



Opening Doors and Minds: Online Faculty Attitudes Toward LGBTQIA2S+ Students


Josef Vice

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-3897-666X>
Purdue University Global, USA


Jason Jackson

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8623-8754>
Independent Researcher, USA


Kelvin Beckett

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-4246-0021>
Purdue University Global, USA


Dora Finamore

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-3593-0965>
Purdue University Global, USA


Christine O'Neal

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0002-6450-3849>
Purdue University Global, USA

Melissa Bahle

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0007-2539-7015>
Purdue University Global, USA

Stephen Velky

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0008-7232-9418>
Purdue University Global, USA

Received: November 6th, 2025 | **Accepted:** March 12th, 2026

ABSTRACT

Creating an equity-minded classroom in the online environment that supports the belonging, success, and graduation rates of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit, and other non-heteronormative identifying college students is challenging. Previous research indicates that these students are at risk both academically and psychologically because of political and social threats to their identities and the trauma they may bring to their college experience. This study found that instructor attitudes towards these online students has a profound impact on whether instructors recognize the relevance of gender identity and sexual orientation to the learning process and whether they take the steps necessary to create an equity-minded classroom that supports particular historically minoritized student populations. The online classroom may contribute to whether instructors respect and support these students' identities, positively impact their sense of belonging, and respond to the microaggressions and homo/queer/transphobia they may encounter at college.

KEYWORDS

Instructor Attitudes, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and Other Non-Heteronormative Identifying College Students, Online Learning, Belonging, Equity-Minded Classroom

INTRODUCTION

While the desire to create an inclusive classroom that supports lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, two-spirit, and other non-heteronormative identifying (LGBTQIA2S+) students may be a goal of many instructors and universities, realizing this goal is hampered by limited knowledge about the specific needs of this student population. Research

DOI: 10.4018/IJBIDE.405238

This article published as an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and production in any medium, provided the author of the original work and original publication source are properly credited.

specifically indicates that far too little is known about instructor attitudes towards these students and how this lack of knowledge impacts the teaching and learning process. Yet research has documented a critical link between communities of belonging and successful outcomes for this student population (Kim & Sax, 2009; Kuh et al., 2010; Linley et al., 2016; Mancini, 2019; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn, 2022; Woodford et al., 2015). The majority of the literature on this critical issue, however, has historically focused on traditional brick-and-mortar institutions of higher education. With more than nine million undergraduate students, or approximately 61% of all undergraduate students in the United States, enrolled in online education courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023) and estimates from the Association of American Universities (2020) that 18.7% of college students identify as LGBTQIA2S+, it is critical to assess the nature of online faculty attitudes toward their students' gender/sexual identities and their perceived capacities for creating an inclusive classroom. The current study was conducted in order to address this need.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic Challenges

Current research concludes that minoritized populations experience college differently. Johnson (2022) argues that Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other racially or ethnically minoritized students struggle with the process of finding their “sense of belonging at institutions that are normed on white, Christian, heterosexual, cisgender men” (para. 2). Systemic, institutional heterosexism still pervades many institutions, including higher education. Supporting the assumption that the norm is heterosexual and that anything or anyone outside of this accepted norm is in some way abnormal (Vyncke et al., 2014), institutional heterosexism negatively impacts LGBTQIA2S+-identifying people's ability to embrace their sexual or gender identity (Draughn et al., 2002). From fear of harassment, anger, discrimination, and even violence (if they express their true identity), the direct and profound consequences of heterosexism can affect students' sense of belonging. For many LGBTQIA2S+ people, institutional heterosexism is more than a fear—it is the reality that they face and is continuing to grow in the United States (Association of American Universities, 2015; Association of American Universities, 2020; Dashow, 2017; Woodford et al., 2014).

The Trevor Project (2024) notes that a growing and “dramatic increase in the number of anti-LGBTQ+ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning+] policies in state and local legislatures across the United States, many targeting schools and LGBTQ+ students' access to affirmation and support in the classroom” (para. 1) creates even greater challenges for supporting LGBTQIA2S+ students. Research indicates that these students' fears and challenges can be reduced with positive identity development and a sense of belonging by understanding and “prioritizing the needs” of minoritized individuals, which Johnson (2022, para. 19) argues is at the heart of equity-minded education goals.

Identity Development and Belonging

Educational systems have powerful influences on a person's beliefs and attitudes about self, as well as impacting how others view and feel about that person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Guy-Evans, 2020; Wilson & Liss, 2020; Winslade & Geroski, 2008). This may be particularly true in relation to belonging, which Allen et al. (2021) define as the “subjective feeling that one is an integral part of their surrounding systems, including family, friends, school, work environments, communities, cultural groups, and physical places” (para. 1). Researchers have demonstrated that having a strong and unambiguous sense of belonging in college benefits psychological and physical health and increases student persistence and achievement. This has the potential to help students sustain their efforts and overcome academic struggles (Gano, 2022; Renn, 2022; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Universities can shape LGBTQIA2S+ students' identity development either positively by, for example, offering

21 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/opening-doors-and-minds/405238

Related Content

What Does Using a Shared Franco-German Toolbox Reveal About the Discourse of Teacher Trainers on Interculturality?

Veronique Lemoine-Bresson and Dominique Macaire (2021). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 31-46).

www.irma-international.org/article/what-does-using-a-shared-franco-german-toolbox-reveal-about-the-discourse-of-teacher-trainers-on-interculturality/281660

Incarcerated Students, the Technological Divide and the Challenges in Tertiary Education Delivery

Lorna Barrow, Trudy Ambler, Matthew Bailey and Andrew McKinnon (2019). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 17-34).

www.irma-international.org/article/incarcerated-students-the-technological-divide-and-the-challenges-in-tertiary-education-delivery/216371

Signs of Plurilingualism: Current Plurilingual Countermeasures in Danish Higher Education

Petra Daryai-Hansen and Marta Kirilova (2019). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 43-58).

www.irma-international.org/article/signs-of-plurilingualism/231473

Dimensions in EDI Policy Development: Considerations for Emerging Work Ethics

Brian Roland Gay (2022). *Mainstreaming Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as Future Workplace Ethics* (pp. 97-118).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/dimensions-in-edi-policy-development/304590

The Emancipation of Women in Africa Using African Decolonial Feminism

William Chakabwata (2023). *Women Empowerment and the Feminist Agenda in Africa* (pp. 243-258).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-emancipation-of-women-in-africa-using-african-decolonial-feminism/333017