

Part I: Preliminary Information

Title: Creating an Accepting and Empowering Environment for LGBTQ Students at Elon University in the Wake of House Bill 2

Abstract:

In the wake of House Bill 2, higher education institutions in North Carolina are facing unprecedented challenges with creating an accepting and empowering environment for LGBTQ students. While the administration at Elon University has created several well-intentioned policies to create a more inclusive academic environment for LGBTQ students, many LGBTQ students struggle with the social climate on campus and within the greater Burlington community. In order to address this problem in a new and innovative way, I will conduct research on best practices at educational institutions that are considered inclusive to LGBTQ students, efforts that other LGBTQ student leaders have taken on their own college campus, and qualitative research on the attitudes and ideas of Burlington community members. Additionally, I will conduct research on relevant leadership theories, such as Burn's transformational leadership, to help with the implementation of the solutions that are generated through my research.

Part II: Problem Description

On March 23, 2016, an emergency session was called for the North Carolina legislature to pass the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act, more commonly known as House Bill 2 or HB2. Governor Pat McCrory immediately signed the bill into law with no public debate. This bill was drafted and passed in response to Charlotte ordinance 7056, a non-discrimination ordinance passed in February intended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in public accommodations or by passenger vehicles for hire or city contractors. In this ordinance, which updated a failed 2015 draft, Charlotte public officials incorporated language that would specifically protect transgendered people and allow them to use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity.

By contrast, HB2 requires that all people use the bathroom that aligns with the gender on their birth certificate. Furthermore, it requires that no local government create a non-discrimination ordinance that is stricter than the state's. The state protects against discrimination for, "race, religion, color, national origin, age, biological sex or handicap," (N.C. Legis. Assemb., 2016). Effectively, HB2 prevents local governments from creating or upholding non-discrimination ordinances that protect LGBTQ citizens. This bill also removed veteran's status as a protected class by the state, preventing local governments from providing discrimination protection for veterans; removed the ability of citizens to take civil action in state court for experiencing any kind of discrimination; and removed the ability of local governments to set their own minimum wage, setting a statewide minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. Though its

discriminatory effects extend to many classes of citizens in North Carolina, HB2 has been colloquially dubbed “the bathroom bill,” as its proponents specifically targeted the rights of transgendered people (Ebbs, 2016).

The argument in favor of this bill was to protect women and children from male predators who may falsely claim a female identity under protection of the Charlotte non-discrimination ordinance. While sexual violence remains prevalent and deserves attention from state and local lawmakers, the incidence of sexual violence in bathrooms with strangers is statistically low. Trespassing and indecency laws are already in place as “common sense” laws to prevent violence in bathrooms. Currently, ten police departments in North Carolina have stated they will not enforce HB2. Because North Carolina adopted a law for which there is no reasonable method of enforcement, it is clear that this law was passed specifically to stigmatize and marginalize certain groups of people.

As the social and legal battle against HB2 unfolds, the impact of the bill on North Carolina’s private sector and social climate has been highlighted by the media as detrimental to the state’s economy. However, the damaging effects of HB2 on higher education have scarcely been explored. UNC system president, Margaret Spellings, expressed her concerns about the impact HB2 will have in higher education, stating:

You all would be mistaken if you thought we were not concerned about the kind of chill this is having as it relates to the climate, the culture, the goodwill that we attempt to engender on university campuses as it relates to free expression, diversity and ability to recruit students and faculty of all types from all over the world. (Stancill, 2016)

Demographic, cultural, and identity diversity is increasingly important to higher education institutions, as a wealth of research supports the idea that sustained interactions between a range of identities contribute to enriching educational and social experiences (Smith, 1989; Hurtado, Milem, & Clayton-Pederson, 1999; Otten, 2003; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Tisdell, 2007). Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) note that “the actual experiences that students have with diversity consistently and meaningfully affect important learning and democracy outcomes of a college education.” It is now widely recognized as a critical component of the learning environment. However, in a few short months the passage of HB2 had a measurable negative influence on recruitment and matriculation at Elon University, directly impairing its ability to maintain diversity in its student population.

