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Queer and Trans* Students' Experience with Gender-Inclusive Housing at Four-Year Public Institutions

Chad D. Novak
Grand Valley State University

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Queer and Trans* Students' Experience with Gender-
Inclusive Housing at Four-Year Public Institutions
by
Chad Novak
April 2023

Master's Project
Submitted to the College of Education
And Community Innovation
At Grand Valley State University
In partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Education



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Chad Novak in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in Higher Education, College Student Affairs Leadership.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Karyn Rabourn'.

Karyn Rabourn, Project Advisor

April 26, 2023

Accepted and approved on behalf of the
M.Ed. in Higher Education Program

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Karyn E. Rabourn'.

Karyn E. Rabourn, Graduate Program Director
April 26, 2023

Accepted and approved on behalf of the
Ed. Leadership and Counseling Dept.

Catherine Meyer-Looze

Catherine Meyer-Looze, Unit Head
April 26, 2023

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Chad Novak

Abstract

Queer and trans* students can face many struggles within higher education, including individual and institutional discriminatory practices. Higher education's housing and residence life can perpetuate a heteronormative environment through gender-segregated residence halls. Research indicates gender-inclusive housing can provide gender-appropriate accommodation for queer and trans* students. However, colleges and universities do not center the voices and experiences of queer and trans* students in creating and assessing gender-inclusive housing, creating additional logistical obstacles to accessing and retaining in housing and residence life. This project aims to mitigate logistical obstacles and struggles faced by queer and trans* students by creating a living-learning community and an advisory board. The living-learning community, called Pride, is designed to meet the needs and lived experiences of queer and trans* students. The advisory board is created to assess the effectiveness of the living-learning community by intentionally centering queer and trans* student voices and experiences.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Queer and trans* students are vulnerable on college and university campuses and face discriminatory and exclusionary practices and behaviors (Hextrum et al., 2021). Queer and trans* students face many challenges and barriers navigating the higher education landscape, extending to their experiences in housing and residence life. Higher education institutions do not center the voices of queer and trans* students when implementing inclusive housing practices, such as gender-inclusive housing (GIH) (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). GIH is a pro-LGBTQ+ practice for queer and trans* students to build community and grow as gender and sexually minoritized students (Amos et al., 2021). However, queer and trans* students' voices are often excluded from conversations during the formation of GIH, so this practice may not impact the retention of these students within on-campus housing (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Lack of intentional planning in housing and residence life may perpetuate a negative experience, lack of support and basic needs, and feelings of isolation for queer and trans* students (Nguyen et al., 2020; Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Unintentional practices and spaces can result in the departure of queer and trans* students from on-campus housing due to the lack of support and increased barriers within this functional area (Kortegast, 2017). Ellett and colleagues' (2020) findings allude to the value of living on-campus, including improved academic success, sense of belonging, and retention. Higher education institutions should prioritize the needs and retention of queer and trans* students within housing and residence life and focus on intentionally centering their voices when creating and implementing inclusive housing practices.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

Queer and trans* students face higher rates of discrimination, oppression, and isolation in higher education than their cisgender, heterosexual peers (Kortegast, 2017). Moreover, trans* and non-binary students face harassment more often than their cisgender, queer peers (Krum et al., 2013). Discrimination can be perpetuated on a personal and institutional level, including practices that do not center queer and trans* students' needs and experiences (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2020). Housing and residence life within higher education can bolster an oppressive environment by reinforcing a heteronormative, gender-binary through their residence hall housing options (Hextrum et al., 2021). Research indicates that 94% of all higher education institutions follow the gender binary and have gender-segregated rooms, with limited colleges and universities offering GIH as a preliminary choice (Hextrum et al., 2021). Consequently, queer and trans* students do not have access to gender-appropriate housing that meets their needs and experiences (Seelman, 2014).

GIH was created to provide a supportive housing environment that aligns with one's gender identity and expression (Amos, 2021) and can facilitate a sense of belonging for queer and trans* higher-education students (Wagner et al., 2018). However, GIH often lacks intentionality and fails to center the voices and experiences of queer and trans* students, creating a space where students may not feel safe, comfortable, or supported (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Additionally, obstacles that prohibit students from accessing or being retained in GIH include increased housing costs, inaccessible information and applications, and untrained housing staff members (Taub et al., 2016). Better understanding the experience of queer and trans* students in housing and residence life can help higher education professionals create intervention strategies to address this population's needs and lived experiences.

Background of the Project

The experience of queer and trans* students within higher education was not considered until the 1960s (Amos et al., 2021). Queer and trans* students have faced and still face many barriers and challenges on college and university campuses, such as oppression and discrimination. Homophobia, queerphobia, and trans*phobia appear in many modalities, such as derogatory slurs and remarks, silencing, verbal and physical harassment, threats, and bullying (Amos et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020). Anti-queer and trans* practices and policies, such as gender-segregated facilities, are another form of discrimination (Seelman, 2014). Spaces like gender-segregated residence halls and restrooms deny support and basic needs for queer and trans* students to develop their gender identity and expression. The discrimination queer and trans* students face can be detrimental to their college experience, sense of belonging, and retention within higher education (Amos et al., 2021; Nicolazzo et al., 2018).

Since 1972, the Title IX Education Amendment prohibited discrimination based on sex for education institutions receiving federal money (Hextrum et al., 2021). Many public and private colleges and universities receive federal aid, so compliance with the Title IX Education Amendment is required. In 2016, President Obama declared that Title IX offered protections based on sex and gender identity in his "Dear Colleague Letter." This expanded protections for trans*gender students, including access to "sex-segregated activities and facilities" (p.8), aligning with one's gender identity as opposed to one's sex assigned at birth (Dear Colleague Letter, 2021; Hextrum et al., 2021). In 2017, the Trump Administration declared gender as biological sex and reversed President Obama's support for trans*gender students (Hextrum et al., 2021). President Trump's rescindment allowed public educational institutions to bar trans* students from using facilities that corresponded with their gender identity, removed trans* students' protections, and

shifted power to the states to determine decisions around gender identity. In June 2020, the Supreme Court recognized that sex discrimination included gender identity and sexual orientation biases, thus, ruling to protect trans* individuals [within employment] (Hextrum et al., 2021). The Supreme Court's ruling sheds light on the discrimination and prejudice queer and trans* individuals face, making progress in protecting them.

The first gender-inclusive housing option at a public university in the United States was started in 2015 at the University of California, Riverside (Smith & Tubbs, 2018). GIH is increasing among higher education institutions; in 2013, 153 four-year higher education institutions had GIH, growing to 268 in 2019 (Nguyen et al., 2020; Anderson-Long & Jeffries, 2019). GIH is a space where queer and trans* students can grow, develop, and create community and a sense of belonging. This housing option can remove gender binaries and cisgenderism from higher education institutions' housing and residence life. However, many obstacles and challenges exist within GIH that further contribute to the exclusion and discrimination of queer and trans* students (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to intentionally center the voices of queer and trans* students in the creation and assessment of gender-inclusive housing practices. Using Schlossberg's (1989) Theory of Marginality and Mattering as a theoretical framework, the project will explore the [negative] experiences of queer and trans* students in housing and residence life. Additionally, the project will propose intervention strategies to purposefully include and center the voices of queer and trans* students in creating inclusive housing practices. The project will address obstacles queer and trans* students face in gender-inclusive housing and aims to mitigate any limitations by developing a queer and trans* affinity living-learning

community (LLC). The LLC will intentionally include the needs and experiences of queer and trans* students, and an advisory board will assess the effectiveness of the LLC. The LLC will provide the necessary support, resources, and housing personnel to ensure the growth of queer and trans* students' sense of community and gender identity development.

