

NATURE

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# LGBTQ+ STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY REPORT

*LGBTQ+ students' experiences and attitudes at universities*

OU SA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

# THANK YOU TO....

*The author would like to acknowledge and thank all those who chose to share their perspectives and experiences by participating in OUSA's 2014 LGBTQ+ Student Experience Survey. Additionally, the author thanks those who assisted in the survey design process by participating in OUSA's focus groups and by testing the pilot version of the questionnaire.*

# ABOUT OUSA

*OUSA represents the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at seven institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.*

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# INTRODUCTION

OUSA's LGBTQ+ Student Experience Survey was a mixed methods research project conducted in November 2014 designed to gain understanding of the opinions and experiences of Ontario university students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, or other orientations or identities that do not conform to cisgender and heterosexual paradigms (LGBTQ+). The purpose of the survey was to identify any gaps that might exist in university services, programming, and supports that can diminish or negatively impact university experiences for these students.

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This research was undertaken with a policy-oriented lens. It was designed to generate information that could inform advocacy and policy discussions, while treating respondents as experts in the subject matter. As a result, readers will find that this report includes elements of attitudinal polling as well as advisory consultation. It is the intention of this report to serve as a resource for policy-makers by providing insight on the perceived challenges facing LGBTQ+ students, and the solutions being suggested by these communities.

Early research highlighted areas of concern with university services and experiences for LGBTQ+ students, so subsequent steps were undertaken under the assumption that dissatisfaction and desire for change would be common in student LGBTQ+ communities. Nonetheless, the survey instrument was designed to be as neutral as possible.

Though there were methodological limitations throughout the project, compelling trends and indications are present in the results, which should be considered when developing policy to affect the experiences of LGBTQ+ students at Ontario universities.



# METHODOLOGY

## DESIGN

The survey consisted of a 25-question online questionnaire (see appendix I). The instrument took a mixed methods approach, collecting qualitative and quantitative data. It was developed following a series of interviews and focus groups with LGBTQ+ students and service providers at Queen's, McMaster, Wilfrid Laurier, Waterloo, and Brock universities. These sessions identified areas of concern and potential need, which were then addressed in the survey.

Any Ontario university student with a sexual orientation or gender identity under the LGBTQ+ umbrella was eligible to take the survey. These criteria were explained to respondents at the beginning of the survey, who were asked whether or not they qualified. Those who were not were thanked for their interest and brought to the ending page. A secondary screening measure was also hidden later in the survey: students who indicated that they were eligible, yet later identified as both straight/heterosexual and cisgender were automatically disqualified from taking the rest of the survey and their results discarded. The questionnaire featured a mixed array of response options such as Likert scales, true or false statements, and open-ended text fields.

The phrasing of Likert-type questions alternated between positive and negative phrasing (e.g. "I feel comfortable and included..." versus "I find it hard to meet and connect..." respectively) to avoid response set bias. Respondents were free to skip almost any question except those necessary for screening purposes.

The questionnaire was piloted by several volunteers who provided feedback on clarity, question logic, and appropriate use of language. Most suggestions were incorporated into a revised version of the questionnaire, which became the final survey instrument. The survey was officially opened for public responses on November 17, 2014 and closed one week later on November 24, 2014.

## SAMPLING, DISTRIBUTION AND HOSTING

The survey was distributed using a "snowball" sampling method, whereby the survey was advertised in the hopes that eligible respondents would complete it, then bring it to their attention of others. This approach was selected both for convenience and for its ability to rely on personal networks to reach individuals from potentially marginalized communities (who may otherwise be difficult to identify and approach). Most advertising occurred via Twitter, Facebook, and other digital means. Respondents were directed to a link hosted on the OUSA website, which led to the opening letter and the survey itself.

The survey was built and hosted on SurveyGizmo, an online survey and data analysis service. Respondents were limited to one survey submission per person using a cookie-based anti-duplication measure. Respondents were anonymous throughout their participation and provided no identifying or contact information. Responses were encrypted, and no IP or geographic information was collected by OUSA.

## DATA MANAGEMENT

Data were cleaned manually using a set of criteria that took into account speed of response and, if necessary, logical consistency between a few key indicators. Responses with an average time per question of four seconds or less were automatically disqualified in order to rid the results of data likely to have been submitted carelessly or insincerely. Responses with an average time per question between four to six seconds were examined further and disqualified or included based on consideration of other red flags such as straight-line response patterns or inconsistent age/year match (e.g. a respondent claiming to be 17 years old and in fourth year).