HB2 was passed late in the typical college recruitment cycle, after many students had already made their college decisions. In March, high school graduates have often already selected a new home from among the schools that accepted them. However, a survey of students who elected not to matriculate to Elon University revealed that HB2, despite its relatively late implementation, impacted the decision-making of 119 students, or 17% of those that decided not to attend (see Table 1).

Table 1: “Did HB2 influence your decision?”

	Deposit Paid	Withdrawn	No Notification
It was a factor	19	52	38
Not at all	60	227	244
Total percentage	24%	19%	13%

In March, Elon University issued an official statement to reaffirm its students’ identities and avow that the state law would not change any of Elon’s policies. The president of Elon University, Leo Lambert, wrote a letter to the editor to the Burlington Times News about the impact the bill has on LGBTQ citizens and North Carolina businesses. Additionally, Elon’s faculty passed a resolution condemning HB2. However, many students felt the university’s response was not enough. The former president of Elon’s Queer-Straight Alliance (Spectrum), Clair Lockard, felt that the statement issued by the university encouraged students to disregard HB2. She considered it a clever way of distancing Elon from the problem, stating, “We’re saying, ‘Oh, it’s OK because Elon’s private. So the bill won’t affect us because we’re not really part of this North Carolina.’ But Elon’s in North Carolina,” (Anderson, 2016). The institutional response offers words of encouragement and affirmation for the LGBTQ community, but fails to present actionable strategies for curbing discrimination on campus or contributing to the bill’s repeal.

As president of Spectrum at the time when HB2 was passed, I coordinated the response from the student body. We began with a “pee-in,” which was a sit in at Raleigh’s city council meeting where students stood in bathrooms that did not align with their gender identity. Student participants distributed information to attendees of the city council meeting on HB2 and encouraged council members to pass a resolution officially opposing it. Spectrum also provided information about protests and rallies that were occurring within the area of Elon and arranged transportation to and from each event. Spectrum partnered with Burlington’s NAACP to conduct many of these protests, and worked with its members to educate the Burlington community about HB2.

On campus, much of the student response was also focused around education. I worked with the Student Government Association (SGA) to pass a resolution making the official stance of the student body in opposition of HB2. Moreover, I emailed 300 professors to request ten minutes of class time to speak to educate students on the effects of HB2. The response from faculty was overwhelmingly positive. Over the next three weeks I personally spoke with approximately 1,000 students about the bill’s effects and the actions they can take to oppose it. Other educational activities that I led include the placement of signs over the men’s and women’s bathroom signs with different binary values (i.e. blonds and brunettes, republicans and democrats, etc.) in all major buildings on campus; the publication of op-eds on HB2 in the pendulum; the creation of a Facebook page for Elon students with facts about HB2; and the creation of a petition to the university, asking the university to create a multi-occupancy universal bathroom to show support for LGBTQ students in this difficult time. The petition was signed by over 1,000 students and resulted in the creation of a Trans-Inclusion Committee, of

which I am a founding member. This committee collaborates with other groups on campus to propose and implement LGBTQ-inclusive policies across campus, including the design and development of a multi-occupancy universal bathroom for future Elon buildings.

While this committee has generated and implemented several ideas that have proven beneficial to first-year students this semester, its actions have done little to solve the underlying problem: HB2 is still legally in effect. The bill has produced a range of damaging socioeconomic effects throughout North Carolina, and even permeates the sphere of Elon University. Some students report feeling unsafe or unwelcome by virtue of their presence in the state of North Carolina. The bill inhibits their ability to make connections with the surrounding community, further isolating them within the “Elon Bubble.” And even within this proverbial bubble, the media attention and the political climate in North Carolina may ostracize some students on campus. Lamentably, the passage of this bill has also resulted in the loss of 119 prospective students – a significant loss to the increasing diversity of our campus.

