

Walking with Our LGBTQ Students: Research Fact Sheet

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Prepared by Jeffrey W. Lockhart, jwlock@umich.edu

This fact sheet and links to more resources can be found at fordhamqueery.org under “Campus Resources.”

LGBTQ college campus climate has numerous and serious **health implications**, including

- **Psychological and physical health:** “self-acceptance and disclosure” play an important role in “positive health and well-being of sexual minorities... Internationally, societies must endeavor to facilitate self-acceptance among [lesbians, gays, and bisexuals] by promoting tolerance, progressing policy, and dispelling stigma. This may no longer be an issue of popular debate but of public health” [1, 2].
- **Alcohol and other drug use and abuse:** LGBTQ people use alcohol and other drugs for the same reasons other people do: as a coping mechanism for stress [5]. These students are not inherently users. However, violence, safety, and stress concerns are more common for LGBTQ students, and these are significantly correlated with increased alcohol and other drug use [3]. LGB students are more likely to experience “incivility,” and those who do are 1.5 times more likely to have problematic drinking, nearly 3 times more likely to use drugs, and 2 times more likely to have problematic drug use: thus *even subtle discrimination and harassment are serious problems* [4]. Substance use can be stimulated by the presence of a “‘hidden curriculum’ of campus norms, policies, and structures that don't reflect all populations and, thus, may feel exclusive to many students” [5, 6]. As campus climate improves, their substance use tends to decrease [1, 5].

Campus climate also has serious implications for **academic and career success**

- **Leaving school:** 23% of LGBTQ student athletes have considered leaving their university because of harassment [7]. LGBTQ students in general are more likely to consider leaving their institution [8]. Student populations and groups with good retention rates tend to be well involved and indoctrinated into campus culture [9].
- **Academic Success:** affirming inclusion in campus culture is critical to academic success [9]. Among LGB student athletes, lower levels of academic success were correlated with lower perceptions of campus climate and respect [2, 7].
- Students cannot focus on **academics and co-curricular activities** when they are worried about an unsupportive environment. For them, “dilemmas related to sexual identity and sexual identity development often take precedence to the exclusion of all other developmental tasks” [10]. LGBTQ student athletes reported being more affected by campus climate than did women, people of color, and all other subgroups [7].
- Students do not take advantage of **career and other resources** when campus climate makes them feel unwelcome and excluded. Poor climate has been found to decrease “two measures of vocational development” [11]. This demonstrates both that negative campus climate has effects beyond graduation and that negative climate impacts students' access to seemingly unrelated resources, such as Career Services.

Trans college students

- **Poor data:** Trans students are often poorly understood, even by LGBTQ studies
- Trans students report **significantly worse** campus climate and educational outcomes than LGB and straight, cisgender students do. They report facing more frequent harassment and discrimination and having a lower sense of belonging [12].

All students suffer from poor climate, **not just LGBTQ ones**

- Researchers examined the effects of heterosexist language and harassment on university campuses and found that those who experienced it had the lowest overall well-being in terms of both health and academic success, but the **harms they found were not limited to sexual minority students** [2]. They write, “an institutional environment in which anti-LGB remarks and jokes are present may have negative implications for the whole campus community, regardless of sex or sexual orientation ... the harms of heterosexist victimization ... may have troublesome influence far beyond harm to any direct targets.” The negative effect on other members of the community is due to “bystander stress.”

Being **LGBTQ at Catholic Universities**

- Recent sociology has found that gay students at Catholic universities generally follow one of four paths [13]. The paper is short, and I highly recommend reading it. The paths with the **best outcomes** involve gay students finding community with other gay students, often through university-supported social groups and events. For some, this provides an opportunity to successfully integrate their sexuality and religion by experiencing community where

gay and Catholic are not incompatible. For others, this allows them to find belonging and support even though they are not Catholic or believe Catholic teaching is at odds with being gay.

- The Fordham Que(e)ry is the first large study of LGBTQ students at a Jesuit university. Its results are available in a public [Community Report](#) with **specific findings and recommendations** for every aspect of campus life [14].

Be careful with **statistics**

- Surveys often show only a small number of students are dissatisfied with campus climate for LGBTQ students. However, research consistently shows that about 4% of college students in the US will identify as LGBTQ on an anonymous survey and that cisgender, heterosexual students do not often recognise the challenges their peers face [14]. Thus, even very low overall **dissatisfaction rates** could be a major portion of LGBTQ students.

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