In 2021, SIUE School of Pharmacy introduced the LGBTQIA+ Student Affinity Group as a safe community space for identifiers† represented within the student cohort. Through participation in the LGBTQIA+ Student Affinity Group, we identified a deficit in guidance for Schools of Pharmacy to create LGBTQIA+ inclusive environments within their graduate program. Three main categories for implementing inclusive LGBTQIA+ environments outlined in this study are student community building, curricular design, and facility infrastructure.

†Definition of "Identifiers" - Individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community

Methods

Six faculty, staff, and administrative members from SIUE School of Pharmacy were individually interviewed, selected based on the potential for their position to promote and maintain diversity and inclusion. Faculty interviews informed the researchers how the school has fostered an LGBTQIA+ inclusive environment, and what challenges and barriers remain to be overcome in such efforts. Seven student members of the LGBTQIA+ Student Affinity Group were interviewed in order to develop recommendations from a student perspective and assess the efficacy of the affinity group in furthering inclusivity.

Table 1. Primary identified trends in faculty/staff/administration individual interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Generalizable</th>
<th>Facility-Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concern around lack of utilization/awareness of pre-existing resources</td>
<td>Difficulty in getting education and training on inclusive practices to be accessible for and engaged in by all faculty members</td>
<td>Large number of SafeZone trained faculty†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of faculty identifiers within our own facility</td>
<td>Lack of faculty identifiers within our own facility</td>
<td>Above average in terms of active DEI efforts and awareness on a national scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty keeping up to date with most appropriate LGBTQIA+ terminology</td>
<td>Need for increased inclusivity in curriculum. LGBTQIA+ specific population health, both in elective and core curriculum modalities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described ideal environment as one where authenticity and diversity are encouraged and celebrated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Primary identified trends in student individual interviews.

Benefits

- Space provided community ownership, validation, normalization, and connection
- Acknowledgement of minority struggles personally and recognition of struggles in others’ experiences
- Informal setting for students – establishment of “safe space”
- Protective measures such as membership anonymity (allows all stages of identity/visibility to participate)
- Increased students’ knowledge regarding inclusivity and facility practices
- Allowed for student voices within community to be amplified and created a pipeline for identification and resolution of community-specific concerns
- Capacity to lessen feelings of isolation (especially in instances such as COVID-19 e-learning)
- Ability for students to fit meetings into their schedules/maintaining energy to feel able to attend
- Unclear description of affinity groups / Unclear expectations
- Need for consistent, monthly to every other month meetings
- Joining without knowing the other members’ identities can be difficult (akin to “coming out” to peers)
- Struggles with identifying most appropriate methods of ongoing communication
- Student identifiers should not be the primary educators for matters specific to the community
- Lack of allyship visibility outside of affinity group
- Ability to integrate advocacy efforts into cohort activity†
- Hosting of student panel for faculty only successfully engaged with faculty members and opened conversation on barriers
- Lack of faculty facilitator who is also an identifier

Discussion

The main topics to which awareness should be drawn to are the level of resource utilization/presence for individuals seeking guidance on improving inclusivity in their own personal efforts, visibility of identifiers among students and faculty and identification of correlating factors, and the value that active engagement and space formation for identifying students brings to the community. Valid concerns regarding financial barriers to hiring diverse representation, time constraints within curricular revision considerations, and ability of faculty to facilitate inclusive programming were addressed and may require facility-specific solutions.

Ongoing efforts at our own institution have precipitated change throughout the research period:

- Hosting of student panel for faculty, educating on LGBTQIA+ student perspectives.
- Invitation of Dr. Kyle Wilby, Associate Professor at Dalhousie University College of Pharmacy as a guest speaker.
- Case-based application revision across the curriculum.

Conclusion

Viewing the furthering of inclusive environments via the compartmentalized lens of three categories by which to effect change (student community, facility infrastructure, and curricular design) allows changemakers to identify deficits and strengths unique to their environment and plan accordingly.

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