

The Transgender Training Institute

April 12, 2021

Dear St. John's University community members,

It is our pleasure to present you with our findings from LGBTQ+ Climate Assessment we conducted in February and March of 2021. We want to acknowledge that St. John's University has placed a great deal of trust in TTI to conduct this work, and we want to honor all of the time and energy that went into planning and executing the focus groups.

The following report outlines our observations, areas of strength, opportunities for growth and recommendations on how to achieve a campus climate that is truly welcoming of LGBTQ+ people within a Catholic context.

We welcome continued conversations about how we can be of support in this work, as well as additional conversations about the contents of the report as needed.

Thank you again!

Warmly,
Eli, Maybe & Mark

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St. John's University LGBTQ+ Climate Assessment

PROCESS & SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings in this report are based on a series of 16+ focus groups and individual meetings with various members of the St. John's University community in February and March 2021, with additional insights gleaned from our recent training work at SJU. The focus groups included representation from SJU undergraduate and graduate students, staff and administrators and faculty members. There were four focus groups held specifically for those who identify as LGBTQ+, and the remaining groups were based on position, department or role at the university. Fourteen of the focus groups were with members of the Queens Campus, and two groups were specific to Staten Island. Due to the very sensitive nature of the information shared with us, we intentionally did not collect demographic data about the participants to protect the confidentiality of all who participated in these sessions (particularly as there were concerns about information shared being traced back to the source).

Overall, while it is clear that St. John's University has made much appreciated efforts towards LGBTQ+ inclusion on campus, from all perspectives, it is not currently possible to say that SJU is a community that is open and welcoming for LGBTQ+ students, staff and faculty.

While SJU does not appear to be a place where there is extensive hostility towards people who are LGBTQ+, there is a culture of silence which is experienced by many as a lack of recognition and support for the LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff and alumni who are members of the SJU community. This neutrality is being read as rejection of LGBTQ+ people or tacit encouragement from those who are anti-LGBTQ to continue to espouse these values on campus.

Support does exist, but largely in very isolated pockets, and it can be especially hard for students to know where to find those pockets of support. Overall, there are few people on campus who have unequivocally positive experiences as LGBTQ+ people (often staff sheltered within a specific department)- most are having very mixed experiences of support, ignorance, bias and prejudice. When compared with other universities, such as DePaul, SJU is significantly behind in this work.

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It is very clear that cisgender and heterosexual people at SJU have a significant responsibility both in the current campus climate, and also for helping to implement changes. Some of this work is already in progress with the support of some LGBTQ+ staff and faculty, but much is being driven by dedicated allies who often feel they need to not call attention to what they are doing out of a fear of repercussions. Cisgender and heterosexual students are one of the most significant opportunities for growth in changing the overall campus climate to one where LGBTQ+ students feel welcomed, as is increasing the university's services and support provided to LGBTQ+ students, staff and faculty.

One of the most consistent findings of this climate assessment is the need for clear communication from university leadership at all levels that SJU is willing to and actively working to support LGBTQ+ people. So many of the people that we spoke to believe that SJU cannot be supportive of or welcoming to LGBTQ+ people because of the Catholic mission of the university, and are very hesitant to engage in support for LGBTQ+ people out of concern that there will be backlash against them for doing so. It is critical to all the work outlined in this report that SJU move towards taking a stronger, more vocal stance in support of LGBTQ+ people through both words and aligned actions. Without this, most of the recommendations provided in this report will not be realistically actionable.

When reviewing these findings, it is particularly important to note that almost all of the LGBTQ+ people on campus that we spoke with were white. We are confident that there are many BIPOC LGBTQ+ identified people on campus, but they may be disconnected from the networks that recruited for this climate assessment. We offer this report with the understanding that for any of the work outline to be successful, it must be done in a context of greater anti-oppression work – particularly anti-racist and anti-ableist movements. Otherwise the work outlined below will primarily benefit LGBTQ+ people who have the privilege of being white and able-bodied with limited benefit to LGBTQ+ people who hold multiple marginalized identities, and will potentially further increase distance between these different parts of LGBTQ+ communities – particularly if it appears that one group is being favored over the other. A both/and approach is very necessary for the success of this work.

In this report, we organized our observations and reflections into 5 key areas of focus:

1. LGBTQ+ Experiences on Campus
2. Communicating Support for LGBTQ+ People
3. University Commitment to LGBTQ+ People

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4. Programs & Services for LGBTQ+ People
5. Academics

In each of these areas, we have provided an overview of the observed strengths, areas of growth, and recommendations for how to shift SJU's campus climate towards one that is more welcoming of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and beyond (LGBTQ+).

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AREA 1: LGBTQ+ Experiences on Campus: Finding Pockets of Affirmation at SJU

There are two key themes that emerge in the discussions of experiences as LGBTQ+ people on campus. The first is that there are many people at SJU who really want LGBTQ+ people on campus to feel safe, respected and welcomed. It is clear that there are many individuals who are LGBTQ+ themselves or allies to the LGBTQ+ communities, who are very eager to do that work to make SJU a more welcoming environment. There are clearly pockets of support for LGBTQ+ members of the SJU community -- this is demonstrated in the lived experiences of some of the faculty and staff members who have been supported when they trusted the community enough to share about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and by students who have found academic departments that are accepting and affirming of LGBTQ+ people.

At the same time, there is a palpable sense of concern about being openly LGBTQ+ on campus. Students, faculty and staff have been told by peers that they need to be careful at SJU because not everyone is accepting, and that there are many on campus who do not support LGBTQ+ people, especially because of the Catholic mission of the university. Students spoke openly about not feeling welcomed on campus, having challenging interactions with faculty, feeling socially isolated and disconnected from other LGBTQ+ people. Most students did not want to attend SJU specifically because they did not feel that they would be welcomed on campus as an LGBTQ+ person, and their experiences on campus have not done much to shift that perspective.

We also observed a dynamic where staff and faculty seemed to be nervous to speak openly about the campus' opportunities to better support LGBTQ+ people. It was unclear to us at times whether the reticence to speak was because they were opposed to supporting LGBTQ+ people and didn't want to say it, or because they were nervous to speak openly about wanting to affirm LGBTQ+ people. This distrust seems to be related to a lack of open conversation about LGBTQ+ identities on campus, which makes it hard for LGBTQ+ people and their allies to know who is supportive. The assumption among students, faculty and staff is that there is a seemingly large number of people on campus who are anti-LGBTQ, but we suspect that is not the full picture, and that it is more likely that people are nervous to speak openly because of a lack of clear messaging from university leadership (explored full in Area 2 of this report.)

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Area 1: LGBTQ+ Experiences on Campus STRENGTHS

Out LGBTQ+ People & Allies

There are members of the SJU community who feel comfortable being out as LGBTQ+ on campus and serve as what Laverne Cox refers to as “possibility models” for others to be their authentic selves on campus. In large part, staff and faculty members we spoke with have been well received and supported by their peers and appreciated how people in their immediate departments were welcoming. Students’ experiences were more mixed, but there were students who had positive peer interactions. There are also really great allies who are working hard to make sure that LGBTQ+ people are seen, respected and valued on campus. This type of allyship is critical to the success of climate change efforts for LGBTQ+ people.

Noted Leadership & Appreciations

While it is clear that there are several people on campus working for change, many participants, especially students, pointed to the work and dedication of Monique Jernigan and Mona El-Shahat as crucial parts of LGBTQ+ inclusion and comfort on each of the campuses. Several people noted that the shift towards more positive experiences for LGBTQ+ students is directly related to the work of these two women. On the staff and faculty side, Nada Llewellyn and Manouchkathe Cassagnol are noted for their dedication and support in changes to make SJU more welcoming to LGBTQ+ people. Matt Pucciarelli is also widely recognized for his advocacy in this area as well.

Awareness of Limitations & Willingness to Learn

Self-reflection and awareness are necessary for any sort of intentional change to occur. It is clear that many staff and faculty members are very aware that more resources and support are needed for LGBTQ+ students and organizations on campus. We see this as a strength, not just the acknowledgement of a need for change, but the concern and desire to improve. Some focus group participants used our questions as a catalyst to research answers and think about changes that can be made proactively. The attitudes of wanting to do better help us know that the SJU community is ready for this conversation and this work.

