

# COLLEGE GUIDE FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

For prospective college students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or queer (LGBTQ), it's crucial to find a college with a supportive learning environment where they can thrive. [Campus Pride](#), the predominant national nonprofit organization serving LGBTQ students, functions as a primary resource for such a search. Each year, the site provides a comprehensive listing of the most LGBTQ-friendly colleges in the nation and hosts a college fair specifically geared toward LGBTQ youths and their families.

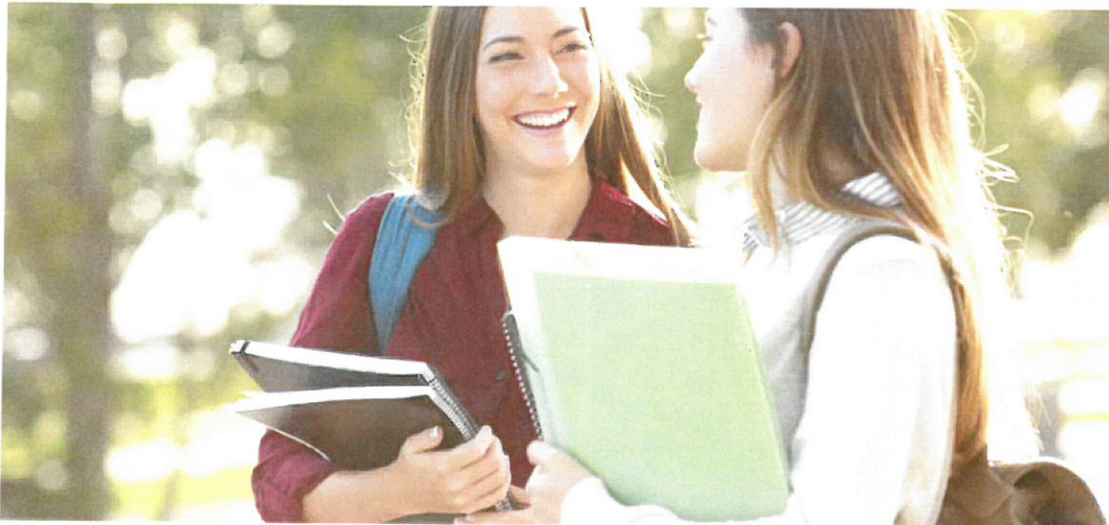


## Interviews - College Access for LGBTQ Students

To get a more personal perspective, we interviewed industry professionals who gave us their unique insight on the challenges and questions LGBTQ students may face when attending college. These experts come from a variety of fields, including mental health counseling and LGBTQ advocacy. Look for the [?] icon throughout this page to expand and read their responses.

To view our featured expert's full profiles and interviews, [click here](#).

In 2015, the [Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals](#) joined with 25 other organizations to request that optional questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation be added to the Common Application used for admission at more than 500 colleges in the US and internationally. The data would facilitate more accurate statistics pertaining to LGBT students, and could help administrators better track their admission, retention, and graduation rates.



A [2016 survey](#) of more than 33,000 students by the American College Health Association found that 10% identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, asexual, pansexual, or questioning. Fortunately, the growing acceptance of homosexuality in America is encouraging more students to come out before or during college. In a [2016 Pew Research poll](#), 57% of Americans supported same-sex-marriage while only 37% opposed it — a positive change that’s developed in recent decades. Additionally, 71% of millennials and 56% of Generation Xers who participated in the poll approved of same-sex marriage.

**A 2016 SURVEY OF MORE THAN 33,000 STUDENTS BY THE AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH ASSOCIATION FOUND THAT 10% IDENTIFIED AS GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANS, ASEXUAL, PANSEXUAL, OR QUESTIONING.**

Early in the gay rights movement, “gay” and “lesbian” served as common labels for non-heterosexuals. In the mid-to-late 1980s, the movement added the terms “bisexual” and “transgender” to create the acronym LGBT. However, this abbreviation has since expanded to **LGBTQIA** (“queer” or “questioning,” “intersex,” and “asexual” or “ally”). An increasing number of college campuses, resource centers, and social media sites use the seven-letter acronym in an effort to be more inclusive of all types of sexuality.



abbreviation LGBTQ for the purposes of this guide. The chart below explains what each letter signifies, accounting for the fact that different organizations use “Q” for “queer” or “questioning,” and “A” for “asexual” or “ally”.