This semester, my activism efforts have been focused on registering students and other citizens to vote in the state of North Carolina and encouraging them to vote in favor of public leaders who oppose HB2. I have also organized collaborative events with other minority student organizations like the Black Student Union, the Latin American Student Organization, the Asian Pacific Student Association, the Caribbean Student Association, the Elon African Society, and the National Panhellenic Council. Together we have hosted several voter registration events and a forum titled “How to Be an Effective Ally,” which attracted around 150 attendees. On November 8th, Spectrum will collaborate with campus allies to organize a demonstration about the harmful impact of HB2 on all Elon students at College Coffee. Along with our continued collaboration with independent student groups, I have assumed a role on the Student Inclusive Climate Committee (SICC), a subcommittee of the Student Government Association. With a range of collaborators across campus, I believe that Spectrum can expand its influence and promote a transparent exchange of information among students.

In addition to my involvement with Elon organizations, this semester I will be a campus ambassador for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). Through GLAAD I have and will continue to network with LGBTQ student leaders on thirty other college campuses. An important aspect of my research will be an analysis of the policies and activities on other college campuses that create an accepting environment for LGBTQ students, and the exchanges of information and ideas enabled by GLAAD will be critical to this project. I am also well positioned to implement the ideas my research gathers institutionally by being the only student member of the LGBTQIA Implementation Task Force at Elon University. Through this position I have direct access to administrators who are willing and able to help create a more LGBTQ-inclusive campus. This research is something I am both well equipped to accomplish and am absolutely dedicated to. Elon University is my home and I want it to truly feel like home for all of my LGBTQ family.

Part III: Plan for Intellectual Inquiry

Elon has fostered a culture of tolerance towards LGBTQ identities, but not acceptance of these people. My goal in this research project is to create a new narrative for Elon University, and in order to do that I must be able to inspire cultural change. Elon has a Campus Pride index rank of tenth in the nation, yet that rating proves meaningless to many LGBTQ students and allies here on campus. From the top down, Elon administrators have attempted to create helpful policies that support Elon's diversity statement, but these policies have not done much to impact student or community attitude. Because of this, my research project will focus on how to improve student attitudes and social climate on campus. Correspondingly, it will also focus on how to improve the Burlington community's attitude and social climate towards LGBTQ communities. I will focus on creating ideas and policies that can be implemented bilaterally through the institution and through individual students.

In order to shape Elon's narrative into one that goes beyond tolerance – even acceptance – to one of LGBTQ empowerment, several challenging questions must be considered. How must student thinking and action evolve? Who must be involved in order to create change on campus climate? How will progress towards collective goals be measured? Unfortunately, there is little literature currently existing on how discriminatory laws like HB2 impact higher education. My research will begin with an analysis of extant literature on the importance of campus social climate and the effect diversity has on students' academic and social experiences (See list of citations). Additionally, I will conduct qualitative research on campus in the form of focus groups to analyze the current perception of acceptance of LGBTQ students at Elon, the effectiveness of institutional and individual responses to HB2, and student perception of the barriers to an equitable and inclusive campus climate. In order to be able to most effectively understand how to create an LGBTQ inclusive culture, my research will continue by studying the actions that exemplary college campuses have taken to create this type of environment.

Through my work as a GLAAD ambassador, I have already begun compiling some ideas and specific areas to explore to change student attitude and social climate. One major area of focus will be working with Greek life, which dominates social culture on Elon's campus. This work may take the form of a media campaign for members of Greek life to show their support and inclusiveness to LGBTQ students. Another area of focus is the expansion of intersectional activism. While I have worked with many cultural organizations already, a new focus will be on creating a more permanent and sustainable alliance between our organizations so that intersectional activism is not limited to individual events. A third area I will study is on the creation of more queer-friendly spaces on campus. Currently, the only queer-friendly space we have on campus is the Gender and LGBTQIA Center (GLC), and that is not highly utilized by queer community members. There are many more areas of focus that I have begun to consider, such as campus media and LGBTQ role model visibility, and many more are sure to arise as a result of my research on other universities. As a GLAAD ambassador, I plan to conduct qualitative interviews of other LGBTQ student leaders about initiatives they have implemented to improve their own campuses.

