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Why Awareness of LGBT issues in the Physics Community Makes Sense

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A thriving innovation ecology requires diversity of perspective and knowledge. We want to attract and retain the best possible talent to Science and Engineering, particularly after expensive investments in training of faculty, postdoctoral fellows and students. Participants who bring their authentic identity to work are much more efficient, as it takes a lot of energy to stay in the closet. It is a concern that so few S&E faculty are out of the closet – we don't know the numbers and they are difficult to obtain. This makes it difficult for the younger generation of students to relate as they do not see sexual orientation as an obstacle. It is also important for LGBT people to be visible in order to benefit from workplace policies such as family leave and other benefits. There are some activities to promote a positive view of LGBT people in S&E. The National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals (NOGLSTP) has been in existence since 1983, and holds receptions and symposia at the AAAS meeting and other professional society meetings, as well as a symposium called "Out to Innovate," next to be held October 13-14, 2012 at Ohio State University. The American Chemical Society started an LGBT subdivision of its Division of Professional Relations in 2010. Much more needs to be done to educate leaders so they can speak knowledgeably about LGBT issues. Their ability to do so can affect their success in hiring and retaining top talent.