

For Immediate Release

May 11, 2022

Media Contact

Rachel Dowd

dowd@law.ucla.edu

(310) 855-2696 (cell)

LGBTQ people four times more likely than non-LGBTQ peers to choose a college away from home to find acceptance

One-third of LGBTQ people experienced bullying, harassment, or assault while in college

A new study from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law conducted in collaboration with the Point Foundation, the nation's largest LGBTQ scholarship fund, finds LGBTQ people were four times more likely than non-LGBTQ people to report having picked a college in a different city or state in search of a more welcoming climate (22% vs. 5%, respectively).

Twice as many LGBTQ people (33%) as non-LGBTQ people (14%) chose to attend a college elsewhere to get away from their families. While in school, LGBTQ students were more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to experience poor mental health, bullying, and harassment.

Using data from the Access to Higher Education Survey, a nationally representative sample of adults ages 18 to 40, researchers examined the experiences of LGBTQ people who have attended a four-year college or graduate school. A companion study [LINK TK] looked at the experiences of LGBTQ people in community college.

In four-year institutions, graduate school, and community college, LGBTQ students were more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to experience discrimination and violence. One-third (33%) of LGBTQ people at four-year colleges were bullied, harassed, or assaulted, compared to 19% of non-LGBTQ people.

“Despite efforts to find more welcoming environments, many LGBTQ people in higher education face significant negative experiences, which can impact their ability to learn and succeed,” said lead author

Kerith J. Conron, the Blachford-Cooper Distinguished Scholar and Research Director at the Williams Institute. “Colleges and universities concerned about improving diversity, equity, and inclusion must focus on improving conditions for LGBTQ students.”

“In this current climate, it’s sadly not a surprise to us that institutions of higher learning have a lot more work to do when it comes to making LGBTQ students feel safe, heard, and equally served by their schools,” said Jorge Valencia, Executive Director and CEO at Point Foundation. “Colleges need to make an institutional commitment that clearly communicates support for LGBTQ students. And LGBTQ students themselves must be involved in the process to ensure that policies, services, and infrastructural components are truly effective.”

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS – FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

Bullying, Harassment, and Assault

- Nearly one in five (19%) LGBTQ people experienced in-person bullying or harassment at a four-year college, compared to 5% of non-LGBTQ people.
- 18% of LGBTQ people experienced sexual harassment, compared to 6% of non-LGBTQ people.
- Among the LGBTQ people who were victimized, only one-fifth (20%) said that their college had an easily accessible, visible, and known procedure for reporting LGBTQ-related bias incidents and hate crimes distinct from generic reporting procedures.

Belonging and Outness

- Fewer LGBTQ people experienced a sense of belonging at college (72%), compared to non-LGBTQ people (84%).
- More than half (60%) of LGBTQ people were not “out” as LGBTQ to any of the faculty or school staff at their college and 37% were not “out” to any other students.
- LGBTQ people were more than twice as likely to have changed their dress, appearance, or mannerisms to avoid discrimination at college compared to non-LGBTQ peers (16% and 7%, respectively).

Mental Health

- LGBTQ people (35%) were about three times more likely than non-LGBTQ people (11%) to say that their mental health was not good all or most of the time they were in college
- LGBTQ people were at least twice as likely as non-LGBTQ people to report that a professional told them that they had a specific mental health problem while in college, including depression (32% vs. 16%), anxiety (33% vs. 15%), and suicidal thoughts (19% vs. 6%).
- A minority of LGBTQ people reported that their colleges had LGBTQ-supportive counseling services (39%) or LGBTQ-informed health services (30%).

Experiences among LGBTQ students in graduate schools and community colleges followed a similar pattern to four-year colleges and universities.

This study is part of a series of reports that analyze data from the Access to Higher Education Survey:

[COVID-19 and Students in Higher Education](#)

[Federal Student Loan Debt Among LGBTQ People](#)

[Educational Experiences of Transgender People](#)

Community College and the Experiences of LGBTQ People [LINK TK]

Read the report [LINK TK]

XXX

The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, a think tank on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy, is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research with real-world relevance.

Point Foundation (Point) is the nation's largest scholarship-granting organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students of merit. Point promotes change through scholarship funding, mentorship, leadership development, and community service training.