

A Guide Towards Intentional Inclusivity of LGBTQ+ Geoscientists

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Although recent efforts have sought to make the geosciences more diverse and inclusive, for the most part, these efforts have not focused explicitly on the LGBTQ+ community. Some of the efforts towards inclusivity have included the implicit or explicit assumption that making such changes will also help the LGBTQ+ community, but this view ignores the fact that LGBTQ+ geoscientists likely face unique challenges. In order to directly assess this community, we surveyed LGBTQ+ geoscientists about their experiences related to visibility, mentorship, and fieldwork in the geosciences [1]. Results of this survey revealed that not only is the LGBTQ+ geoscience community is diverse with respect to sexuality and gender, but it is also different than what has been found in other STEM fields. Respondents also shared they had suffered from a lack of visibility, representation, mentorship, and support in and out of the classroom.

Identifying these problems is key to developing solutions to make the geosciences more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community. A simple first step is to incorporate strategies grounded in best mentorship practices; these include an increased awareness and knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues, identities, and gender as well as signaling allyship. In class, support can include using correct pronouns, gender neutral language, and incorporating LGBTQ+ themes into class material. Out of class support can be provided from the individual and departmental level, and can consist of a knowledge of LGBTQ+ resources, LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion training for faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants, and the celebration of the achievements of LGBTQ+ students and colleagues. The LGBTQ+ geoscientist community is diverse, yet has experienced a lack of visibility, mentorship, and support. An intentional effort explicitly addressing LGBTQ+ students will help increase recruitment and retention in the geosciences.

[1] Olcott, Alison N., and Matthew R. Downen. 2020. "The Challenges of Fieldwork for LGBTQ+ Geoscientists." August 28, 2020. <https://eos.org/features/the-challenges-of-fieldwork-for-lgbtq-geoscientists>.