

Application for Sabbatical Leave, 2019-20: The Status of South Jersey LGBTQ+ Communities
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Aims and Objectives of Project

I am requesting a one-year leave to partner with GLSEN (a K-12 school advocacy organization formerly known as the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network), Garden State Equality (GSE, New Jersey's statewide LGBTQ+ advocacy organization), and the Youth Services Commissions (YSC's) of six southern New Jersey counties to analyze publicly available data on LGBTQ+ youth and adult residents, design and conduct a school climate survey, and write the first-ever report on the status of LGBTQ+ communities in southern New Jersey. The report will inform grant writing, policy making and peer-reviewed scholarship to address knowledge gaps and unmet needs of the sizable LGBTQ+ youth and adult populations of Stockton's home region. It will also establish baseline data for purposes of tracking changes in LGBTQ+ well-being over time.

National studies of health and behavioral factors among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth confirm drastically heightened risk for social isolation, bullying, mental health problems, substance use, harassment, violence, homelessness, and suicide (Kann et al 2016, Kosciw et al 2018). Unlike northern and central New Jersey, southern New Jersey offers extremely limited support services to LGBTQ+ communities, including youth. National figures indicate that about 8% of youth identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Schlanger 2017). This represents about 26,000 children under 18 across the state's six southernmost counties, not counting youth who identify as transgender, queer or other non-conforming gender/sexual identities (thus the "+"). Only a minority of South Jersey high schools offer Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs – student support organizations), counseling, or social services for at-risk LGBTQ+ students. Competent local resources for addressing the catastrophic health, behavioral and juvenile justice risks facing LGBTQ+ youth and adults are severely lacking, partly because systematic analysis of LGBTQ+ demographics and cultural climate has never been conducted in South Jersey.

Background Work

The proposed project emerges from my prior research and constitutes the logical next step in my scholarly trajectory. I have addressed LGBTQ+ health and responses to violence through my PhD Dissertation, entitled *Queering Anti-Violence Politics*, several peer-reviewed publications and community engagement projects. Prior to joining Stockton's faculty I conducted interviews, analyzed data, wrote and edited peer-reviewed manuscripts on a \$1.6m National Institutes of Health-funded project investigating sexual behavior, decision-making and HIV transmission.

The critical need for data on the demographics, health risks and support needs of South Jersey LGBTQ+ communities has been clear for some time, and I have forged solid community partnerships in recent years that enable me to design and conduct a targeted project to address this need. As a teacher, researcher and Stockton's Faculty Fellow for Service-Learning, I have cultivated relationships with GLSEN (both the local chapter and the national research office), GSE, Interweave-South Jersey (a local faith-based LGBTQ+ organization), county women's and youth commissions and lawmakers.

My ability to execute the project in the proposed timeframe is demonstrated by my successful collaborations with these and other groups. Recent projects have extended my capacity to direct collaborative research with students, community partners and governmental agencies, identify and collate relevant secondary data, collect new quantitative and qualitative data, synthesize products of student research, present findings and discuss policy implications with students, lawmakers, scholars, nonprofit organizations and community members. I evaluated outcomes of a three-year, CDC-funded chronic disease prevention initiative with low-income Latino communities in Vineland, NJ, and our multi-stakeholder team won the first Population Health Hero Award from the NJ Department of Health (2017). I was the lead researcher on the first Report on the Status of Women in Atlantic County (2015), a two-

year, RPD Social Engagement-funded collaboration among multiple Stockton faculty, service-learning classes, student research assistants and the county women's commission. I coordinated the collection, analysis and reporting of county-level baseline data on demographics, employment, educational and economic status, political participation, and health. My team published a 92-page report, made seven presentations to policy makers, scholarly and community audiences, and consulted directly with county Commissioners, Freeholders, and the County Executive regarding policy implications of our findings.

I have developed and taught several Stockton courses incorporating student community engagement research on gender, race, health, and social policy. These include four semester-long service-learning projects specifically addressing sexual health and LGBTQ+ well-being at Stockton and in southern New Jersey. These groundbreaking projects have generated a great quantity of preliminary data on local LGBTQ+ communities that demand analysis and further investigation. A year of dedicated time will enable me to fully recalibrate and expand the research design to six counties with community partners, and to devote the necessary undivided attention to bring a series of meticulous tasks to completion.

Procedures and Methodology

Data collection and analysis will have two phases: First, I will gather and analyze publicly available data on demographics, risk factors, health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth and adults in South Jersey counties. Conducting smaller-scale local studies has familiarized me with appropriate resources and procedures to complete a comprehensive multi-county study. Sources of **county-level data** include:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation: economic, educational, safety, health, risk indicators for children
- US Census: census-tract-level population data (numerous measures); same-sex couple households
- Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law: LGBT demographics, family, workplaces, health, discrimination, violence, crime, immigration; local and state-level policy analyses

Sources of **state-level data** (and of models for creating my own county-level analyses) include:

- GLSEN: school safety, risk, policies, services, educational and health outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth
- GSE: evidence-based school and community needs assessment, school trainings, rights protections
- Movement Advancement Project: civil rights protections re: sexual orientation, gender expression
- National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs: incidence of anti-LGBTQ hate violence, intimate partner violence and homicide, HIV-affected violence, LGBTQ anti-violence programs and services

Tableau software (purchased by Stockton for interpretation of quantitative institutional data) will facilitate analysis and visual presentation of county-level quantitative data (e.g. graphs).

