

## Transcript

# Intersectionality and Belonging on Campus: Working With Howard's LGBTQ+ Community feat. Jose Cadiz

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[00:00:00] **Frank:** In America, 1.2 million adults identify as black and LGBT. But for many, discrimination is even harder than their white counterparts for their intersectional identities. Here at Howard University, efforts to support LGBTQ students have resulted in the formation of the intercultural affairs and the LGBTQ+ Resource Center. Let's dig into it.

Welcome to HU2U, the podcast where we bring today's important topics and stories from Howard University right to you. I'm Frank Tramble, today's host, and I am here with Jose Cadiz, the director of Howard's Intercultural and Affairs and LGBTQ Center. Welcome to our podcast.

[00:00:48] **Jose:** Thank you. Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

[00:00:50] **Frank:** So, tell us a little bit about the center itself. And what are your goals? You've been here for what, three years?

[00:00:55] **Jose:** About two years.

[00:00:56] **Frank:** Two years, two years, right?

[00:00:57] **Jose:** Yeah.

[00:00:58] **Frank:** Running the center, I've had a good opportunity to come over and see, you know, the growth of the center thus far. But tell us about your work and what your plans are.

[00:01:04] **Jose:** The center is created in three different tiers and it's support and advocacy for students to individually support our students, also, education and awareness, and then community building. I think that those three things that we have cultivated here at Howard really does lend into the Howard Forward plan. But it also enhances the sense of belonging for vulnerable communities, specifically our LGBTQ+ community here at Howard University.

And I also want to just layer that in saying our staff and faculty as well being seen, being heard, understanding that there is a LGBTQ+ Resource Center where students, faculty, and staff can

go to, to seek resources, to voice opinions, to voice different, maybe, biases that they've experienced, microaggressions that they've experienced as well, and to be a sounding board.

I think we have the distinct opportunity to have the ear of many, many cabinet members, as well as the student body, HUSA, exec, Houston Senate. All of these different bodies withhold so much power. And how we do things here at Howard University that we are, you know, privileged enough to have that.

I mean, we are one of seven HPCUs that have resource centers. And there are 103, 104 on a great day HBCUs across the country, and we want to make sure that we're pioneering just the efforts for a sense of belonging for our HBCU students.

[00:02:31] **Frank:** Thanks. Yeah, I think that's wonderful. You know, one of the things that I've heard as criticism sometimes is the fact that, you know, we're already in HBCU, there's already a lot of resources around the students here. Why is it necessary to have a LGBTQ+ Resource, out of all the other ones that exist as well?

[00:02:46] **Jose:** Of course, when we think about the LGBTQ+ community, we think about how marginalized we have been. And myself, you know, I identify in the LGBTQ+ community. And so, I have witnessed firsthand and had lived experience with how things were done. People would speak to me throughout my time in undergrad and just being, you know, in a profession.

I think, with becoming an HBCU administrator, I had an obligation and a duty to the people of color, the black LGBTQ+ bis in here, alum, and current students, and our future students as well, students that are coming that identify in the LGBTQ+ community. It's really important to have this sense of belonging, first and foremost, for the LGBTQ+ community because we create so much of a narrative in our historical context in the black community of what it means to be LGBTQ+.

We're talking about the religious aspect of it. We talk about how we have been so marginalized in other spaces where, you know, being black is not hard enough. Now, you're going to be black and gay, right? Now, you're going to be a male black and gay.

And so, we talk about that a lot with the intersectionalities that we discuss in our inter-dialogue conversations with our students. And we create spaces for those students to, kind of, unpack all of those different things that they, kind of, take with them. Imposter syndrome is a huge thing that we have, not even only in the LGBTQ+ community, but also in the black community, right? We have to see ourselves in a different way to be successful. And that shouldn't be the way that we operate through life.

So, when we are giving these tools to the LGBTQ+ community here at Howard, it's through the lens of being authentically yourself and being who you are and showing up as you are

everywhere you go, because you have an obligation, not only to yourself, but to your future family, to your future children, the past ancestors that have come and didn't have the obligation or the bandwidth to be out and authentically themselves.

[00:04:56] **Frank:** Mm-hmm. I think that's so important to call out. And, and you also mentioned something that I think is, kind of, an interesting fact because, when we talked about the intersectionalities, it's almost like every layer is a different level of different type of discrimination. And, and even when we, we can't group LGBTQ all as one together, too, because even the race still plays a part in that.