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Connected Students Have Access to Support

Spaces of inclusion and support for LGBTQ+ people on campus seem to be in what we'd call "pockets of affirmation." We found that certain offices, departments, and sometimes individuals are safe places LGBTQ+ students know they can go to be seen and heard. For those students who are connected with these people/pockets, they know where to find their pockets of affirmation.

Supportive Staff & Faculty Departmental Culture

We heard from multiple (though not all) LGBTQ+ identified staff and faculty members that their specific departments have been supportive upon finding out that one of their colleagues is LGBTQ+. This is what we would expect in a community where people have strong, respectful collegiality among colleagues. Of the people we talked to, there is more affirmation in certain departments of the university than some SJU community members might think exists at first glance.

Financial Accessibility

SJU has a strong financial aid program that allows an affordable education to many students who are LGBTQ+ and might have otherwise not been able to attend a four year institution.

General Lack of Hostility

Unfortunately, we're in a social and political climate where hostility has come to be expected, especially within Catholic institutions, but participants did not identify this to be a usual part of their experience with administration or the university as a whole. In our conversations with participants (staff more than students), it became clear that SJU was not an openly hostile environment for LGBTQ+ people.

Area 1: LGBTQ+ Experiences on Campus OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Entry Points to the SJU Community

One of the most consistent messages that we heard from LGBTQ+ students in particular, but was also echoed by staff and faculty members, was a significant concern before coming to campus of how they will be treated because of their LGBTQ+ identities. LGBTQ+ faculty and staff indicated concerns even applying to work at SJU, and it is very

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likely that SJU is not recruiting a lot of talented employees because of the perception (and for many, lived reality) that SJU is not a welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ people. For students, the overwhelming sentiment was that they did not want to attend SJU specifically because of a perceived lack of LGBTQ+ affirming culture as an applicant, but that they felt compelled to attend because SJU was able to offer more financial support than other more LGBTQ+ affirming institutions. A unique aspect of the LGBTQ+ college experience is that many students would rather attend a university that is welcoming, if not enthusiastically affirming of their identities, but lack the financial resources to attend those institutions. The dynamic students are describing is consistent with student identity development^[1]—wanting a space that allows them to be affirmed and the ability to explore their own identities within the larger world. Students see what is happening at other universities and are experiencing sadness, anger and jealousy because they are missing out on an experience that is critical to their self-value and worth. Moving forward, it will be important for SJU to consider how the campus climate appears to LGBTQ+ who are on the outside, looking in. At the end of this document we provide a school-by-school analysis of how SJU's LGBTQ+ representation on the university website compares with peer institutions.

Burdening & Burden Shifting

A theme that came up prominently in the groups was that of burden shifting, particularly as it relates to Spectrum, and the expectations placed on LGBTQ+ staff and faculty. (Burden shifting is when social dynamics dictate that the marginalized group take on the responsibility for fixing their marginalization.) On college campuses, this often shows up as LGBTQ+ students and employees being expected to create and maintain spaces where they can support each other around their experiences of being marginalized, while being asked to provide volunteer labor to make an entire cultural shift of the university around inclusion and welcome. This type of burden is different than the expected volunteer labor put on people of non-marginalized identities because the starting point of institutional inclusion is different for majority-identity folks, and leads to burnout at higher rates for LGBTQ+ staff and faculty members.

From various vantage points, there is a lived reality that while Spectrum is meant to be a supportive and welcoming place where LGBTQ+ students can be themselves and connect with peers, students feel that the administration expects that Spectrum students to do the emotional and logistical labor of educating the community and guiding change without overstepping with limited mentoring on how to do those things. Several students we spoke with were frustrated because they felt that they were paying tuition to have to do

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the work to make SJU more accepting and affirming, with not enough return on their investment. Without a designated employee for this work, the labor needed for a university to be inclusive and make people feel welcomed and valued falls on the shoulders of students that can be easily over-burdened or burnt out by the lack of resources and support offered by the university.

Moving forward, it will be essential for the university to take a stronger role in supporting those who are working to make SJU more welcoming to LGBTQ+ students, staff and faculty. This will need to include more institutional resources, and allyship training so that others can help play effective supporting roles under LGBTQ+ people's guidance. It will also be greatly beneficial to offer students the opportunity to receive social support in welcoming spaces, separate from any change work that the students would like to engage in.

Bias Reports:

Ideally, campuses would be free of instances where LGBTQ+ people are concerned for their physical, emotional and psychological safety, but reality dictates that is a goal that will take significant, sustained effort over time. However, any effort to reduce the amount of anti-LGBTQ+ bias on campus is important and meaningful work for LGBTQ+ people. As reported by SJU, between February 2018 and February 2021, there have been 46 anti-LGBTQ bias reports, (12 gender identity, 2 gender expression and 32 sexual orientation), which represents over 10% of the total bias reports on campus. These are likely to be very underreported numbers, as the campus climate leaves LGBTQ+ students in particular believing that they cannot rely on the university to protect them or adjudicate such situations. While there are higher numbers of sexual orientation related reports, it is very important to note that statistically there are likely far fewer transgender and non-binary people on campus than those who identify as LGBTQ+. With 43% of the LGBTQ+ reports being related to gender identity and expression, this indicates that transgender and non-binary people on campus are likely experiencing the brunt of anti-LGBTQ prejudices on campus.

Microaggressions:

Across the groups of LGBTQ+ folks we talked to, there were consistent experiences of non-affirming interactions--especially for the students. Students who identified as LGBTQ+ reported faculty insisting marriage being between a man and a woman being reinforced regularly in certain classrooms. Students who identified as transgender and non-binary did not hold out much hope that their affirming name and pronouns would be

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consistently used and respected, particularly by academic faculty and many of their peers. Other microaggressions were often related to unexamined cultural norms, such as the assumption that ‘everyone is heterosexual’ (heteronormativity) or that ‘everyone is cisgender’ (cishnormativity). We also heard reports of faculty, staff, and administration members fumbling painfully with LGBTQ+ related language, which has been interpreted as a lack of competence and support. In these instances, LGBTQ+ people have to make active decisions about whether or not to disclose their identities, and if it is safe to do so. The cumulative impact from negotiating situations like this is another example of Minority Stress^[2] which can have a significant impact on mental and physical health--particularly for students. It is important to note that though these interactions are not outwardly or explicitly hostile, many people noted that these interactions felt indicative of the non-affirming culture on campus that contradicts the message (i.e., the lived culture, versus the espoused message). Some students noted faculty members’ tendency to use Catholic education as a way of directly attacking their identities in personal or class conversations. This use of the concept of Catholic education in non-affirming ways seemed to be a familiar part of the student experience. Microaggressions training will be an important and necessary part of the greater social justice and equity efforts.

A Selective Catholic Mission

Often in matters of charity and grace, LGBTQ+ people feel abandoned and unsupported by an institution that espouses love for all and such a strong message of inclusion from the university but does not extend the same support to LGBTQ+ people. A telling phrase that arose in the interviews was “the university is Catholic when it wants something from you, but it’s not when you need something from it.” This statement was referring to the dynamic that the university espouses messages of charity and generosity when it asks its constituents for something (e.g., money, excessive labor, etc.) but does not hold itself to the same standards or ideals when it comes to delivering support of inclusion for LGBTQ+ people. As SJU works to intentionally build a more welcoming campus community, it will be important that SJU consider the ways it lives out its Catholic mission in just modes of support for its LGBTQ+ constituents.

Improving Health & Wellbeing for LGBTQ+ Students

One area for growth includes the emotional and physical well-being of LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff. Students named that cisgender heterosexual couples feel free to publicly display affection, while LGBTQ+ students feel that they cannot fully be themselves on campus, particularly when it comes to their love lives. This is especially true when navigating “dating” on campus. Students described that they would feel anxious and

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afraid to engage in public displays of affection with their partners. There is a strong unspoken rule that LGBTQ+ students need to hide their relationships from their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Because LGBTQ+ students need and crave connection with other LGBTQ+ people and because dating classmates or bringing a date to campus doesn't feel like a safe option, students are going to the city and are making decisions to engage in high-risk behaviors that put their physical safety at risk.