Objectives of the Project

The project proposes an intervention strategy that seeks to increase visibility and give a voice to queer and trans* students residing in higher education on-campus housing. The creation of the LLC aims to provide a safe space for queer and trans* students to grow and develop as gender and sexually minoritized persons. Through intentional design, support, and resources, the LLC can enable queer and trans* students to establish a sense of belonging and explore their identities. The LLC will comprise of housing, academic, and co-curricular components to facilitate queer and trans* students' sense of belonging and gender identity development and expression. Research indicates a lack of involvement of queer and trans* students in forming and assessing inclusive housing practices (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). So, by creating an advisory board, queer and trans* students can share their experiences residing in the LLC. Additional stakeholders, including various higher education professionals, faculty, and community members, will sit on the advisory board to offer expertise, experiences, and best practices for the LLC. Housing personnel and the advisory board will engage in regular assessment through surveys and one-on-ones to evaluate the effectiveness of the LLC. The goal of the intervention strategy is to intentionally center queer and trans* students to ensure their needs are being met and supported.

Definition of Terms

A definition of common terminology used throughout the project is provided below:

- *Gender-inclusive housing (GIH)* refers to residence hall housing on a college campus that allows a student of any biological sex or gender identity to live with someone of a different biological sex or gender identity (Taub et al., 2016; Amos et al., 2021).
- *Housing and residence life* refers to higher education students living in college or university on-campus housing overseen by student affairs professionals (Ellett et al., 2020).
- *Living-learning community (LLC)* refers to residence hall housing where students with similar interests or identities reside and build community through an academic and cocurricular model (Caviglia-Harris, 2022).
- *Queer* refers to an individual who is not heterosexual or cisgender.
- *Retention* refers to the housing and residence life's ability to re-enroll a student from one semester or term to the next.
- *Sense of belonging* refers to a student's social and emotional connection and inclusion with a group or space.
- *Trans** refers to an individual whose gender identity does not identify with their biological sex assigned at birth (Anderson-Long & Jeffries, 2019).

Scope of the Project

The proposed project addresses the needs and experiences of queer and trans* students in higher education housing and residence life, specifically at Central Michigan University (CMU). The project uses the living-learning community and advisory board best practices to guide priorities and focus areas. The LLC, known as Pride, will have the infrastructure, academic, and cocurricular integration components that aim towards creating a space where queer and trans* students can build community and development their gender or sexual identity. The advisory

board focuses on creating a group of institutional and community partners to assess the effectiveness of Pride for queer and trans* students. Throughout the project, the literature highlights obstacles faced by queer and trans* students in housing and residence life, and GIH, that the intervention strategy will address and mitigate. The project includes plans and strategies to collect quantitative and qualitative feedback to understand the impact of the LLC on queer and trans* students.

The project only addresses some aspects of creating an LLC, yet the information provided will vary based on institutional support and resources. The project is intended for CMU; however, various institutional types can adapt and alter the intervention strategy to meet their specific needs and campus culture. The effectiveness of the LLC and advisory board is impacted by institutional buy-in and the college or university's commitment to creating an inclusive housing practice for gender and sexually minoritized populations. Additionally, the availability of staff, resources, and funds will impact the success and support offered to queer and trans* students. Higher education administrators must consider the best practices provided in the project to ensure queer and trans* students feel safe, supported, and comfortable residing in their institutions' on-campus housing.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Understanding the experiences of queer and trans* students within higher education's housing and residence life is crucial. When creating inclusive and pro-LGBTQ+ policies like gender-inclusive housing, colleges and universities do not center the voices of queer and trans* students (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Queer and trans* students face discrimination in higher education, and practices that do not center these students' voices, needs, and lived experiences contribute to an oppressive environment (Denton & Cain, 2020; Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Using Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory as a lens for examining queer and trans* students within housing and residence life, specifically gender-inclusive housing (GIH), may enable student affairs professionals to better understand the barriers and challenges these students encounter that prohibit access or retention within GIH. The theoretical framework lays the foundation to recognize how queer and trans* students are marginalized and identify an intervention strategy to center the voices of queer and trans* students. The literature reviewed in the following sections highlights queer and trans* students' experience in higher education, housing and residence life, and gender-inclusive housing. Finally, a possible intervention strategy is examined, such as a living-learning community and advisory board that address the unique needs of this student population.

Theory/Rationale

Marginality and Mattering

Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory describes how transitioning into a new landscape affects individuals' feelings of marginality and mattering. Marginality is defined as not fitting in, which can result in negative behaviors such as self-consciousness and

depression (Patton et al., 2016). Mattering is the belief that individuals fit in, feel important, and matter to others (Patton et al., 2016). Marginality can be a temporary or permanent condition. Temporary marginality results from individuals transitioning into a new space and feeling marginal – they do not feel like they fit in or belong. While permanent marginality is classified for minoritized individuals, such as queer and trans* students, and is part of one's identity (Schlossberg, 1989). Queer and trans* students in higher education and housing and residence life are marginalized. These students face discrimination, harassment, and oppression through individual and institutional behaviors, policies, and practices (Hextrum et al., 2021). Queer and trans* students perceive campus as unsafe and hostile due to being targets of harassment, such as derogatory remarks and unsupportive climates (Kortegast, 2017). Within housing and residence life, gender-segregated residence rooms perpetuate heteronormativity, and the lack of intentionality within GIH fails to meet the needs of queer and trans* students (Hextrum et al., 2021). When individuals are marginalized, feelings of wanting to be included and valued emerge (Schlossberg, 1989).

Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory explains five aspects of mattering to address issues of marginality. First, *attention* refers to the feeling of individuals wanting to be noticed and acknowledged by others. The depth of how someone is paying attention, or *importance*, is the second aspect. Third, *ego-extension* refers to the emotions others elicit in solidarity with one's accomplishments. Next, *dependence* is the feelings of others depending on an individual rather than that individual solely depending on others. Finally, *appreciation* describes an individual who wants to feel appreciated and that their efforts did not go unnoticed (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) suggests that individuals want to feel as if they matter, and programs, services, and policies must help convey feelings of mattering. This model helps

examine how queer and trans* students feel marginal within higher education, specifically housing and residence life, and how high-impact practices like a living-learning community (LLC) can help with mattering. Pro-LGBTQ+ practices, like an LLC, can help queer and trans* students create a sense of community and develop their gender identity and expression (Choset, 2021; Amos et al., 2021).

Research/Evaluation

The following section will review research on queer and trans* students' experience in higher education, housing and residence life, and gender-inclusive housing. Next, logistical obstacles and challenges in gender-inclusive housing will be addressed. Finally, literature on a proposed intervention strategy – a living-learning community and an advisory board – will be introduced.

