



Supporting Transgender and Nonbinary Students: College Admissions & Financial Aid

Resource Guide for College Access Professionals



Introduction

This resource guide is designed to assist college access professionals who work with high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, or queer (LGBTQ+). The information provided emphasizes supporting transgender youth who plan to continue their education at a postsecondary institution. This guide is not intended as legal advice and has been compiled from various sources (see page ten). Students should contact their prospective postsecondary institutions or Federal Student Aid for specific guidance.

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RESOURCE: Glossary

Find some common terminology in the *Glossary* section on page nine of this guide. To learn more, see **Teaching Tolerance**: <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>

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Applying to College as an LGBTQ+ Student

The college application process is complicated for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. For LGBTQ+ applicants, however, their sexual orientation or gender can bring added challenges during the admissions process. For transgender and/or non-binary students who are early in their process of transitioning, there may be many different reasons for wanting to use (or not use) their legal name. Students should know that procedures and policies vary from institution to institution. It's important to understand the college requirements to which you are applying.

The college process also represents an excellent opportunity for students to find a campus that is friendly and welcoming of their LGBTQ+ identity. This guide is designed to help college access staff assist students who wish to be out during their application process and help students assess the level of LGBTQ+ friendliness on campus.

Assessing the LGBTQ+ Friendliness of a Campus

Figuring out how warmly a campus welcomes LGBTQ+ students involves weighing several factors, including existing policies and less concrete cultural forces.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Policies

An LGBTQ+ friendly campus will have policies to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are comfortable and protected during their college years.

- Look to see if a campus nondiscrimination policy includes sexual orientation and gender identity.
- For transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students, it is often crucial that the school offers an easy process for changing gender markers on official school records. Some schools also provide transition-related care in their campus insurance plans.
- Other LGBTQ+ friendly policies include providing gender-neutral housing (in which students of different genders may live together in the same room) and gender-neutral bathrooms.
- The way that a campus treats its LGBTQ+ employees is an essential indicator of how welcoming a campus will be to LGBTQ+ students — it reflects how the institution feels about the rights and protections afforded to LGBTQ+ individuals. Do they offer domestic partner benefits? Is there an employee resource group?

RESOURCE: Campus Pride Index

The FREE online tool allows prospective students, families/parents and those interested in higher education to search a database of LGBTQ+ friendly campuses who have come out to improve the academic experience and quality of campus life.

See Campus Pride Index:
<http://www.campusprideindex.org>

LGBTQ+ Resources on Campus

One way that colleges and universities can provide support is through LGBTQ+ student groups and resource centers. Help students assess LGBTQ+ resources at an institution by having students research these questions:

- Does the school have an employee to provide resources and services to LGBTQ+ students?
- Is there an LGBTQ+ center on the campus?

- Is there one or more LGBTQ+ student groups or organizations that acknowledge the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community? For example, some schools have groups dedicated to transgender students or LGBTQ+ students of color, while others have one group broadly dedicated to the LGBTQ+ population.
- Does the school offer health and counseling services designed for LGBTQ+ students?
- What kind of events does the campus LGBTQ+ group or center sponsor? Groups may be aimed toward activism and advocacy, while some organizations are more interested in providing social opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community.
- How many events did the campus LGBTQ+ group or center hold last year? How many people attended? With student-run groups especially, it is usually good to check whether they are active.

RESOURCE: Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse

Are you a prospective student wondering what campuses have gender-inclusive housing? An administrator researching trans-inclusive health insurance models to implement on your campus? A parent looking for trans-friendly colleges and universities for your child? The Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse is a resource for transgender policies at colleges and universities. The clearinghouse is updated regularly by Dr. Genny Beemyn, a noted scholar on trans issues in higher education and the Director of the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Stonewall Center.