Concerns for Job Security

While some LGBTQ+ people on campus have been appreciated, others—especially faculty—fear that their sexual orientation might be an inhibitory factor in their advancement at the university. Whether someone was nervous about coming out in their department or felt unwelcomed, this stress contributes to an unwelcoming atmosphere. There were also reports of co-workers being surprised when someone was 'out' or open about their identity at work, implying that most people don't expect that to be brought up or acknowledged in the workplace, and that those who do may make others uncomfortable. With faculty and staff navigating a culture that is being compared to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," they can spend more time worrying about their safety and employment than focusing on their work and their lives.

Vastly Different Experiences Across Campuses

While we know it is somewhat common knowledge that the Queens and Staten Island campuses have a different culture and vibe, it is important to note that this is having a particularly strong impact on LGBTQ+ students on the Staten Island campus. Students there are socially isolated, starving for LGBTQ community, and are nervous for their safety. The Staten Island campus is drawing from a more politically conservative community than the Queens campus, and that shows in the students' experiences. LGBTQ+ students on the Staten Island campus indicated that they do worry about their physical safety on campus, do not feel that they should be seen with their partners on campus, and that the faculty were particularly non-affirming, and are teaching information that is highly and overtly prejudiced against LGBTQ+ people. Students experienced more direct forms of discrimination and lack of safety on the Staten Island campus--a lack of faculty support, the fetishization of their orientation by other students, students not feeling safe from the student body (less from physical aggression and more from social ramifications) or employees (i.e., faculty actively speaking out against students coming out). One student indicated that the hour-long focus group was the first LGBTQ+ centered conversation they had ever had at SJU and was the first time in their life that they have been able to speak openly about being LGBTQ+. Many of these students desire

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to attend the LGBTQ+ events that are being held on the Queens campus, but lack the transportation to do so, and the once-a-day SJU shuttle makes it nearly impossible for students to attend the events where they would be able to connect with other LGBTQ+ people. The LGBTQ+ messaging that is present on the Queens campus did not translate to the Staten Island campus, leading some who enrolled in St. John's feeling duped into believing the campus was inclusive.

Mona El-Shahat is one of the strongest allies and most welcoming resources for LGBTQ+ students on the Staten Island campus. That said, expecting one person to shift a culture of exclusion is not a holistic approach to inclusion. Essentially all the LGBTQ+ identified students we spoke with from the SI campus described feeling separated or cut-off from life and university culture on the Queens campus. While students on the Queens campus did not describe a particularly affirming experience, the students on the Staten Island campus were jealous of what they perceived as significantly more support provided to Queens LGBTQ+ students. It seemed that any resources and efforts St. Johns implements takes place on the Queens campus, leaving few resources to effect similar change on Staten Island. While we understand that there are historical and institutional barriers at play here, the message that is received by LGBTQ+ students on the Staten Island campus is one of minimal interest. It is our observation that LGBTQ+ students on the Staten Island campus are in a vulnerable position, as they are experiencing much higher levels of social isolation and exclusion, in a more prejudiced community, with less dedicated resources. Providing more resources and opportunities for connection may be life changing and life saving for these students.

Area 1: LGBTQ+ Experiences on Campus RECOMMENDATIONS

Students Dictate the Campus Climate

One way to change the culture of silence or exclusion that LGBTQ+ students feel from their peers is to help cisgender and heterosexual students better understand and appreciate LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. Since our country's educational system generally does not provide basic education about LGBTQ+ people in K-12 settings, many students are coming to campus with outdated and inaccurate information--even in the social media age. We would recommend that SJU consider options such as establishing a student peer education program, where LGBTQ+ students and allies who wish to educate others on campus have the opportunity to do so. In order to make such programs

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successful it will be important that the university not only provide resources (such as training-of-trainers programs for the peer educators to set them up for success in these roles), but to also encourage staff and faculty to utilize these resources. Having students train the university leadership would be great modeling for other people on campus, particularly as it would signal the administration's approval of LGBTQ+ content being taught.

We also recommend that the university take an intersectional approach in creating learning opportunities about diversity and difference across identities for the betterment of *all* people holding marginalized identities on campus. Efforts for LGBTQ+ inclusion cannot be separated from anti-racist, anti-ableist and other anti-oppression movements, else they will only benefit the most privileged members of LGBTQ+ communities, specifically those who are white, perceived as men, and able-bodied. Just as it will be important to ensure that LGBTQ+ perspectives are including in other diversity and difference related trainings, that anti-racist and anti-ableist perspectives be brought into the LGBTQ+ trainings. By intentionally building programs that help students learn about identities across differences, all students will be better prepared for the increasing necessity to be literate (at minimum) in social justice principles and practices in the workplace and beyond.

Continued Staff & Faculty Training

The training needs of staff and faculty are different than that of students. It was clear based on most groups that we spoke with that there is a real eagerness to learn how to do better by LGBTQ+ students, staff and faculty. Continued opportunities to opt-in to LGBTQ+ trainings, and explicit communication from university leadership that individuals are encouraged to participate will help build positive peer pressure to have increased awareness and understanding of LGBTQ+ people. Specific areas of operation will benefit from tailored training that helps them negotiate their work. For example, training on working with LGBTQ+ identified students in counseling settings, or understanding how to support transgender and non-binary students in negotiating the selective service requirements for financial aid will be practical boosts to help improve the quality of services received.

Utilize Internal/External University Connections

Centers of information on campus where students go for LGBTQ+ issues should be well connected with resources both on campus and in the surrounding community as well. Each department should have an awareness of resources available and referral lists for

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LGBTQ+ people who need resources not offered on campus. Similarly, staff and faculty across the university should have a greater sense of what is available for LGBTQ+ students, other than referring them to the IRC or Counseling Center. It's common for people to believe that because SJU is in NYC there are ample resources available for LGBTQ+ people, but due to St. John's distance from the neighborhoods where LGBTQ+ services are most often concentrated, these are inaccessible for most students. For that reason, it will be important for SJU to make a concerted effort to cultivate connections within closer proximity to the school's campuses, and ideally provide more LGBTQ+ support and community connection on campus.

Ombudsperson

In the case of bias incidences, it is useful for universities to have an ombudsperson specifically trained in bias incidents that uniquely affect the LGBTQ+ community. This position not only acts as a point of institutional communication of sensitivity to inclusion, but they can also keep track of key areas of change the university may face moving forward. This ombudsperson allows for an avenue of change in the university that LGBTQ+ employees and/or students can go to ensure areas of dearth or resistance to change are documented and addressed accordingly.

Conflicting Systems & Need for Transparency

The recent changes that the university made to include a 'preferred name' field are an excellent start to the processes for those who need them most. It is important to revisit/continue examining this matter across all university systems--particularly as the university has to manage the integration of multiple systems that do not innately provide these options. This should be done with the goal of giving students agency and informed consent about where names will show up in which systems, allowing them the ability to identify places they do or do not want these changes to occur. Some considerations for these systems will include:

- The names on mail going home to parents of students that may not be affirming.
- The names on mail sent out to alumni.
- Names, pronouns, and their relation between the registrar, the Learning Management Systems, campus email, payroll systems, HR files, etc.

Also of note, the language of 'preferred' is increasingly being considered a microaggression, and it would be advisable to update the name of the policy and related fields to reflect more current and affirming language.

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Culture and Resources at Staten Island

We recommend that as a part of the shift in cultural climate, the Staten Island campus create a goal of engaging with its local community, acting as a resource for the local community on learning and inclusion. SJU will need to focus on internal work first, but engaging with the broader community will help to strengthen both the university and the community. It is also important that SJU address communication between campuses/shuttles/including students and employees in the academic and cultural life of the Queens campus, or offer comparable opportunities on the SI campus as well.