Queer and Trans* Students' Experiences in Higher Education

Queer and trans* students are minoritized and face discrimination, harassment, and oppression in higher education (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2020). Queerphobia, trans*phobia, and genderism are prevalent on university and college campuses, organizations, policies, and practices (Davis, 2018). For example, Pryor and Hoffman (2020) found that colleges, universities, and individuals uphold heteronormative ideologies rooted in cisgenderism, creating an oppressive environment for queer and trans* students. Discrimination against queer and trans* students is perpetrated in many forms and presented in written and unwritten policies, as well as subtle and blatant forms of harassment (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2020; Dessel et al., 2017). First, institutional policies include practices that do not meet the lived experiences and needs of queer and trans* students (Hong et al., 2016), such as gender-segregated facilities (Hextrum et al., 2021). Next, subtle forms of discrimination include microaggressions, feelings of being left

out or ignored because of one's sexuality or gender identity, or expression (Hong et al., 2016; Blackmon et al., 2020). Finally, blatant forms of discrimination are intended to cause impact, such as physical and verbal harassment, including bullying, slurs, and jokes (Hong et al., 2016; Dessel et al., 2017; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2020). Approximately more than a third of trans* students experience subtle and blatant harassment on college and university campuses, a higher rate than their cisgender, queer peers (Anderson-Long & Jeffries, 2019; Krum et al., 2013). Queerphobia, trans*phobia, and genderism are common amongst all higher education institutions and can adversely affect queer and trans* students.

Due to the discrimination queer and trans* students face, college and university campuses can be unsafe and cause additional stressors for students (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2020). Hong and colleagues (2016) found stressors to include a negative self-perception and a lack of belonging, resulting in poor mental and physical health. Subtle and blatant forms of discrimination communicate a lack of safety on campus for queer and trans* students; therefore, students lack a sense of identity and belonging (Blackmon et al., 2020). Furthermore, harassment, discrimination, and a lack of belonging contribute to sexually and gender-minoritized students experiencing an increase in poor mental health (Bourdon et al., 2021). The prejudice queer and trans* students experience in higher education is detrimental to their holistic identity development and overall connection to their institution. However, Blackmon and colleagues (2020) state that a sense of belonging can mitigate negative experiences and create meaningful relationships and experiences. Queer and trans* students can develop a sense of belonging and support when they are in a community with one another (Kortegast, 2017). Additionally, research indicates queer and trans* students can feel supported when there is campus buy-in and institutions are creating pro-LGBTQ+ practices, such as gender-inclusive housing (Amos et al.,

2021). Acknowledging the needs and identity development of queer and trans* students is essential, and colleges and universities need to place value in creating gender-inclusive policies and practices on campus. Creating inclusive housing practices are strategies a college or university can implement to work toward the inclusion of queer and trans* students.

Housing and Residence Life

Housing and residence life operations on college campuses serve many purposes, including student identity development and a sense of belonging (Amos et al., 2021). On-campus housing is a service that encourages students to interact with peers and housing and residence life staff and develop relationships and connections to the institution (Dumford et al., 2019). Through these interactions and the design of housing facilities, on-campus housing creates a sense of “home” and is intended to provide support and comfort for students (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). Additionally, learning happens as much outside the classroom as it does inside the classroom (Choset, 2021). Housing and residence life can help foster student identity growth through intentional programming, living arrangements, and co-curricular design (Ellett et al., 2020). Dumford and colleagues (2019) found that the social networks one creates within on-campus housing facilitate this development. Furthermore, the authors found students living on-campus had higher levels of belonging than their peers living in off-campus housing (Dumford et al., 2019). Similarly, Ellett et al. (2020) indicated that colleges and universities' on-campus housing not only contributed to a sense of belonging and connection to the institution but an increase in academic success, persistence, and retention. Higher education institutions' housing and residence life serves a purpose to help students develop a sense of belonging, and that is important for queer and trans* students. Queer and trans* students seek opportunities to create a

sense of belonging to help mitigate negative encounters. A supportive housing environment can contribute to one's connectedness and belongingness on campus (Blackmon et al., 2020).

Queer and trans* students' experiences. Queer and trans* students may have negative experiences with housing and residence life because of the lack of inclusive practices, resulting in further exclusion and discrimination (Anderson-Long & Jeffries, 2019). Higher education institutions' housing and residence life uphold heteronormative ideologies through gender-segregated facilities (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). Hextrum et al. (2021) found that 94% of colleges and universities in the United States have gender-segregated residence rooms, which can harm queer and trans* students' sense of belonging and identity development. Research indicates that in these spaces, there is an increased risk of discrimination and harassment for queer and trans* students, contributing to their negative residence housing experiences (Krum et al., 2013; Amos et al., 2021). Seelman (2014) found trans* students often had issues with their roommates, including being "outed" as trans* by them. Queer and trans* students do not have access to gender-appropriate housing within higher education. Wagner et al. (2018) found that 80% of trans* students did not have access to necessary and adequate housing. Many of these students have been denied access to gender-appropriate housing and bathrooms (Seelman, 2014). Consequently, Denton and Cain (2020) found that some queer and trans* students found off-campus housing options to attempt to combat the heteronormative, gender-binary within college and university housing and residence life. Queer and trans* students often do not develop a sense of belonging or connection within gender-segregated housing residence rooms due to harmful heteronormative practices (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020).

Importance of Gender-Inclusive Housing

Gender-inclusive housing is a pro-queer and trans* housing policy that allows individuals to pick their roommates regardless of biological sex or gender identity. GIH can provide queer and trans* students a safe, comfortable space to explore and develop their gender identity (Amos, 2021). GIH facilitates students to create a sense of belonging and feeling supported on campus because their institution provides a safe space and visibility for queer and trans* students (Wagner et al., 2018). Having the ability to pick their roommates, queer and trans* students can be surrounded by individuals with similar ideas and values, helping contribute to one's sense of belonging (Nguyen et al., 2020; Amos, 2021). Not only can GIH help create a sense of belonging and contribute to identity development, but GIH also makes the experience of queer and trans* students on campus visible (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). Therefore, there are broader efforts at the college or university to include the lived experiences of gender and sexually minoritized students, highlighting the importance of peer support and acceptance (Amos, 2021).

Queer and trans* students stated that they selected institutions that provided GIH because they knew the college or university had gender-appropriate accommodations (Wagner et al., 2018). GIH has various styles, the most popular being apartment style and single-occupancy rooms (Krum et al., 2013). Apartment-style rooms allow each resident to have their own bedroom [and sometimes bathrooms] and the ability to lock their door, providing a safe space (Krum et al., 2013). Single-occupancy rooms may better suit a student's identity development, as the student does not have to worry about roommates (Krum et al., 2013; Hextrum et al., 2021). These inclusive housing practices often allow students to create a safe space and feel at home. GIH can support a vulnerable population by mitigating oppressive systems and behaviors that queer and trans* students face in gender-segregated housing (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). These

practices often serve as a counter space for queer and trans*s students to be surrounded by supportive and validating peers and institutional practices (Wagner et al., 2018). GIH is an inclusive practice that can enable queer and trans* students to develop their identities, create a sense of belonging, and feel supported by their college or university.

