

Executive Summary of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Advancement of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) Inclusion in the RUME Community

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The SIGMAA on Research in Undergraduate Mathematics Education (RUME) community recently had to grapple with issues encountered as a result of California state law, which states that, “California must take action to avoid supporting or financing discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people” (California Assembly Bill No. 1887, 2016). In effect, this law prohibits California state-funded travel to other states which have religious freedom laws that are viewed as discriminatory to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. On June 22, 2018 Oklahoma was added to the list of states where travel was prohibited, due to a newly enacted law SB 1140. This law states that child-placement agencies will not be required to place a child in adoption or foster care in situations that “violate the agency’s written religious or moral convictions or policies” (Oklahoma Senate Bill No.1140, 2018). The enactment of SB 1140 and the prohibited state-funded travel meant that some members of the RUME community would be unable or unwilling to travel to the 2019 and 2020 RUME conferences, which were slated to be held in Oklahoma.

The SIGMAA RUME Executive Committee decided to respond to this issue while attempting to uphold the SIGMAA on RUME’s principles of equity and mentorship, to address previously contracted financial obligations, and to instill fairness and transparency within the RUME community. As a result of conversation with the Oklahoma organizing committee, the RUME Executive Committee decided to host the 2019 Conference in Oklahoma but to relocate the 2020 SIGMAA RUME Conference. On October 13, 2018 the Executive Committee communicated this decision in an email sent to the RUME listserv and read in part:

The SIGMAA RUME EC has had several difficult discussions among ourselves, as well as with the Oklahoma planning committee regarding how this impacts our community especially given our equity statement, which explicitly states that as an organization we will respect our LGBTQIA+ members. As such, have decided that, in the context of the California travel ban, having our conference in Oklahoma in 2020 would violate this statement. We very much want to also honor our equity statement and strongly believe that having the 2020 SIGMAA RUME conference in Oklahoma would send the wrong message to our LGBTQIA+ SIGMAA RUME members. Given we very much want to support all of our members, we have decided to not have the 2020 SIGMAA RUME conference in Oklahoma. At the same time we want to honor our initial commitment to our Oklahoma members who have been working hard to plan the 2019 SIGMAA RUME conference – as such the 2019 conference will still be in Oklahoma.

This initial communication sparked a rapid dialogue, resulting in 23 posts to the listserv in less than two days (as well as numerous non-listserv communications) before posting was suspended for a short duration. In an effort to address the concerns via the listserv and foster a positive and affirming SIGMAA RUME community, the Executive Committee created an Ad Hoc Committee for the Advancement of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) Inclusion in the RUME Community. The committee was formed via nominations of willing and interested researchers in the community, representing both individuals within and outside the LGBTQIA+ community. The authors of this executive summary comprised the members of this committee, and they were charged with creating a proposal for incorporating activities and/or sessions into the 2019 conference that would promote education about—and discussion of—issues related to the participation of LGBTQIA+ colleagues and students in our research community in particular and in our society in general.

The ad hoc committee met on several occasions to determine the focus and intent of the activities, to draft a list of recommendations, and to plan for their implementation. One of the initial considerations addressed was how broadly to implement issues of inclusivity at the conference. For instance, the committee considered focusing on inclusivity and marginalization generally, to include activities on how these may be experienced by women, scholars of color, those in the religious minority, etc. Yet, for this conference, the committee decided to keep it focused on LGBTQIA+ issues because it was directly related to the charge of the committee, helped ground conversations in particular experiences, and provided a common thread throughout the activities.

LGBTQIA+ Activities and Sessions

In this paper, we showcase the recommendations proposed by the committee, the rationale behind such efforts, and a discussion of how they were implemented at the conference. Our hope is that by sharing these efforts others can learn and implement similar practices at other conferences, in departments, at their institution, etc.