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AREA 2: Communicating Support for LGBTQ+ People: Silence is SJU's Loudest Message

When it comes to communicating about LGBTQ+ identities, and specifically the support of people on campus who hold these identities, the main message being received by the SJU community is one of silence. This is contributing to a campus climate where community members are reticent to speak openly in support of LGBTQ+ people on campus, out of a fear of repercussions and LGBTQ+ people are being given messages that they should be careful who they share their identities with. There is a general assumption by students that the silence is because the university is not and does not wish to be affirming, while the staff and faculty tend to indicate that the SJU silence is likely because SJU is a Catholic university. The silence translates into a campus where LGBTQ+ people are welcomed as members of the SJU community, but not necessarily embraced as LGBTQ+ people. Communicating support for LGBTQ+ people is currently one of SJU's greatest and most important opportunities to help boost the campus climate for LGBTQ+ people.

Area 2: Communicating Support for LGBTQ+ People STRENGTHS

- In the review of the website and other select university communications, we have no indication that SJU is formally communicating rejection of or a lack of support for LGBTQ+ people on campus.
- Strong messages, such as the email from Father Tracey from the Office of Mission after a faculty member paid to publish an anti-trans op-ed piece in *The Torch*, were noted and well-remembered among certain pockets of staff and faculty. Showing public support with actions like signing the LGBTQ+ anti-bullying letter, *God Is On Your Side*, can also communicate support for community members.

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Area 2: Communicating Support for LGBTQ+ People

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Effectiveness in Current Communications:

From our conversations with community members, it seems that messages such as Father Tracey's, are generally not memorable to the community, which indicates these messages are not having their intended impact. Students especially wanted to hear messages of support from the University President and their faculty members. Staff and faculty are looking to all levels of university leadership to model clear messages of support for LGBTQ+ people on campus, so that they know it is safe and acceptable for them to do the same.

Disparities in Communications between Students, Staff & Faculty

Having spoken with various groups of students, faculty and staff, it is very clear that not all people on campus are getting (or reading) the same communications. Students, faculty and staff all have different understandings of what is, and is not, being communicated by the university. For example, while some staff members were clear that housing accommodations are possible for transgender and non-binary students to protect their privacy and safety, this was largely unknown to students.

Clarity and Guidance on Avenues of Support

A common concern that came from our conversations with staff and faculty was the lack of clarity around the ways in which they are "allowed" to support LGBTQ+ people. We found that though the overarching message of acceptance is there, it doesn't seem to trickle down into every situation or interaction as easily as hoped. For example, there were several mentions of hesitations to publicly acknowledge LGBTQ+ days of celebration. Even though the overarching message of inclusion exists, it is clear that various staff and faculty members do not know if there are lines where they will be penalized for supporting LGBTQ+ students.

Need for More Inclusive Language & Awareness of Microaggressions

Some participants identified situations in which the language they were hearing on campus was not aligned with their understanding of the overall messages of inclusion at SJU. This is experienced as ample microaggressions that LGBTQ+ people must tune out or negotiate as a part of their SJU experience, particularly for students who lack social capital. The message of inclusion suggests that all people are welcome at St. John's, but it will be

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important for all members of the community to be considerate and aware of the impact of language that is distancing and hurtful.

Job & Academic Security

While talking to staff and faculty, we found that some people were nervous about their ability to keep their jobs at SJU because of their identities or the content they might be teaching. Some participants expressed a more conservative approach on campus prior to being tenured in order to avoid consequences. While they would be legally protected from discrimination in New York, that does not stop it from occurring, and it's not an uncommon experience for LGBTQ+ people to worry about their employment status in such situations. It is important to directly communicate in ways that alleviate these fears.

Area 2: Communicating Support for LGBTQ+ People RECOMMENDATIONS

Clear Statements of Support for LGBTQ+ People

Messages mean a lot when coming from places like the president's office or the board of directors. In line with the Catholic mission, messages of support can be communicated to the community on events like LGBTQ History Month, National Coming out Day, Transgender Day of Remembrance, Trans Day of Visibility, International Pronouns Day, LGBTQ Pride, or by continuing to take actions such endorsing the Bishops' letter condemning the bullying of LGBTQ+ people. Sending emails or posting messages for the entire community to see helps dispel the fear and silence that people experience from the university around these issues. These messages of support should go beyond tolerance and acceptance, and demonstrate joy and appreciation for the LGBTQ+ members of the SJU community.

Note: When framing these messages, it is important to note that *employees* see messages from the Office of Missions as being particularly useful at modeling LGBTQ+ acceptance that is inline with the Catholicity of the university, while *students* see messages from the Office of the President and other high-level administrators as having a more meaningful impact. In sending a clear message, we encourage all leaders in positions of power to vocalize their support for and welcoming of LGBTQ+ individuals in these messages.

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Clear Messages To and From University Leadership

The culture of a university is strongly influenced by those in leadership roles, particularly when it comes to the treatment of LGBTQ+ students, staff and faculty. Several members of SJU's leadership (of various levels) are unclear of what 'is allowed' at a Catholic institution in regards to supporting LGBTQ+ individuals. Moving forward, it will be very important for SJU to dedicate time and resources to determine what can and will be done to support LGBTQ+ people as a Catholic institution. There was a general sense of optimism and hope that the incoming president, Father Shanley, will be the leader who provides concrete guidance and direction for the path ahead.

Catholic Leadership and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Much has been done by the Catholic leadership on campus in good will for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people (e.g., Fr. Tracey's letter following the anti-trans op-ed, public endorsement of Bishop Anti-Bullying Statement). More can be done with the powerful message of love and compassion that accompanies the Catholicity of such an institution. Catholic leadership has a power to communicate the message of love and acceptance at a Catholic university that no other office can. This leadership has a powerful influence on the culture of the university which sends a message about the types of behaviors that are tolerated (silence, passively witnessing discrimination) and which types of behaviors are encouraged (loving each other, inclusion, a seat at the table, etc.). This office has the opportunity to show a face of Catholicism that encourages acceptance and affirms the human dignity of others by dispelling the message that 'silence is ok' or 'it is ok to live in ambiguity when it comes to affirming LGBTQ+ persons.' The employees, especially, look to these people to be leaders in how inclusion can happen and to set the tone for this endeavor (i.e., silent tolerance or inclusion and celebration). Is tolerance of difference enough? Or is there room for inclusion and celebration of each person in their uniqueness who brings specific gifts to the community? We recommend making a clear commitment to this, naming the fears and concerns while developing an action plan for how inclusive practices can help shape the culture of the university and bring about a Catholic mission of universal love to all.

Using Gender Neutral and Gender Inclusive Language

Many institutions tend to rely on gendered language in salutations and descriptions of the community. Using gender exclusive language (such as: boys and girls, men and women, ladies and gentlemen, or brothers and sisters) can feel very alienating for people who are transgender and non-binary. Using gender inclusive language, (such as "everybody," "students," "SJU community members," "Thunderbirds" etc.) will signal that all people are

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seen and welcome regardless of their gender identities. Specifically in the public communications from the university (e.g., emails sent to the community, the spiritual life/public prayer of the university, etc.), the gender neutral term “siblings” can be used instead of or in addition to “brothers and sisters:” brothers and sisters can be followed by “and siblings in Christ” or “SJU family.” This messaging can communicate the recognition and acceptance of transgender and non-binary individuals from a place that is seen as a core value of the university (i.e., prayer/public mention) displaying a place at the proverbial table in St. John’s spiritual life.

Explicit Statements that LGBTQ+ People are Welcome at SJU

Whether included in SJU hiring announcements, or on the HR website for potential staff and faculty applications, SJU will have a far better chance of increasing the strength of the community by offering language such as “people with historically marginalized identities, including people who are BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and those with disabilities” are encouraged to apply. On the student side of things, explicit language on the admissions portion of the website will be a helpful and welcoming sight for LGBTQ+ students who are applying to SJU. Making the statements explicit instead of inferred will help to ensure that communications are being received in the ways that the university hopes.

