

OUT AND APPLYING?

The question of whether or not to be out on one's application does not have a simple answer. While it would be amazing to think that every person involved in the admissions decision-making process is sensitive to LGBT issues, this is probably not the case. A student may want to research a particular school's climate on LGBT issues before deciding to be out on their application, and may even decide to not apply at all based on what they find.

If a student's LGBT identity is significant to their personal development, extracurricular activities and/or academic integrity, and the school appears to be LGBT-friendly, mentioning this may be advantageous. If they decide to be out, here are some suggestions on ways to do it appropriately.

THE INTERVIEW:

The purpose of the interview is to learn more about the applicant as a person. If the student is interviewed by an alumnus/a in addition to (or instead of) an Admissions Officer, they should gauge this accordingly since some alumni/ae may not be as understanding of LGBT issues as other alumni/ae or an Admissions Officer. If applicable, the applicant can tell the interviewer about the process of forming or leading the school's gay-straight alliance (GSA).

THE ESSAY:

Discussing a challenge one has overcome, or one's greatest achievement, is a very common application essay question. The student might consider writing about the experience of "coming out" to family and friends and the personal insight gained as a result.

ACTIVITIES:

If the student has been a member of the school's gay-straight alliance (GSA) or a local LGBT group, include it in the list of activities. Explain why one's involvement in an LGBT community is important.

"It's extremely important that colleges/universities take measures to ensure an inclusive and safe environment for LGBT students so that students can achieve their full potential."

– KELLY COSTELLO
AGE 19, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY – WASHINGTON DC

LGBT RESOURCES

EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

GLSEN – www.glsen.org
Student Pride USA – www.studentprideusa.org

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation – www.glaad.org
Gender Education and Advocacy – www.gender.org
Gender Pac – www.gpac.org
Human Rights Campaign – www.hrc.org
National Association of LGBT Community Centers – www.gaycenter.org/natctr/
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force – www.nglftf.org

POST-SECONDARY ORGANIZATIONS

Delta Lambda Phi – www.dlp.org
LGBT Campus Resource Centers – www.lgbtcampus.org
United States Student Association (USSA) – www.usstudents.org

LEGAL RESOURCES

American Civil Liberties Union – www.aclu.org
Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund – www.lambdalegal.org

ONLINE RESOURCES

Gay.com – www.gay.com
LGBT Search Engine – www.rainbowquery.com
Planet Out – www.planetout.com
Queer America – www.queeramerica.com

PHONE SUPPORT AND CRISIS LINES

Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline: 888-843-4564
National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800-448-4663
Peer Listening Line: 800-399-7337
Trevor Help Line: 800-850-8078

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FINDING AN LGBT FRIENDLY CAMPUS

A GUIDE FOR
COUNSELORS ADVISING
LGBT STUDENTS
PURSUING HIGHER
EDUCATION

SPONSORED BY:



GAY, LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

Guiding students through the college application process is often a difficult task. In addition to helping students formulate a list of possible college choices, you must then help them develop a strong application: academically, extracurricularly and personally. While discussing and highlighting a student's academic and extracurricular achievements is fairly straightforward, discussing a student's personal traits might be a bit trickier. This is especially true of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, considering possible biases based on their sexuality or gender identity or expression.

This brochure is designed to help you meet the needs of your LGBT-identified students applying to post-secondary education. In addition to providing you with a list of criteria that students should consider when looking for LGBT-safe and accepting schools, we also illustrate why these students need particular attention. As members of an often-invisible minority, LGBT students have specific needs to which people involved in every aspect of education need to pay attention. Whether this topic is new to you or not, we hope to make the advising of LGBT students going on to post-secondary education easier.

"I don't know how accurately I can portray myself in an application without at least touching upon how being a sexual minority has affected my life. Identifying as a female-to-male transsexual is beyond the scope of understanding for most people. I'm eager to find others like me in college, and to be in a place where my differences are accepted, even celebrated."

— STRAUSS

AGE 17, SHADY SIDE ACADEMY FOX CHAPEL, PA

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN SEEKING AN LGBT-SAFE SCHOOL

1. NUMBER OF "OUT" LGBT STUDENTS

The number of "out" LGBT students can have a marked effect on how comfortable students themselves feel being out. Many LGBT high school students go through high school being the only, or one of the few "out" students. For this reason, attending a post-secondary school with many "out" students can introduce a student, perhaps for the first time, to what being part of an LGBT community is about.