Opening Session to Address LGBTQIA+ Issues

The SIGMAA RUME conference opened with a session that included a panel who specifically addressed LGBTQIA+ issues. Incorporating this panel into the well-attended opening session set a tone concerning these issues and opened a dialogue for the remainder of the conference. Keeping the SIGMAA RUME equity statement in mind, the opening session was framed around this statement. SIGMAA RUME's Position Statement on Equity "reflects the commitments and perspectives of the community in advancing equity in undergraduate mathematics education with respect to: 1) participation within the community; 2) teaching practices; and 3) research. For purposes of this document, equity is defined as a state in which all participants are enabled to fully participate and become successful in a community of practice" (Committee on Equity, 2018, p. 1). Therefore, the panel of testimonials or narratives was geared towards equity researchers, RUME faculty, and students. The overarching questions addressed by the panel included:

- How does identifying within the LGBTQIA+ community impact your experience in RUME?
- How does identifying within the LGBTQIA+ community impact your experience in mathematics classes?
- How does your research agenda impact the LGBTQIA+ community and your pursuits as a scholar?

As such, the panel included both in-person sharing and written testimonials that were submitted prior to the conference and projected for conference attendees to see and read in silence. Both senior and junior members of the community shared testimonials about their experience as LGBTQIA+ RUME members. These testimonials of such participants included comments on making career decisions based on safety and livelihood, on monitoring or tracking their feelings of inclusion within the community, and on the emotional impact of discriminatory laws in both the U.S. and abroad. One of the panelists shared that as a first-time conference attendee it was important for them to see the efforts to promote inclusivity at the conference, since their first exposure to the community was through the email listserv exchange. Another panelist shared that although they didn't share about their personal life, it was important to them to serve on the panel in order to share how they constantly monitor/assess ways in which they feel safe and included in situations and ways in which they feel marginalized and at-risk. Another panelist shared the emotional toll of not seeing members of the community at the conference because of the travel ban and expressed their struggle with how we as a community should address this topic.



Figure 1. Opening session participants and Committee members

Finally, a set of testimonials from others within the community, students and equity researchers were projected on the screen. The ad hoc committee decided not to read aloud the testimonials of those who submitted written responses, as we believed that it would be inappropriate to voice their words and experiences when they are not our own. Rather, these testimonials were projected and read quietly by audience members. Those who could not view the testimonials were welcomed to stand and come forward for a closer view. To use the old idiom, you could have heard a pin drop; the silence was all-encompassing. The session was attended by well over 200 people and ended in a standing ovation. The remaining conference activities capitalized on this energy, providing a space for attendees to engage in deeper conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues and inclusivity in general.

Wall of Identity

As mentioned, the opening session with testimonials provided a window into the vulnerability and the human endeavor of research; this seemed to help others connect and share their journey with the RUME community. In order to allow all conference participants to share such experiences, a “wall of identity” was created to feature the printed versions of the written testimonials and block paper for others to respond to the following prompt: “Please feel free to share how your identity (e.g., who you are) has impacted your experiences with the RUME community or your interactions at this conference.” This prompt allowed what are sometimes less visible or public experiences to become part of the communal dialogue, and the wall was actively contributed to throughout the conference.