In fact, 33% of black LGBTQ+ individuals reported experiencing discrimination in the last year that has had a significant impact on their lives and everyday experiences. Are you seeing that on a constant basis from the students that you're working with?

[00:05:31] **Jose:** I think there's multiple layers to how students express their concerns. There are ways that I communicate with students. And they come into the office and, kind of, speak to me candidly about their experience here. Previously, before, we've had the resource center. It was a lot more of the concerns, specifically in the aspect of gender binaries, gender pronouns, preferred names, and how faculty and staff either abided by that, or they, kind of, just turned, you know, a blind eye and did not go into depth about how we would conduct ourselves here in the classroom.

And I think that it's just that layer that needs to be, you know, either trained or needs to have a little bit more professional development, not only for staff and faculty, but for students as well. We have to have a culture change where we are seeing that students are a lot more understanding and knowledgeable about the differences in our community here, from religious-based organizations and religious-based student experiences, all the way through to our LGBTQ+ students, right?

We have six, almost seven generations at Howard right now. And so, we need to understand the differences of experience, of how we were brought up, of religious, you know, based, kind of, affiliation. But we also need to make sure that we lead with humanity. And so, I think that we do that well in some aspects, but I do think that we are getting to a point where the LGBTQ+ community does feel a sense of belonging. They do feel written into the history and the traditions and culture of Howard University.

This past year, we had our first Pride Fest. And we also had our first pride game at the varsity basketball game. And so, these types of traditions really create a sense of belonging for our students. And what I heard from athletics was that that was the most well-attended basketball game to that point, to that date.

[00:07:40] **Frank:** Wow.

[00:07:40] **Jose:** And so, we are creating a space for not only, “Oh, you're here at Howard and you're accepted and you have these parameters and you're loved and cared about,” but, “No, you are engulfed in the traditions and culture that we're cultivating here.”

[00:07:53] **Frank:** Yeah, I'm always at awe at the work that you all have been doing, because the opportunity to be inclusive here is something that has been the university's goal for a long time. And the work the center's doing is helping to realize that.

What does it look like to be supportive when it comes to the pronoun discussion? There's a lot of times you'll see in the signatures now people offering up what your pronouns are. How are you instructing or, kind of, guiding the conversation around, how do we make sure that the correct pronoun is used in each of the scenario that's important? But also, you know, understanding that, for some people, we may tend to use the wrong one, not trying to offend and trying to find that balance of, well, there's been just, like, natural language of what you're used to saying and there's a lot of new, kind of, additions that people have to learn and navigate and get used to as well to be supportive? How do you have that conversation right now with people, both in the LGBTQ community and both who are supporters of it?

[00:08:50] **Jose:** Yeah, I think the pronoun conversation is just way of action. So, anytime I step into a room, anytime I introduce myself, I am using my pronouns. So, I am continuing to introduce myself and adding my pronouns to see if other individuals would also like to use their pronouns. I never obligate anyone to use their pronouns, but I always make sure that I let individuals know if you have a question or if you're... You know, we have a lot of androgyny in our community as well. And it's okay to have those open conversations of, “Hey, can I pull you to the side and say what pronouns? I don't want to be misgendering. I want to be understanding. Can I ask you your pronouns?”

For instance, we have students that are extremely androgynous. However, they are still using their biological pronouns. And that has to do with many things. That has to do with comfortability at home. That has to do with comfortability of committed to that pronoun and, and a lot of self-work.

So, we treat the pronoun conversation as you would, are you vegan? Are you vegetarian? Or, you know, do you eat meat? Yeah. That is what it should be. So, I think that in the way that we are so scared to have those conversations, it shouldn't be. And I think the LGBTQ+ community is extremely welcoming to having individuals that don't identify with the LGBTQ+ community to ask those questions and be a little bit more knowledgeable.

Obviously, there's a way and respect that you do that, and there's a level of, kind of, subtlety, but I guarantee you no one would be offended if you have a candid conversation with them and say, “Hey, I just want to be respectful. I want to ask you your pronouns. I don't want to

misgender you.” That’s totally fine. And I always make sure that individuals, I encourage them to do that.

