



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

LGBTQ+* Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

Historically, sexual orientation and gender identity (beyond birth sex) have not been documented by the U.S. Census in any products beyond reporting on same-sex couples residing in the same household, which began in 1990.⁵ In 2021, the U.S. Census began including questions of sexual orientation and gender identity on the Household Pulse Survey (HPS), a survey begun in 2020 to monitor the effects of COVID-19.⁴ According to the September 2024 HPS, 8.3% of the population aged 18 or older identified as LGBT, with 2.9% identifying as gay or lesbian, 4.9% bisexual, 3.6% as an orientation not listed, and 0.7% transgender.⁴

ENROLLMENT

Though postsecondary enrollment by sexual orientation and gender identity is not recorded by traditional postsecondary federal data sources, it is asked by the High School Longitudinal Survey (HSLs). The following enrollment data are based on respondents to the HSLs that were high school freshmen in 2009 and responded to the follow-up surveys in 2013 and 2016.

- As of 2016, 31.6% respondents identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or a sexuality not listed had never enrolled in postsecondary education.³
- As of 2016, 40% of respondents identifying as transgender, genderqueer, or nonconforming had never enrolled in postsecondary education.³
- Among the students that had ever enrolled in postsecondary education by 2016, 8.2% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or a sexuality not listed.³
 - 1.4% identified as transgender, genderqueer, or nonconforming.³

FINANCIAL AID

- In the HSLs, respondents identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or a sexuality not listed were more likely to be offered grant aid in 2013, including Pell, than respondents identifying as straight.^{^3}
 - 48.2% of lesbian or gay respondents were offered grant aid.³
 - 50.1% of bisexual respondents were offered grant aid.³
 - 44.8% of respondents who identified as a sexuality not listed were offered grant aid.³
 - 43.4% of straight respondents were offered grant aid.³
- Transgender, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming respondents were less likely to be offered grant aid than respondents who were cisgender (37.5% vs. 43.7%).³
- Respondents identifying as lesbian or gay were more likely to be offered student loans than other sexual orientations (42.9% compared to 37.1% overall).³
- Transgender, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming respondents were less likely to be offered student loans in 2013 than respondents who were cisgender (31.6% vs. 37.3%).³

* While the title of this factsheet is LGBTQ+, reported statistics mirror the terms used in each referenced study (e.g., LGBTQ+, LGBT, gay, lesbian, etc.).

[^] The HSLs does not disaggregate grant types, so we cannot determine the share of LGBTQ students who received a Pell grant, nor identify federal loans apart from their total loan amount. It also lists being *offered* grant aid, rather than *receiving* grant aid.

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- The Williams Institute at UCLA and Gallup found that 30% of LGBT people held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 32% of non-LGBT people.⁶

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- Gay and lesbian respondents earned less than their straight counterparts, and the gender wage gap increased among bisexual respondents.⁷
 - Lesbian female respondents reported an average wage of \$45,606.⁷
 - Gay male respondents reported an average wage of \$56,936.⁷
 - Bisexual female respondents reported an average wage of \$35,980.⁷
 - Bisexual male respondents reported an average wage of \$85,084.⁷
 - Heterosexual female respondents reported an average wage of \$51,461.⁷
 - Heterosexual male respondents reported an average wage of \$83,469.⁷
- LGBT respondents also were less likely to have savings accounts, employer sponsored retirement accounts, or individual retirement accounts (IRA).⁷

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- In 2021, sexual orientation was the second most motivating bias for hate crimes at postsecondary institutions.⁸
- In a survey by the Association of American Universities (AAU), 60% of transgender college students reported that they feared for their physical safety due to their gender identity or their perceived sexual orientation.⁹
 - 65% of transgender students reported experiencing harassing behavior since they first enrolled in school.⁹
 - Transgender students (both undergraduate and graduate) were more likely to experience intimate partner violence and stalking than their peers.⁹
- 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.¹
- LGBTQ college students disproportionately struggled with their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.²
 - 74% of LGBTQ+ college students reported struggling with their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 64% of heterosexual students.²
 - 69% of LGBTQ+ college students reported feelings of loneliness or isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 59% of heterosexual students.²

DATA SOURCES

¹[COVID-19 and Students in Higher Education](#). The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, May 2021.

²[Education in a Pandemic](#). Department of Education, June 2021.

³[High School Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, April 2024.

⁴[Household Pulse Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, December 2024.

⁵[How Accurate Are Counts of Same-Sex Couples?](#) Pew Research Center, August 2011

⁶[LGBT Data & Demographics](#). The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, 2019.

⁷[Married LGBTQ+ Couples and Money](#). Prudential, June 2020.

⁸[Office of Civil Rights](#). Department of Education, July 2024.

⁹[Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey](#). Association of American Universities, 2020.