You can search trans policies at colleges and universities across the United States (last modified 2023):

- [Colleges and Universities with Nondiscrimination Policies that Include Gender Identity/Expression](#)
- [Colleges and Universities that Cover Transition-Related Medical Expenses Under Student Health Insurance](#)
- [Colleges and Universities that Cover Transition-Related Medical Expenses Under Employee Health Insurance](#)
- [Colleges and Universities that Provide Gender-Inclusive Housing](#)
- [Colleges and Universities that Allow Students to Change the Name and Gender on Campus Records and to Have Their Pronouns on Course Rosters](#)
- [Colleges and Universities with a Trans-Inclusive Intramural Athletic Policy](#)
- [Colleges and Universities with LGBTQ Identity Questions as an Option on Admission Applications & Enrollment Forms](#)
- [Women's Colleges with Trans-Inclusive Admissions Policies](#)

Source-Campus Pride <https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/>

Understanding the Campus Climate

While policies and services that protect and nurture the LGBTQ+ community are crucial considerations for LGBTQ+ applicants, it is also vital that students and their families try to understand the cultural climate on campus regarding LGBTQ+ students. Encourage students to:

- Look up bias crime statistics for the campus to see if there have been any recent incidents that targeted LGBTQ+ students or employees (or any other marginalized group, for that matter).
- Read the campus newspaper, often online, to see what potential future peers say about LGBTQ+ issues.
- Visit campuses (some schools offer travel scholarships) and talk to students who don't work for the admissions office about the campus climate. Reach out to students through the campus LGBTQ+ center or a dean of multicultural affairs.

Students deserve to be on a campus where they feel safe and free to be who they are in every context—whether in the classroom, in their social life, or while competing for their school. Their school's culture and policies will impact their experiences, and students should remember this throughout the application process.

Being Out During the Application Process

There is no hard-and-fast rule regarding being out during the application process. Ultimately, the choice to disclose an LGBTQ+ identity to schools depends on the individual. Many schools appreciate having the fullest possible sense of all of their applicants — including the fact that they are LGBTQ+. Ultimately, it is up to the individual to decide what they are most comfortable with disclosing, and the decision should be carefully considered in consultation with counselors and family members as appropriate. Researching all prospective institutions as part of this decision-making process is essential.

RESOURCE: Scholarship Databases

- Human Rights Campaign's LGBT Student Scholarship Database:
www.hrc.org/resources/scholarship-database
- Campus Pride National Scholarship Database:
www.campuspride.org/national-scholarship-database/

In 2013, Washington State's community colleges added voluntary questions about sexual orientation and gender identity to all student registration forms. Students may share information about their sexual orientation and gender identity at the time of registration. The data collected helps two-year schools promote a welcoming campus, enhance programs and services, better track students' progress and success, and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for LGBTQ+ students enrolled in the Community and Technical College (CTC) system.

You Can, But Don't Need To, Come Out In Your Essay

While some LGBTQ+ students write their application essay on a topic related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, there are other ways to come out to admissions staff in an application. For example, the application may have a "Personal Statement" section where students can write about their LGBTQ+ identity or use the "Additional Information" section to note their orientation or identity. Some schools will also allow students to disclose LGBTQ+ identity in their supplement. Again, this is a choice made best by the individual. Students are not required to disclose if they are not comfortable doing so.

It Is Possible To Be Out To Admissions Staff Members But Not Your Family

Not everyone comes out before leaving high school for a variety of reasons. LGBTQ+ students who are not currently out to their families may want to consider whether or not they want to come out in their written application materials. If students choose not to disclose information to admissions through the written application, they may opt to call admissions officers at a school or come out during an interview with a staff member.

Conclusion

As you help students through the college admissions process, remind them to look for a school where they will feel comfortable academically and socially. Students should also consider how the college they select will accept their LGBTQ+ identity and the support services that will be available to them.

Content adapted from the Human Rights Campaign: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/applying-to-college-as-an-LGBTQ-student>

Completing the FAFSA

The FAFSA is an official government form. According to Federal Student Aid, applicants must enter their information as it appears on official government documents (e.g., birth certificate and social security card). If the student has not changed their legal name and gender marker on Identity Documents (e.g., birth certificate, license, passport, Social Security Card), they must use the original information. If students do not use their legal name and official gender designation, their application will not be processed successfully, and their financial aid may be in jeopardy.