Clear Messages of Identity-Related Job Security

While legal protections against discrimination are required by NYS/NYC law and exist in HR protocol, it is important that SJU explicitly communicate condemnation of this practice and provide reassurance to LGBTQ staff and faculty that they are welcome, valued and appreciated members of the SJU community. The reassurance is particularly necessary due to the unfortunate history of LGBTQ+ people being terminated based on their sexuality and/or gender identities, LGBTQ+ staff and faculty often have fears of retaliation when working at Catholic educational institutions. Because this type of employment discrimination still occurs at other Catholic institutions, it will be important for communications to be framed with this in mind. Situating the message of acceptance and job-related security in the context of this cultural phenomenon communicates to employees that LGBTQ+ people are welcomed and celebrated here at SJU, regardless of what is happening at other institutions.

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AREA 3: University Commitment to LGBTQ+ People: Intentions and Impact

One of the key findings of our assessment is a general sense that SJU has identified an overall commitment to diversity and inclusion, but that when it comes to LGBTQ+ people's experience on campus, it feels in large part as if the words are not translating to enough action to have a meaningful, positive impact on the campus climate. Virtually every group we spoke with identified that while the message of inclusion exists on campus, there is little in the way of actionable steps that have been taken to show a concerted effort of inclusion to evoke feelings of belonging in LGBTQ+ members. Much of the university language about inclusion had been described as 'lip service' with the intention to be inclusive, but not actually following through with the behaviors that demonstrate inclusion. In the section below, we review the key themes related to the university's commitment to LGBTQ+ people, and identify strengths, areas of growth, and recommendations for moving forward.

Area 3: University Commitment to LGBTQ+ People: STRENGTHS

HR Benefits for LGBTQ+ People on Campus

The existence of the clauses for married same-sex partner benefits and medical transition in the HR benefits is a great step in the way of showing an institutional care for employees of diverse orientation and gender experiences. These benefits communicate an affirmation of dignity in the relationships of same-sex couples and in one's gender. Likewise, the existence of the Employee Resource Group for LGBTQ+ faculty and staff members is a strength, acting as another institutional signal of affirmation and that employees with these identities are valued members of the community.

Name Change Process & Pronouns Policy

Many students who utilized the name change forms with the registrar appreciated how quickly the adjustment was made in the related systems. The ability to update/indicate one's gender marker in Residence life at any time was also noted as a helpful institutional tool. While the lack of communication between all of the various systems on campus was noted as an area of frustration for students, the evidence that the university is *trying* to make a change here as quickly as possible was noted as a strength and met with

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appreciation. This effort shows people that someone's name, which is such an integral part of their identity, is being taken seriously by the university in a way that communicates acceptance, affirmation, and protection from harm. When students don't have the option to easily or quickly change their name in systems, it can not only be frustrating but emotionally taxing and invalidating every time they are confronted with the wrong name. Ensuring the efficiency of these systems will make the name change process a major pillar of inclusion on campus.

Dedicated Bias Reporting Process

The university has taken care in ensuring that LGBTQ+ people are included under protections provided by the Title IX office. In this role, Keaton Wong is working to track LGBTQ+ bias incidence over time, which is critical information for the university to have and track when changing the climate for LGBTQ+ people.

Ongoing Training & Climate Assessment

Some participants were encouraged by SJU's willingness to host trainings, and we know of those that we have facilitated, there has been representation from all levels of the university. Other participants were greatly encouraged by the university leadership supporting this climate assessment as an indicator of willingness to grow and change. This strength was articulated as 'SJU's heart and intentions are in the right place.' This is an important step in creating a safe and affirming environment for campus constituents.

Inclusive Sexual Assault Policy Language

Another notable strength involves the inclusive verbiage in policy at SJU. For example, the verbiage of gender diversity in perpetrator/victim dynamics as part of Title IX language (e.g., recognizing sexual assaults can be perpetrated by people of any gender and victimize a person of any gender) can send an institutional message of acceptance around the diverse experiences of relationship structures, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Often times, LGBTQ+ people have a hard time speaking up about sexual assault or even believing what happened to them was wrong because it does not fit the mainstream narrative of what assault looks like (e.g., a cisgender man assaulting a cisgender woman). Language that highlights the realities that people of all genders commit assault and people of all genders can experience assault is beneficial because it can help LGBTQ+ people to name their experiences as a first step to getting help.

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Area 3: University Commitment to LGBTQ+ People: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Unfulfilled Intentions

Virtually every group we spoke with identified that while the message of inclusion exists on campus, there is little in the way of actionable steps that have been taken to show a concerted effort of inclusion to evoke feelings of belonging in LGBTQ+ members. Much of the university language about inclusion had been described as 'lip service' with the intention to be inclusive, but not actually following through with behaviors that communicate inclusion.

Aligning Words with Actions

While the message of inclusion is present in verbiage, particularly around messages of inclusion across identities, there is an air of fear and uncertainty about what people with limited power are allowed to implement in regard to inclusive change. In working to dispel this air of secrecy, fear, uncertainty, and confusion, we strongly recommend the university adopt a culture of naming this organizational ambiguity and committing to clearly espousing their message of inclusion along with resources and change that communicate acceptance (more specific steps on this in the recommendations below).

Centering LGBTQ+ People Instead of Resistance

From our observations, it seems that in discussions of LGBTQ+ inclusion, much of the institutional energy is spent on the concern about the people who would be bothered by a change rather than focusing on the harm that comes to those from not changing. When many of the conversations about inclusion get stalled by the concerns about who will be upset or bothered by a change, LGBTQ+ students and employees are actively hurting because of a direct or indirect culture of exclusion or silence at St. John's. Whether this culture is created by those in the university or permitted by a silence around these issues, there are cultural components that are ignoring or insulting the dignity of LGBTQ+ constituents while these conversations are not being resolved.

Department-Specific Training

Some areas of the university operated better than others when it comes to their departmental understanding of LGBTQ+ people and trade-specific inclusive practices. One area for growth here includes the research and understanding of best practices for LGBTQ+ inclusion in a given department. It was apparent in the interviews that many

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departments discussed the willingness to do better, but not having the information necessary to begin affecting a lasting change.

Preferred Name & Pronoun Policies

The ability to have one's affirming name and pronouns reflected in university systems through the registrar is helpful and necessary for transgender and non-binary students, but it is an incomplete way of addressing this issue across the web of systems that exist at SJU. It seems that not all of the systems communicate with the registrar system that updates names and pronouns, nor is there a way for students to monitor what name is on mail sent to an external address (i.e., a family home) that may not be an affirming place for the student to be out, or, when name addressed to their prior name outs them to people they are living with -- both are safety risks for students and alumni. A better understanding of places student/employee names and pronouns appear will be a step in resolving this concern. Likewise, it is important to note that with such momentous events like graduation, students should have an option to decide what name is used in the program, and related announcements. This will help protect transgender and non-binary students' privacy, and ensure they are able to focus on the accomplishment rather than experiencing gender dysphoria over what name will be called out. Students are the best individuals to determine which name is best and safest for them, and this should be honored in all places, as is possible.

Limited Health Benefits

While the efforts that SJU has made to have LGBTQ-inclusive benefits, particularly as a self-insured university, are significant gains, there are some university policies involving employee and student benefits that hold exclusionary barriers to supporting LGBTQ+ members of the SJU community. Policy exclusions such as not having domestic adult partner benefits for health insurance (i.e., not all LGBTQ+ people wish to be legally married for a range of personal and political reasons, including not being able to be married in the Church) will have a targeted impact on LGBTQ+ people. Likewise, SJU's benefit coverage for medical transition has a very low cap, compared to the costs of many surgical interventions, which will leave transgender and non-binary employees unable to access surgery. (Generally speaking, surgeons are not able to accept patients where the cost cannot be covered by insurance, as employment discrimination and other factors have resulted in significant economic challenges for transgender and non-binary people.) It is also important to consider the role of PTO and FMLA in supporting transgender and non-binary people, who may need extended recovery times for medical procedures. While the costs associated with these can sound scary, generally these will be benefits that are

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infrequently used but offer a profound opportunity to change someone's life for the better in a myriad of ways.

Employee Resource Group

While an employee resource group (ERG) exists at St. Johns, virtually no one outside of HR knew of its existence. There appears to be some breakdown in communication which has prevented this group from being publicized or disseminated throughout the institution. The effect of this is two-fold--employees remain unaware of the group, and the lack of attention to its communication further perpetuates and enforces the culture of assumed silence on issues of LGBTQ+ identities.