TERM	DEFINITION
LESBIAN	A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.
GAY	The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.
BISEXUAL	An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to the same gender and different genders. It is the attraction that helps determine orientation.
TRANSGENDER	A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity.
QUEER	Reappropriated from its earlier negative use, the term can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities.
QUESTIONING	A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.
INTERSEX	Individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia.

**ASEXUAL**

An individual who does not experience sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently.

**ALLY**

A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBTQ but who is supportive of LGBTQ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate.

Source: *PFLAG National Glossary of Terms*

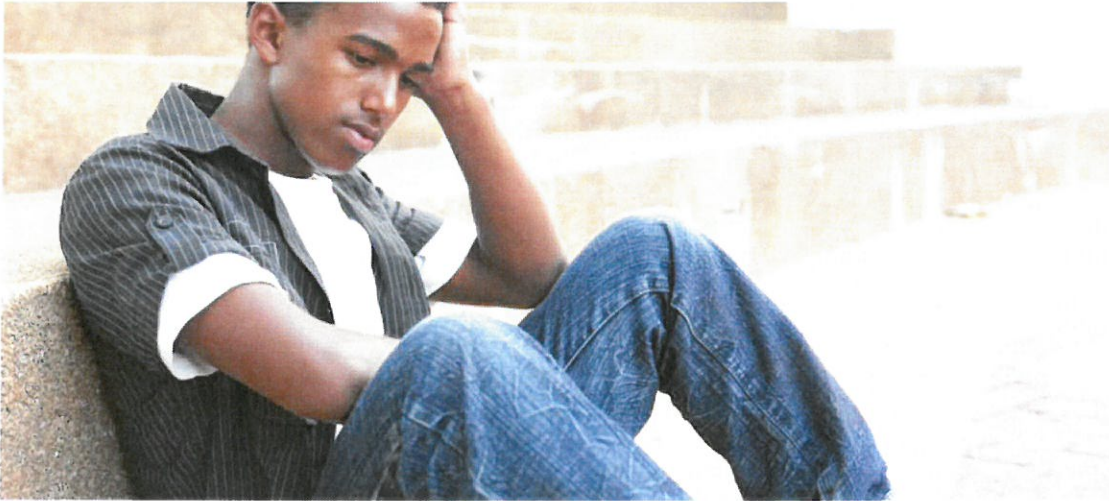


**What advice would you give to an LGBTQ student who is considering college?**



## Common Difficulties Faced by LGBTQ Students

The transition from high school to college can prove difficult for all students, but LGBTQ students are particularly vulnerable. Before you arrive on campus, read up on federal and state anti-discrimination laws and become familiar with campus ordinances. Many larger colleges and universities have LGBTQ resource centers and/or student organizations on campus. Additionally, national and regional organizations can provide helpful information and important resources. Check with the office of the Dean of Students, the student services center, or the on-campus counseling center at your school for guidance.



**Harassment**



**Isolation**



**Labels and Loss of Personal Identity**



**Lack of Community and Financial Resources**



**Housing Discrimination**



Despite the hardships that LGBTQ students face on campus, the number of organizations offering positive support and access to valuable resources grows every year. Many universities have dedicated LGBTQ directors to help LGBTQ students qualify for financial aid, housing, and other programs that can make college not only possible, but also a positive experience.

## Finding the Right School for You



hesitate to ask administrators, counselors, and students about the resources available to LGBTQ students on campus. Ideally, you want to find a campus that can feel like home, but the work to become comfortable at school starts before you even submit your first application.



If you are not out yet, or you're questioning, an LGBTQ-friendly college could be a healthy environment for you to discover your true identity. Look for schools with websites demonstrating an active LGBTQ community that's supported on campus. Additionally, signing up for a course in [LGBTQ studies](#) or attending a seminar at the school's LGBTQ Resource Center could help you on your journey of self-discovery and allow you to connect with others who are struggling with similar issues.