[00:10:42] **Frank:** Yeah, that’s, that’s really good advice. I think one of the things we all miss today, especially with social media and phones and technology, is just the ability to have an open conversation, eye-to-eye and, kind of, break down those barriers to say, “Hey, I’m a person too, and I’m trying to make sure I’m as supportive as I can with who you are.” I think that’s great advice.

So, when you talked about what support looks like on campus right now with the game and such, what does not supporting look like? Where are the spaces that, when you’d see some of these students, or just in, in general, the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, what are some of the areas where you feel like they’re not getting support and that there’s a lot of room for growth?

[00:11:23] **Jose:** Yeah, I think, and I absolutely respect my colleagues in many, many ways, I think the classroom is a big one, because I’m hearing it from students. I’m hearing that a lot of individuals, you know, faculty are not being supportive of the gender expression of preferred names. And so, those aspects, I think, are where we lack.

However, Provost Wutoh has been extremely diligent with working with myself and my team to do some trainings for faculty. Faculty Senate has been extremely open to working, you know, with my team to do some further trainings. Deans and directors, I’ve presented at, and they’ve been extremely diligent with having me speak to their faculty and talk with them about how some things are appropriate and some things are not.

One thing that I have done when I first got here was look keenly into Title IX and how we were holding individuals accountable when it comes to implicit bias. And so, we need to be a little bit more diligent with looking at what we have to be accountable for. One of the things that I’ve been doing with the Title IX coordinator is re-looking at language, not only within the Title IX policy, however, we have been looking into the schools and colleges and all of their documents, and how we can move away from being a man-and-woman society to be a more inclusive society of gender non-binary students and faculty and staff, because we do have them in our community, and creating a sense of just open dialogue.

So, I think that those are one of the places. Another place that we need to be a little bit more cognizant of is our enrollment and how we are looking at the questions that we ask in admissions enrollment, their admissions application, because we need that data. And we’ve been working really closely with enrollment management, Oliver Street, which has been amazing, and Joanne Pluff, to do a little bit more work on what questions we are asking as they come in to collect that data, so that we can better prepare and we can better see what demographic students are coming from.

I think we also look at geographical locations of student population and how some demographics and some geographical locations are extremely more open to LGBTQ+-identified students, staff, and faculty, where some may need a little bit more, you know, this is more acceptable in the north and, and not the south. And, you know, those aspects of having the conversation and layered conversations. But we're doing the best we can right now.

[00:14:09] **Frank:** Yeah. I think you're doing more than just the best you can. I think you're advancing a lot of these topics on a day-to-day basis.

All of our goals with all of our students is to get them matriculated through the school in the best way we can for them to have the best experience they can, but all to end with getting themselves a career and a job and a way to sustain themselves and to follow their passions. One of the things that I find interesting is that 78% say that discrimination has affected their ability to be hired, to some degree. While, you know, 55% of white LGBT correspondents reported the same thing. 56% say that discrimination has affected their ability to retain employment, to some degree. 46% of white LGBT respondents reported the same. And 40% made specific decisions about where to work in order to avoid discrimination. And 33% of white correspondents said the same thing.

So, does that surprise you? Is that some of the feedback that you're getting to? What should these workplaces, you know, that we're sending our students into, what should they be doing to address these issues?

[00:15:13] **Jose:** So, it's really interesting that we have all of these data points, because one thing that I saw as soon as I got here was the immense support for us exposing our students to more inclusive corporations and different jobs around. So, when we have our career fair, they're being, you know, kind of, filtered through the inclusion aspect. They're looking at how company culture is. And our students are not afraid to ask that. And our students are not afraid to call some company out for not having a sense of belonging or not having a more inclusive environment, because we have been able to cultivate that here at Howard.

And so, when, when I speak to my students about their career plans, when I speak to them about what they're looking for in a job, they always mention, "I want to see myself in that culture." They don't say money. They don't say geographical location. They see, "Can I be happy there with all of my identities?"

And I think that's a true testament to how we prepare our students and create this space for students to think critically and to think, like, long-term when it comes to what happiness looks like, even with internships. We have a very robust internship program. And our students are creating these spaces of, "Okay, I'm going to intern at this company first. And if I like and adore the way that they treat me, or can I see myself there, is there more people of color, are there

more LGBTQ+ people at the leadership aspect?" They're not just looking at their, you know, colleagues and peers.

[00:16:51] **Frank:** Right.