Area 3: University Commitment to LGBTQ+ People: RECOMMENDATIONS

LGBTQ+ Specific Strategic Plan / Integration into University Strategic Plan

In order to implement this feedback in a substantial way, we recommend the university devise a strategic plan that outlines an intentional plan for shifting the campus climate to be one that is safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ+ students. As noted by the Washington Consulting Group, it takes 7-10 years of ongoing intentional work for a campus to truly enact changes that result in more welcoming and affirming environments. Having this work outlined with resources and accountability systems dedicated to this goal will help ensure success. Continuing to utilize outside consultants will be a necessary part of this process until SJU has been able to recruit enough LGBTQ+ people to campus to oversee and hold this work without external support.

Centralized Intentional Leadership

There is a lack of central leadership to intentionally build a more supportive and welcoming campus for LGBTQ+ people. Creating a council on LGBTQ+ Affairs on campus, and centralizing change efforts through this group will help. If SJU wants to send a strong message to the community around supporting LGBTQ+ people on campus, such a council will ideally be endorsed by all leaders, and be integrated into the university's equity and accountability measures and strategic plan, as appropriate.

Designated Staff & Space for LGBTQ+ Affairs

Because members of the SJU community felt unduly burdened with having to search for the resources offered by the university, and work in a climate that is largely silent about

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its joy that they are there, we recommend a full-time position dedicated to the care and concerns of LGBTQ+ people on campus and having that person work on both campuses. An LGBTQ+ affairs coordinator communicates investment in these marginalized identities on the part of the university. This position also acts as a central hub of information to new members of the SJU community. Centralizing information in this way helps lessen the burden of searching for information across campus and helps institutionalize change in matters of silence or exclusion on LGBTQ+ issues. Along with a designated staff position, the resource of space on campus is also a physical representation of the priorities around these issues. When a space exists on campus, LGBTQ+ people have a location to congregate for community that is otherwise missing, sending the implicit message that there is no space at the proverbial table for LGBTQ+ constituency. Similarly, the location of a space can also have implicit messages attached--a room in a basement with no windows may imply something they are trying to hide, rather than an office space in a visible location on campus. These are resources that are provided by DePaul, and would be of great benefit to the LGBTQ+ community at SJU.

Inter-University Comparison & Communication

Many employees of Catholic higher education are curious about what other institutions are doing around issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Demands of time may prevent employees from seeking out this information on their own. While many Catholic institutions are attempting inclusion of LGBTQ+ peoples to various levels of success, we strongly recommend reaching out to these institutions to better understand what they are doing about these matters on their campus. Conferences about LGBTQ+ inclusion on Catholic campuses may not (at the time of this writing) exist in ways that they used to, but the spirit of affirmation may exist in places on other campuses from which institutions can learn from each other. For example, in similar Vincentian schools, they are able to house LGBTQIA resource centers, incorporate LGBTQ/Sexuality Studies into the curriculum in more public ways, create LGBTQ faculty and staff networks with public-facing advertisements, and hold conferences on LGBTQ+ studies.^[3] If other Catholic institutions with similar Vincentian missions can make these things happen, it seems that St. John's has both the physical and philosophical ability for inclusive change--SJU just may need a clearer picture of how they can begin connecting these dots. Opening lines of communication about this can look like hosting a conference about these topics to engage student affairs and academic professionals, or on a smaller scale--dean to dean or director to director. Other institutions with similar social positions (i.e., metropolitan universities) are dealing with similar issues of inclusion and may be having success in ways that employees at SJU feel stuck.

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Campus Pride Ranking

Another opportunity for SJU's leadership to signal support of and a desire to do better by LGBTQ+ people on campus would be to participate in the Campus Pride database. This is a service very frequently used by LGBTQ+ students and their families to help determine if a college or university will be a safe and affirming experience. (It is also a resource used by job applicants.) Based on the current services and programs that SJU offers for LGBTQ+ people, it is our guess that SJU would have a ranking somewhere around a 2.5-3 out of 5. While many universities want to wait to enter the Campus Pride rankings, we believe that being ranked in and of itself shows a commitment to improving experiences for LGBTQ+ people on campus. If using this system, it will be very helpful to use the SJU LGBTQ+ resources page and connect it to the aforementioned strategic plan so that people can see both the ranking and the plans to improve that score.

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AREA 4: Programs & Services for LGBTQ+ Students, Faculty & Staff: Strengthening Structures

University programs and services represent all of the elements of campus support for LGBTQ+ people on campus that have not already been explored above (such as clarity around the name change systems and needing a dedicated LGBTQ+ Resource Center & a LGBTQ-identified staff member to oversee the work.) These programs, services and structures are essential to creating welcoming environments for LGBTQ+ people on campus. The resources that are available to people on campus seemed disjointed, not clearly organized, not easily locatable, hidden, or only known by word-of-mouth. From before new members step foot on campus, the message of inclusion is there, but requires a great deal of work to locate the existing resources on campus – particularly if students are not connected with other LGBTQ+ peers at SJU already. In some cases, students are keeping private lists to share with each other about how to navigate these systems and note where the pockets of support can be found.

Area 4: Programs & Services for LGBTQ+ Students, Faculty & Staff: STRENGTHS

IRC & Related Staff

The Inclusivity Resource Center (IRC) was frequently mentioned as an office of great importance in the university's efforts for inclusive change on campus - especially Monique Jernigan and Mona El-Shahat. While participants note that historically LGBTQ+ topics/discussions have been considered sensitive with an air of silence around them, many people across campus identified the cultural shift that led to the IRC and hiring of Monique demonstrated a commitment to inclusion on campus. This office signals the start of a commitment by the university to create institutional resources to address matters of exclusion, silence, and alienation.

Spectrum

The existence of Spectrum as a student organization was noted by long-standing members of the community as a significant step in an affirming and supportive direction for LGBTQ+ inclusion. The fact that St. John's has a group like Spectrum, that is supported through the IRC, allowing students to connect with each other, is an important start to create a space of affirmation. This allows students the ability to connect with others who have similar

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experiences of marginalization and create a sense of community on campus that will help improve their university experience. Even for LGBTQ+ students who do not use the IRC, knowing that it is there as a resource is crucial.

Lavender Graduation

Another positive component of inclusion is the recognition, representation, and honoring LGBTQ+ students through the Lavender Graduation ceremony. One area of breaking silence about the support SJU has for people of LGBTQ+ identities is the celebration of its community members in a collegiate way that is characteristic of a university and institutionalizes a recognition that can help evoke feelings of affirmation and acceptance. Events such as Lavender Graduation provide a space for LGBTQ+ students to celebrate separate from triggering family and or public ceremonies that may have triggering elements.

Residence Life

The ability for students to choose a single dorm for a gender accommodation was noted as a useful component of affirming transgender and non-binary students on campus, and protecting students' privacy. Gendered housing assignments can be not only uncomfortable to some transgender and non-binary students, but it can also be very unsafe, emotionally and physically. Having the system in place to offer solo alternatives can let a student have private living accommodations that can ensure their wellbeing while limiting distractions to their studies.

Area 4: Programs & Services for LGBTQ+ Students, Faculty & Staff: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Departmental Tokenization & Inclusive Responsibility

It is clear and expected that some departments will focus on inclusion as their main office responsibility more than others. The IRC, for example, is an office specifically commissioned with this task. A conversation may go something like "LGBTQ+ stuff? Yeah, that goes to the IRC or Counseling Center." However, in some ways, it seems other areas of the university may push off the idea of inclusion to departments like the IRC or Counseling center without addressing the ability to be inclusive that lies within their grasp. Beyond what is considered the normal departmental responsibilities of the IRC and

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Counseling Center, this habit leans more in the direction of dismissing the responsibility of inclusion by “othering” it to these specific departments.

