbia is committed to providing support at every step along this process. It is important to note that changes in gender expression and transition are highly individualized; what is involved differs from person to person, and people will go about any of the possible changes at their own pace. Therefore, it is paramount that we follow the transgender or nonbinary person's lead. Some tips for allies are:

Support. For some people, transitioning can be a lonely, challenging process; therefore, they are encouraged to seek support within their social circles, including at work and in school. Let the person who is transitioning know that you are available to take on a supportive role. While your attitude may be implicit in your conduct, a verbal show of support goes a long way. For example, say, "I want you to know that you have all my support. If you need help with anything, I'm here for you."

Talk about it with discretion. Along the same lines, let the person who is changing or transitioning know that you are available to talk about their experience if they choose to do so. Transitioning is a personal experience—some people may benefit from sharing it with others, while others may decide against discussing it. Either way, let them know that you are available to listen to them if they opt to do so. If something isn't clear, ask questions respectfully. Be self-aware regarding what is helpful to know about transitioning and what is just curiosity.

Avoid assumptions. People transition in different ways. Avoid formulating assumptions regarding the pathways, reasons, and outcomes of transitioning as they differ from person to person. While people transition, it is particularly important to listen to how they talk about themselves and to refer to them with their chosen name and pronouns. Keep in mind that names and pronouns may change at the beginning of the transition or at a later stage.

Be aware and take care of your feelings. Transitioning doesn't happen in isolation. Depending on your relationship with the person who is changing their gender expression or transitioning, you may experience a range of feelings such as happiness, surprise, confusion, or even fear. Be aware of these feelings, and if you need to, discuss them with someone other than the person who is transitioning. If you need support, don't be afraid to ask for it. Take time to learn more and research the subject. If you make mistakes, apologize, and learn from them.

For additional resources, please see the Appendix.

5.4: LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING

Columbia's student and trainee body is diverse in sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It is also increasingly diverse in race/ethnicity, including LGBTQ+ students and trainees who are black or brown and LGBTQ+ (see Section 7). An important goal of the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement is to promote diverse representation across all Columbia communities, including faculty and administrators.

> *"Historically, we've had very, very few people of any kind of minority in very significant leadership positions in the University. That's the environment. And I'm not saying that's coming from a decidedly negative place. But I just think that the institution has lacked a diversity of thought, and that predictably puts it in this kind of place. Because when you have people who haven't been in the minority in a real kind of way in their life, making, you know, hiring policy, benefits, educational policy, they don't know what they don't know."*
> (Midcareer faculty member, Medical Center)

In the interviews we conducted with faculty to inform the content of this guide, the value of LGBTQ+ visibility and endorsement by individuals in leadership positions was seen as critical for fostering an environment in which LGBTQ+ individuals feel included and affirmed. For example, the support from department chairs, school deans, and central administration for events on LGBTQ+ topics served as important acknowledgements of Columbia's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and of the issues relevant to the LGBTQ+ community.

> *"We have greater diversity lower on the ladder; we need to nurture and promote them. Race proportions flip with staff and clinical coordinators; many are LGBT, Latinx, younger. Are we losing them?"* (Junior faculty member, Medical Center)

Mentoring

At the heart of academic life are the relationships we have with colleagues. Over and over again, LGBTQ+ faculty at Columbia shared that the single most important factor that allowed them to succeed in pursuing their passion for teaching, research, scholarship, and service at Columbia was their relationships with academic mentors. In 2016, the Office of the Provost created a *Guide to Best Practices in Faculty Mentoring*, but for LGBTQ+-identified faculty and students, mentorship takes on additional meaning in the context of the stigma that remains attached to LGBTQ+ identities and scholarship today. For students,

this includes mentors who were open about their LGBTQ+ identity and/or who demonstrated a genuine interest in the lives and well-being of their mentees. For mentors, this included the rewarding experience of seeing their mentees flourish and contribute to the field, whether this was in LGBTQ+ scholarship or unrelated fields. Mentor-mentee relationships were able to ease fears on both sides related to internalized stigma.