[00:16:51] **Jose:** They're thinking so critically that they're actually looking at the cabinet levels, the CEOs, the sweet level people. And they're saying, "Okay, am I represented here?" And it always amazes me, and that's why I say we have the brightest students, because those are the critical questions that they're asking, where I was 10, 15 years ago, I was, where's the money? You know, like, where, where can I have the happiness with supporting my lifestyle rather than happiness in feeling like I belong there?

And so, that's what we have here. And I think that those stats are accurate. Those stats are extremely accurate. But I think our students are way further ahead than many, many students.

[00:17:33] **Frank:** You speak to something I've always believed, which is, when we think about the company cultures and, and the teams that we try to put together, raises are definitely a part of it and should be a part of it, but also dollars only make you happy for a certain amount of time. The culture is what keeps you and retains you. Without a good culture, you can throw money at people all the time. And honestly, in this generation, they're, they're turning down and saying, "Well, the money doesn't matter. I want the culture more than I want any of those things." So, I've seen that happen.

That also leads to, then, talking about, you know, mental health and how the LGBTQ+ community is really being affected in those spaces, too. 83% of discrimination in the LGBTQ community has negatively affected their physical wellbeing, to some degree. 95% reported that the discrimination has negatively affected their psychological wellbeing. And 86% of reported discrimination has negatively affected their spiritual wellbeing. Talk a little bit about how you're addressing those portions, too, because there is the combination of the direct discrimination and indirect discrimination, where I think some students can feel left very lonely and very isolated. What's the center doing to, kind of, address those mental health needs?

[00:18:40] **Jose:** Yeah. So, one thing that is a good process that we do is we are in the division of student affairs, which also houses the counseling center and student services. And we work really closely with the chapel as well. What we do to cultivate that is reach out and be a good collaborator and continue to make sure that our students are seeking these services and they feel welcome.

A lot of it is just creating a space where students, LGBTQ+ students specifically, are feeling that someone is there and they see them, and not just, "Oh, it's a student service and I'm going there just to check a box of how we're supporting our students." That's not what that is.

So, our counseling center, our student services, our health center, they're doing an amazing job with creating a more inclusive environment so that our LGBTQ+ students here on campus feel that they can actually go to these spaces, receive all of these services, and know that they are going to continue to receive the help and care that they need.

Even with, you mentioned spiritual. I mean, we have continued to struggle with the religious aspect of LGBTQ+ community and religious. And so, I think that these generations, I would say Generation X, Z, millennials, have coined the balance of having to have this relationship with whatever their spiritual being is or their religious being is. And then, it doesn't have to be synonymous with, oh, if you're gay or if you are lesbian, then you are condemned, right? Like, this narrative that has perpetuated our existence for far too long.

And so, interpretation, conversations, more openly accepting churches around our chapel, right. But I would just want to highlight the amazing work that Dean Richardson has been doing and with the chapel and, kind of, having an inclusive environment in that space.

Now, do we have a lot more to do? Absolutely. I've absolutely witnessed and talked to students that have gone to services and still felt personally just afraid to be themselves in that space and not to what the chapel is doing, but just to what we in society have done in the religious aspect of being LGBTQ+.

And so, that really does hinder a lot of the progression, because there, there are a few generations that still believe and really do condemn LGBTQ+ people. We have them here. And I think that there's a generational divide, but there's also zero tolerance here. And I want to just highlight the work that Dr. Frederick has done here with that zero tolerance in how the supportive measures of the LGBTQ+ community have always been to create a space for the LGBTQ+ community here at Howard University, with really being a person to support the Lavender Reception. And also, his wife and him have continued to support that also financially. And even this last Lavender Reception, we had the most amazing turnout. About 450 individuals came out. And it was a good...

[00:21:55] **Frank:** I had a good time. It was, it was a good time.

[00:21:57] **Jose:** It was great. And we, you know, we were able to just, kind of, see the, the change and the shift in just the continued support from the president's office and from the university cabinet as well, so...

[00:22:09] **Frank:** Yeah. You know, Dr. Frederick has a saying that I always feel very connected to, which is our responsibility, you know, as bison are to amplify each other's humanity, which I connect to so much because I think that's the core part to everything. We, we all have a difference in, in who we end up becoming and what decisions we make. But if we start with just



humanity, the fact that we're all humans and that we all are trying to do our best and we're having a human experience -

[00:22:32] **Jose:** Absolutely.