Improved Housing Options

Due to SJU being a Catholic institution, we are aware that there will be unique challenges in creating LGBTQ+ specific housing. That said, while students appreciate that there is an option to have safer housing, they were also very clear that from their perspective, it is the worst housing on campus and leads to social isolation. Providing more appealing alternatives for LGBTQ+ students will help to increase their safety on campus while also reducing their sense of being literally marginalized into inferior housing options.

Gender Neutral Restrooms

It is noted and appreciated by students that there is a list of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus, there was still ample concern about how few there are and how they are located in places that are out of the way. If the university has not already done so, any and all single stall restrooms on campus should be converted to gender neutral by changing the signs to reflect the equipment that is in the bathroom (rather than who goes in). This looks like having a sign with a picture of a toilet, or a picture of a toilet and a urinal, instead of men/women signs. This will help folks make the best decision about which bathroom will best suit their needs and will also benefit students with disabilities, people with young children and others in need of privacy in the bathroom.

Area 4: Programs & Services for LGBTQ+ Students, Faculty & Staff: RECOMMENDATIONS

Staffed LGBTQ + Resource Center

Though this was explored in an earlier section, we feel that this is mission critical to SJU's success in creating a more welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ students experience on campus, and for the university to have someone who is specifically hired to help make the changes necessary for the campus to be more welcoming.

Scholarships for LGBTQ Students

As noted earlier in this report, one of the main reasons that LGBTQ+ students are accepting admission to SJU because of the financial aid provided. One significant way that SJU can signal to applicants that LGBTQ+ students are welcome is to provide LGBTQ+ specific scholarships as a part of aid packages for students. While there are many

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groups who are in need of significant support and financial aid to attend college, it is important to remember that LGBTQ+ students are entering a campus climate that is not currently welcoming. Having scholarships available demonstrate commitment to LGBTQ+ students, and will help these students feel seen and more appreciated within the SJU community.

Creating a Formal LGBTQ Alumni Network

One area where SJU may be able to tap into extended resources of support is by creating an 'opt-in' LGBTQ+ alumni network, where people who are LGBTQ+ can be connected with each other. Often LGBTQ+ alumni have an interest in supporting current students and may be willing to volunteer as a part of change efforts based on their own experiences as the university.

Greater Inclusion Across Programs and Services

One aspect of inclusion that can be relatively easy for the university to address is the representation and visibility of LGBTQ+ acceptance and affirmation on campus. This can take many forms including staff and faculty LGBTQ+ groups interaction with the student group, student events that center LGBTQ+ experiences, other departmental presentations that center LGBTQ+ inclusion (i.e., "job hunting for LGBTQ+ people"), and inviting speakers who are LGBTQ+ and/or discuss issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Some possible avenues include:

- Speakers and events on LGBTQ+ people, events, history, etc.
- Identify the ways LGBTQ+ people can be accepted and celebrated in the dynamic spiritual/religious life on campus.
- Collaboration between Spectrum and the Law School student groups on LGBTQ+ events or programming.

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AREA 5: Academics

While academics may be the heart of the university's services – this is one of the areas that was least mentioned in our focus groups, and most of the messages we received were mixed, so we have provided both the strengths and areas of growth together.

Area 5: Academics: STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies Minor

On a curricular level, the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies minor provides the indication that there is LGBTQ+ content is available in course content. This curricular engagement with issues of gender, sexuality, identity, and inclusion is a way to begin a culture of change on campus. It creates a space of both student and faculty collaboration and dialogue of these issues within the context of St. John's University. That said, very few students knew about the existence of the minor, and when reviewing the courses listed as including LGBTQ+ content on the LGBTQ+ resources pages, it gives a clear impression that while there are courses being offered, that there are very limited options for students to engage with LGBTQ+ specific content. Many of the options that are listed appear to be higher level elective courses for specific majors that may include a bit of LGBTQ+ content, rather than courses that center LGBTQ+ content and would be relevant across multiple areas of study.

Academic Freedom for Faculty & LGBTQ+ Content in Class

There were mixed experience of academic freedom to teach LGBTQ+ related content. Of the faculty who felt academic freedom was supported around issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion, they identified security and support in their academic research and content inclusion in their curricula. This is a strength not only in supporting academic freedom, but also in affirming LGBTQ+ identities as worthy of academic inquiry and part of the intellectual life of the university. That said, there is genuine concern that being vocally supportive of LGBTQ+ people on campus may result in negative outcomes for those individuals speaking out - particularly in the academic arena. There were several faculty we spoke with who felt that as tenure track faculty they did not dare to include LGBTQ+ content in their courses or their research agendas until they had achieved tenure, out of a fear of having their tenure applications rejected. This is an important indication of the cultural norm of not being able to discuss LGBTQ+ topics freely, and the expectation of

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silence. Faculty on the Staten Island campus were particularly concerned about backlash from students, and overall adjunct faculty were very concerned about their continued employment if they include LGBTQ+ content, particularly as LGBTQ+ faculty. It is critical for LGBTQ+ students to see themselves included not just in the campus environments and in certain offices or events, but in their classes and academic discussions so that they have the opportunity to learn more about LGBTQ+ histories, experiences in the US and throughout the world, LGBTQ+ content and culture. Highlighting inclusive and representative curriculum is not just a positive for the LGBTQ+ people in the room, but helps all students have increased understanding and awareness about LGBTQ+ people, and to better understand the diverse and expansive nature of sexual orientation and gender.

Prejudiced Faculty

One of the pieces that was reported back to us by students, staff and faculty alike is that while there are a few faculty members who are doing great work around creating a welcoming learning environment for LGBTQ+ students (with English department and Law school being notable pockets of affirmation), there are far more faculty at the university who intentionally teach outdated LGBTQ+ content from an offensive and marginalizing perspective. This is having a particularly negative impact on LGBTQ+ students and allies, as they feel powerless to fight back, and again contributes to Minority Stress. For transgender and non-binary students, there were many instances where students' affirming names and pronouns were not honored or were intentionally disrespected, which is both disruptive to their learning experience but also presents a risk to these students emotional and physical wellbeing. Students do not feel it is worth it to report these instances out of very legitimate concern for their grades. Once they are out of a class with prejudiced faculty, many either want to do their best to forget the experience or will not report because they will need to have these faculty again. We understand that with academic freedom that this can be a challenging concern to address, particular with tenured faculty. That said, we very strongly recommend messaging from academic leadership that there is an expectation that faculty be reviewing what they are teaching to ensure that it is up-to-date and accurate information. Learning opportunities for faculty will be useful, if they are willing to engage. Many of these faculty may also be looking to the Office of Mission to communicate that these topics should be taught from a standpoint that values the dignity and worth of LGBTQ+ people.

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Area 5: Academics: RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic Freedom Inconsistencies

We recommend directly affirming the university values of free academic inquiry while specifically including issues of inclusion and matters of studying matters of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences.

First Year Seminar Experience

One very successful strategy that has been employed at many colleges and universities is to create a First Year Seminar experience where all students need to take a course in their first semester that is dedicated to learning about people whose experiences and identities are different than their own. Often these course center on reading books dedicated to social justice issues, and are taught by faculty with a passion for these topics and are particularly interested in supporting the academic success of students entering the SJU community. These types of programs can provide very necessary opportunities for students to learn about LGBTQ+ people, in addition to other oppressed groups in the United States. By making this as a first-year experience course that is required of everyone, within 4-5 years, all students on campus will have learned at least LGBTQ+ 101 content, as well as content that is anti-racist, anti-ableist, and beyond, which will go a long way in changing the campus climate for people who hold these identities.

Guest Scholars with Expertise on LGBTQ Identities

Another opportunity for SJU's academics is to intentionally cultivate more scholars who focus on LGBTQ+ topics for their research and writing. For example, the university could create a visiting scholar position that invites LGBTQ+ researchers to campus to share their work with students and lead LGBTQ+ specific classes. Likewise, SJU could create a guest scholar position that openly explores the intersections of LGBTQ+ identities from a Catholic perspective (provided that the scholar is affirming of LGBTQ+ people). Inviting LGBTQ+ scholars as honored guests to campus demonstrates a commitment from the university to LGBTQ+ inclusive scholarship and would be a way to jumpstart this process without having to commit to a faculty line. A faculty search specifically for faculty who focus on LGBTQ+ scholarship will help institutionalize LGBTQ+ inclusive content and signal to other faculty that there is safety in teaching this content.