Unsure of what to do? Contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center by email, chat, or phone. See <https://studentaidhelp.ed.gov/app/home/site/studentaid>.

Students can find out how to get a legal name change where they live and update their name/gender on state and federal IDs and records at the National Center for Transgender Equality ID Document Center for Washington State: www.transequality.org/documents/state/washington.

In addition, in Washington State, people who identify as nonbinary may change the sex designation change on a birth certificate. Under this rule, people born in Washington State who want to change the sex designation on their birth certificate to reflect their gender identity may do so by completing the appropriate request form. The new rule added “X” as a third-sex designation option. “X” means a gender that is not exclusively male or female, including, but not limited to, intersex, agender, androgynous, bigender, demigender, female-to-male, genderfluid, genderqueer, male-to-female, neutrois, nonbinary, pangender, third sex, transgender, transsexual, Two Spirit, and unspecified.

You are required to complete the appropriate Sex Designation Change request form. A court order or a letter from your physician will not be accepted.

Learn more:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/BirthDeathMarriageandDivorce/SexDesignationChangeonaBirthCertificate>

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What laws protect LGBTQ+ students?

A: State and federal civil rights laws prohibit discrimination in public schools.

Protected Class (Discrimination Prohibited)	Federal Law	Washington State Law
Sex	<p>Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (34 C.F.R. Part 106)</p> <p>Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. §2000c, et seq.)</p> <p>Employment Discrimination: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (34 C.F.R. Part 106)</p>	<p>Chapter 28A.640 RCW - Sexual equality</p> <p>Chapter 28A.642 RCW - Common school provisions – Discrimination prohibition</p> <p>Chapter 392-190 WAC – Equal educational opportunity – Unlawful discrimination prohibited</p> <p>Chapter 49.60 RCW</p> <p>Washington Law Against Discrimination*</p> <p>OSPI Guidelines: Prohibiting Discrimination in Washington Public Schools</p>
Sexual Orientation	<p>Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (34 C.F.R. Part 106)</p> <p>Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex and sex stereotyping, such as discrimination based on a person’s failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.</p>	<p>Chapter 28A.642 RCW - Common school provisions – Discrimination prohibition</p> <p>Chapter 392-190 WAC – Equal educational opportunity – Unlawful discrimination prohibited</p> <p>Chapter 49.60 RCW</p> <p>Washington Law Against Discrimination*</p> <p>OSPI Guidelines: Prohibiting Discrimination in Washington Public Schools</p>
Gender Identity and Expression	<p>Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (34 C.F.R. Part 106)</p> <p>Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex and sex stereotyping, such as discrimination based on a person’s failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.</p>	<p>Chapter 28A.642 RCW - Common school provisions – Discrimination prohibition</p> <p>Chapter 392-190 WAC – Equal educational opportunity – Unlawful discrimination prohibited</p> <p>Chapter 49.60 RCW</p> <p>Washington Law Against Discrimination*</p> <p>OSPI Guidelines: Prohibiting Discrimination in Washington Public Schools</p>

Sources- OSPI Equity and Civil Rights: <http://www.k12.wa.us/equity/CivilRights/default.aspx>

U.S. Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/lgbt.html>

- Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act:** Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. Title IX applies to institutions that receive federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), including state and local educational agencies. These agencies include approximately 16,500 local school districts and 7,000 postsecondary institutions. As of

2021, the U.S. Department of Education Confirmed Title IX Protects Students from Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