2. NUMBER OF "OUT" LGBT FACULTY MEMBERS/ADMINISTRATORS

Just like having "out" students, having "out" faculty members and administrators can help one feel more comfortable being "out." In addition, having LGBT people in influential positions is perhaps indicative of how the school, in general, feels about LGBT students and issues. There are most likely LGBT faculty members, administrators and students on every campus around the country. The number who choose to be "out" may be telling of how comfortable the atmosphere is for LGBT people.

3. INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

There is a broad range of programs, positions and groups that schools can deem "institutional resources." The most common and effective is a paid staff member whose job includes outreach to the school's LGBT population. Having such a person in place allows for easier and often friendlier access to a school's administration, a vital concern for students historically underrepresented, and occasionally overlooked or mistreated.

4. STUDENT RESOURCES

The heart and soul of every campus is the "student life." If one is looking to feel part of a specific community, this is most often and most easily facilitated through involvement in student groups. For example, as members of an LGBT student group, students could find themselves getting involved with campus activism, community activism in the town/city where the school is located, community outreach to high school gay-straight alliances or HIV/AIDS service organizations, writing for the campus LGBT-focused publication, or writing for the campus newspaper as the beat writer for LGBT-related stories. LGBT student groups often plan many social events where one can interact with others in more informal ways. In addition to the existence of an LGBT-related student group, one should investigate the presence of other identity or issue-based groups towards gathering an idea of the school's overall diversity.

5. EXISTENCE OF LGBT STUDIES OR COURSES

LGBT/Queer Studies have only emerged as an accepted academic discipline over the past twenty years. Its interdisciplinary approach allows for the study of sexuality and gender and the varied representation of sexuality and gender in history, film, law, music, politics, women's studies, social movements, television, art, theatre, and literature. Whether a school offers LGBT/Queer Studies as a major or a school offers some courses within the field, one should be assured that such a school is committed on some level to the academic worth of LGBT contributions to society.

WHY ALL THE CONCERN WITH LGBT STUDENTS?

The past decade has seen a marked increase in visibility of LGBT people and issues in popular media and public life. As a result, more and more LGBT youth are becoming aware of their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression at earlier ages than ever before. But as LGBT concerns have moved from the margins to the mainstream, many educational institutions have been slow to incorporate programming and services that meet the needs of this growing population.

The American School Health Association recommends that "every school district should provide access to professional counseling by specially trained personnel for students who may be concerned about sexual orientation." (Source: American School Health Association, "Gay and Lesbian Youth in School," www.ashaweb.org/resolutions1.html.) Yet, in a 1991 study of school counselors, two-thirds had negative attitudes about lesbian and gay youth (Source: Sears, J. "Educators, homosexuality and homosexual students: Are personal feelings related to professional beliefs?" *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22, 1991).

Additionally, GLSEN's 1999 National School Climate Survey found that over a third of students reported having heard homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff and over a third reported that teachers and school staff did not intervene when homophobic remarks were made. (Source: GLSEN, www.glsen.org)

The absence of attention to LGBT issues may increase the health and safety risks for LGBT youth.

- 69% of LGBT youth reported experiencing some form of harassment or violence in school because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Source: GLSEN (www.glsen.org), 1999.

- 41.7% of LGBT youth reported not feeling safe in their schools because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Source: GLSEN (www.glsen.org), 1999.

- Gay, lesbian, bisexual youth were more likely to report having attempted suicide than their peers. Source: The Center for Disease Control and Prevention and The Massachusetts Department of Education, The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1999.

- LGBT youth of color reported chronic stress from anti-gay harassment -- 50% reported stress from being ridiculed for being gay or bisexual. Source: Rosario M., Rotheram-Borus M.J., & Reid H., "Gay-related stress and its correlates among gay and bisexual male adolescents of predominantly Black and Hispanic background." *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24, 1996.

School counselors have the unique opportunity to provide invaluable assistance to all youth by educating themselves about LGBT issues. LGBT students frequently indicate that isolation is their greatest problem, and that an understanding teacher or counselor has played a vital role in helping them to enjoy a healthy self-image and a positive school experience. LGBT inclusive services must therefore be a part of any comprehensive counseling program.

TO OBTAIN THE ABOVE INFORMATION, YOU SHOULD CONTACT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING: STUDENT ACTIVITIES OFFICE, STUDENT COUNSELING OFFICES, LGBT STUDENT GROUP (THE PREVIOUS TWO OFFICES CAN TELL YOU IF ONE EXISTS), ALUMNI/AE ASSOCIATION.