In total, 11 responses were disqualified during the cleaning process, 20 were disqualified automatically through the eligibility screening mechanisms, and 96 responses were abandoned by the respondents and not submitted. After excluding disqualified, ineligible, and partial responses, a total of 311 valid responses were analyzed and the descriptive data (frequencies) were tabulated.



Text data were analyzed using an inductive coding technique. The researcher explored responses and, based on the content, devised categories and labels to classify them. Policy-oriented categories were used, as this research was undertaken primarily for policy purposes. For example, responses to the question “what do you think is the biggest barrier, disadvantage, or issue facing LGBT or Queer students in particular” were categorized into “buckets” based on the nature of the problems identified in the responses (such as “lack of education” or “hostility”) in order to suggest goals of potential policy interventions. Depending on the content of the response, it was assigned one or more buckets, which could then be counted.

## LIMITATIONS

Like any research project, this survey has several limitations that must be considered.

Perhaps most importantly is the representativeness of the sample. Most online or telephone surveys are able to select a random sample of the target population, and after attaining a sufficient response rate, can be assured that their results reflect hold true among the general population. However, due to the nature of the population and the resources available, it was not possible to directly contact a sample of eligible participants or to calculate a response rate. As a result, it is possible that this survey suffers from selection bias: the risk that LGBTQ+ students with a certain perspective (perhaps those most involved with advocacy and activism, for example) were more likely to engage with the survey than the ‘average’ LGBTQ+ student, leading to a bias in the results.

Additionally, as the survey was advertised mostly through OUSA’s and affiliated social media networks, it is likely that most responses come from students at the seven OUSA institutions (Brock, Queen’s, Western, Waterloo, Laurier, McMaster, Trent Durham). While some responses indicate participation from students elsewhere, such as Windsor and Ottawa, due to the anonymity and security built into the survey, it is impossible to tell how far the survey “snowballed.”

Given the uncertainty regarding distribution and representativeness of the sample, care must be taken when generalizing the results of this survey. Certain trends were observed, but

further research will be needed to verify them.

Another possible weakness of this survey is the reliability of eligibility screening. With all surveys and especially those conducted online or by mail, there is no way to be sure that the participants were truthful about their eligibility to participate. There were some respondents who were disqualified by the hidden, secondary screen (i.e. despite answering “yes” when asked if they were an LGBTQ+ Ontario student, they later claimed to be cisgender and heterosexual/straight), suggesting that for whatever reason, a few respondents tried to misrepresent their eligibility. However, it is difficult to imagine that more than a small handful of respondents did so, as there was no material incentive to participate in the survey.

Similarly, there is no way to be certain that respondents did not submit the survey multiple times. Though duplication protection was used, savvy respondents determined to fraudulently submit multiple responses could circumvent this measure. Based on their start and finish times, and the similarity of answer sets, a small number of ineligible respondents attempting to retake the survey immediately after being disqualified were identified and screened appropriately.

Lastly, though efforts were taken to prevent this, it could be argued that the phrasing of some questions “primed” participants to have a certain frame of mind. The open-ended questions, for example, ask for solutions to problems, presupposing that problems exist, and prompting thinking along these lines. Some of this was unavoidable, as the policy-oriented nature of the research searches for improvements to existing conditions. To minimize the extent to which this priming effect might have influenced responses, these less neutrally phrased questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire.

# RESULTS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

After screening and data cleaning, 311 responses to the survey were analyzed. 92% of respondents were full-time, undergraduate students. The years of study for undergraduates were fairly evenly distributed and 9% of respondents were graduate students. No significant differences were noted in the responses based on year of study.

Respondents were asked to provide their sexual orientation and gender identity, though it was prominently noted that they were free to skip these questions. They had the option to write their preferred terms in an open text box, select one or more options from a list, or abstain from the question altogether. Most participants chose to provide a response.

Just over half identified as “homosexual/gay/lesbian.” The majority indicated that they were cisgender. No respondents identified as heterosexual/straight (only respondents who identified as something other than cisgender would have been able to without being disqualified).

