Career Decision Making for LGBTQ Students

In this handout...
Self Exploration: How Important Is Being Out to Me?
Career Exploration: Finding Safe Places
Implementation: How Much Do I Share With Employers?
Reality Testing: The Right Fit

Self Exploration: How Important Is Being Out to Me?

This is a very personal question that requires serious self-reflection. Some may strongly sense that they do not feel that they are being themselves if they remain in the closet. Others try to maintain a separation between their personal and professional lives. Finally, some may choose to be out at school or work in order to be a visible and vocal advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in a particular field, while others may express their beliefs in a less direct manner.

The strength of your identification and level of past commitment to the LGBTQ community may be a deciding factor in whether or not to come out in the workplace and how visible to be. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How many of the organizations of which I belong are primarily focused on LGBTQ issues?
- Are most of my mentors in the LGBTQ community?
- Am I out to most of my friends and family members?
- Is my partner out in most situations?

Remember, the degree to which you are out is YOUR choice. There are pros and cons to each position. To date, there is still no federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Decide what you are comfortable with now, but also keep in mind that you can change your decision in the future.
Career Exploration: Finding Safe Spaces

Workplace Heterosexism Continuum

Overt Discrimination ↔ Covert Discrimination ↔ Tolerance ↔ Affirmation

If during the self-assessment process you discover that finding a place where your sexual identity will be affirmed is important to you, you should begin to develop a list of industries and specific companies that are affirmative of LGBTQ persons. In many ways, companies are ahead of federal and state governments in offering benefits and protections to LGBTQ community members.

Consider the following criteria when evaluating whether or not an organization is supportive of LGBTQ individuals:

- Existence of non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation/gender identity
- Domestic partner benefits (ie: child care, family leave, health insurance, company discounts)
- LGBTQ employee interest groups
- Diversity training for managers that includes sexual orientation issues
- Active marketing of products/services to LGBTQ community

The following resources may be of help:

Human Rights Campaign ([http://www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)): Source of information on workplace and corporate attitudes and policies surrounding sexual orientation. The Human Rights Campaign is also the publisher of the Corporate Equality Index. This index "provides a simple way to evaluate whether America's biggest employers are treating their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees and consumers equitably."

LGBTQ Professional Associations ([http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/lgbt-professional-and-student-associations](http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/lgbt-professional-and-student-associations)): Provide members with a local and/or national network.

University Career Assistance Network—UCAN ([http://hoosonline.imodules.com](http://hoosonline.imodules.com)): Provides contact information for U.Va. alumni available for informational interviewing.

UCS Diversity Digest ([https://www.career.virginia.edu/students/diversity.php#X-2012101112522111](https://www.career.virginia.edu/students/diversity.php#X-2012101112522111)): Visit this section of our website to sign-up for the Diversity Digest. This is a biweekly newsletter that features diversity-related opportunities, career events around Grounds, internships, leadership programs, and scholarships sponsored by employers.

UCS Diversity Resources Online ([https://www.career.virginia.edu/students/diversity.php#Lgbt](https://www.career.virginia.edu/students/diversity.php#Lgbt)): Visit this section of our website for a more complete list of online resources.
Once you have identified prospective LGBTQ affirmative employers or a LGBTQ alum or ally who works in an organization of interest, set up a meeting in person or via phone.

Potential **Informational Interview Questions** to ask in Safe Spaces:

- Are there any individuals who are out and in leadership positions within the organization?
- What are the stated formal organizational goals related to diversity?
- Is there a reporting procedure for worker complaints, including those about sexual harassment and/or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression?
- Is staff morale high in most departments? Among LGBTQ employees?
- Do LGBTQ persons fully participate in all aspects of office life, including social events?
- Are conflicts constructively resolved? Is there space to openly discuss conflict?
- Given the climate, how out should a person entering the organization be?
- Does the organization use language that is inclusive?
- What kinds of organizations do the company’s charitable efforts benefit?
- How LGBTQ friendly are the neighborhoods near the organization?

**Tip:** UCS has several books on LGBTQ workplace issues that are available for check-out.

- *Lavender Road to Success: The Career Guide for the Gay Community*
- *The Corporate Closet: The Professional Lives of Gay Men in America*
- *Gay Issues in the Workplace*

**Implementation: How Much Do I Share With Employers?**

If you have gained relevant skills in obviously LGBTQ organizations, you might struggle with whether or not to include these experiences on your resume or talk about them in an interview. Through the self-assessment process, you should identify whether it is more important for you to work for an organization that is supportive of LGBTQ individuals or if your priority is to simply get in the door, with the expectation that you can always come out after you have proven yourself on the job and people have gotten to know you or when/if you feel comfortable.

