



Career Planning & Job Search Issues for LGBTQ Individuals

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Entire books have been written on this topic and many web sites and resources exist to support individuals with the job search process as well as coming out and being out in one's career. This handout was designed to highlight some common issues and stimulate thought and discussion. It is adapted with permission from the "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Resources" page on the University of Pennsylvania Career Services web site.

The Twardowski Career Development Center is a welcoming office for the LGBTQA community with many staff who are WCU Allies. We invite you to come to the center to talk more about your individual questions and circumstances, whether pursuing internships, jobs or graduate study.

Where to Begin

Many agree that the world would be a far more accepting place if more LGBTQA folks "came out." Certainly, over the last several decades, our social landscape has changed drastically and it is easier to be out than it used to be. There are challenges, however, that LGBTQA individuals still face in their daily lives. Because many adults spend most of their time in some sort of workplace, career or job, whether or not to come out at work (and how) is a common question.

First, think about how "out" you have been up to this point in your life. In what situations have you chosen to come out, to whom, how did you do it, and how easy or difficult was that? Has your gender identity or expression "outed" you in some way without having to say anything? As you imagine what it might be like to go to work every day in a full-time career-related position, what sorts of interactions and conversations do you want to have with your co-workers? Do you like the idea of keeping your personal and work lives separated or would it be difficult if you did not share certain aspects of your life with your co-workers?

Second, spend time researching and exploring what it might be like to work in the career field that interests you. Certain careers, industries, or places of employment may be more welcoming and open; looking at the context in which you will spend your daily work life is an important consideration. It is also important, however, to not to operate on stereotypes; do not assume because you want to be an elementary school teacher that you cannot be out, but also do not assume that it won't be without challenges to be out in that setting. Even if a field seems supportive and accepting to LGBTQA individuals, you should research each organization to which you apply for a job.

How to Get Started With Research

The best place to begin your research about an organization is to look at their personnel policies and nondiscrimination/hiring practices statements. You can go to the Human Resources section of any organization's web site to learn more about their Equal Employment Opportunity practices and to see if they have statements of nondiscrimination that include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Look at the benefits offered to employees; for example, do they offer medical plans which provide coverage for individuals who are transitioning? In the past you would want to determine if they offered same-sex partner benefits, but with marriage equality that landscape has changed. If you have a partner and are not married and don't wish to be married, you may actually no longer have access to domestic partner benefits (i.e., some companies many now only extend benefits to married partners). Certainly there are also legal issues related to employment that you may want to look into, such as using a preferred name versus having to use a legal name on job applications and other employee paperwork.

Familiarize yourself with the state, local, or municipal protections that may be in place. A great resource for researching this sort of information is the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) workplace website: <http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace>.

While it is positive when an organization has LGBT-supportive policies and benefits, how can you find out whether the climate is welcoming? This is something that takes a little more digging. For mid-size or larger companies, there may be an LGBTQA employee or affinity group that you can reach out to. Use the *Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index*, the national benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices pertinent to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees.

Use other networks such as contacting gay-owned businesses in the area where the employer is located; let them know you are thinking about a job with a certain company and you are trying to network to find other LGBT individuals who might work there. If there is a college or university in the area that has an LGBTQA center or office, contact the staff there to inquire about who might be in their networks.

RESUME WRITING

If you have been actively involved in LGBTQA organizations and activities, what should you include on your resume and how should you include it?

The three primary tasks of writing any resume are:

1. Identify what the employer wants (qualifications, experiences, credentials)
2. Identify your skills, experiences and accomplishments
3. Compare and match the two

The three primary rules of resume writing are:

1. Be relevant
2. Be consistent
3. Be concise

What does all of this mean? If you want to be a scientist, criminal investigator, nurse, teacher, accountant - is it "relevant" that you belong to an LGBTQA organization? It can be – the true task when putting these activities on your resume is to focus on SKILLS.

When surveyed about qualities they seek in new hires (from the National Association of Colleges and Employers *Job Outlook 2016*), employers rank the following skills as most important:

1. Leadership
2. Ability to work in a team
3. Written communication skills
4. Problem-solving skills
5. Verbal communication skills
6. Strong work ethic
7. Initiative
8. Analytical/quantitative skills
9. Flexibility/adaptability
10. Technical skills

These are pretty much all transferrable skills; they are not specific to any one career path or major. As such, they are exactly the kinds of skills you are developing as a result of your participation in extracurricular activities and you need to seriously consider including them on your resume. You may still want to evaluate the implications of including certain student organizations or information on your resume, given that you cannot control other people's opinions and biases.

The following examples demonstrate a few options of how to present your involvement in LGBTQA students groups and activities on the resume.

ACTIVITIES (Traditional, Chronological example)

Sexuality and Gender Alliance

Aug 2016 – present

Co-Chair

- Allocate budget of \$2,500 to support campus events, including Campus Speak Outs and the Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.
- Organized the 15th Annual Campus Pride Festival with a leadership team of five officers.
- Co-facilitate weekly discussion group for lesbian and bisexual women.

OR

Co-Chair, SAGA

August 2016 – present

- Allocate budget of \$2,500 to support campus events.
- Organize and coordinate more than 20 special events and festivals for undergraduates.
- Co-lead weekly discussion group of undergraduate women.

