



## City Tech Exec: We Need to Do More For Gay Students

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"While City University of New York (CUNY) campuses individually have been addressing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender student concerns for some time, much remains to be done," said Dr. Marcela Armoza, vice president of enrollment and student affairs at New York City College of Technology (City Tech). "We need to provide appropriate services to GLBT students to help ensure their academic success and personal well-being, as we aim to do for all of our students."

Her remarks were greeted with murmurs of agreement from the group of 50 administrators, faculty, staff and students representing 15 CUNY campuses and the Central Administration at the recent colloquium, "Gay Today at CUNY: The State of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (GLBTQ) Student Services on Our Campuses," held at City Tech, 300 Jay Street.

"If students don't feel safe on campus being who they are, their academic achievement will suffer," concurred Terri Clark, director of City Tech's Student Wellness Center. "When students feel included, they can focus on learning."

Looking at the national picture, LGBT students do not feel safe. According to a **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** study of several U.S. college campuses, one in five GLBT respondents had feared for their physical safety because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, 43 percent considered their campus homophobic, 41 percent stated their college/university was not addressing issues related to their sexual orientation and gender identity, and 51 percent concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid intimidation.

A colloquium participant from Kingsborough Community College, Estelle Miller, who is director of that college's Center for Women and Non-Traditional Students, said the extent of the problem became clear to her when she heard about the homophobic backlash that greeted a showing of the film, "Brokeback Mountain" (a film depicting a love relationship between two cowboys) in an English class. "I think there is a tendency for homophobic slurs not to be taken as seriously as racial or ethnic slurs," she said.

It is just this type of behavior, according to City Tech's Clark, who was one of the colloquium's organizers, that has created a growing need on college campuses to provide personal and institutional support to their LGBTQ students and to educate heterosexual students, faculty and staff about LGBTQ issues.

"We know that homophobia and heterosexism greatly contribute to LGBTQ youth's high rates of attempted and completed suicide, homelessness, violence victimization, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and HIV-associated risky behaviors," she said.

CUNY colloquium participants discussed the challenges involved in building a LGBTQ student support program. The current level of services run the gamut from straight/gay alliances at CCNY and the College of Staten Island, to a gay and lesbian club at Hunter, to a part-time LGBTQ coordinator at Lehman, to no services at all at some colleges.

City Tech had already established itself as a pioneer of sorts in GLBTQ student services by being the first CUNY campus to offer the Safe Zone program, which offers a voluntary opportunity for faculty, staff and administrators to become allies for LGBTQ students. Volunteers participate in a three-hour training that introduces them to the issues that GLBTQ individuals face and explores how they can be supportive allies. The City Tech Safe Zone program was replicated at Kingsborough Community College and for a time at John Jay College.

“Most of our GLBTQ students are not comfortable disclosing their orientation or gender identity and so are not ‘out’ to their peers,” said City Tech’s Director of Counseling Cynthia Bink. “That’s why it’s so important for us to create a positive atmosphere backed up by strong support services and visible role models of faculty and staff who are GLBT.” This is why, in June, a GLBT Pride group photo was taken of “out” City Tech faculty, staff and students, and displayed on easels at the entrances of three campus buildings.

Working in small groups, colloquium participants brainstormed possible services and programs to satisfy the unmet needs of this student population, which includes a wide range of sub-groups, such as those who are gender-questioning, immigrants, HIV, at risk and people of color. Suggestions included making an effort to incorporate GLBTQ issues into the curriculum, establishing a CUNY-wide GLBTQ resource center, implementing faculty development around GLBTQ issues, having a CUNY Coming Out Day and Pride Month, requiring new hires to undergo Safe Zone training, building alliances with other multicultural groups on campus and off.

The idea for the colloquium grew out of a desire by City Tech’s Vice President Armoza to strengthen the climate of inclusiveness and respect for diversity that has been a priority since she assumed her current position last year. Already in place on campus are Bink’s weekly support group for GLBTQ students and the Safe Zone Training sessions, conducted by Clark and Director of Student Life Daniel Fictum, which to date have trained 25 faculty, administrators and staff.

The colloquium’s program was facilitated by Christopher Murray, LMSW, a counselor at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Community Center and also a therapist in private practice. Earlier this year, he was awarded a Charles H. Revson Fellowship for the Future of New York at Columbia University. He holds a BA from the University of Michigan and an MSW from Hunter College.

Participants left the colloquium feeling buoyed by the opportunity to network with other concerned colleagues and by the strong start that was made to deal with the issues. Said John Holloway, associate dean of student affairs at Lehman College: “I am very pleased that the University community came together to discuss LGBT matters within CUNY.”

Added Adam Rockman, executive assistant to the vice president for student affairs at Queens College, who voiced a feeling shared by most of the other participants: “It was a good first step. What we really need to do is come up with concrete plans. We have a long way to go but this was certainly an encouraging beginning.”