Based on your industry and employer research, determine ahead of time how out you want to be. If you are applying for a job that supports issues facing the LGBTQ community (e.g., lobbyist for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force), then your experiences in the LGBTQ community can be an obvious advantage. But what about other types of jobs? The transferable skills you developed outside of the classroom are likely to be of interest to many employers; although, the organizations in which you participated may be viewed with less enthusiasm by some.

Your options for presenting LGBTQ organizations on a resume or during an interview are:

- Exclude mention of these organizations altogether
- Mention your LGBTQ activities, but don’t draw attention to them
- Say it loud, “I’m gay and I’m proud!”

Sample resume excerpts from students involved in LGBTQ activities:
President, Anti-discrimination Group
Spring 2012–Present
• Elected by peers to lead organization with 100 members
• Oversee the executive board which sets goals, implements policies, approves budget and plans events which attract up to 500 attendees
• Serve as student member of U.Va.’s Bias and Incident Reporting Committee

Treasurer, QSU
2012–2013
Elected to manage $2,000 budget. Balanced expenditures and deposits on a monthly basis. Kept membership apprised of organization’s financial standing. Exceeded fundraising goals two consecutive semesters.

Queer Student Union, U.Va.
Public Relations Chair
August 2012–Present
• Promote programs and social events that foster a safe, welcoming environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals through weekly emails, web alerts, mailings and word of mouth
• Represent organization to university media regarding LGBTQ issues

Tip: Need assistance with your resume? Stop by for UCS walk-in hours, visit us in Monroe Hall during our drop-in hours or schedule an appointment by calling (434) 924-8900 for a resume critique.

Regardless of how comfortable you are with being out, you should always focus more on your responsibilities and achievements as opposed to the mission of the organizations to which you belong(ed). Highlight your qualifications—written communication, leadership, budgeting, analytical, problem solving, event planning, public speaking, teamwork, organizational skills, etc.

Depending on the approach you have used to present LGBTQ-related activities on your resume, you have already given the interviewer an indication that you may be a member of the LGBTQ community or a staunch ally. Anything on your resume is fair game in the interview. You do not want to be caught off guard, appearing unprepared or even awkward about your background or interests. An interviewer might ask, "I see you were treasurer of QSU. Tell me more about that organization." If you have decided to be out, you can respond with a succinct description. If you have chosen not to come out yet, you may want to refer to it as a social justice organization and then focus on the relevant skills you developed as a result of your work within the organization.

Tip: Take advantage of mock interviews offered through UCS. When completing the paperwork necessary to schedule a mock interview, feel free to indicate that you would like to practice handling questions regarding your involvement in LGBTQ organizations. All conversations at UCS are kept confidential.

As a job seeker, you naturally focus your energies on defining the qualities that you want in a job and an employer. But in an interview situation, the employer is more interested in knowing what you can do for their organization in the role that is open, and how well you would fit into their culture. Always try to research a company’s policies and climate pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identification and expression in advance of the interview. However, if you did not find information
about the issues that matter to you, the interview may provide an opportunity for you to ask questions of the employer. It is not advised to begin your question time with an inquiry about the company’s anti-discrimination policy. Though this may be important, it sends the message that it is more important than other aspects of the job such as expectations, your responsibilities or the department’s function. Keep in mind that if the job is not a good fit for you, the employer’s stance on LGBTQ issues becomes of less consequence. If you are interested in the company, it is your responsibility during the interview to make them want to hire you. You can always ask your questions about the organization’s diversity initiatives after being offered the position.

**Reality Testing: The Right Fit**

You can only learn so much from reading an article or talking to people about a particular field or company. The best way to discover if you are a good match is to try one on for size by gaining practical, hands-on experience. While volunteering, job shadowing, completing an internship or working in your first full-time job, ask yourself the following:

- Is the company’s affirmative stance on LGBTQ issues common knowledge and demonstrated in concrete ways?
- Do I feel like my/the perspective of LGBTQ individuals is valued?
- Am I surrounded by people who (would likely) accept me as I am?

Remember UCS is available to support you during your career exploration!