ACTIVITIES (Functional example)

Leadership

- Served as an officer in three different student organizations.
- Acted as special events committee chair, organizing concerts and campus rallies.
- Served on a 20-member advocacy committee focused on improving campus climate.

Communication

- Facilitate small weekly discussion groups.
- Delivered public addresses at several campus functions and events.
- Wrote small grant proposals to fund club activities, resulting in awards totaling \$1,500.

ORGANIZATIONS

Sexuality and Gender Alliance

Aug 2015 – present

Health & Wellness Peer Educator

Aug 2014 – May 2015

English Club

Aug 2015 – present

INTERVIEWING

Preparation is critical for any job interview. Your primary concern should be to focus on the job and the organization, the skills you have to do the job, and your motivation and interest in working for this particular organization. The three primary questions employers seek to answer when interviewing candidates for jobs are:

1. Can this candidate do the job?
 - a. Do you have the knowledge, skills, and abilities the employer deems necessary to successfully fulfill and excel at the job responsibilities?
2. Will this candidate do the job?
 - a. Are you motivated, enthusiastic, and genuinely interested in this position and organization?
3. Is this candidate a good fit for the organization, job and/or group?
 - a. Do your personal qualities, personality and temperament mesh with the office culture?

The first two items are fundamentally under your control. If you have prepared thoroughly, you should be able to offer an interviewer specific examples of accomplishments that demonstrate your skills. If you are enthusiastic and articulate specific motivations for wanting to be hired for the position, then you should be

addressing the second item well. What about the third item? General advice about interviewing is to “be yourself” and interviewers will ultimately have their own ways of evaluating whether they think you are a “fit.” For many LGBTQA individuals, however, this is where the question arises regarding whether or not to come out during an interview. Can “being yourself” include coming out during an interview?

A bottom-line question you can ask: **“What do I hope or expect to accomplish by coming out during a job interview?”** Your main purpose in a job interview is to convince the employer you have the relevant skills, abilities and motivation to do the job successfully. If there is no direct link between your identity and the job you are seeking, do you really need to come out at that point?

There is no one answer to this question. If you have researched an organization's policies and culture, you probably have some information to help you. If you are applying for a job in which experience with diverse populations is an advantage, then it might be an advantage to talk about your background in more detail. If you are applying for a “gay job” (e.g., an advocate with the NGLTF, a volunteer coordinator for a camp for gay and lesbian youth, etc.) then it probably would not occur to you to not self-identify during the interview process.

Do you want to come out in the interview to test the waters regarding what it might be like to be out in this particular work environment? You may find this approach to be very useful, and then again you may only gain exposure to the interviewer's perspective (which may not be reflective of the organization as a whole). You can ask questions during the interview if you have not been able to get a sense of the culture and environment: "Can you tell me about diversity in the organization, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender? What sorts of training or other initiatives are taking place in the organization related to diversity and inclusion?"

Many people still suggest that you wait to come out until after receiving a job offer, when already you know the employer is interested in hiring you; you don't want to give the interviewer any sort of reason to knock you out of consideration. Others suggest waiting to come out at some point on the job, given that you may choose to come out to different people in different ways and at different times, once you get to know people better and once you have a better first-hand sense of the environment.

You may not have the same choice of deciding how to come out, however, if you are a transitioning individual but have not yet executed a legal name change. For background checks that use legal name and/or social security number, you will be in the position of “outing” yourself, something that others will not experience. You are going to want to take time to research the legal implications with a community agency or resource with expertise in legal employment issues for LGBTQ individuals.

What can feel most complicated in an interview is if you think your gender identity and/or expression might in some way “out” you or affect how your interviewer perceives you. Individuals with cisgender privilege often don't worry about this particular aspect as much; everyone is concerned with “interview appropriate attire” and making a positive first impression via appearance, however gender queer individuals might have more concerns. In the final analysis, you have little to no control over others' perceptions, other than doing your best to research what appropriate attire is for the industry in which you are interviewing, and make your best effort to align how you dress with those expectations and norms.

Many employers will say that they can tell when a person is not bringing their authentic self to an interview, and so you may in the end prefer to somehow disclose during the interview. The best advice is to talk to a career counselor, trusted faculty, and mentors about strategies for how to be professional and true to your authentic self in employment interviews.

Resources

Human Rights Campaign – Workplace Site (includes transgender-specific resources)

<http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace>

National Center for Transgender Equality

<http://transequality.org/issues/employment>

National Center for Lesbian Rights (includes legal issues, transgender issues)

<http://www.nclrights.org/our-work/employment/>

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: What You Should Know About EEOC and the Enforcement Protections for LGBT Workers

http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/enforcement_protections_lgbt_workers.cfm

National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC)

<http://www.nglcc.org>

LGBT - GLBT - Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning and Allies Networking

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/63687/profile>

Independence Business Alliance

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/1208587/profile>

Out and Equal

<http://www.outandequal.org/>

Out for Work

<http://www.outforwork.org/>

GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network)

<http://www.glsen.org/>

Out for Undergrad – Conferences for LGBTQ Students

<http://www.outforundergrad.org/>

Out Professionals

<http://www.outprofessionals.org/>

Pride at Work

<http://www.prideatwork.org/>

Transgender Law & Policy Institute

<http://www.transgenderlaw.org/employer/index.htm>

FAQs for Transgender Job Seekers – University of Vermont

<https://www.uvm.edu/~career/pdf/FAQtransjobseekers2015.pdf>