- **The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** This federal law protects the privacy of student educational records and gives current and former students the right to amend those records to match their legal documents if they are “inaccurate, misleading, or in violation of the student’s rights of privacy.” **Once a student reaches 18, their parents cannot access these records unless the student grants permission. (For more information, see [“A Transgender Advocate’s Guide To Updating and Amending School Records”](#).)**
- **Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD):** WLAD protects people from discrimination based on sexual orientation,** which is inclusive of gender expression or actual or perceived gender identity in these areas:
 - Places of public accommodation (i.e., places that serve the public), including restaurants, hotels, and public schools;
 - Housing, including the renting, buying, and selling of homes;
 - Employment, specifically in state, municipal, and private workplaces with eight or more employees;
 - The extension of credit; and
 - Insurance transactions.
- **HB 3026 / Chapter 28A.642 RCW:** This state law prohibits discrimination in Washington public schools and includes sexual orientation and gender expression or identity as protected classes. It is similar to the sexual equality law already in the school code, [chapter 28A.640 RCW](#), which prohibits discrimination based on sex.

Q: How should K-12 school districts address a student’s name and sex on official records?

A: School districts maintain permanent student records, including a student’s legal name and gender. To the extent that the school district is not legally required to use a student’s legal name and gender on school records or documents, the district should use the name and gender by which the student identifies. School IDs, for example, are not legal documents and should use the student’s preferred name. The school district should change a student’s official record to reflect a change in the student’s legal name or gender upon receipt of documentation that such change has been made under a court order or through amendment of state- or federally-issued identification. When school staff or administrators are required by law to use or report a student’s legal name or gender, such as for standardized testing, school staff should adopt practices to avoid the inadvertent disclosure of such confidential information.

Q: Should K-12 schools inform staff, students, or parents about a student’s transgender status?

A: Information about a student’s transgender status, legal name, or gender assigned at birth may constitute confidential medical or educational information. Disclosing this information to other students, parents, or third parties may violate privacy laws, such as the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) ([20 U.S.C. § 1232g](#); [34 C.F.R. Part 99](#)). **School staff should not disclose information that may reveal a student’s transgender status to others, including parents and other school staff, unless legally required to do so or unless the student has authorized such disclosure.**

RESOURCE: The Rights of Transgender People in Washington State

This guidebook is designed to help transgender individuals understand their legal rights in Washington State. It is not meant to provide legal advice.

View Guide: <https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/rights-transgender-people-washington-state-updates-progress>

Source: ACLU-WA. 2024

Q: Can a religious institution discriminate against a transgender student?

A: Title IX prohibits educational institutions that receive federal funding from discriminating based on sex, including gender identity. The law allows religious-based schools to claim exemptions. In 2014, the ED granted such exemptions to three colleges: George Fox University in Oregon, Spring Arbor University in Michigan, and Simpson University in California.

Q: Can a single-sex college reject an application based on the fact a student is transgender?

A: Title IX allows certain educational institutions to admit students of only one “sex,” including all-women’s colleges. In December 2014, the ED issued its third official guidance on this issue, this time affirming that “All students, including transgender students and students who do not conform to sex stereotypes, are protected from sex-based discrimination under Title IX. Under Title IX, a recipient generally must treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity in all aspects of the planning, implementation, enrollment, operation, and evaluation of single-sex classes.” This applies to single-sex institutions, as well.

Q: Do transgender students have the right to be placed in campus housing according to their gender identity?

A: Yes, trans students have that right if their college or university is subject to Title IX and hasn’t specifically exempted itself from this requirement. Institutions frequently use the gender marker on the application to inform campus records and practices. Encourage students to find out if their prospective college or university offers gender-inclusive housing as an option; this is particularly important for non-binary or gender-nonconforming (GNC) students.

Q: Do transgender students have the right to use restrooms and locker rooms on campus by their gender identity?

A: Yes, restroom and locker-room rights are much like housing rights: Students are protected if their college or university is subject to Title IX and hasn’t specifically exempted itself. Students might also be protected under state or local nondiscrimination laws. Have students find out if their prospective institution has gender-inclusive (not single-sex) restrooms; these can be particularly important for GNC students. For more information, see the **Trans Policy Clearinghouse** at www.campuspride.org/tpc/.

Q: What should college students do to change the name or gender marker on a student ID, transcript, or diploma?