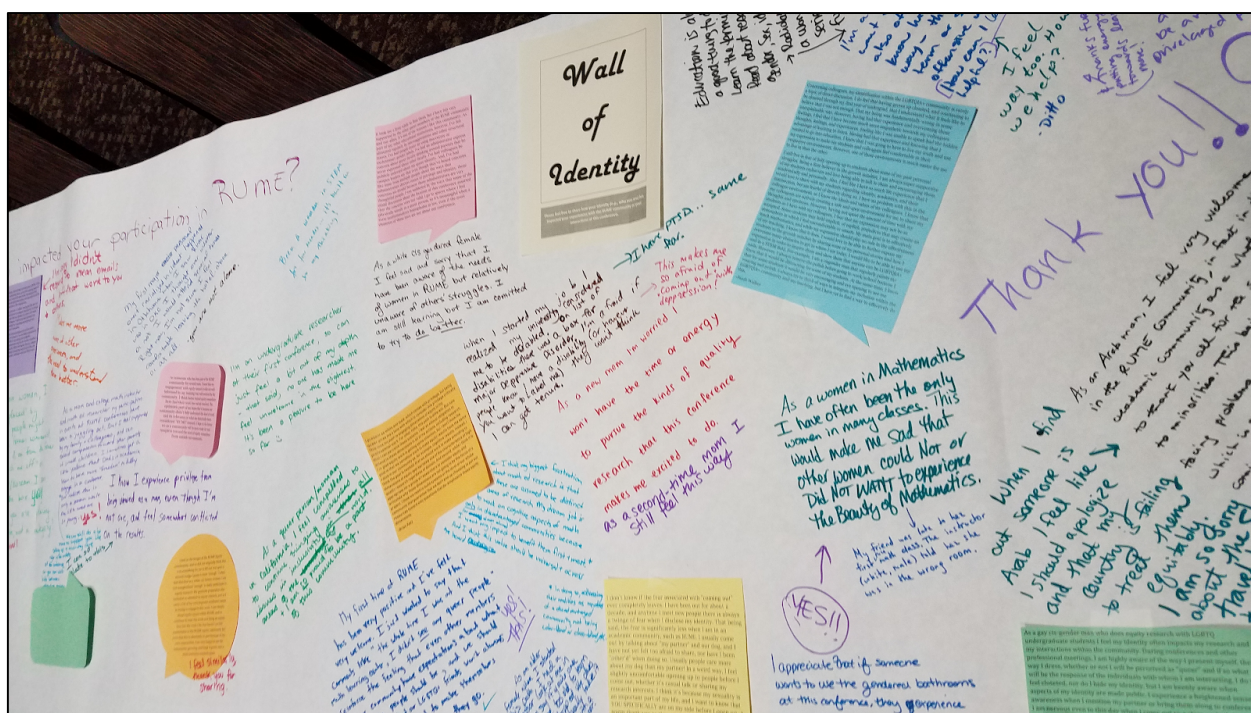


Figure 2. Wall of Identity

On the Wall of Identity, over 50 people described their experiences in RUME, shared how their identities impact their participation in the RUME community, and responded to others' concerns. Many of these experiences shared on the Wall of Identity resonated with others and led to a chain of people commenting. Some of the themes that were shared on the wall related to feelings of imposter syndrome, to feelings of isolation, and to the lack of representation. Individuals shared the ways in which their identity led to racialized experiences in RUME, gendered experiences in RUME, and differential involvement as a parent. Additionally, several members shared that they felt like peripheral members of the community because of a research focus in community college, developmental mathematics, or equity. There were also general positive experiences in RUME expressed such as admiration for the RUME community and feeling welcomed at the conference. Finally, the wall included statements from an individual recognizing their privilege as a straight white cisgender man in RUME.

Coffee Break Dialogue Sessions

In addition to the wall of identity, a series of targeted questions were posted at each of the conference breaks along with poster paper to allow participants to express and expand on their views, understandings, and knowledge base of LGBTQIA+ issues. These questions were designed to align with the ongoing activities at the conference and to allow individuals to continue the conversation about LGBTQIA+ issues throughout the entire conference. The set of questions included the following:

Table 1. Coffee break dialogue prompts

Break Session	Question Prompt
One	What ideas resonated with you, or what insights did you gather as a result of attending the panel discussion about LGBTQ+ issues?
Two	What might be potential challenges as it relates to critically engaging with and/or discussing LGBTQ+ issues? What has been or could be the most helpful mechanism to assist you with supporting LGBTQ+ mathematics students?
Three	What were your takeaways from the Faculty LGBTQ+ Ally critical discussion? What resources or support systems are needed in your community/institutional/departmental space to truly advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusivity?
Four	How might you redesign one of your mathematics lessons, examples, or projects to (further) engage with LGBTQ+ issues? How might your research projects, tasks, etc. (better) attend to LGBTQ+ issues?
Five	How might these critical conversations about LGBTQ+ inclusivity benefit the RUME community? What are potential next steps for advancing LGBTQ+ inclusivity in RUME?