## 10 THINGS TO LOOK FOR WHEN SEARCHING FOR LGBTQ-FRIENDLY COLLEGES

### 1. Campus Vibe



### 2. LGBTQ Student Organizations



### 3. Out LGBTQ Students

**4. Out LGBTQ Faculty** +

**5. Inclusion Statements and Anti-Discrimination Policies** +


**6. LGBTQ Resource Centers** +

**7. Gender-neutral Restrooms and Housing** +

**8. Off-campus LGBTQ Groups** +

**9. Campus Security Offices** +

**10. Local Law Enforcement** +

 **What are the three most important attributes or characteristics an LGBTQ student should consider when selecting a university experience and why?** +

## RELIGIOUS COLLEGES

Often, LGBTQ students are wary of religious schools that embrace conservative ideals, fearing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, some deeply religious LGBTQ students, including those who have not come out, may feel pressure from family and friends to attend a religious college. Additionally, some may wish to pursue an area of study available only at a particular school. Still others may simply want to continue their education in a setting affiliated with their religion.

organization founded in 2011, fosters communication between LGBTQ students, faculty, staff, and alumni at more than 75 evangelical Christian colleges. Additionally, Safety Net helps students find information on gay-straight alliances (GSAs) affiliated with their schools, and can provide assistance to anyone who wants to start such a group.

If you're still unsure about attending a religious college, research the student code of conduct at a school you're considering. Ask yourself whether you'd be comfortable signing a contract signifying your agreement with the statements it contains. Also, review the university's hiring practices; if a school would not hire someone who identifies as LGBTQ, would you want to attend classes there? Find out if the school has filed for an exemption to Title IX that would permit them to discriminate on the basis of sex in hiring, admissions, etc. based on adherence to their religious doctrine or moral code.



**What advice do you have for students who may want to attend a traditionally conservative or religiously affiliated college?**



## OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

As an LGBTQ student, you need to evaluate not only the campus climate but also the city and region surrounding the college. Will you be able to enjoy your leisure time? Is the town a place you might want to live after you graduate?



**Arts and Recreation**



**Healthcare**



**Events and Festivals**





**Nightlife****Local Economy and Lifestyle****How important are the community and civic attitude (where the university is located) towards LGBTQ students when selecting a college to attend?**

## Applying to College as an LGBTQ Student

A growing number of colleges [inquire about sexual orientation](#) on their applications. Whether you choose to be open about your sexuality during the application process is something only you can decide. You may decide to disclose such information when applying to schools that are LGBT-friendly but withhold it from those that you fear might not accept you on that basis. In some cases, identifying yourself as LGBTQ could open doors to scholarships or diversity grants that might not be otherwise available to you. Applying to college is a bit trickier for LGBT students who have not come out to their families. In such situations, the [Human Rights Campaign](#) advises applicants to avoid stating their LGBT status in writing and come out to an admissions officer on the phone or in person.

**How should a student, who might not be out to their families yet, navigate finding colleges that feature inclusive environments, or apply for LGBTQ scholarships?**

## Life on Campus

As the number of openly LGBTQ students on college campuses increases, institutions of higher learning around the country are working to foster welcoming environments

workshops, to protect and promote the physical and emotional well-being of LGBT students.

American University's Center for Diversity and Inclusion, for example, offers a [peer advising and conversations program](#) open to current and prospective LGBTQ students. Additionally, Penn State's [LGBTQA Student Resource Center](#) publishes student testimonials discussing how the center helped them adjust to college and cope with difficult issues.



### What opportunities for student life and community are available to new LGBTQ college students? +

Most students receive contact information for their new roommate before they move in, so you might want to reach out through email or on the phone before you move in together. You will have to decide if you want to discuss sexual orientation before or after you meet. The key to a good relationship with any roommate is communication. Be respectful of each other's boundaries and try to explore common interests.