Logistical Challenges with Gender-Inclusive Housing

Intentionality. The purpose, creation, and implementation of GIH are to establish an environment where queer and trans* students feel comfortable, safe, and supported; however, many obstacles prevent students from accessing and or thriving within these spaces. GIH can be viewed as a checklist of diversity initiatives by college and university administrators rather than an opportunity to intentionally create practices that support the needs and lived experiences of queer and trans* students (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). The idea that GIH will make a college or university seem progressive or prestige is an engendering reputation (Davis, 2018). Many higher education institutions lack intentionality when designing GIH by excluding queer and trans* student voices in conversations involving inclusive policies and practices (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Queer and trans* students are targets of individual and institutional discriminatory and oppressive practices, and the lack of intentionality in implementing GIH furthers prejudiced behaviors and actions (Krum et al., 2013). Providing GIH without consulting queer and trans* students can be harmful, exacerbating oppressive practices and erasing the needs and voices of a vulnerable population.

Marketing. The lack of intentionality within GIH creates barriers and challenges for queer and trans* students. Queer and trans* students noted a lack of advertisement for GIH. Wagner et al. (2018) research participants stated that higher education institutions rely on the institution's website to disseminate information about GIH; however, such information is buried

and hard to find. Furthermore, queer and trans* students stated that navigating how to access GIH was unclear and confusing, preventing students from utilizing the services (Wagner et al., 2018; Kortegast, 2017). Not only was GIH poorly advertised, but some institutions also advertised GIH for "all" students rather than for queer and trans* students. Advertising GIH for "all" students shifts the purpose of GIH and minimizes the needs and lived experiences of queer and trans* students (Wagner et al., 2018). Colleges and universities do not have accessible communication strategies to spread the word about GIH, creating an obstacle to accessing gender-appropriate housing.

Application and language. GIH requires queer and trans* students to fill out an application, creating an additional barrier or challenge to housing access. The application processes are unclear, need extra work, and are insensitive to queer and trans* students' identity development. Queer and trans* students stated that the application process was ambiguous, like GIH information on the institution's websites (Denton & Cain, 2020). Most colleges and universities require additional paperwork to apply for GIH as a screening process (Taub et al., 2016; Willoughby et al., 2012), requiring students to "out" themselves as queer or trans* (Kortegast, 2017). Queer and trans* students had to "prove" their affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community, and this consisted of students disclosing their sexuality or gender identity to "unknown" higher education administrators and professionals (Hextrum et al., 2021; Amos et al., 2021).

Additionally, the applications were not inclusive and were insensitive to students' identity development. The language on the GIH applications was unclear or had limited options based on one's sexuality or gender identity. The applications excluded terminology for individuals who do not identify as "male" or "female" and for trans* individuals who are in the transition process or

do not wish to transition medically (Denton & Cain, 2020). Higher education institutions seem to lack understanding of identity development and the fluidity of gender identity and expression. Furthermore, many GIH applications had class standing requirements and excluded freshman or first-year students, only offering the housing option to upper-level or transfer students (Taub et al., 2016; Krum et al., 2013). Sexuality and gender identity development is a continuous process and [often] takes place before one enters higher education, demonstrating the lack of intentional thought behind institutions' GIH policies and application processes and requirements.

Cost. The cost of GIH creates an additional obstacle to accessing gender-appropriate housing. GIH's cost is a barrier to queer and trans* students, especially for individuals with other marginalized identities, such as being low-income (Seelmam, 2014). GIH comes in various room layouts, one being a single-occupancy room. Research indicates that single-occupancy rooms at higher education institutions are 1.5 to 2 times more expensive than other room layouts, such as double-occupancy rooms (Hextrum et al., 2021). Therefore, queer and trans* students must decide – either spend more money to access adequate housing or be placed in gender-segregated housing that is unaffirming to students' gender identity or expression (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). Higher education institutions' single-occupancy room costs are not the only cost barrier. Double-occupancy and apartment-style rooms can have an additional cost regarding roommate selection. Many colleges and universities require queer and trans* to select their roommates. If a roommate leaves [the living situation], the institution may require the remaining students to find another roommate to fill the spot; if they do not, they will be financially responsible for covering the cost of the vacancy (Taub et al., 2016). This policy creates inequitable practices and barriers for queer and trans* students. The remaining students often having to opt out of GIH and revert to gender-segregated residence rooms if they cannot fill the vacancy (Taub et al., 2016). The cost

associated with GIH practices creates a significant barrier for queer and trans* students accessing gender-affirming housing.

Housing and residence life staff. GIH needs to be more intentional, particularly with the housing and residence life staff overseeing the housing. Queer and trans* students mentioned that the housing and residence life staff is under-trained, and do not feel supported by the housing staff (Wagner et al., 2018; Kortegast, 2017). Moreover, queer and trans* students feel uncertain that housing and residence life staff can deal with LGBTQ+-related issues, such as trans*phobia, due to their lack of training (Wagner et al., 2018). Queer and trans* students noted that housing staff needs to center the voices of sexually and gender-minoritized students and engage in education around the trans* experience (Denton & Cain, 2020). Furthermore, Denton and Cain (2020) stated that housing staff needs sensitivity training on supporting queer and trans* students best, which involves continuous efforts around education and assessment. Queer and trans* students face many barriers and challenges accessing and retaining in GIH. Research alludes to how higher education institutions are not centering the voices and lived experiences of queer and trans* students in GIH creation, implementation, and practices.

Intervention Strategy

Living-learning community. Creating a space for queer and trans* students to come together in support and community is essential. A living-learning community (LLC) is a residence hall program that facilitates shared community for various student populations, including identity-based groups, through an academic and cocurricular model (Choset, 2021; Caviglia-Harris, 2022). Dunn and Dean (2013) state that LLCs are created as a response to students' needs – there is a need for inclusive and pro-LGBTQ policies and practices that center the voices of queer and trans* students within the residential setting. Research indicates that

LLCs positively impact student success through intentional academic and social support, improving student retention, persistence, and GPA (Caviglia-Harris, 2022). LLCs allow like-minded individuals to unite, share similarities, and have open discussions and dialogue (Choset, 2021). LLCs connect a community, fostering student development through intentionally designed learning goals, outcomes, and initiatives (Dunn & Dean, 2013). LLCs can positively impact the queer and trans* student experience through intentionality, support, and community building.

LLCs can help students develop a sense of community and belonging at their institution. In studies around minoritized student populations involved in living-learning communities, students had positive experiences due to the support, safety, and community (Banks et al., 2021; Suejung et al., 2018). The literature emphasizes the importance for minoritized populations to have a safe space on campus, and LLCs are a residential practice that can create a sense of safety (Suejung et al., 2018). Banks and colleagues (2021) state that LLCs are high-impact practices that increase educational benefits for historically underserved populations through community building and support. This community building and support contributes to minoritized populations creating a sense of belonging and connection with peers, housing and residence life, and their institution (Suejung et al., 2018). Furthermore, LLCs have a student-first mentality, creating a higher sense of community in the residential setting than peers who do not live in an LLC (Choset, 2021). When students feel safe and supported, LLCs can provide space for personal and identity development (Suejung et al., 2018). LLCs have proven to have a positive academic and social impact on minoritized student populations. It is essential to create residential spaces that allow queer and trans* students to feel safe and supported, contributing to their overall identity development and connection with the institution.