The questions posted at each of the breaks helped to keep transformative conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues occurring throughout the conference. For example, an instructor shared that one way to support LGBTQIA+ students was to humanize the subject of mathematics to promote relational interactions with students. This discussion shows the synergy of having these coffee break questions woven throughout the conference since the questions about LGBTQIA+ inclusion linked well with one of the plenary sessions on equity “for all” and relational interactions.

Name Badges and Pronouns

Beginning with the 2017 RUME conference in San Diego, space was added on name badges to allow for participants to enter in their pronouns (e.g., they/them/theirs, he/him/his, she/her/her). This practice (GLSEN, n.d.) helps support inclusive spaces at the conference by allowing individuals to be referred to by their self-selected pronouns and conveys that the conference organizers are open and accepting of non-binary or non-traditional pronouns.

Gender Inclusive Restrooms

Often times there are not gender-inclusive restrooms at conference locations, or these are not easily accessible or clearly indicated for participants to find. This can present a barrier and challenge for transgender and non-binary individuals who are uncomfortable using gendered restrooms (e.g., men's, women's). To address this issue, gender-inclusive restrooms were created by re-labeling the gendered restrooms to be all gender restrooms. This proved to be especially impactful because the inclusive restrooms were central to the conference activities and they were the primary restrooms available. One participant during the coffee break discussion pointed out that the gendered restrooms were inconveniently located further from the main conference rooms, and so those wishing to use such restrooms were inconvenienced in a way that many members of the LGBTQIA+ community feel every day by not being welcomed to use the restroom of their choice.



Figure 3. Gender Inclusive Restrooms

Having gender-inclusive restrooms generated several discussions throughout the conference regarding restroom availability for transgender individuals, feelings of unsafety for women, and the privilege experienced by many cisgender individuals. In a post-conference survey, 11 out of 52 open-ended responses to the LGBTQIA+ activities focused on the gender-inclusive restrooms. Over half of these expressed concern with how the restrooms were announced and updated (e.g., first the women's restroom was updated, and then a few hours later the men's restroom was updated) and concern with availability of gender-specific restrooms. One participant expressed concern that re-labeling the men's restrooms as gender-inclusive is problematic since they also had urinals present, which they expressed as problematic for fear of being exposed to a colleague's genitalia. This participant suggested that the urinals could be marked off as "out of order" during the conference. Another suggestion was to clearly label what is inside the restroom (e.g. 5 urinals and 6 stalls) so individuals can choose which restroom they desire. Another participant expressed concern using a restroom with a man present, because a man in the women's restroom could be a potential sexual assault. The ad hoc committee does not have definitive answers as to what would be the best practice for restroom access for future

conferences; however, we hold steadfast to the necessity of having gender-inclusive restrooms available and easily accessible for conference participants.

Safe-Space Training

In order to promote education, our intention was to partner with the local LGBT and Gender Center to offer safe-space training during the conference. Due to scheduling conflicts, this was not able to be offered in its entirety and instead there was a lunch session that promoted a critical discussion on being an ally for LGBTQIA+ colleagues and students. This session was attended by 10-15 participants and provided a space for unpacking the series of events at the conference as well as discussing issues of teaching and mentoring LGBTQIA+ students. Participants in attendance expressed that having a space to learn about issues, unpack conference events, discuss personal struggles, and get practical advice was a helpful. They also appreciated the space to have such conversation that were separate from the research focus of other sessions. Therefore, the ad hoc committee posit that there is a need to have sessions and programming efforts that offer education as well as informal spaces to discuss our practices and lived experience at future SIGMAA RUME meetings.