Improving the attitude and social climate of the Burlington community to be more inclusive to LGBTQ students and citizens will necessitate addressing these challenges from a different perspective. To improve perception among community members, I intend to organize educational events in Burlington, create and assist local Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) organizations, establish partnerships with LGBTQ-friendly businesses, help to create an annual pride parade, and petition for the creation of more queer-friendly spaces. In order to effectively create change within our local community, I will also conduct qualitative research on community attitudes towards HB2 and LGBTQ citizens. I will begin by interviewing local business owners about the impact HB2 has had on them and how they have responded. This research will help me understand the current social climate of the Burlington community and will inform the development of future initiatives for education and social change.

Through this research, I intend to encourage change in social systems and individuals in the Elon community. I plan to implement my research by following the principles of James McGregor Burn's transformational leadership theory. This style of leadership will be most effective for my goals because I will be challenging the status quo and demonstrating how current patterns of treatment towards LGBTQ students are not effective in creating an inclusive and empowering environment. In the wake of HB2, which sanctions an environment in North Carolina in which it is legal and acceptable to discriminate against LGBTQ citizens, my research will articulate and actualize a clear vision of challenging goals for Elon to rebuke the state law. As president of Spectrum and a leader in a number of other organizations, I will serve as a role model for students who want to create sustainable change for all marginalized students.

My research will seek better ways to achieve institutional goals of inclusivity. This will be accomplished by a bottom up approach with students and Burlington community members, rather than a top down approach from the administration. My efforts will create mobilization through its proposed solutions, which I am well positioned to implement through my many leadership roles on campus. Finally, my research will raise the morale of LGBTQ students on Elon's campus through its goal of empowerment. I hope to create momentum that can be sustained by Spectrum, LGBTQ students, and allies beyond my graduation. This research will be a starting point for others at this university to continue improving campus climate and LGBTQ relationships in the Burlington community.

As I continue through my own academic experience, coursework in my leadership minor will inform how I carry out this work. As a leadership fellow and member of the Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program, I am inspired by my cohort to discover new ways to create lasting impacts on Elon's campus. This research will be my legacy project for the Fellows program, so the ideas, plans, and designs generated by this research will continue to develop under the supervision of Professor Paula Patch. I will present my findings at the Summer Undergraduate Research Forum and other regional conferences, Elon's 2017 Intersect conference, and GLAAD's national leadership conference in New York City.

It is my hope that the solutions generated by this research can be replicated on other North Carolina campuses that must contend with the effects of HB2, as well as more broadly at

any institution attempting to create an LGBTQ-inclusive climate. This transformation will take a dedicated effort from both the institution and students, but I am confident that it will improve the higher education experience for all.

Part IV: Feasibility, Budget, and Timeline

Changing campus climate is not a feat easily accomplished within 2 years. However, significant progress can be made within this timeframe. My goal is to create the foundation for sustainable initiatives to be continued after I graduate. The first year of my project will be focused on qualitative research on the problem in order to generate several different types of solutions that can be implemented within the following year. The timeline below shows a more detailed format. Furthermore, by creating a more empowering environment for LGBTQ students through the implementation of my solutions, it will be easier for LGBTQ and ally students to develop and implement initiatives in this area in the future. My existing relationships and work within this area make this project both viable and feasible.