Inkelas and colleagues' (2018) Best Practice Model in Nielsen and Sajkich's (2022) "Theory to Practice: Applying the Best Practices Model (BPM) for Living-Learning Communities at Cabrini University" recommend best practices for designing an LLC. Inkelas and colleagues (2018) propose three building blocks – infrastructure, academic, and the co-curricular environment – to create a successful LLC. Infrastructure is the foundation of the LLC and involves having resources and systems in place to implement an LLC. Next, the academic environment focuses on the educational integration of academics within the community. Finally, the co-curricular environment concentrates on community building and learning outside the classroom (Nielsen & Sajkich, 2022). The model assumes that if all three building blocks are designed intentionally for the community it serves, the "pinnacle" or the successful integration of the residents – queer and trans* students – will be achieved (Inkelas et al., 2018).

Advisory board. Centering the voices of queer and trans* students is integral to ensuring their needs are met within housing and residence life. Colleges and universities must meet queer and trans* student needs, and an advisory board can help facilitate this action. An advisory board is a group of stakeholders at a higher education institution who volunteer their time to offer advice, feedback, and recognize areas of improvement (Dormey, 2013). Board members can include representation from student and academic affairs, community members, alumni, faculty, and students (Rose & Stiefer, 2013; Craig et al., 2018). Craig and colleagues (2018) emphasized the importance of including faculty and students to ensure representation across the university, diverse perspectives, and viewpoints. Advisory boards may be implemented at institutions for various reasons, including assisting students or improving programs or services (Nehls, 2022; Rose & Stiefer, 2013), such as a living-learning community. Dormey (2013) noted that advisory boards could help institutions and departments achieve their mission – a mission of meeting

queer and trans* student needs and lived experiences. Craig and colleagues (2018) found many benefits of implementing an advisory board, such as meeting student needs, providing feedback on programs and services, raising awareness of resources, better connections with the campus, and a collaborative effort to improve student success.

The U.S. Department of Education's (2008) "Building an Effective Advisory Committee" suggests best practices for developing an advisory board. The U.S. Department of Education recommends five steps, four of which will be utilized in the intervention strategy. Step one includes establishing the purpose and scope of the advisory board. The second step involves recruiting and selecting members that align with the advisory board's goals. Once members and processes are in place, engaging board members in work around the purpose and formation of the group is the next step. Members should feel empowered to support the committee's goals. The final step is maintaining the advisory board and enhancing the effectiveness of the group.

Summary

Queer and trans* students' experiences are not centered within housing and residence life. GIH is a practice implemented to meet the needs and lived experiences of queer and trans* students; however, without intentionally including students' voices, needs, and lived experiences, GIH is often ineffective and inaccessible (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Using Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory, research indicates queer and trans* students face discrimination much more than their cisgender, heterosexual peers in higher education (Kortegast, 2017). Discrimination and oppression are further exacerbated through anti-LGBTQ+ policies and practices, such as gender-segregated housing (Krum et al., 2013). GIH is an inclusive and pro-LGBTQ+ practice implemented to include queer and trans* students' needs and lived experiences within the residential setting, yet many challenges exist within GIH. These

obstacles include a lack of intentionality, advertisement, inclusive language, ambiguous applications, increased costs, and under-trained housing and residence life staff (Taub et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2018; Kortegast, 2017; Nicolazzo et al., 2018). These challenges can prevent access or retention within these spaces, and queer and trans* students often do not feel like they belong and may resort to moving off-campus (Kortegast, 2017).

Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory indicates that students want to matter and belong, and queer and trans* students or no different. An intervention strategy, such as a living-learning community and an advisory board, is a way to intentionally center the voices of queer and trans* students and achieve a sense of mattering. An LLC can help students gain a sense of belonging and safety at their institution, creating space and comfortability for personal and identity development (Suejung et al., 2018). Additionally, an advisory board can allow stakeholders, including students, to work towards improving programs, services, and success (Craig et al., 2018). Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory provides a lens for student affairs professionals to recognize how queer and trans* students' needs and lived experiences are not always being met and practical ways to center their voices through an intervention strategy. It is crucial to recognize the ineffectiveness of inclusive policies if queer and trans* students are not centered on creating, developing, and accessing such policies. Policies and practices should build a sense of belonging and allow for identity development for queer and trans* students.

Conclusion

The literature review highlighted how queer and trans* students are oppressed in higher education on an individual and institutional level. Despite creating gender-inclusive housing to meet the needs and lived experiences of queer and trans* students, higher education

professionals failed to intentionally center the voices of these students, creating inaccessible and unattainable practices. Many logistical obstacles exist within GIH, defeating the purpose of why the housing practice was implemented. Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory is a lens student affairs professionals can use to center the voices, needs, and lived experiences of queer and trans* students. Creating and implementing an intervention strategy such as a living-learning community and an advisory board can give queer and trans* students a voice in developing and assessing an inclusive practice that will allow for a sense of belonging on their college or university campus.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

Queer and trans* students' voices are not centered when creating and implementing pro-LGBTQ+ housing practices, such as gender-inclusive housing (GIH) (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Therefore, challenges exist for queer and trans* students in accessing and retaining within housing and residence life (Taub et al., 2016). To address the barriers and challenges queer and trans* students face in GIH, this chapter outlines intentional ways to center queer and trans* voices, including creating a living-learning community (LLC) and implementing an advisory board. An LLC can provide a safe, comfortable space for queer and trans* students to reside on public, four-year college, or university campuses. An advisory board can engage stakeholders, including queer and trans* students, to meet and discuss needs, criteria, and feedback for the intentional integration of students residing in the LLC. By deliberately including queer and trans* students in assessing the LLC, the LLC will address struggles and barriers faced in GIH and cater to queer and trans* students' needs and lived experiences. The chapter will include the project's components, evaluation, conclusions, and implementation plan.

Institutional Context

The following intervention strategy is intended to support queer and trans* students at Central Michigan University (CMU). CMU is a public research university in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan (Central Michigan University, n.d.). CMU has 15 residence halls, and the institution's residency policy requires first- and second-year students to live on campus. The Office of Residence Life and the Office of LGBTQ Services and Gender Equity Programs provide gender-inclusive housing; however, all students inquiring about GIH must contact the Office of Residence Life. CMU offers single-room housing options, yet there is a limited capacity, and

prices are 1.5 times the regular room rate (Central Michigan University, n.d.). Mt. Pleasant is in mid-Michigan, and the city is known for being home to CMU, with a total population of 54,000 full-time residents, including students (Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, n.d.). Based in Mt. Pleasant, the Listening Ear Crisis Center offers safe and affordable housing for individuals needing transitional living (Central Michigan University, n.d.). Midland, the city next to Mt. Pleasant, houses Great Lakes Bay Pride, a non-profit that provides resources for the LGBTQ+ community (Great Lakes Bay Pride, n.d.).

Project Components

To help mitigate the negative experiences and challenges of queer and trans* students in housing and residence life, an intervention – a living-learning community and advisory board – has been designed. The living-learning community, Pride, will be created based on the recommendations and practices suggested by Inkelas and colleagues (2018). Pride’s intent is to provide a safe space for queer and trans* students to develop a sense of belonging and explore their identities. To evaluate the effectiveness of Pride, an advisory board will be created and include institutional and community partners with diverse expertise, experiences, and research. The advisory board will consist of queer and trans* students to help ensure the LLC meets the needs of gender and sexually minoritized students.