Anonymous Feedback Platform

An anonymous feedback platform was created for participants to ask questions. The purpose behind having this anonymous platform was to allow individuals to ask questions that they may feel uncomfortable asking in a group setting. That way, the ad hoc committee could respond to or post their feedback for other conference attendees to see. With this platform, a total of 13 responses were received throughout the conference ranging from general positive affirmations of the activities, questions about how to address gendered language when calling on people (e.g., yes, ma'am?), and suggestions for revising the equity statement to address the inclusion of developmental mathematics constituents and K-12 practitioners.

Other Efforts

There were several other efforts that were undertaken to promote inclusion at the conference. These included having a letter writing campaign to the state legislature, having a social hour at a local LGBT bar, and connecting with local LGBT organizations and student clubs such as Out in STEM (oSTEM).

Participant Reactions

In an effort to assess the impact and effectiveness of the previously mentioned activities, several survey questions were included in a post-conference survey distributed to all participants. There were a total of 155 survey responses, with 150 that included responses to questions about the LGBTQIA+ activities and sessions. Asked to what extent they appreciated the inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ activities at RUME out of the 151 responses to this question, 54% of respondents supported including all of them and 23% supported including some of the activities but neutral to others (see Figure 4). Only 3% of respondents did not support including most or all of the activities and sessions. Of the remaining respondents, 13% were neutral about most of the activities and 8% supported some activities but did not support others. Given the listserv catalyst for the creation of this committee, these results help provide context that a majority of RUME participants are supportive of including activities that address issues of identity and inclusion at the conference. In fact, 15 of the 52 open-ended responses discussed a desire for including activities at the next RUME conference that addressed issues of identity and marginalization of

other groups of individuals (e.g., people of color, undocumented students, people with a disability, women).

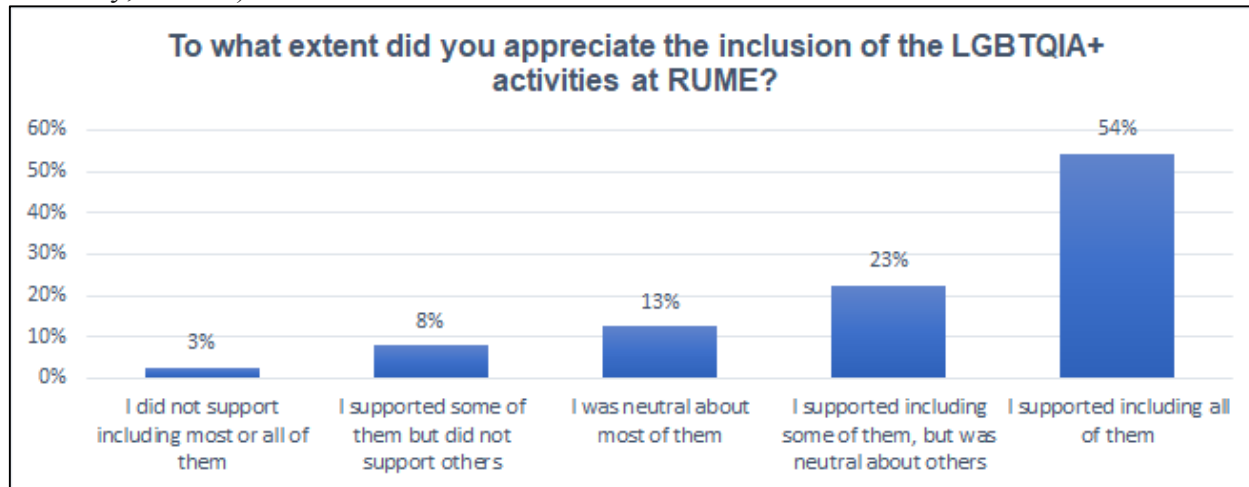


Figure 4. RUME conference participants response (n=151) indication appreciation of LGBTQIA+ activities. Due to rounding the percentages total greater than 100%.

Asked which of the activities or sessions participants (n=129) found the most helpful for facilitating learning and discussion about LGBTQIA+ issues (see Figure 5), the most indicated sessions were the introductory panel of testimonials (100), the wall of identity (62), the pronouns on name tags (56) and the gender inclusive restrooms (54).

