



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## LGBTQ+<sup>1</sup> STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While [over 250 LGBTQ centers](#) exist on college campuses across the country, there is limited data about LGBTQ+ students in higher education. Existing research shows that LGBTQ+ students face challenges in their K-12 experience that factor into their college enrollment and experiences. For example, data has shown that nearly [10% of LGBTQ students](#) who experienced frequent verbal harassment didn't plan to attend college after high school. Available data shows us that LGBTQ+ students who do enroll in postsecondary education continue to face unique challenges.

### ENROLLMENT

- In a 2020 survey from the Association of American Universities (AAU) that sampled more than 180,000 undergraduate and graduate students, nearly [17% identified](#) as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, queer, or questioning.
- In the same AAU survey, 1.7% of undergraduate and graduate students identified their gender as transgender, nonbinary, or questioning.

### ATTAINMENT AND EARNINGS

- Self-identified members of the LGBT community age 25 or older earn bachelor's degrees at rates similar to non-LGBT members.
  - [Seventeen percent](#) of self-identified members of the LGBT community age 25 or older have earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 18% of non-LGBT members.
  - Thirteen percent of self-identified members of the LGBT community age 25 or older have earned a graduate degree, compared to 14% of non-LGBT members.
- Gay men were twice as likely to [obtain](#) a bachelor's degree in comparison to lesbian women in 2015.
- The probability of a lesbian or bisexual woman earning a bachelor's degree was 25%, which was below heterosexual women's predicted probability of 34% in 2015.
- According to a 2016-2017 [study](#), lesbian women earned less than heterosexual women, reporting an average annual salary of \$45,606 versus \$51,461.
  - The gap was bigger for gay men who reported earning an average yearly salary of \$56,936, compared with average earnings for heterosexual men of \$83,469.

### SAFETY CONCERNS AND WELLNESS

- [According to NCES](#), sexual orientation was the second most motivating bias for hate crimes at postsecondary institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> While the title of this factsheet is LGBTQ+ reported statistics mirror the terms used in each referenced studies (e.g., LGBTQ+, LGBT, gay, lesbian, etc.).

- Sixty percent of TGQN (transgender women, transgender men, nonbinary/genderqueer, gender questioning, or gender not listed) college students reported that they feared for their physical safety due to their gender identity or their perceived sexual orientation according to the 2020 AAU survey on sexual assault and misconduct.
  - 65% of TGQN students reported experiencing harassing behavior since they first enrolled in school.
  - TGQN students (both undergraduate and graduate) were more likely to experience intimate partner violence and stalking than their peers.
- [The Williams Institute](#) found that 30.9% of LGBTQ students surveyed in 2021 experienced housing disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 16.9% of their non-LGBTQ peers.
- LGBTQ college students disproportionately struggled with their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. [According to the US Department of Education:](#)
  - Seventy-four percent of LGBTQ+ college students reported struggling with their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 64% of heterosexual students.
  - Sixty-nine percent of LGBTQ+ college students reported feelings of loneliness or isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 59% of heterosexual students.

## SOURCES

[“The 2019 National School Climate Survey.”](#) GLSEN, 2021.

[“AAU Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct \(2015\).”](#) Association of American Universities, September 2015.

[“The big LGBTQ+ wage gap problem.”](#) BBC, June 2022

[“College Guide for LGBTQ Students.”](#) Best Colleges.

[“COVID-19 And Students In Higher Education.”](#) The Williams Institute, May 2021

[“Degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by level of degree and sex of student: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2026-27.”](#) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

[“Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students.”](#) U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

[“Federal Student Loan Debt Among LGBTQ People.”](#) Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. July 2021

[“Find an LGBTQ Center.”](#) Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals.

[“Hate Crime Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions.”](#) NCES, 2018.

[“Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct.”](#) Association of American Universities, January 2020.

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