### KEY TERMS EXPLAINED

**QUEER:** *Historically, a derogatory term for homosexuality, used to insult LGBT people. Although still used as a slur by some, the term has been reclaimed by some members of LGBT communities, particularly youth.*

**PANSEXUAL:** *A person who is emotionally or sexually attracted to individuals of diverse gender expression, identity or assigned sex.*

**ASEXUAL:** *A person who may not experience sexual attraction or who has little or no interest in sexual activity.*

**DEMISEXUAL:** *Someone who can only experience sexual attraction with a partner with whom they share an intense emotional connection.*

**CISGENDER:** *Refers to someone whose gender identity corresponds with their birth-assigned sex.\**

**GENDERQUEER:** *Refers to a person whose gender identity may not correspond with social and societal gender expectations. Individuals who identify as genderqueer may identify with both male and female genders, move between genders, or reject the gender binary all together.\**

**NON-BINARY:** *Refers to someone whose gender identity is not exclusively male or exclusively female; does not ascribe to the traditional gender binary.*

**TRANS:** *A term commonly used to refer to transgender, transsexual, and/or gender variant identities and experiences. While it is often used as an umbrella term, some people identify just as trans.\**

*\*taken from the “LGBT Resource Guide” from Egale Canada*

TABLE ONE: SEXUAL ORIENTATION

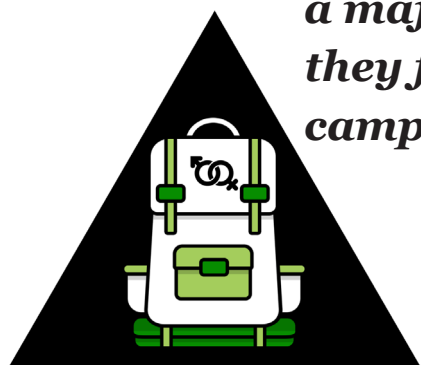
Sexual Orientation	Number	Percentage
Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian	158	51%
Queer	86	28%
Bisexual	80	26%
Pansexual	44	14%
Asexual/Gray Asexual	26	8%
Demisexual	14	5%
Bi-curious	13	4%
Other	7	2%
Polysexual	5	2%
Total Selections	433	

n=309

TABLE TWO: GENDER IDENTITY

Gender Identity	Number	Percentage
Cisgender	240	78%
Genderqueer	29	9%
Non-binary	26	8%
Gender fluid	20	7%
Trans	19	6%
Agender	10	3%
Other	6	2%
Total Selections	350	

n=306



*a majority of respondents indicated that they felt comfortable and included on campus*

*a majority also said they would like to see more permanently designated LGBTQ+ safe spaces*

## CAMPUS CLIMATE AND RESOURCES

Students were asked several questions regarding campus climate and the resources available for LGBTQ+ students. Responses were measured either on four-point Likert scales, or simple yes or no questions.

A large majority of respondents indicated that they felt comfortable and included on campus (18% strongly agree, 62% agree), and that they felt welcome at large university events or activities (21% strongly agree, 60% agree). However, a small majority agreed that they find it hard to meet and connect with like-minded students on their campuses (20% strongly agree, 37% agree).

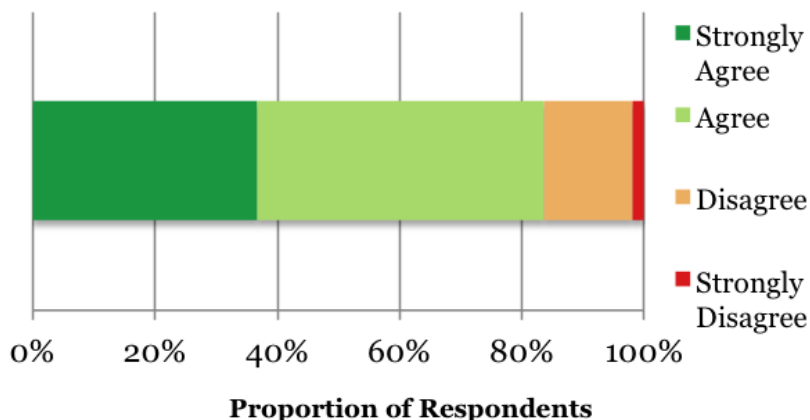
A large majority agreed that they would like more student areas permanently designated as LGBTQ+ safe spaces (32% strongly agree, 48% agree). Overall, a small majority agreed that they would prefer to use gender-neutral washrooms on campus (28% strongly agree, 28% agree); however a large majority of non-cisgender respondents (79%) either agreed or strongly agreed.

The strongest opinion observed in this section was in response to the statement “I wish the university employed more full-time staff to run LGBTQ+ groups, events, and spaces,” which saw very high levels of agreement (37% strongly agree, 47% agree). Figure 1 shows these results below.

Nearly all (89%) respondents were aware of a pride centre, resource space, or similar organization on their campus, although many (54%) said they were not involved with it, as either a member/user or staff/volunteer.

