

# Factors for Choosing an LGBT-Inclusive Campus

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**National Best-Selling Author & Educator for LGBT campus issues**

Now is your time: You are leaving high school and looking for a college that is a great fit for you.

You're anxious to move on. You've been waiting a lifetime for this next momentous step. There are so many factors to consider. But, what you're looking for is not quite as clear—rather it is quite queer. You want to find a campus that offers services surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues—things like queer studies classes, gay student groups, local gay hang-outs, gay support resources, gay supportive policies, or even a drag show. Sadly, these are not topics that typically come up on your official tour of campus... unless you ask!

Nevertheless, more colleges and universities are coming forward to create safe learning environments and are finding innovative ways to extend a rainbow welcome for LGBT students. The choice for college can be "quite queer" if you know what to look for and which questions to ask.

These key questions are highlights from the upcoming book *The Best of the Best: The Official LGBT Guide to Higher Education* due out in Spring 2006. Students can currently nominate their campus for the book online at [www.campuspride.net/best](http://www.campuspride.net/best).

## 1. LGBT Policy Inclusion

Quite simply, if the college or university does not have policies that prohibit discrimination toward LGBT students, you may want to reconsider. A lack of inclusion in school policies is your first warning sign.

### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in the written non-discrimination policy statement and in written statements about diversity and multiculturalism?
- Does your campus provide domestic partner benefits for LGBT employees with same-sex partners?

## 2. LGBT Support & Institutional Commitment

A big opportunity to score major points will be the level of LGBT support and institutional commitment. You have to listen closely and ask more involved questions to find out truly where the campus falls. Do they get an A+ grade or a solid F grade?

### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus have a Safe Zone program or Safe Space program (i.e., an ongoing network of visible people on campus who identify openly as allies for LGBT people and concerns)?
- Does your campus have a professional staff person who is employed to increase campus awareness of LGBT concerns/issues as part of his/her job description?
- Does your campus have an LGBT concerns office or an LGBT student resource center (i.e., an institutionally funded space specifically for LGBT education and support services)? If not, does your campus have another office or resource center that deals actively with LGBT issues and concerns (e.g., Women's Center, Multicultural Center)?
- Does your senior administration actively demonstrate inclusive use of the words "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" when discussing community, multicultural and, or diversity issues on campus?

## 3. LGBT Student Life

Are the next four to five years of your life going to be fabulous or a slow, tedious bore? Well, answers to questions on LGBT student life may make the difference.

### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus sponsor regular, on-going campus-wide activities and events to increase awareness of LGBT issues/concerns on campus?
- Does your campus have regular, on-going social events specifically for LGBT students?
- Does your campus have a college/university-recognized LGBT campus student organization for all LGBT students and allies?
- Does your campus have any student organizations that primarily serve the social or recreational needs of LGBT students (e.g., Gay social fraternity, Lesbian Volleyball Recreational Club, Gay Coed Lacrosse Club, etc)?
- Does your campus have any student organizations that primarily serve the needs of under-represented or multicultural LGBT populations (e.g., LGBT Latinos/Latinas, International LGBT students, LGBT Students with Disabilities, etc)?
- Does your campus have any student organizations that primarily serve the religious/spiritual needs of LGBT students (e.g., Unity Fellowship for Students, Gays for Christ, LGBT Muslims, etc)?

## 4. LGBT Academic Life

Let's focus on the main reason for attending college or university. LGBT inclusion must extend to the classroom. A campus that truly supports LGBT issues will hopefully give honest answers to these challenging questions.

### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus have out LGBT faculty members?
- Does your campus have an LGBT studies major? If No, does your campus have LGBT-specific courses offered through various academic programs?
- Does your campus integrate LGBT issues into existing courses when appropriate?
- Does your campus include LGBT issues in new faculty/staff orientation programs and on-going training opportunities?
- Does your campus have an extensive collection of LGBT-related holdings in the campus library?

## 5. LGBT Housing

For many schools, it is financially advantageous to live on campus. Often times, new students are required to live on campus. As an LGBT student, you should learn the facts about your housing options.

### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus provide LGBT-themed housing options or LGBT specific living-learning communities in campus housing?
- Does your campus allow for students with same-sex partners to reside together in campus housing?
- Does your campus provide housing options that are sensitive to the needs of transgender students?
- Does your campus provide training sessions for housing employees on LGBT issues and concerns?

## 6. LGBT Campus Safety

Safety is seldom considered an issue until something happens, and, by then, it is too late.

You should consider up-front the level of safety for LGBT students and whether the campus has clear procedures and services to address LGBT safety concerns.

#### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus provide training sessions for public safety officers on LGBT issues and concerns and anti-LGBT violence?
- Do your campus public safety officers carry out LGBT outreach efforts and meet with LGBT student leaders/organization?
- Does your campus have a clear procedure for reporting LGBT-related bias incidents and hate crimes?
- Does your campus have a bias-incident and hate-crime reporting system for LGBT concerns?

## 7. LGBT Counseling & Health

Be wise. Don't put yourself into a campus community that does not have the necessary services to support your health emotionally, physically and mentally. You must have options for help when dilemmas arise that you may uniquely face as an LGBT student. These are questions that are often overlooked.

#### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus have support groups for LGBT individuals in the process of coming out and for other LGBT issues/concerns?
- Does your campus have individual student counseling that is sensitive to LGBT issues/concerns?
- Does your campus provide training for campus health care professionals to increase their sensitivity to the special health needs of LGBT individuals?

## 8. LGBT Recruitment & Retention Efforts

Many colleges and universities are targeting the LGBT student population as a way to increase enrollment numbers. Some institutions attend LGBT-themed college admission fairs and have specific LGBT programs to increase retention.

#### Questions to Ask:

- Does your campus participate in an LGBT Admission Fair designed for outreach to incoming LGBT high school students?
- Does your campus have any scholarships specifically targeting LGBT students and heterosexual students who are supportive of LGBT equality?
- Does your campus include LGBT issues in new student orientation programs?
- Does your campus have an LGBT Mentoring program to welcome and assist LGBT students in transitioning to academic life and other involvement on campus?

### About the Author

Shane L. Windmeyer, best-selling author of *Out on Fraternity Row*, noted gay activist, and founder of [Campus PrideNet](http://campuspride.net), is one of the foremost educators on sexual orientation issues on college campuses. Windmeyer is hailed as a dynamic, inspirational presenter who challenges audience members to come out as an ally and build bridges of understanding around LGBT issues. Windmeyer shatters perceptions through active participation, and his style has been described as "unconventional, witty, clever, sincere, passionate, refreshing and perfect for our conservative campus." His book, *The Best of the Best: The Official LGBT Guide to Higher Education*, is due to hit shelves in the spring of 2006.

You can share your thoughts with Windmeyer about what LGBT issues you look for most in your choice of college by e-mailing [info@campuspride.net](mailto:info@campuspride.net).