> *"In so many ways, the advisor-student relationship is kind of like a parent-child relationship. There are a lot of similarities there. [An advisor may] share details about their own life, for example. And they encouraged me to be social during a time in my life that I was 100 percent focused on class and research."*
>
> (Junior faculty member, Morningside)

Faculty mentors may be in need of support for themselves. Faculty spoke to us about the feeling of having to be a rock, a role model, strong for their students and for the communities they represent.

> *"As a professor, I have meetings all day, every day, with students, and I have to be the rock for them. So I can see how for some professors that might just beat or batter you down after a while. Always displaying strength for your students and never attending to your own needs."* (Junior faculty member, Morningside)

Faculty with multiple minority identities may experience added burden in this regard. This is further amplified by the fact that these faculty are often called upon for various roles and initiatives to represent their respective communities.

> *"And so that's a huge piece of the service. And it's not really accounted for. But it's an integral part of you because somebody helped you, and you feel that obligation to help others. We've got to find some way of acknowledging that."* (Junior faculty member, Morningside)

> *"We call on the same people when it comes to supporting diverse faculty; how do we broaden that support without burdening/causing burnout for the same people? We need a larger group of people who have competence to provide support as allies."* (Karen Fife, Director, Higher Education Recruitment Consortium)

Forming relationships with potential mentors can also be facilitated through the networking resources outlined in Section 5.3 and professional organizations listed in the Appendix. The *Guide to Best Practices in Faculty Mentoring* is a valuable resource for units and individuals who are looking to establish or enhance formal and informal mentoring programs.

Peer Mentoring

In addition to senior mentor/junior mentee relationships, peer and near-peer mentoring relationships, as outlined in the above-mentioned guide, "remove the inherent senior-junior power dynamic defined by roles and rank, and may permit freer reciprocal exploration of career issues. Such relationships may be particularly important to women and underrepresented minority faculty." (Mott, 2002)

One example of programming to respond to this need is the LGBTQ+ peer mentoring program initiated in Fall 2020 by the office of Dr. Anne Taylor, Senior Vice President for Faculty Affairs and Career Development for CUIMC. The goals of this program are to provide mentorship in various aspects of career development for LGBTQ+-identified faculty and to provide networking opportunities. For its first meeting, over 50 faculty registered from across CUIMC schools and participated in break-out discussion groups on such topics as how to best support LGBTQ+ mentees, gaining a deeper understanding of LGBTQ+-lived experiences within higher education, and LGBTQ+ family planning and benefits. For more information, visit their website.

5.5: CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND HUMILITY IN HEALTHCARE DELIVERY AND TRAINING

In healthcare settings at Columbia, engagement in a process of cultural competence and humility is key to communicate and work effectively with patients and colleagues of diverse cultural backgrounds, including in terms of gender and sexuality. According to Campinha-Bacote (2018, 2019), five components of cultural competence can be distinguished:

1. *Cultural awareness* is the process of conducting a self-examination of and critical reflection on one's own biases toward other cultures and the in-depth exploration of one's cultural (organizational and individual) background. Cultural awareness also involves being aware of the existence of documented "isms," such as sexism, cisgenderism, heterosexism, and racism, and acknowledging the privilege and power inherent in one's position.

2. *Cultural knowledge* is defined as the process in which the individual and the organization interconnect to seek and obtain a sound educational base about culturally diverse groups, including LGBTQ+ communities.

3. *Cultural skill* is the ability to conduct a cultural assessment to collect relevant cultural data, including on sexual orientation and gender identity, regarding one's organization and the students, other trainees, patients, and employees they serve.

4. *Cultural encounters* encourage individuals and organizations to directly engage in face-to-face interactions and other types of encounters with LGBTQ+ individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds to modify existing beliefs and to prevent possible stereotyping.

5. *Cultural desire* is the motivation needed to seek cultural encounters and further the process of becoming culturally aware, knowledgeable, and skillful in interacting with LGBTQ+ individuals and their families and communities.

Organizations and individuals cannot engage in cultural awareness, knowledge, skill, encounters, and desire without operating from a cultural humility lens (i.e., a lifelong process of self-reflection and personal critique; Tervalon and Murray-Garcia 1998), that is continuously being infused throughout each one of these five components.