

# Invisible diversity

## CFA's LGBT Caucus aims to shed light on hidden discrimination

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CFA's Council for Affirmative Action includes caucuses that provide voices for sectors of the CSU faculty that are underrepresented or experience discrimination.

We co-chair the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Caucus. One of several purposes these caucuses is to ensure our sector of the CSU faculty is visible and assertive about ensuring an equal and safe space for us to live, work and learn.

We are guided by the work of Jill D. Jacobson, Esq. who wrote:

*"Diversity" traditionally is defined to mean racial, ethnic and gender diversity. But diversity manifests itself in many other ways. Invisible diversity is the diversity we usually do not see when we meet and interact with others. It can encompass disability, religion, class, age, regionalism, sexual orientation and other characteristics...."*

The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals in the workplace provide solid examples of the costs incurred when invisible diversity is hidden. Discrimination against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity is still legal in a number of states, and the federal government has yet to pass workplace protections.

Time and time again, workplace discrimination against the LGBT community (perceived or real) is subtle and often masked by "objective evaluation" of individuals i.e. finding work-related deficiency where they would not exist if the individual were not LGBT.

The LGBT caucus has been part of the Council for Affirmative Action since its inception. A small but

determined group of us formed it in a conference room at the Hacienda Hotel in Los Angeles during a state-wide meeting on equity. Since then we have accomplished much!

At the time, the Council for Affirmative Action adopted three major goals—to help CFA successfully bargain a new contract, to play a role in CFA's political action program, and to build relationships between CFA and our respective communities. The LGBT Caucus helped in these and became a valued part of the CAA.

On bargaining, our caucus worked for a contract that would "protect the positions of all faculty, but especially women, people of color, and other historically vulnerable faculty." The LGBT Caucus joined forces with the CFA Disability Caucus and CFA staff Kathy Sheffield and Bernhard Rohrbacher to come up with language that CFA's bargaining team could use to expand protections against discrimination contained in contract Article 16.

Regarding political action, CFA Legislative Director David Balla-Hawkins helped the LGBT Caucus devise language that led to what hopefully will become two resolutions! ACR 82 (Hall): "Pre-K-University: Discrimination-Free Zones" would encourage tolerance in the school system and AJR 19 (Brownley): "Repeal of Federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)" tells it all in the title. Each has received State Assembly approval and, at this writing, awaited hearings in the state Senate.

Also, our caucus members worked on changes to CalPERS policy towards same-sex married couples to allow them access to the CalPERS Long-Term Care program.

To build our connections, we have met with the state legislature's LGBT Legislative Caucus. This gave us the chance to converse with elected LGBT legislators on faculty issues.

Health care reform and rights will be a new area of focus for us; the Caucus will work to ensure equity in health care with respect to state and federal policy. The lack of benefits and access to health care are real concerns for LGBT faculty members. These weigh heavily on career decisions and retention.

Lastly, we have been building working relationships with students and the community. We have worked with Alice Kessler (Equality California) and Shannon Minter (National Center for Lesbian Rights) on the national dialogue and strategy to overturn the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

We have encouraged caucus members to become faculty advisors for LGBT and/or Gay Pride groups on campuses. Many of our members have helped form faculty/student Pride groups. Some of these groups have been exceptionally successful in putting a stop to LGBT hate crimes on their campuses.

Part of stopping hate crimes has been to encourage participation in regional Safe Zone Trainings. We have had directors of housing, administrators, faculty and students come from all over the state to attend Safe Zone trainings!

If you are an LGBT faculty member, or wish to learn more about the CFA LGBT Caucus, please contact us at [cfa@calfac.org](mailto:cfa@calfac.org).

We will meet over the coming months and at CFA's Equity Conference in March when the Caucus will convene a panel on Proposition 8 and strategies to overturn other discriminatory laws.

The panelists will bring expertise in the battles being won by other LGBT organizations.

For more information, contact CFA staff Jackie Teepen at [jteepen@calfac.org](mailto:jteepen@calfac.org) ▲