Living Learning Community

Infrastructure. The infrastructure is the core building block of creating a successful LLC (Nielsen & Sajkich, 2022). The LLC, Pride, aims to provide a safe, comfortable space for queer and trans* students to develop a sense of belonging and facilitate identity development and exploration. For this to happen, there must be clear, supportive, and accessible infrastructure to ensure queer and trans* students know about the LLC and can remain within the space. The

infrastructure includes physical space, advertisement, personnel, financials, and resources for queer and trans* students.

Physical space. Having adequate space for Pride is essential to help prioritize queer and trans* students' privacy and security. While it is not always possible for a college or university to create a new residence hall, CMU can repurpose existing space to meet the needs of queer and trans* students. CMU should seek out a residence hall with apartments or single-occupancy rooms, such as Northwest Apartments or Cobb Hall. Krum and colleagues (2013) found that apartments and single-style rooms were preferred among queer and trans* students. The apartment-style rooms should have individual bedrooms that allow students to have their own space and privacy. At least one single-occupancy bathroom should be dedicated to the apartment and only used by students living there. If CMU repurposes a single-occupancy residence space, the single rooms should have a bathroom. The institution should avoid a residence hall with community bathrooms because it might not provide security for students nor be inclusive of one's gender identity. A barrier for queer and trans* students with traditional residence halls is community bathrooms (Taub et al., 2016), so it is best if the LLC can avoid this trend. However, if the residence hall does have community bathrooms, CMU will need to make the bathrooms "all-gender" to avoid categorizing bathrooms within the gender binary.

The location of the LLC is essential to consider, as this will relay implicit messages about the importance of the residence hall. The residence hall should be located near the other residence buildings on campus; however, it should not be the busiest residence hall to avoid students living outside the LLC entering a queer and trans* safe space. Centralizing Pride with the other residence halls, such as within the Towers Community, will communicate the importance and visibility of queer and trans* students. Placing the LLC near other residence

halls can lead to campus-wide conversations about including gender and sexually minoritized populations. The area will serve as a safe space for queer and trans* student to create a community and explore their identities. Additionally, Pride should have a community space to engage in co-curricular programs and community-building events (Nielsen & Sajkich, 2022). Having a space for residents to gather communicates the intentionality of the LLC to foster a sense of belonging and provide a space for queer and trans* students to come together in the community.

Advertisement and application. The advertisement of the LLC should be clear, transparent, and easily accessible. CMU should promote the LLC to all students to increase the visibility of the housing option, intending to reach queer and trans* students. Pride should be promoted as a gender-inclusive housing option and communicated through various outlets, including the Office of Residence Life website. Information on the website should be clear and specific, expressing that the LLC is intended for queer and trans* students, but welcomes students of all genders and sexual orientations. The LLC will be available for all student standings, ranging from first year to graduate students; thus, the university implicitly communicates that identity development is not bound by class standing but is a continuous process.

During the housing selection process, registration for Pride should be available for students. Registration should not require additional paperwork nor students to “out” themselves or disclose their gender identity. Students should not have to prove their gender or sexual orientation to access the housing option. However, registration should explicitly state the purpose of the LLC and the population it serves. All students who elect to live in Pride should sign and agree to community standards to ensure the purpose of the LLC is maintained and regulated

(Krum et al., 2013). Additionally, when students sign up for housing options, other gender-inclusive housing options on campus should be clearly communicated if a student is not seeking to live in Pride but prefers a GIH option. This can help relay the message that GIH is available elsewhere, leaving space for queer and trans* students who need the LLC to support their identity development and safety on campus.

Personnel. CMU will need to be intentional with LLC personnel to ensure queer and trans* students feel supported and comfortable to share their experiences. To have a supportive environment for queer and trans* students, the LLC will need a faculty advisor, residence hall director, resident assistants, and inclusion assistants. The faculty advisor will oversee the academic integration of the LLC and be an educational resource for queer and trans* students. Further information about the faculty advisor is listed in this chapter's academic environment section. The residence hall director will be the lead staff member that lives and works within the LLC. They will oversee the staff within the building and work closely with the faculty advisor and resident and inclusion assistants to facilitate co-curricular programs. The residence hall director will work with an Office of Residence Life leadership team member to train the staff living in the building.

Additionally, the resident assistants are student staff live-on positions. The resident assistants interact closely with the students living in the LLC and will facilitate co-curricular programs, check-ins with students, and resolution conference meetings. The inclusion assistants are student staff that provides education around diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belongingness. Recognizing the intersectionality of identities, the inclusion assistants support students with minoritized identities and provide resources, programming, and equity-based education. The personnel within Pride should hold similar identities represented within the

community of students living there. This may enable queer and trans* students to relate better with staff and feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with those living and working in the residence hall. However, finding personnel with similar identities as the residents can be limited at CMU, so integrating inclusion assistants provides additional support for minoritized populations.

All personnel should undergo onboarding training that increases sensitivity around working with queer and trans* students. The staff must be visible role models and create a welcoming and inclusive climate. Training should include the resources available to support queer and trans* students so they are comfortable facilitating dialogue around queer and trans* students' needs, lived experiences, and struggles. Training should also focus on identity development, coming 'out,' transitioning, gender fluidity, etc., and the supports available to students regarding gender identity, such as the Office of LGBTQ Services and Gender Equity Programs. Additionally, staff members must understand their biases and how their identities are viewed in society. The Office of Residence Life staff will need sufficient training to serve the population of students best they will be working with. Queer and trans* students should feel comfortable going to their residence hall director, resident assistant, or inclusion assistant about their experiences or challenges they may be facing. The staff members should be able to facilitate conversations or direct the student to the appropriate resources. Students should feel safe and comfortable discussing their identity around staff members; thus, training is essential.

Financials. The LLC needs adequate funds to accomplish its goals and adequately compensate personnel. Each college or university will have different financial means, but CMU should consider the following for budget planning. Money should be set aside for co-curricular programming and community building. Resident and inclusion assistants will create social and

educational programming to facilitate belongingness in the LLC and institution. Faculty will also develop co-curricular programs to connect the educational environment beyond the classroom.

Regarding staffing, resident and inclusion assistants must be compensated for their work. Compensation can include free housing, meal plans, and a monthly or semesterly stipend. The residence hall director can receive a monthly salary, free housing, and a meal plan. The faculty advisor should be given additional compensation due to co-curricular programs extending beyond the classroom. Additionally, the budget should account for additional staff as needed, such as front desk student staff or other resident or inclusion assistants. Another area of consideration is money for resources, such as materials for bulletin boards, hygiene products, cleaning products, and more. While the institution may have a budget or the supplies already purchased, funds should be available to purchase gender-appropriate resources and supplies, as listed in the following section.

Resources. Appropriate resources in the LLC can help communicate the intentional care the institution provides for queer and trans* students. Pride should have community standards published throughout the residence hall, which should highlight the care-based practices the LLC intends to follow and remind the residents and staff members what the community stands for. Pride can offer additional personal care products, such as tampons, menstrual pads, menstrual cups, etc. These resources are essential for persons with a uterus and should be available for residents. Also, the LLC can provide a dedicated space for residents to try on and keep gender-appropriate clothes. The clothing items can be donated by students living in the LLC, institution, or community. It is a free service for students to wear clothes that accommodate their gender expression. The resource list is non-exhaustive and will depend on students' needs and available support, resources, and financials of CMU and the LLC.