[00:22:32] **Frank:** ... I think that's where level-setting, you can really get to some points of commonalities and be a part of the entire community in those spaces.

So, fewer than 10 HPCUs out of the 100 have support support centers for LGBTQ+ communities on campus. I know we've implemented ours. What's your message to the others outside of the fact that, you know, of course financially there's always an issue with trying to support it, but what is your message to every school right now, not just HBCUs, but every school on the importance of having a center like this?

[00:23:03] **Jose:** Yeah. My message would be, if you are geared toward a target of student population that you want to, kind of, kind of, exile from enrollment, then do everything you can and continue to do what you want to do, right? However, I think that is going to be to your demise as we continue to see individuals in the LGBTQ+ community attend spaces and HBCUs that have that support.

We have had many open days where families and students, prospective students, have come on campus, and they've been amazed at how many college tours they have been on and haven't had this type of support. So, I know for sure that those individuals will most likely come to a Howard, go to a NCCU, go to a Virginia State, because those individual HBCUs, they have LGBTQ+ resource centers.

And I'm not saying that's the only factor. I'm just saying that that is an added bonus to the experience of that student, from feeling a place, or a space of safety, to a family that, you know, they don't know a lot or they don't have the tools necessary. And we do. We share resources, not only with students, but we also share the opportunity for resources with families as well in many, many ways.

And so, I think the only thing that I would say to those institutions is really start to look at and broaden your perspective when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion. And if you're saying that you're performing diversity, equity, and inclusion by not supporting the LGBTQ+ community, then you're falling short. Because it all is encompassing of the diversity, equity, and inclusion aspect and your vision and mission that HBCUs were founded on being more inclusive and founded on being extremely, extremely open to the most marginalized communities in our country.

And so, the LGBTQ+ community falls within that. And a lot of those individuals also share the identities that you service. So, we talk about intersectionality and we talk about how that

operates within the space of higher education. If you're not doing the work, then you're falling short.

[00:25:17] **Frank:** You make such good points. So, I have one last question. Whether it's the 17-year-old deciding to go to college or the professor that wants to come work here or a staff member that wants to come work here, what are the resources that the center offer? And why should they come?

One of the things that I'm always conscious of is that we have resource centers, but we can't make people come to resources, you know.

[00:25:38] **Jose:** Right.

[00:25:39] **Frank:** What is it that you guys provide that will allow the support to happen for individuals in that space?

[00:25:45] **Jose:** So, what we have been able to cultivate for Howard University and prospective students, prospective staff, prospective faculty, is again, we see you. We know you are here. We know you are a part of our community. We know that we are going to celebrate you and not just tolerate you when you're here.

And so, what we want to continue to cultivate is the sense of belonging from every level, to really truly see themselves within our community and to grow within our community and not just be here and occupy the seat. We want you to elevate the programs that you run. We want you to elevate and think about how you are experiencing a more inclusive space for the experience of the students.

And then, when we matriculate those students through, and even when staff and faculty move on to other endeavors, we still want them to look back on their experience here at Howard and say, "I was seen. I was wanted. I was... I felt like I was a part of the community with all of my identities and not just, you know, I was just getting paid or I was just getting the degree."

And that is the shift, and that is the way that we continue to really be the illustrious university that we are. I talk a lot about the Mecca and what that means to me. And so, creating that narrative surrounding LGBTQ+ community and creating a space where, you know, the Mecca truly is that top of the notch, on the hill, sitting high, and mighty in that illustrious university, it's not just because we have, you know, the first woman black president in the White House. It's because of the work that we're also doing right now with the individuals that are here and supporting them, no matter what ideology, no matter what gender expression, no matter what identities they have that have sometimes really truly been ostracized. But we are who we are because of what we do right now.

[00:27:53] **Frank:** Yeah, wonderful. And, and I can tell the... our listeners that Mr. Cadiz is a man of much more than words. This is a man of pure action. He's one of my favorite people to talk to. He knows that.

[00:28:03] **Jose:** Thank you.

[00:28:04] **Frank:** But I want to thank you so much for coming on the podcast today. For anyone listening, this is someone you will find all across campus all the time. And again, one of the pleasures of, you know, working here is always being able to talk and connect with you.

So, this HU2U, the podcast where we dig into today's important topics from Howard University and bring them right to you. I'm Frank Tramble, today's host. Thank you for listening, HU.

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