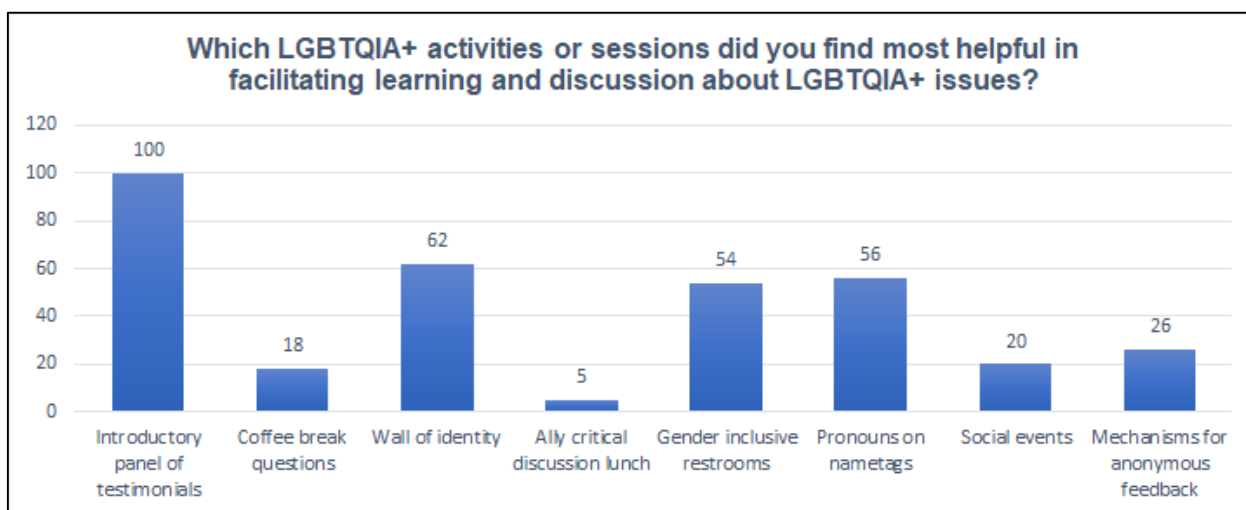


Figure 5. Response counts from 129 participants to the activities and sessions that were most helpful in facilitating learning and discussion about LGBTQIA+ issues.

Participants (n=151) were also asked how the activities and sessions impacted their *understanding* of LGBTQIA+ issues and experiences, resulting in 25% expressing a lot, 57% a little, and 18% not at all. The fact that a plurality of participants grew in their understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues suggests that the educative goals of this committee were supported by conference activities. Participants (n=150) were also asked how the sessions created opportunities for *discussion* about LGBTQIA+ participation, resulting in 45% expressing a lot, 46% a little, and 9% not at all. These results indicate that the vast majority of participants saw

opportunities in the activities to discuss with other participants about LGBTQIA+ participation in RUME. Based on these results, a majority of participants found the activities and sessions encouraging discussion and promoting understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues and experiences, which was the charge of the committee.

Reflections on the Initiatives

The activities and sessions mentioned in this article are not an exhaustive list of the ways in which inclusivity within the RUME community can be promoted, but they are a start in recognizing the humanity and dignity of our colleagues and friends. The activities implemented at RUME 2019 included:

- The opening session to address LGBTQIA+ issues,
- The wall of identity,
- Coffee break questions and dialogue,
- Pronouns on name badges,
- Gender-inclusive restrooms,
- A safe-space training,
- An anonymous online feedback platform, and
- Other local informal efforts.

Additionally, all of these efforts helped to promote discussions within and outside the formal conference program, with participants discussing how the issues shared related to their identity within the field. Our hope is that by engaging in these discussions, experiencing vulnerability and empowerment, we can support each other to allow all members to engage fully within the SIGMAA RUME community.

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