

# Pass the Button Maker

Supporting LGBTQIA+ Patrons and Library employees with low stakes, high impact programming

Jo Klein, GIS and Data Visualization Librarian & Assistant Professor, UNCG University Libraries

Melody Rood, Student Success Librarian & Assistant Professor, UNCG University Libraries

## Background

Most, if not all libraries have LGBTQIA+ patrons, who may not consider the library to be a safe place to access information and community. LGBTQIA+ patrons – and library employees – experience discrimination and can feel isolated, unwelcome and unsafe in the library. Additionally, studies such as in Trimble's 2019 article "The Right to Be Counted: Student Retention and the Washington State LGBTQ Student Success Initiative" have shown that, at academic institutions specifically, LGBTQ students experience higher barriers to academic success, which may be addressed through interventions that aim to improve campus climate and provide direct non-academic support.

These interventions, which can be adapted to other public-facing libraries, may take the form of social events like Adrianna Martinez's temporary dedicated space for LGBTQIA+ students at the New York Institute of Technology for National Coming Out Day. Public-facing libraries can utilize such interventions to address barriers which prevent access to information and community space for LGBTQIA+ patrons, such as lack of up-to-date resources, indicators of welcomeness, representation, and assured privacy and safety.

We adapted Martinez's idea of a temporary dedicated space and implemented our own low stakes and high impact "Queer Cafe" event at UNCG, with the goal of promoting visibility of LGBTQIA+ library staff to students who share similar experiences through creation of a safe space for socializing and sharing of campus and library resources and activities.

## The Event: Queer Cafe at UNCG University Libraries

### Safety & Privacy

Balancing accessibility and visibility with privacy, and creating a safe space free from discrimination, hate, and violence:

- Conducted outreach through campus LGBTQIA+ networks
- Reserved an easily findable but not hyper-visible physical space in the library
- Stayed cognizant of and planned for simultaneous competing events and opposing demonstrations
- Didn't have participants register and counted nametag labels to determine attendance numbers, rather than having attendees sign-in
- Established Chatham House rules for all attendees

### Inclusion & Identity

Acknowledging and affirming identity to protect mental and social well-being and inclusion:

- Small networked group of 5 LGBTQIA+ employees
- Support from allies in marketing and outreach
- Used intentional language in outreach
- Discussed usage of "queer" and specific acronyms in our specific community
- Gave attendees the opportunity to share pronouns with name tags
- Limited attendance to only LGBTQIA+ students and library staff based on event goal

### Activities & Resources

Selecting both social and non-social activities and featuring resources for and by LGBTQIA+ people:

- Set up a button maker (always a hit) with stickers and pride flag and pronoun templates
- Displayed a selection of circulating books, graphic novels, and zines on LGBTQIA+ topics and by LGBTQIA+ authors
- Created a flyer of online resources, including the "Don't want to ask" guide



## Outcomes

- Learned more about characteristics and needs of current LGBTQIA+ students
- Facilitated student engagement with library resources (including staff!)
- Identified missing/lost materials and gaps in the collection
- Provided an opportunity for students and library staff to de-stress, socialize, and participate in creative activities

## Lessons

- Have a plan for requests from student reporters and images shared via social media
- Assess event impact while retaining privacy
- Include icebreakers or other introductory entry activities
- Think about who is being represented

## Future Directions

- Virtual adaptations
  - Privacy and security in Zoom
  - Translating interactive activities to less engaging format
- Working with academic units and other groups on campus
- More types of activities

## Bibliography

Martinez, Adrianna. "The Quiet Solidarity of National Coming Out Day Through Queer Storytelling and Coffee." *ACRLog* (blog), January 9, 2019. <https://acrlog.org/2019/01/09/the-quiet-solidarity-of-national-coming-out-day-through-queer-storytelling-and-coffee/>.

Trimble, Danielle V. "The Right to Be Counted: Student Retention and the Washington State LGBTQ Student Success Initiative." *New Directions for Community Colleges* 2019, no. 188 (November 2019): 79-94. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20380>.



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