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^[1] See for example, Chickering's Vectors: Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). Education and identity (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

^[2] Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674-697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>

^[3] See, for example, DePaul's [LGBTQIA resource center](#), [LGBTQ Faculty and Staff Network](#), and [Queer Revolt Conference](#), etc.

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Comparisons with other schools

(Based on what can be seen in public facing materials)

Below is a chart that depicts what we were able to glean as an outsider about resources available for LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff at each of these institutions. From our climate assessment we understand that some of the items below are offered by St. John's but they are not easily accessible on the website. We assume the same may be true for other schools - particularly other Catholic schools that may be hesitant about publicizing their support for LGBTQ+ people. These findings are based on an initial review of the websites, conducted in the way that people who are LGBTQ+ often do when applying to learn/work at a particular school.

✔ = easily found

? = unclear

✘ = not present/found

	DePaul	St John's	Fordham	Niagara	NYU
All Gender Restrooms List/Map	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔
Campus Pride Index Score	✘	✘	✔	✘	✔
Dedicated LGBTQ Staff Support	✔	✘	✘	✘	✔
Featured LGBTQ Scholars/hip	✔	✘	✘	✘	✔
Info for LGBTQ Applicants	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘
LGBTQ affirming student press	?	?	✔	✘	✔
LGBTQ Alumni Network	✘	✘	✘	✘	✔
LGBTQ Bias Response Resources	✔	✔	✘	✘	✔
LGBTQ Career Support	✔	✔	✘	✘	✔
LGBTQ Celebratory/Honor Events	✔	✘	✘	✘	✔
LGBTQ Educational Resources	✔	✔	✘	✘	✔
LGBTQ Employee Resource Group	✔	✘ ^^	✘	✘	✔
LGBTQ Faith Group/Space	✘	✘	✘	✘	✔

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LGBTQ Inclusive HR Benefit Info	×	×	×	×	×
LGBTQ inclusive non-discrimination policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LGBTQ people explicitly encouraged to apply in job listings	×	×	×	×	×
LGBTQ Resources Webpage	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
LGBTQ Scholars / Speakers	✓	×	×	×	✓
LGBTQ Scholarship Support	✓	×	×	×	✓
LGBTQ search results*	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
LGBTQ Social & Support Spaces	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
LGBTQ Specific Classes	✓	× ^	×	×	✓
LGBTQ Specific COVID resources	×	×	×	×	×
LGBTQ Specific Social Media	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
LGBTQ Student Housing	×	✓	×	×	✓
LGBTQ Student Organizations	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
LGBTQ Student Resource Center	✓	×	×	×	✓
LGBTQ Studies Program (Specific)	✓	×	×	×	✓
Name Change Policy Accessible	✓	✓	×	×	✓

* When searching “LGBT” on the university website, there are results that are positive, affirming, recent (within the 1-2 years) and represent topical LGBTQ inclusion in many different areas of campus.

^ For this, we understand that the LGBTQ+ Resource page has courses listed, but when looking at the courses listed, none/few seem to be centered on LGBTQ+ topics by their titles, giving the impression that LGBTQ+ content is largely incidental to the content of the course.

^^ While we know from internal conversations that there is an ERG, we were not able to find it on the website, which means that others will not know about it either.

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Recommendations by Department

This is a brief guide on changes departments can make regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion and affirmation. For more detailed reasoning, see the sections explored above.

Higher Administration:

- Ensure your message of inclusion is translated to visible action.
- Voice affirmation and appreciation of LGBTQ+ community members when issues of national attention arise (such as violence against LGBTQ+ people, discriminatory laws, etc).
- Have St. John's act as a Catholic university in public support of the dignity of LGBTQ+ people when communal opportunities like this arise (i.e., as was the case for the LGBTQ+ Anti-Bullying statement, God is On Your Side).
- Openly support events important to those in the LGBTQ+ communities such as Pride, Transgender Day of Remembrance, Trans or Bi Visibility Days, etc.
- These can be financial support, or sending out messages/emails to the community noting a time for celebration or recognition (note the student v/ employee difference of seeing messages from the President and the VP of mission).
- Commission of an ombudsperson for bias complaints

Mission & Ministry:

- Address messages of love and acceptance whenever possible: prayer services for victims of hate crimes, Transgender Day or Remembrance vigils/prayer services.
- Include "siblings," "family," or other gender neutral term of inclusion at the opening of prayer.
- Encourage speakers for speaker series on the inclusion and affirmation of LGBTQ+ people.
- Voice condemnation or solidarity when public news events of LGBTQ+ people intersect with the Catholic Church. (e.g., continued actions like affirming the bishop letter condemning bullying). Your LGBTQ+ community members are listening. And the messages you do not say may sometimes ring louder than the ones that you do.
- Hold Mass dedicated to people of LGBTQ+ identities
- When issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion arise in the church--such as the [petition around the blessing of same-sex unions](#)--send messages to the university keeping the community abreast of the issue and offer support in affirming identities, highlight the mission of the university in affirming human dignity of LGBTQ+ peoples, and stress the message of inclusion embodied on campus.

Student Affairs:

- Collaborate with offices and events on campus to create LGBTQ+ centered speaker events.

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- Host events that foster LGBTQ+ inclusion and the recognition of LGBTQ+ identities such as LGBTQ Pride, Transgender Day of Visibility, National Coming Out Day, LGBTQ History Month, Transgender Day of Remembrance, International Pronouns Day, etc.
- Continue to offer support and resources to the organization of LGBTQ+ students.
- Hire full time staff member for LGBTQ+ affairs.
- Ensure a space (clearly visible) for an LGBTQ+ affairs office and gathering space.
- Raise employee awareness of/have specific training on departmental concerns related to people of LGBTQ+ identities across the industry.
- Address deficit of services for LGBTQ+ students on Staten Island campus.
- Train students in leadership skills to encourage student organization involvement.

Residence Life:

- Ensure students are aware of the gender-neutral or single dorm options available.
- Publicize affirming policies and clarify language around housing options so LGBTQ+ students know the university's affirming policies and practices.

Academics:

- Prioritize inviting LGBTQ+ speakers to campus and/or host speaking events on LGBTQ+ topics. Create a speaker series about LGBTQ+ people.
- Integrate first year experience classes where students can learn about the diversity that surrounds them and how to understand diversity in the college environment, paying special attention to the dignity of diverse peoples.
- Encourage academic engagement around inclusive conversations of sexuality and gender.
- Institute a student-led Peer Education program where LGBTQ+ students and allies who want to educate others can share their experiences and expertise. Set these students up for success with leadership trainings and mentoring.

Facilities:

- Increase the number of all gender bathrooms on campus.
- Create or locate a space for an LGBTQ+ office and social gathering.

Enrollment:

- Clarify admissions material around LGBTQ+ identities, naming ways their identity will be affirmed and safe on campus (more information after other offices' recommendations are implemented).
- Highlight the current LGBTQ+ inclusive offerings on campus.
- Be aware of and honest inc communication about the differences between the Queens and Staten Island campuses pertaining to LGBTQ+ accessibility.
- Raise awareness to the needs and concerns of incoming LGBTQ+ students.

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Marketing:

- Address and eliminate the fear of publicly addressing LGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Promote resources and messages of inclusion for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff.
- Be consistent with incorporating the voices of LGBTQ+ people in university marketing. Find out what events are happening on campus and incorporate them into the marketing material.

Registrar/Tech:

- Continue the support of technical/system adjustments for names and pronouns.
- Ensure systems communicate effectively and are quickly adaptable.
- Look for ways students may exercise control over what names go on what pieces of mail that go to a parent/guardian's home.
- Raise awareness of/specific training on departmental concerns related to people of LGBTQ+ identities across the industry.

Counseling:

- Compile, maintain, and disseminate a referral list to access services outside the university, particularly for transgender and non-binary people.
- Hold specified trainings for addressing emerging adulthood issues of gender and sexual diversity.