Academic environment. The academic climate supports the educational components of Pride, and academic courses are a critical component of LLCs and emphasize the *learning* part of the residence hall and community. Taking courses for credit helps facilitate integrative learning within the community and emphasizes that learning does not stop outside the classroom but continues within the residence and co-curricular spaces (Nielsen & Sajkich, 2022). The institution could create its own course for the LLC; however, this will take time to develop and be approved by the institution. CMU could also create a curriculum for the LLC once the community has been established. An alternative to creating their own curriculum is partnering with the First Year Experience department and requiring students living in Pride to take the same course and section of the First Year Experience (FYE) 101 class. Since the LLC is based on identity rather than a major, it would be hard to require a class related to a major or minor; thus, a First Year Experience class would focus on institutional support and resources and count as a general education course competency. It would fulfill university requirements while bringing students together who live in Pride. A customized class of FYE 101 can be tailored for Pride residents; however, the university would only need a new curriculum if the personnel and resources were available.

The LLC will have a faculty advisor that oversees the academic integration of the LLC. The faculty advisor will work closely with the First Year Experience faculty and the residence hall director to promote learning outside the classroom and help create co-curricular programs. The faculty advisor will also meet with the residents of the LLC and have a typical "advisor" role with the students. Topics related to academics, identity development, and social integration will be of conversation. Conversations around academics will emerge, especially around the First Year Experience class and its relation to support resources available for Pride residents. Still, the

purpose is to shift the perspective of the faculty advisor to someone to learn and explore with rather than someone with just academic knowledge. While the students in the community will have their major-specific advisor at the institution, the LLC's faculty advisor serves as a safe space for the queer and trans* students to feel comfortable discussing their experiences on campus while holding a gender or sexually minoritized identity.

Co-curricular environment. Co-curricular programs complement the academic environment and enhance the out-of-class experience (Nielsen & Sajkich, 2022). Co-curricular programs help achieve the goals of Pride – create a sense of belonging and facilitate identity development and exploration. There are various co-curricular programs the LLC and staff can implement to achieve the purpose of Pride. To complement academic learning, resident assistants can create study sessions where residents can collaborate and work on schoolwork. This is an easy way to create a supportive educational climate and reinforce the benefits of living in an LLC. To focus on creating a sense of belonging for queer and trans* students, resident assistants can design and implement social-based programs. These programs can include programs ranging from a movie or game night to a queer and trans* prom. These events facilitate social integration and give space for queer and trans* students to come together in the community.

Additionally, the resident assistants can work with the residence hall director to create a hall council. The hall council is a student government council for the LLC, and residents can take on leadership positions and programs for the community. Hall councils give queer and trans* students the ability to connect and work together to create an inclusive and welcoming environment. Furthermore, focusing on the LLC's identity development and exploration aspect, the inclusion assistants can program around queer and trans* identities. They can organize educational events involving topics around the LGBTQ+ community and partner with the Office

of LGBTQ Services and Gender Equity Programs on campus. Educational programming facilitates identity awareness among residents and can allow them to educate themselves on unfamiliar or curious topics. It can provide the foundations for identity exploration and development, a significant component of the LLC.

The residence hall director can create a peer mentoring program with the residents living in Pride. Peer mentors serve as a support resource for their mentees, and in this case, upper-level students living in the LLC can be peer mentors to their first- and second-year students living in the LLC. A peer mentor program is another way for queer and trans* students to build community and learn about their identities. Peer mentors can help ease the transition into college for their mentees and be a support resource throughout the year. Peer mentors and mentees can engage in academic or social opportunities – study sessions, community events, one-on-one bonding, and more. Through the peer mentorship program, the hope is first- and second-year residents feel integrated within the community, Pride, and CMU. Peer mentees should feel supported and know they have an upper-level peer to connect with if they need support or advice.

Advisory Board

Purpose. The initial step in creating the advisory board is to determine the purpose and scope of the group (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The advisory board aims to develop a group that will assess the effectiveness of Pride. Individuals on the advisory board will have a different affiliation with the college or university; therefore, board members can provide insight based on their expertise. Bringing various stakeholders together will facilitate dialogue around queer and trans* students' needs to ensure the LLC supports students' lived experiences and identity development. The advisory board's purpose is to raise awareness around resources and

support practices needed to maintain a safe, comfortable, and supportive environment for queer and trans* students. The advisory board will meet monthly post-creation of the LLC to ensure continuous evaluation and assessment of the program.

Members. The advisory board will include various stakeholders with diverse thoughts, opinions, and experiences. The board will consist of members inside and outside of the institution. A leadership team member from CMU's Office of Residence Life department will lead the board. The leadership team member will facilitate the meetings, recruitment efforts, and compile the LLC's lists of improvements (e.g., increased hygiene products available). Within the advisory board, there should be representation from various stakeholders, including students, to university leadership team members. The members will be comprised of at least three queer and/or trans* students, a residence hall director, resident assistant, inclusion assistant, First Year Experience professor, Higher Education Administration professor, Office of Student Activities and Involvement staff member, Division of Student Affairs leadership team member, Office of LGBTQ Services and Gender Equity Programs staff member, and a member from Midland's Great Lakes Bay Pride.

The queer and trans* students can provide their experiences within higher education and the support and resources they need to feel safe and comfortable in housing and residence life. Next, the Office of Residence Life staff members can offer insight into the functionality of housing and residence life and best practices for a successful LLC. The professors can offer input within their field of study, highlighting literature and research findings around gender and sexually minoritized populations. Additionally, LLCs offer co-curricular programming, and the Office of Student Activities and Involvement staff member can be a resource for providing a perspective in programming and building a sense of community. The Division of Student Affairs

staff member represents the division; thus, it is essential to have a leadership team member represented. The staff member can provide direction and offer feedback from an administrator's point of view. Furthermore, CMU's and the community's LGBTQ+ center staff members can advocate for queer and trans* students' needs while providing their own experiences and expertise. They work directly with gender and sexually minoritized students and will significantly support assessing the LLC.

Work. The advisory board will conduct meetings monthly throughout the academic year to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the LLC. Later in this chapter, the project evaluation processes will be detailed. The advisory board's work is crucial to the inclusion and safety of queer and trans* students residing in CMU's residence halls. The board needs to lay out the needs and priorities of the LLC – research and benchmarking will help ensure resources and support are integrated. Topics around infrastructure, academic environment, co-curricular environment, and the integration of queer and trans* students in Pride will be discussed in monthly meetings. All work conducted should be aligned with the goal of this advisory board, discussed in the purpose section of this chapter. While integrating queer and trans* students is the “pinnacle” step of the LLC, it serves as the purpose for all aspects of the LLC, including the support and resources offered. It is vital for members of the advisory board to feel empowered and recognize their work is making a difference. The board should establish priorities and create actionable steps each month to enable a successful integration of queer and trans* students within housing and residence life.

Maintaining the advisory board. Creating an LLC will require ongoing conversations, evaluation, assessment, and problem-solving (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The board members can provide regular updates to other members and stakeholders about the status of the

LLC and its effectiveness. The board should engage and review the literature around LLCs and the queer and trans* community to stay current on needs and trends within higher education. The advisory board will administer a survey to students living in Pride to understand their perspective and experience, and the board will focus on areas of improvement. Representation from other departments and functional areas are needed based on assessment results. Further discussion about program evaluation will be referenced next in this chapter. As the academic years change, it will be necessary for the advisory board to seek new members to ensure new ideas, thoughts, opinions, and expertise are represented on the board. Overall, the advisory board needs a purpose, tasks to strive for, and recognition for their hard work. It is essential to make changes to the advisory board to ensure the accomplishment of the LLC's goals.