Second, with my community partners I will design and deploy an IRB-approved survey of school climate in high schools throughout GLSEN-SNJ's six-county service area: **Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Camden, Gloucester and Salem Counties** (including 69 public high schools total). The national GLSEN research office has developed and tested a **77-item survey instrument**, has authorized me to adapt it to local specifications, and offers deployment strategies. The survey covers topics including school safety, harassment, bullying, gender expression, homophobia, violence, school policies, resources and supports.

Timeline

In Fall 2018 (pre-sabbatical) I presented preliminary findings from student service-learning projects at the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) annual conference, garnering relevant feedback from social scientist colleagues. I have met with GLSEN, GSE and YSC partners to assess specific county-, school-, and grant-specific data needs and to discuss potential data collection tools. County YSCs across

New Jersey operate on a 3-year program funding cycle. Piloting and revising the survey in Fall 2019 will allow me to deploy the fully revised climate survey with South Jersey high school students in early Spring 2020. Findings from both study components will inform grant proposals in Spring-Summer 2020 for state Educational, Children’s System of Care, and/or Juvenile Justice-funded programs to commence during the 3-year cycle starting Jan. 1, 2021. Grants may also be submitted to nonprofit philanthropies.

Pre-sabbatical Fall 2018	Presented preliminary findings at SSSP conference (August, Philadelphia). Will continue meeting with community partners to assess county data needs and develop specific research questions and sociological research designs for report, grants and scholarly manuscripts.
Pre-sabb Spr/ Sumr 2019	Investigate literature for methodological models and report formats; Identify data sources by area-level (census tract/city/county/state) and type (risk/health/policy etc); Pursue training in use of Tableau software for interpretation/presentation of data. Submit IRB proposal.
Sabbatical Fall 2019	Sept-Oct: Collect secondary data for six counties from Census, UCLA, MAP, LGBTQ+ data banks. Sept-Oct-Nov: Revise survey instrument, pilot, re-revise; create survey deployment plan with partners. Nov-Dec: Collate data for six counties. Create collaborative outline for final report.
Sabbatical Spring 2020	Jan-Feb: Analyze secondary data. Deploy school survey. Feb-March: Create tables & figures for secondary data. Clean survey data. April: Present preliminary findings to community partners. Apr-May: Conduct analyses of survey data; Compare to state/national data; Create tables & figures. April-May: Write narrative for each section of results. June: Draft complete report following outline.
Post-sabb Summer 2020	Revise and edit report with partners. Develop collaborative proposals for external funding with YSC’s and community partners. Submit report for public and policy presentations and to policy makers. Develop theoretical/ sociological implications for peer-reviewed presentations and publication.

Importance and Further Research

Developing a comprehensive report on the status of South Jersey LGBTQ+ communities is a crucial step in creating new programs and policies to reduce life-threatening risks and bolster local crisis response capacity. Community-driven dialogues about report findings will deepen collective understanding of social problems facing LGBTQ+ youth and adults and identify policies and practices to remedy disparities in educational and health outcomes. (For example, although new state guidance on school transgender policies has just rolled out literally as we speak [cite], past experience—e.g. Egg Harbor Township School Board (2017)—indicates that enforcement is uneven and that NJ school districts are unprepared to implement state guidance effectively, requiring evidence-based input.) Collective reflection about findings, challenges, problems and potential solutions will offer new avenues for Stockton student and institutional engagement with local counties, communities and the state. Finally, completing a baseline report will enable research on trends in LGBTQ+ well-being over time. As the most densely populated, most ethnically diverse state in the U.S., New Jersey serves as a bellwether for the nation. Since South Jersey counties regularly rank lowest in the state on a range of health and economic indicators, it is likely LGBTQ+ communities in the southern region face the highest risk. It’s high time we found out.

Outcomes

Outcomes will include a report on the status of LGBTQ+ communities in South Jersey counties, external grants to state Educational, Children’s Systems of Care, and/or Juvenile Justice programs, community presentations, targeted survey results and report summaries specifically for school administrators, school boards, county Youth Commissions, city, county and state policy makers. Scholarly outcomes will include submission of a conference proposal (e.g. American Public Health Assoc., American Sociological Assoc., National Sex Ed Conference) and an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal such as *Gender and Society*, *Youth and Society*, *Social Problems* or *The American Journal of Public Health*.

Please see attached letters of support from my community partners. Thank you for your consideration.

References

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