A college's athletic department can be one of the least LGBTQ-friendly places on campus. Thanks to the efforts of national LGBTQ organizations and new policies



organization, [Athlete Ally](#) promotes public awareness about LGBT issues through educational programming and workshops at colleges and high schools. The organization also works with major sports organizations like the NFL, NBA, and NCAA to enhance player awareness and sensitivity. Additionally, Berkeley's Gender Equity Resource Center provides a comprehensive list of [LGBTQ Resources in Athletics](#).

If you find yourself facing a difficult situation or issue on campus stemming from your identification as LGBTQ, seek recourse at your school's student counseling center. There, you can report specific incidents; receive confidential individual, couple, or group mental health counseling services; and join support groups where you can discuss LGBTQ issues with other empathetic students. Additionally, you might want to check out legal services available at your school; often, colleges have licensed attorneys on staff to provide limited counsel and representation for students. If you fear for your safety, contact campus security personnel as soon as possible.



**What are the ways a college should support LGBTQ students? Where can students go for help if an issue does arise?** +

## ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

If your school lacks an LGBTQ Resource Center, you may be able to find one locally or online. Getting involved in the center's network can help you learn about your rights and how to combat discriminatory behavior on campus and in your community.

### CAMPUS PRIDE

Campus Pride supports LGBTQ student organizations as they work toward a society free of bigotry and hate. The group effects change by developing student networks and offering useful online resources, including a ranking of LGBTQ-friendly colleges.

### GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE (GSA)



straight students can support each other, socialize, and enhance gender diversity.

### **GAY AND LESBIAN ADVOCATES AND DEFENDERS (GLAAD)**

Since 1978, GLAAD has fought for legal equality for the LGBTQ community and those living with AIDS. The organization strives to build a society free of discrimination based on a person's gender identity, HIV status, and sexual orientation.

### **TREVOR PROJECT**

Founded in 1988 by the creators of the Academy Award winning film "Trevor," the Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth from ages 13-24. The group offers education, resources, and supportive counseling to kids and young adults who need help.

### **SAFETY NET**

Safety Net fosters conversation between LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff at religious colleges, universities, and seminaries. The organization also helps students find GSAs near their schools. If no GSA exists in your community, Safety Net can help you start a new group.

### **GAY, LESBIAN, AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK (GLSEN)**

An organization for students, parents, and teachers alike, GLSEN helps create safe school environments for LGBTQ students. Additionally, the group promotes projects like Day of Silence and Ally Week, and founds GSAs in local communities.

### **OUT FOR WORK**

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after graduation.

### **TRANS STUDENT EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (TSER)**

A youth-run organization, TSER works to foster more trans-friendly environments in schools.

### **ASEXUAL VISIBILITY AND EDUCATION NETWORK (AVEN)**

The world's largest online asexual community, AVEN supports students who identify as asexual. The site features an impressive collection of resources on the topic.

### **BINET USA**

America's largest national organization devoted to bisexual awareness, BiNet oversees a network of independent bisexual and bi-friendly communities. Beyond condemning discrimination and promoting anti-discriminatory policies, the organization distributes educational information on sexual orientation.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN**

The largest civil rights organization in the U.S., HRC strives to achieve LGBTQ equality. Boasting more than 1.5 million members and supporters, HRC works to end discrimination, secure equal rights, and protect the health and safety of LGBTQ individuals.

### **POINT FOUNDATION**

Point Foundation serves as the nation's largest scholarship-granting organization for LGBTQ students, providing scholarship funding, mentorship, leadership training, and community service opportunities.

A member-based organization, the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals seeks to make college campuses a safer and more welcoming place for LGBTQ students.

## HOW TO START YOUR OWN LGBTQ ORGANIZATION

Starting a new GSA or LGBT resource center is a significant project that requires intensive research and support from others. The first step is to recruit other LGBTQ students, allies, and faculty members for a committee or task force. One of the biggest challenges you'll face is enlisting the cooperation of a university official who will support your group.

Prepare a presentation on why the college needs an LGBTQ center. [Campus Climate Assessment](#) is a good source of information on campus assessments. Your presentation might include statistics on the growing number of LGBTQ students on campus, testimonials from LGBTQ students who have experienced harassment, and input from victims of sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. Providing examples of other colleges with successful LGBTQ resource centers and information on the services they offer will give university officials a better idea of what you are trying to accomplish and why.

