

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students

United States Student Association



Barriers to Higher Education

LGBT students face multiple barriers to getting an education. These barriers come in the form of financial instability, unsafe living conditions, homophobic classmates and professors, institutional heterosexism, and an overall lack of university support. The lack of resources for LGBT student organizations and retention centers, turning a blind eye to repeated incidents of harassment and violence against LGBT students, and insufficient training for residence hall staff and key administrators limit LGBT students' access to higher education and threaten their ability to earn a degree.

Harassment on Campus

LGBT students on college campuses face harassment ranging from verbal abuse and homophobic graffiti to physical violence. Unfortunately, these incidents of hate are not often reported to the university or law enforcement. LGBT people do not always report anti-gay and anti-trans abuse for fear of being "outed" or of being further harassed by police. Most college campuses do not provide LGBT sensitivity trainings to their campus police. When police do not have the training on how to properly identify and deal with anti-gay hate crimes, they are less likely to pursue an investigation. Because these crimes either aren't reported or are ignored, statistics on anti-gay crimes may not be collected and every new case is seen as an "isolated incident".

Tracking queer students is difficult because universities rarely ask for information regarding a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Even if universities attempt to gather this information, many students would be reluctant to answer honestly for fear of harassment and discrimination.

Many queer people do not use the terminology gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender to identify their sexual orientation and gender identity. This presents further difficulty when attempting to gather information on queer students.

Of the over 3,000 institutions of higher learning in the United States, only about 347 include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. Human Rights Campaign, www.hrc.org

Homophobia in the Residence Halls

Many schools require new students to live on campus and most colleges and universities randomly match roommates for first year students. LGBT students placed with homophobic or transphobic roommates face uncomfortable and unsafe living conditions. Residence hall staff that have not been trained in how to deal with homophobia or transphobia in residence halls cannot properly handle these situations, leaving LGBT students with no way out.

Homophobia in the Classroom

The homophobia that LGBT students face in the classroom can come from classmates, professors, and the curriculum. Professors can turn the classroom into a hostile place by making derogatory jokes, silencing LGBT students, or by assuming that a single LGBT student can speak for the entire community. The curriculum used in some classes is heterosexist and biased. For example, a class on civil rights movements that does not address the importance of LGBT civil rights ignores the contribution and historical importance of this community. A psychology class that discusses transgender people as have a gender identity disorder that requires a cure, often including psychological treatment for young children, reinforces transphobic attitudes and behavior.

For More Information: Contact the United States Student Association @ 1413 K Street NW, 9th Floor, Washington DC 20005
Phone: 202.347.USSA Fax: 202.393.5886 e-mail: lgbt@usstudents.org web site: <http://www.usstudents.org>

