

Task force presents LGBTQ climate survey results

Task force will use results to improve campus environment for LGBTQ community

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Only 3.5 percent of student respondents who identify as non-heterosexual strongly agreed that their sexual identity is welcomed on campus, according to the results of a survey sent to students, staff and faculty.

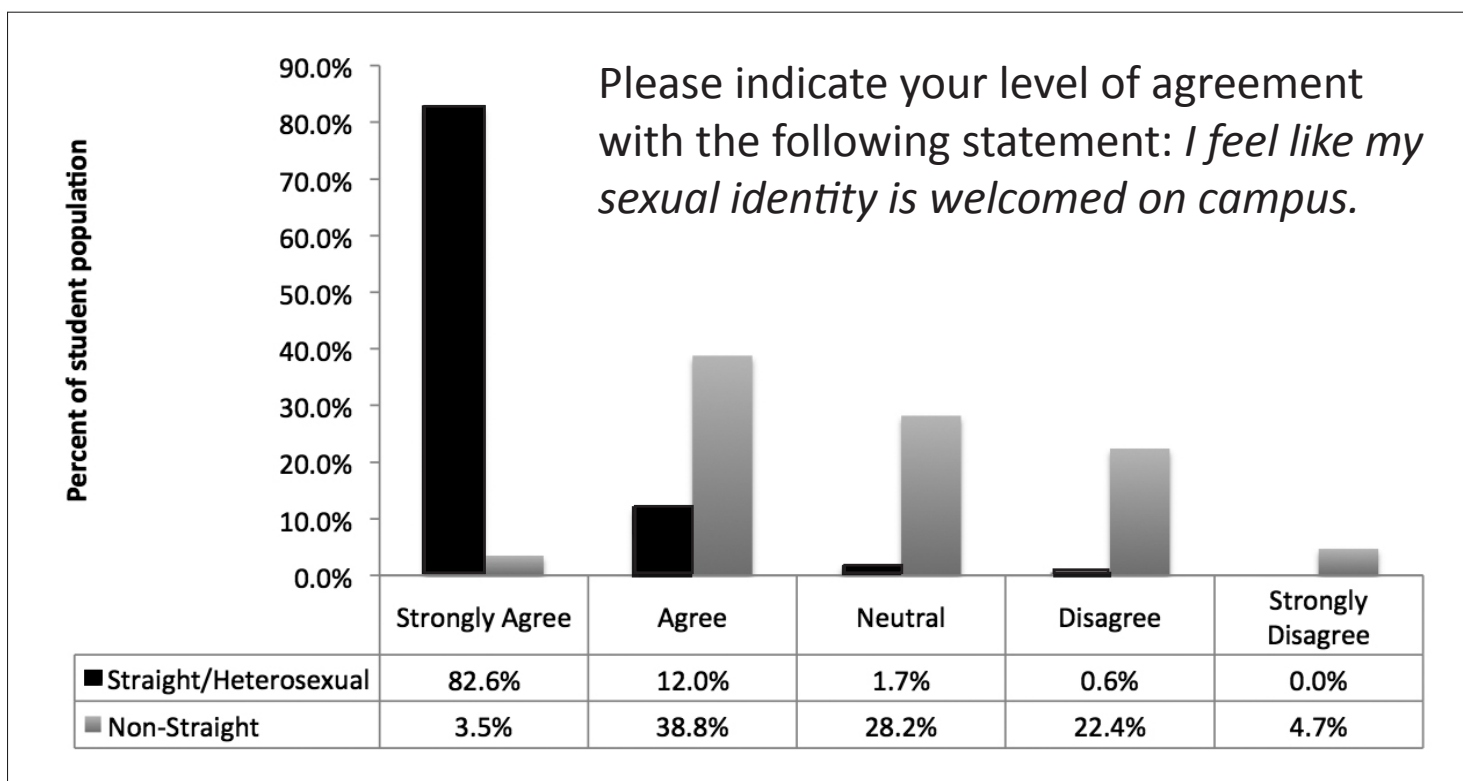
Non-heterosexual student respondents include those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, pansexual and asexual.

The Student Government Association's Task Force on LGBTQ Affairs conducted the survey on LGBTQ campus climate in December. Krista Catafago '14, Director of Multicultural Affairs for the SGA, presented the survey results at Thursday evening's SGA senate meeting.

Four hundred and thirty-six students responded to the survey. Nineteen percent of those students identified as non-straight. Of the 360 respondents from staff and faculty members, nine percent of staff and eight percent of faculty identified as non-straight.

The sample size was large enough to allow the task force to draw conclusions about the atmosphere surrounding LGBTQ issues on campus. "We got a lot of respondents, arguably more than I thought we would," Catafago said at Thursday's SGA meeting. "Obviously it's hard because there are more straight or heterosexual respondents than there are non-heterosexual, but I still think we have large enough numbers to draw our conclusions."

Only 4.5 percent of faculty and staff respondents strongly agreed that their sexual identity is welcomed. Over 25 percent of non-straight students responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed. "This is one of our most pressing questions," Catafago said. "The 'non-straight' number is really concerning to me. Part of your identity is



Infographic courtesy of SGA Task Force on LGBTQ Affairs

your sexual identity and that fact that so few people are feeling welcomed is definitely a problem."

The task force was also interested in the number of incidences of discrimination toward people based on sexual orientation. Over 40 percent of all students responded that they occasionally or often observed "discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at people on campus based on their sexual orientation or gender identity."

In written responses, students indicated that the words "gay" and "fag" are commonly used derogatory slurs. Respondents specifically mentioned "weekends down the hill" as a social setting where such slurs are heard more often. "A lot of the responses said that this was a problem that [students] felt at Patterson Court, and that there were some social contexts that this wouldn't be happening in, and others where it was a lot heavier," Catafago said.

Fewer faculty and staff observed discriminatory behaviors, but written responses indicated a wider range in opinion on incidences of discrimination. Some heard derogatory gay slurs often; others did not believe such remarks were used with malicious intent. "We have professors saying that they have heard 'gay' in the classroom [...] or in the hallways, but that it was being used in a colloquial way, so that's fine," Catafago said. "I think that's a problem that we have to attack."

Another problem for the task force to address is awareness of the college's bias intent and hate crime reporting procedure. About 70 percent of all respondents did not believe or were unsure that the college has a "clear and visible procedure for reporting LGBTQ-related incidents and hate crimes."

"There's no point in having this system in place if no one knows about it," Catafago said. "The procedure exists, but if only 20

percent of people even know it exists, that's really weird and something that would be really easy to fix."

The form for reporting bias incidents and hate crime can be found at <http://webapps.davidson.edu/bias>.

Following review of their survey results, the LGBTQ Task Force will present the data to various groups of campus personnel, including deans and directors, Residence Life Office staff, Human Resources and Student Life staff.

Moving forward, the task force has several proposed initiatives to improve campus culture around LGBTQ issues. Larger initiatives include a campus center for LGBTQ resources. "Every other school of Davidson's caliber has a center," Catafago said. "Whether that needs to be called 'LGBTQ' or not, because some people think that name could be limiting, we just need a space."

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