The [Consortium of Directors of LGBT Director in Higher Education](#) offers advice on starting an LGBTQ resource center, including information on staffing and funding programs. Penn State's [LGBTQWeb.net](#) provides sample documents, presentations, and resources that you can access and modify as you start your own resource center. If you cannot procure the support of the university, you can form an unofficial GSA off campus. [GSA Network](#) and [GSAcenter](#) are great resources with lots of helpful information for starting an off-campus group.

## Friends and Family



friend or family member comes out to you, it's important to let them know that you admire their courage and that you respect their privacy. LGBTQ youth often fear rejection; it's crucial to reassure your friend or family member that coming out will not harm your relationship. Be available to listen and discuss sensitive issues, but don't be judgmental or treat them any differently. Encourage any out LGBTQ friends or family members to reach out to others at an LGBTQ resource center, or help them find relevant resources online.



**What are some of the ways family and friends can support LGBTQ students during this time of transition?**



## **ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF LGBTQ PEOPLE**

### **PFLAG**

An organization for LGBTQ individuals and their families and allies, PFLAG offers a variety of resources to promote equality. In addition to information on local chapters and upcoming events, the site features free downloadable pamphlets on relevant topics, like advocacy and inclusion. Additionally, the website includes links to LGBTQ-friendly faith communities and scholarship resources.

### **GAY AND LESBIAN GUIDE TO COLLEGE LIFE**

Published by the Princeton Review, the Gay and Lesbian Guide to College Life is a comprehensive handbook featuring listings of LGBT-friendly campuses and profiles on the surrounding communities. With information gathered from surveys of students and administrators at more than 70 colleges, the guide offers tips on everything from researching school policies to responding to discrimination.

### **OUTPROUD FAMILIES**

on workshops, reports, guides, and other resources. Laurin Mayeno also shares narratives from her journey with her gay son on the site through her “Proud Mom” videos.

## **CAMPUS PRIDE**

This site has a ranking of LGBTQ-friendly colleges and includes a searchable map by state. As one of the top educational resources for LGBTQ students, the Campus Pride website features lists of programs and services catering to LGBTQ students, including college fairs, workshops, and events.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN (HRC)**

The nation’s largest civil rights organization, the HRC works on a variety of initiatives to promote equality for the LGBTQ community. The website features articles relevant to LGBTQ youth and their parents, in addition to information on resources available in each state.

## **AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (ACLU)**

The ACLU has handled more LGBTQ lawsuits than any other national organization. ACLU leaders fight for advocacy initiatives and keep the public and media informed about contemporary issues. The website serves as a good resource for LGBTQ students seeking help with discrimination complaints.

## **GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE (GSA) NETWORK**

The GSA Network urges students dealing with discrimination to call for assistance. Additionally, the site offers guidance on how to talk to school administrators about LGBT issues and how to file a discrimination or harassment complaint at your college or university.