These results demonstrate that most respondents feel generally comfortable and included in campus life, though roughly 20% do not. A majority also would like to see increased investment and attention from universities in LGBTQ+ oriented activities and spaces.

**FIGURE 1. “I WISH THE UNIVERSITY EMPLOYED MORE FULL-TIME STAFF TO RUN LGBTQ+ GROUPS, EVENTS, AND SPACES.”**





## CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

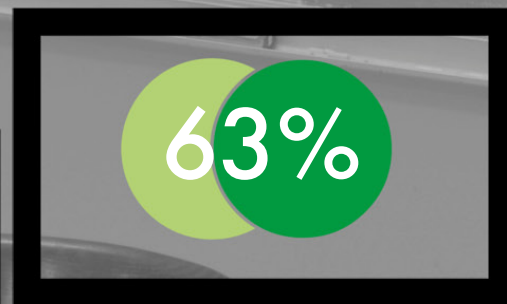
Students were also asked several questions related to their classroom environments and professors. These responses were measured on five-point Likert scales. Most respondents (38%) reported that they were “sometimes” made uncomfortable in class regarding their orientation or gender by their professors’ comments or assumptions, while 25% indicated often or always, and 30% indicated never or rarely. Half of respondents reported that their professors never (15%) or rarely (35%) used gender-neutral language, with a plurality indicating that they sometimes do (36%), and very few indicating that they often (12%) or always do (2%); however here as well responses differed between cisgender respondents and those who did not identify as cisgender, with 27% of the latter group saying that professors never used gender neutral language, to the former’s 12%. Perhaps this points to differences in understanding of what constitutes “gender-neutral.”

Additionally, very few felt that materials and curricula outside of gender studies programs always (1%) or often (6%) include LGBTQ+ figures with most saying that they rarely (47%) or never (25%) do, and some saying that they sometimes do (21%).

These more specific questions reveal a wider range of experiences and hint at areas that need improvement. Inclusive language use and acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ identities is uncommon in courses other than those that deal specifically with gender, and only a third of respondents rarely or never encountered troubling remarks from their professors.



*“Acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ identities is uncommon in courses outside of those that deal specifically with gender.”*



*63% of respondents are made uncomfortable “sometimes” or “often/always” about their orientation or gender in class due to their professors’ language or assumptions*

1 in 5



**LGBTQ+**  
*respondents*

*reported that physical  
health care staff did not  
have the knowledge  
necessary to provide  
them with good care.*

ONE RESPONDENT  
DESCRIBED HOW THEIR  
DOCTOR STRUGGLED TO  
MAKE EYE CONTACT



WHEN  
SAYING  
THE  
WORD

*transgender*

## HEALTH SERVICES

Respondents were asked to respond to true or false statements about healthcare services on their campuses. In general, respondents seemed to have positive impressions of physical and mental health care. Nearly half of respondents had never used these services, but of those who had, the large majority believed that practitioners had been respectful and professional.

However, 20% of respondents who had used these services indicated that physical healthcare workers (such as doctors or nurses) were not respectful or professional and that they lacked the knowledge necessary to provide good care. Further, 34% of students who had used mental health services reported that the counselors and therapists lacked the knowledge necessary to provide good care. These respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate in an open text field.

Among those who reported bad experiences, a common theme was practitioners who were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the healthcare needs of LGBTQ+ students, and with LGBTQ+ identities more generally. This was particularly true for trans health issues; multiple students recalled delays and difficulties obtaining prescriptions for hormones because doctors did not feel confident enough in their own knowledge to proceed. One respondent's doctor searched Google for basic medical information on hormones in the middle of an appointment. Another response described how, over many months, their doctor had struggled to make eye contact when saying the word 'transgender.'

Complaints were not limited to Trans health issues, however, with many respondents expressing frustration with practitioners' limited knowledge or discomfort about Queer sexual health or orientations. One respondent describes their healthcare workers as "simply uneducated in safe lesbian sex." Another got the impression that "they thought I had STDs because I was gay." Another respondent commented "revelations of my sexuality resulted in visible discomfort on the part of those I was in contact with."

Fortunately, the majority of respondents who had accessed these services did not have negative experiences. Nonetheless, the one-in-five students who did describe troubling instances that hint at some deeper failings. These deserve attention from policy makers.



## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Respondents were asked to write-in what they believed to be the biggest challenge facing LGBTQ+ students in Ontario universities. Responses reflected a wide range of issues, but key themes emerged. Though many of the themes are interrelated, and many were discussed in tandem, they are mostly distinct.