A key variable that will impact the feasibility of this project is the impending outcome of the November 8th state elections. This election will have a significant impact on the larger North Carolina culture and attitude towards LGBTQ citizens and will be factored into how I orient my work towards improving the social climate of the Burlington community. Regardless of the election outcome, HB2 has already had a significant impact on higher education institutions in North Carolina, and there is a significant amount of healing necessary to improve the general attitude towards the LGBTQ community. My research will be critical in moving forward with this healing in the Elon community, but the solutions may take a different form than anticipated based on the outcome of the elections. Because of the current political situation, my research is very timely and will work well within the year and a half timeline.

The majority of my project will involve qualitative research within the Elon and Burlington community. The main resources that I need for this project are funding to attend conferences, funding for incentives for the participants of my qualitative research, funding for travel to NC universities to analyze their responses to HB2, and funding for the implementation of my solutions. Since many of my solutions have yet to be determined or delineated, it is difficult to apportion funding to this part of my budget. Because at this time I do not know what will be needed, I am allocating a significant portion of the prize to my tuition, with the stipulation that I will reallocate it as necessary to fund solution implementation.

Budget

Conferences			
	AAC&U Diversity, Learning, and Student Success Conference; Jacksonville, FL		

		Registration fee	\$580
		Travel expenses (airfare from RDU to JAX)	\$250
		Hotel (2 nights)	\$200
		Food	\$50
		Taxi service	\$100
			\$1,180
	Creating Change Conference sponsored by the National LGBTQ Task Force (<i>travel expenses based on 2017 location; location changes every year</i>)		
		Registration fee	\$325
		Travel expenses (airfare from RDU to PHL)	\$200
		Hotel (3 nights)	\$300
		Food	\$75
		Taxi service	\$100
			\$1,000
	International LGBT Leaders Conference sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Institute in Washington, D.C.		
		Registration fee	\$295
		Travel expenses (gas reimbursement for 600 miles)	\$75
		Hotel (3 nights)	\$300
		Food	\$75
			\$745
<i>Conference Subtotal</i>			\$2,925
Focus Groups			
		Food	\$100
		Gift cards	\$200
<i>Focus Groups Subtotal</i>			\$300
Interviews			
		Gift cards	\$300

<i>Interviews Subtotal</i>			\$300
In-state Travel (3 Universities, TBD)			
		Travel expenses (gas reimbursement for 600 miles)	\$75
		Hotel (1 night per university)	\$300
<i>In-state Travel subtotal</i>			\$375
Tuition*			\$4,100
Solutions			
		Queer space presentation materials and models	\$100
		Large prints (posters, banners)	\$500
	Creating and Supporting local GSAs		
		Food	\$200
		Activities	\$200
	TBD**		\$1,000
Solutions Subtotal			\$2,000
TOTAL			\$10,000

* Tuition dollars may be reallocated to solutions that have yet to be developed

** Solutions may be developed as informed by research conducted

Timeline

Fall 2016 Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research existing literature Compile University List Create interview questions for student leaders at other universities Begin GLAAD ambassador interviews Attend GLAAD leadership conference
Spring 2017 Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create focus group questions for Elon students Complete focus group studies Create interview questions for Burlington business owners and Burlington community members Interview Burlington business owners and Burlington community members

	<p>Travel to/and research universities with LGBTQ inclusive climates and compile list of best practices</p> <p>Present at SURF day</p> <p>Present at regional conference</p> <p>Create and flesh out implementation plan for solutions</p> <p>Attend AACU Diversity, Learning, and Student Success Conference (March 16-18)</p>
<p>Fall 2018 Semester</p>	<p>Creating Change Conference sponsored by the National LGBTQ Task Force</p> <p>International LGBT Leaders Conference sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Institute in Washington DC</p> <p>GLAAD leadership conference</p> <p>Implement solutions</p>
<p>Spring 2018 Semester</p>	<p>Study Abroad in Israel</p> <p>Continue Implementation of solution with fellow Spectrum leaders on Campus</p> <p>Assessment of program success</p>

Part V: List of Sources

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