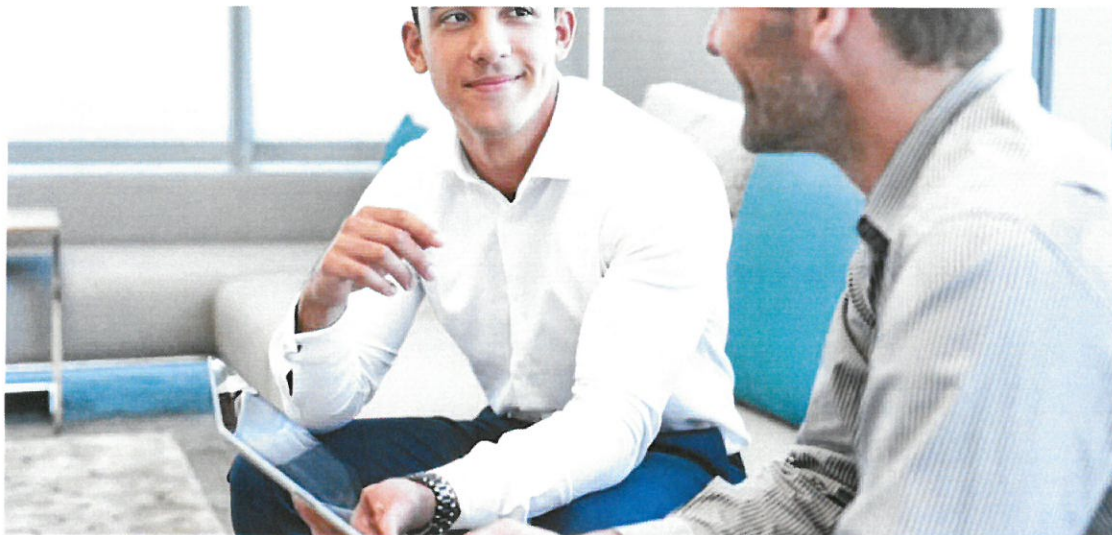
Lambda Legal specializes in legal issues of transgender students. The website provides information on transgender rights, along with resources to help students handle campus challenges and advocate for more gender-inclusive policies. An online legal help desk answers questions at no charge.

## Legal Rights for LGBTQ Students

Before beginning classes at a college or university, LGBTQ students should know their legal rights. In the event that you become a victim of discrimination or harassment, you will be better prepared to protect yourself with knowledge of the laws and protections on your side. In 2009, the [Matthew Shepard Act](#) expanded the definition of hate crimes to include those based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability. [Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972](#) is a federal civil rights law that forbids discrimination, including sexual harassment, rape, and sexual assault, in education programs and activities that receive federal funding. Under the provisions of Title IX, a college receiving federal funds can be held legally responsible for monetary damages if the institution knew about and ignored sexual harassment or discrimination (whether it was the act of a student, staff, or faculty member).

The [HRC](#) has identified 56 colleges in 26 states that requested exemptions from Title IX by claiming it conflicts with their religious doctrines or religious-based moral codes. With its report [Hidden Discrimination: Title IX Religious Exemptions Putting LGBTQ Students at Risk](#), the HRC seeks to increase the accountability of schools requesting exemptions and to make sure LGBTQ students do not enroll in a university with discriminatory policies.





Additionally, a growing number of states have laws that protect LGBTQ individuals from sexual discrimination and bullying. [Lambda Legal](#) offers a guide with information on legal protections available to LGBTQ individuals in each state. The [Equality Federation's Movement Advancement Project \(MAP\)](#) also provides data on state LGBTQ laws and listings of cities and counties with anti-discrimination ordinances.

Students experiencing discrimination at college may file an internal appeal. It is advisable to seek help from a lawyer, the local legal aid society, or a national organization specializing in LGBTQ legal issues. Students also have the right to file a Title IX complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's [Office of Civil Rights](#). Title IX protects students at schools that receive federal funding from sex discrimination in admissions, housing, recruitment, athletics, financial assistance, and counseling services. Check out [this list](#) of local, state, and national LGBT organizations and groups that specialize in discrimination cases.

## LGBT Scholarships

Scholarships established for LGBTQ college students are available from several organizations, both through specific schools as well as private groups. Some welcome all LGBTQ applicants, while others may focus on specific subgroups. To learn more

## Full Expert Interviews



**Dr. Darla Linville; Assistant Professor**



**Emma Naliboff Pettit; Program Director**



**Brittany Steffen; Marriage & Family Therapist**



**Steve Willich Director; LGBTQ Student Resource Center**



**Tiffany Delaney, MA.Ed; Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion**



**Matthew Banks; Coordinator for Multicultural Programs/LGBTQ+ Student Support Services**



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WHAT TO EXPECT FROM ONLINE CERTIFICATE AND DIPLOMA PROGRAMS

ONLINE VS. TRADITIONAL COLLEGE DEGREES:  
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM ONLINE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

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ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

ONLINE VS. TRADITIONAL:  
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN ONLINE ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAM

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ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

ONLINE VS. TRADITIONAL COLLEGE DEGREES:  
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN ONLINE DOCTORATE PROGRAM

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