Project Evaluation

Evaluating the success of the LLC is crucial to understand the program's effectiveness. Both formal and informal assessment strategies will be used to learn if Pride is building a sense of community and facilitating identity development for queer and trans* students. At the end of each semester, the advisory board will email a formal evaluation for residents to fill out. Quantitative and qualitative questions will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the LLC and provide the space for queer and trans* to express their experiences living in the residence hall. Questions for the survey can be found in Appendix A. Based on the survey answers, the advisory board will discuss strategies moving forward to ensure the LLC is meeting the needs and lived experiences of the residents. The board will discuss areas of improvement the staff members can implement to better cater to queer and trans* students. The advisory board can invite residents to the advisory board meetings to share their experiences and the support and resources they hope to see in the LLC.

Additionally, resident and inclusion assistants can email formal surveys after an event or program they host. These surveys would go to residents who attended the events, and questions will be based on the program's goals. Surveys will contain quantitative and qualitative questions to understand residents' experiences after attending a co-curricular event. For example, if it is a social or community-building event, questions can pertain to one's connection to the community or university. If it is an educational event, questions can include topics related to identity awareness. Program evaluations can help the Office of Residence Life staff learn about the experiences of queer and trans* students and whether the events hosted by the staff benefit the residents. An example of a survey can be found in Appendix B.

There are also informal ways for staff to evaluate the LLC's effectiveness. Part of the resident and inclusion assistant's responsibilities is to conduct one-on-ones with their residents every semester. The one-on-ones are an opportunity for the Office of Residence Life staff to learn how residents are adjusting to college and ask questions regarding the goals of the LLC, such as their social and community integration. The resident and inclusion assistants can use this feedback to gauge whether Pride is meeting the residents' needs or if they need more intentional programming. Furthermore, the faculty advisor will meet with queer and trans* students residing in the LLC to discuss their academics, social integration, and identity development. The faculty advisor will receive feedback about the academic climate of the LLC and if classes are contributing to the goals set forth by the institution. Both these meetings allow staff members to ask follow-up questions to comprehend the students' experiences. The Office of Residence Life staff and faculty advisors can discuss findings with each other and the advisory board to make necessary improvements to the LLC.

Project Conclusions

Colleges and universities are not being intentional when creating inclusive housing practices by not centering the voices and needs of queer and trans* students (Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Creating a living-learning community and advisory board can address queer and trans* students' needs and experiences by developing intentional designs, resources, and support. Pride will be a gender-inclusive housing practice for queer and trans* students to unite, build community, and explore and develop their identities. The LLC will be created based on the Best Practice Model by Inkelas and colleagues (2018) and include components around infrastructure, academic, and co-curricular environment. With adequate staff, support, and resources, the LLC can create a space that mitigates barriers faced by queer and trans* students. Additionally, the advisory board brings various stakeholders together to assess the experiences of queer and trans* students and how the institution can best support the students through an inclusive housing practice. The board will collaborate to create recommendations and best practices for maintaining the goals of the LLC. The effectiveness of Pride will be evaluated through formal and informal assessment strategies to engage residents in feedback through multiple modalities. The feedback gained from the assessments can allow the advisory board and the Office of Residence Life staff to improve the effectiveness of the LLC. The implementation of Pride can facilitate an inclusive, welcoming environment and aim to increase a sense of belonging and identity development for queer and trans* students at CMU.

Plans for Implementation

The proposed intervention strategy is intended to be implemented at Central Michigan University; however, various institutional types can adopt and adapt the LLC. The intervention aims to repurpose a residence hall space to create a queer and trans* affinity living-learning

community called Pride. The LLC seeks to create an inclusive and welcoming climate for queer and trans* students, and institutions wishing to expand LGBTQ+ support resources should consider adopting the program. An LLC needs staff and faculty dedicated to increasing access and retention of queer and trans* students within housing and residence life. Time and energy must be invested in sensitivity, onboarding training, and continuous research around the LGBTQ+ community. Implementing the LLC can create a sense of belonging and facilitate identity exploration and development for queer and trans* students.

Furthermore, implementing an advisory board can give a voice to various stakeholders, such as queer and trans* students, highlighting their needs and experiences. The advisory board can engage in intentional research and benchmarking with multiple institutions around creating an effective queer and trans* student LLC. All findings can be implemented within the LLC to ensure the institution is meeting the needs of its students. Institutions must engage in continuous feedback to improve the LLC as needed. The program can be modified based on the college or university to meet institutional and student needs. Implementation plans can be considered for various institutional types, such as public, private, and four- and two-year colleges and universities.

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The required academic coursework complements the living-learning community.

1 2 3 4 5

Rank 1-5



The housing staff provides support and resources.

1 2 3 4 5

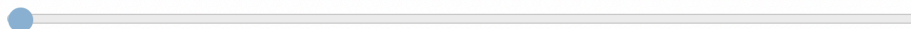
Rank 1-5



The housing staff advocates for my needs and experiences.

1 2 3 4 5

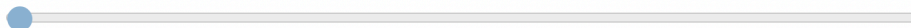
Rank 1-5



I have had a positive experience in the living-learning community.

1 2 3 4 5

Rank 1-5



I would live in the living-learning community next year.

1 2 3 4 5

Rank 1-5



Thinking back on your residential experience, please share your experience in the living learning community.

What is your favorite part about the living-learning community.

How would you improve the living-learning community?

Please share your overall experience residing in the living-learning community.

What other feedback do you have about the living-learning community?



The following questions are optional.

What year are you in school?

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Fourth Year

Fifth Year +

Other (specify below)

What is your gender?

What is your sexual orientation?

Are there any other identities you would like to share?



Appendix B

Post Program Survey



The purpose of this survey is to learn about your experience at the living-learning community event. The survey should take no longer than 2 minutes to complete. By completing the survey, you consent to housing and residence life using your feedback to improve future programs.

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being "really did not enjoy" and 5 being "really enjoyed"), please rate your overall experience?

1.) Really did not enjoy

2.) Did not enjoy

3.) Somewhat enjoyed

4.) Enjoyed

5.) Really enjoyed

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being "really not connected" and 5 being "really connected"), how connected did you feel to the community?

By connected, we mean brought together, met a peer, associated with campus, bonded with peers, etc.

1.) Really not connected

2.) Not connected

3.) Somewhat connected

4.) Connected

5.) Really connected

On a scale of 1-5, (1 being "really not welcoming" and 5 being "really welcoming"), how welcoming was the environment?

By welcoming, we mean friendly, inclusive, accessible, inviting, positive, accepting, etc.

1.) Really not welcoming

2.) Not welcoming

3.) Somewhat welcoming

4.) Welcoming

5.) Really welcoming

What was your favorite part about the program? (Please write in your answer)

How would you improve this program? (Please write in your answer)

What else should we know about your experience?



The following questions are optional.

What year are you in school?

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Fourth Year

Fifth Year +

Other (specify below)

What is your gender?

What is your sexual orientation?

Are there any other identities you would like to share?