A: First, encourage students to check to see if their prospective college or university already has a procedure in place for allowing name and gender marker changes on student records. More than a hundred institutions now allow students to indicate their chosen name on school records regardless of whether they have legally changed their name. Others require students to legally change their name and gender marker on other documents, such as a state ID, passport, or birth certificate, before they will amend certain educational records. For more information, see the **Trans Policy Clearinghouse** at www.campuspride.org/tpc/.

If the campus does not have a stated procedure for allowing name and gender marker changes, or if students do not meet the existing policy requirements, the Registrar's Office may be willing to work with those students to change their educational records. In approaching the Registrar, students may want to enlist the support of an ally such as a staff member, faculty, or an LGBTQ+ resource professional. You may also want to bring some helpful materials, including [Lambda Legal's Transgender Rights Toolkit](#), to help your school understand how important updating your educational records is.

Source: Lambda Legal- <http://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/transgender/in-college-faq#5>

Glossary

Cisgender: Of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.

Gender expression: External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender-fluid: A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Gender Identity is one's internal, personal sense of one's own gender. Many people believe in a more fluid gender identity than simply "male" and "female."

Gender Non-conforming: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer: Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static gender categories and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female, or as falling completely outside these categories. They are also known as **non-binary**.

Gender Transition is when a person begins to live in a gender role determined by their internal gender identity. Transition is not a one-step procedure but a complex process that occurs over a long period. The transition may include some or all of the following cultural, legal, and medical adjustments: informing one's family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one's name and sex on legal documents; undergoing hormone therapy; and/or seeking surgical alteration (see Sex Reassignment Surgery).

LGBT: An acronym for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender." Other versions may add "Q" for Queer or Questioning, "I" for Intersex, and "A" for Allied. Some may prefer to list the acronym as TBLG to place trans people in a position of importance and to rectify the way trans has historically been omitted, devalued, or excluded.

Non-Binary: Most people – including most transgender people – are either male or female. But some people don't neatly fit into the categories of "man" or "woman," or "male" or "female." For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman or a gender different from either male or female. Some people don't identify with any gender. Some people's gender changes over time. People whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with non-binary being one of the most common. Other terms include *genderqueer*, *agender*, *bigender*, and *more*. None of these terms mean the same thing – but all speak to an experience of gender that is not simply male or female.

Queer: Queer is a term that has been reclaimed by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities to describe people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender traditionalism. Although still a derogatory term in many cases, many queer-identified people have taken back the word to use it as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity.

Transgender: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This group includes, but is not limited to, transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Sources

[ACLU-WA](#)- The ACLU of Washington is a non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting, fostering, and extending the civil liberties principles embodied in the Bill of Rights and the Washington State Constitution.

[Campus Pride Index](#)- Campus Pride is the leading national educational organization for LGBTQ+ students and allied college students and campus groups, building future leaders and safer, more LGBTQ+-friendly learning environments at colleges and universities.

—Federal Student Aid, part of the U.S. Department of Education, is the nation's largest provider of student financial aid.

[GLSEN \(Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network\)](#)– A national organization for educators and students who want to create schools where differences are respected. They support Safe Space training, a Day of Silence event, Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, and other resources for educators.

[Human Rights Campaign](#)- National lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights organization,

[Lambda Legal Defense Fund](#)—This organization aims to create equality for lesbians and gays. It has developed publications on LGBTQ+ students' rights.

[National Center for Transgender Equality](#)– A national social justice advocacy organization. Offers guidance around transgender rights.

[Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#)- Washington's primary agency overseeing K-12 public education.

[Safe Schools Coalition](#)– A pioneer in assessing the safety of LGBTQ+ youth and provides student panels and mediation for schools in Washington.

[Teaching Tolerance](#)- A place for educators to find thought-provoking news, conversation, and support for those who care about diversity, equal opportunity, and respect for differences in schools.

[U.S. Department of Education \(ED\)](#)- ED's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

[Washington State Legislature](#)- Find information on Washington State bills, laws, rules, and regulations.