
Is Your GSA Welcoming?



When we ask students to describe their GSA, we often hear them say things like “GSA is a place where anyone is welcome!” and “GSA is a judgment-free zone!” GSAs do provide an important space for students to talk about their identities and other things going on in their lives, but every GSA can benefit from occasionally taking a moment to ask, “Is our GSA welcoming?”

In the retail clothing industry, many companies will hire “secret shoppers” who are given the task of going into a store to rate their experience. They are asked to observe how the sales associates interact with them and other shoppers, and they have a checklist of other things to look for as they pretend to shop. This might seem like a strange comparison to GSA, but what if a secret shopper came to your GSA? What kind of “customer service” would they receive?

- Does your GSA greet new members every time? Even if you have a lot to get done, it’s important to welcome new members and ask why they came. But don’t put people on the spot – if new members are asked to introduce themselves, everyone else should do the same. Think about a time when you went into a store and felt pressured by a salesperson. Find a balance between welcoming a new person and giving them some space to “browse.”
- Does your GSA use a lot of “industry lingo”? We use a lot of acronyms in the LGBTQ+ community and terms that people who are new to GSA might not know. Do you take the time to explain terminology and be patient with those who haven’t heard the latest terms?
- Does your GSA feel like an exclusive, members only club? It’s common for students in a GSA to become a close-knit group of friends, but ask yourself honestly: Is our GSA a clique?
- Is your GSA one size fits all? People have different learning styles and different ways they like to interact with a space. If every meeting looks like people sitting in a circle and talking, that style might not fit some people. Think about accessibility for people with different abilities.
- Do you make assumptions about what the “GSA customer” looks like? While it’s a noble goal for a GSA to be a “judgment-free space”, the reality is that we all have biases, and those biases may cause us to think certain students wouldn’t be interested in GSA. Check your assumptions.
- Is your GSA affordable? If members are asked on a regular basis to help pay for things or if GSA takes trips that cost money, some students will feel like they can’t participate.

What other things might a GSA secret shopper look for? Chat with your GSA and let us know!