

HBCUS AND LGBTQ+ SUPPORT: ARE YOU CENTERING YOUR STUDENTS?

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What are HBCUs doing to support LGBTQ+ students on their college campuses? The research brief: Modeling Inclusion: HBCUs and LGBTQ+ Support, sheds light as to how HBCUs are and need to continue to embrace changes in policy and practice to better provide a more inclusive campus environment for LGBTQ+ students. In collaboration with the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI) and The Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC), I had an opportunity to collaborate and write on a topic that connects to me at my core.

As a joto (queer) Latinx, I have come to learn how my sexual orientation functions based on my experiences as a Queer Person of Color (QPOC). As a Jotería scholar/activist, I have navigated the Ivory Tower, known as higher education, as the proud son of Mexican parents, a first-generation college student, and currently working towards my Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. I have had to redefine what it means to be queer and Latinx in the academy. The innovative steps taken by institutions such as Bowie State University, Howard University, North Carolina

Central University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ students on their campuses marks the beginning of a new era and possibilities for HBCUs.

For many college students, the undergraduate experience is pivotal to one's identity development and transformation. When thinking about queer students and more specifically, Queer Students of Color (QSOC), it is essential to take a holistic approach in the ways we provide support to these student populations. As institutions -- administrators, faculty, and staff -- we must be accountable for our actions or lack thereof when it comes to the policies in place, curriculum, and support services for QSOC at HBCUs.

HBCUs traditionally have had to fight for their right to provide an equal, if not better, education for African Americans in the U.S. Why should those rights exclude LGBTQ+ students at these institutions? I ask this question as it connects to the power behind policies, which currently marginalize students at HBCUs. Changes in policies at HBCUs have the power to transform a heterosexist campus environment to one where QSOC feel that they belong. As mentioned in the brief, using gender-neutral language and deconstructing binary representations of gender can have a lasting positive impact. Furthermore, developing a curriculum that incorporates theory and practice from an LGBTQ+ lens, will not only diversify what students are learning, but also critically engage the campus community to examine and inspire new pedagogy, research and practice. Finally, having a physical space such as a Queer Resource Center on campus can be a safe haven for many QSOC, who may not have a community on campus or feel they belong to the institution.

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