

Explorations – The Journal of Undergraduate Research, Scholarship and Creativity at Wright State

Volume 1

Issue 1 *Summer Undergraduate Research, Scholarship and Creative Activities Issue 2012*

Article 9

2012

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Recommended Citation

Miller, L., Burns, G., & Morris, M. (2012). Sexual Minority and Ally Brain Drain in Ohio: Survey Design and Pilot Study, *Explorations – The Journal of Undergraduate Research, Scholarship and Creativity at Wright State*, 1 (1).

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Leah Miller

Sexual Minority and Ally Brain Drain in Ohio: Survey Design and Pilot Study

Abstract

The purpose of this project was to develop a study to examine sexual minority and ally college students' intentions to relocate after graduation. Research questions asked whether sexual minorities and allies plan to leave Ohio after graduation and sought to determine which specific issues might cause this migration. In partnership with Equality Ohio, we developed a survey and database of potential participants and conducted a small pilot study. In the Fall of 2012 this data collection will expand across Ohio; in 2013 the project will expand to examine brain drain across all 50 states.

Introduction

The “brain drain” phenomenon occurs when a large group of college graduates relocate to pursue careers elsewhere (Hansen, Ban & Huggins, 2003). It has been found that Ohio alone lost 163,876 people in an 11 year span from 1986 to 1997 and even more recently two-thirds of all people aged 25-39 moved from Ohio from 1995 to 2000 (McGuire, Johnston & Saevig, 2006). The large depletion of residents can make it problematic for certain areas to maintain or attract industry thus hurting the economy in that area.

With an escalating amount of recent college graduates migrating from Ohio; organizations focused on equality want to know “why.” Equality Ohio is an organization that advocates and educates to achieve fair treatment and equal opportunity for all Ohioans regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Equality Ohio expressed interest in researching the issue of possible brain drain in Ohio concerning sexual minorities and allies and what effects a lack of legislation concerning sexual minorities' rights might have on this brain

drain.

The research questions we asked in this study were “Are sexual minorities and allies leaving Ohio due to lack of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression protective legislation?”, “If so then what specific issues are causing these people to leave Ohio?”, and “If they are not leaving because of the lack of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression protection, then why are they relocating?”

Database Construction

The first step in this process was to create a database for each of the 50 states containing a list of the state’s colleges and universities. From there, we were able to find contact information for each of the schools LGBTQA or multicultural organizations if the school recognized one on their website. If no such organization was denoted, we would collect contact information for the student activities office or the college/university. Once we collected this information for all 50 states, we created a spreadsheet to calculate the percentages of schools per state that had recognized LGBTQA organizations. To better analyze these percentages, the states were divided by regions: Northwestern, Western, Mid-Western, and Southern.

For this current study, we wanted to examine even more specific percentages in schools advertising LGBTQA organizations in Ohio. In order to do this, we examined different regions of Ohio: Northwest, Northeast, Central, West, Southwest, and Southeast. Similarly to how the database was facilitated for the U.S., a database was created for the regions of Ohio. In this database, each school was listed under the region and whether or not they have a LGBTQA organization denoted on their school’s website.

We found a total of 54 applicable schools in Ohio, of those 38 had recognized LGBTQA student organizations on their website. When we narrowed it down by regions of Ohio we found

that 80% of schools in the southeastern region, 76.47% of schools in the northeastern region, 75% of schools in the southwestern region, 67% of schools in the western region, 67% of school in central Ohio, and 60% of schools in northwestern Ohio had denoted such organizations on their school's website. The total percentage of schools in the state of Ohio who recognized a campus LGBTQA student organization on their website was 70%.

We created a 70-item survey using the web-based survey software Qualtrics. The survey focused on college student experiences and their intentions about staying in or leaving Ohio after they complete their degree. Initially, the survey gathers students' demographic information and what type of career they are planning to pursue. The survey also examines such issues as workplace discrimination, housing discrimination, marriage inequality, adoption issues, bullying in schools issues, and hate crime issues. Finally, the survey attempts to determine how much weight sexual minority individuals and allies put on these issues when considering staying in Ohio or moving.

Initial Pilot Testing

We collected data from 10 students from a mid-sized midwestern university. The students were all members of a campus LGBTQA organization. Of our students, three were male and seven were female with an average age of 22 years. Five students identified themselves as lesbians, three identified as gay males, and two identified as straight. Eight out of the 10 students have had jobs in the past and one said that they were discriminated against at work.

From our pool of students, two said they will be moving after graduation, two said they will not be moving, and six were unsure. We gave the students 28 items to rank as very important to very unimportant in their decision to leave Ohio. In the "very important" box, seven students put "availability of future paths" and six students listed "availability of career options"

and “LGBT marriage equality laws.” Also in that category, five of the students said that “quality of employment opportunities,” “LGBT anti-discrimination employment laws,” and “LGBT anti-discrimination housing laws” were important in their decision to leave Ohio.

Future Steps and Implications

Limited pilot data limits the ability to make conclusions about the state of brain drain among sexual minorities and allies in Ohio. Future large scale data collection is required to better understand these issues. The results from this study could be used to help government and political officials in Ohio understand what changes could be made to retain this large population after graduation. Equality Ohio could use this to determine if they need to place a new strategy to educate students on pressing sexual orientation discrimination issues.

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