When asked to describe the biggest barriers or disadvantages that Ontario LGBTQ+ students face at university, six themes crystallized. Explanations of these themes, and examples of each, are as follows:

**RESOURCE INADEQUACY** - Any issue stemming from a lack of attention, funding, or programming from the institution such as: not having a LGBTQ+ space, not having or insufficiently promoting LGBTQ+ events, not having gender neutral washrooms or residence options, etc.

*“It’s about finding a space that is truly welcoming ... it can be challenging to ensure that appropriate supports are in place. Universities need to provide funding.”*

**IGNORANCE** - Staff, faculty, or other students who are inadvertently discriminatory due to a lack of understanding or awareness of LGBTQ+ issues or identities.

*“The ignorance of others when it comes to gender binaries and sexualities. People see in black and white and don’t realize that there are thousands of shades of gray.”*

**ANXIETY** - Pressures or fears beyond those a cisgender/heterosexual student might face, particularly relating to coming out, being targeted, being judged, or being mistreated as a result of one’s orientation or gender identity.

*“The fear of being rejected or judged by others, especially when you don’t know how to let them know, or bring it up in conversation.”*

**EXCLUSION** - Having one’s gender identity or sexuality be ignored, mischaracterized, dismissed, or forgotten; being subject to false assumptions or stigmatization; or being routinely exposed to non-inclusive language.

*“Assumed gender binaries and assumed heterosexuality makes my own identity feel sidelined and unimportant.”*

**HOSTILITY** - Overt homophobia or transphobia, scorn, or otherwise offensive behaviour from peers, administration, or faculty.

*“Having people shout insults like ‘fag’ at you, attempting to sexualize you by asking [for] threesomes.”*

**SOCIAL CHALLENGES** - Any issue stemming from added difficulty finding friends, peers, or romantic/sexual partners as a result of identifying as LGBTQ+.

*“It can be difficult to find people you want to have a relationship with who feel the same way about you.”*



The following table shows the frequency with which each of these barriers was discussed in responses, and the percentage of respondents who mentioned them (note that the percentages do not sum to 100% as many respondents noted multiple issues). Issues discussed fewer than three times were sorted into an “other” category.

TABLE THREE: “WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST BARRIER, DISADVANTAGE, OR ISSUE FACING LGBT OR QUEER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PARTICULAR? FEEL FREE TO GIVE EXAMPLES FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES.”

Theme	Number	Percent
Exclusion	61	31%
Inadequate Resources	40	20%
Ignorance	36	18%
Hostility	33	17%
Social Challenges	30	15%
Anxiety	19	10%
All others	17	9%
Total Discussed	236	

n=196

TABLE FOUR: “WHAT ACTIONS CAN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS OR FACULTY TAKE TO IMPROVE THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE FOR LGBT OR QUEER STUDENTS IN PARTICULAR?”

Theme	Number	Percent
Resources	48	29%
Inclusion and Language	45	27%
Education	44	27%
Non-Academic Programming	27	16%
Policy	14	8%
Academic Programming	10	6%
Disengage	7	4%
Queer Representation	3	2%
All others	14	8%
Total Discussed	211	

n=166



Students were also asked to identify possible solutions - specifically, the actions that universities should take to improve the student experience for LGBTQ+ students. Suggestions and recommendations once again covered a broad range, but were sorted into a few common intervention types. Suggestions discussed fewer than three times were sorted into an “other” category.

**INCLUSION AND LANGUAGE** – Increases in day-to-day acknowledgement and inclusion of LGBTQ+ students and identities, particularly through the use of inclusive language.

*“Simply recognizing that not all students are cisgender and heterosexual would be a big step – using gender-neutral language ... would make a huge difference.”*

**ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING** - Greater representation or inclusion of LGBTQ+ figures, communities, or issues in course content; more Queer-focused courses.

*“Including more queer topics in courses.”*

**NON-ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING** - More – or more support for – social or campus life events or groups catering specifically to LGBTQ+ communities.

*“Host events or help promote events that are LGBTQ friendly.”*

**EDUCATION OR TRAINING** - Engagement in anti-oppression, sensitivity, or LGBTQ+ issues training for faculty, service-providers, administrators, or other students.

*“Have some basic, mandatory training on appropriate terms and not assuming that their students are cis/het.”*

**RESOURCES** – Increases in funding for projects, generally infrastructure based, such as the building of gender-neutral washrooms, residences, and permanent space for LGBTQ+ groups.

*“Make more dedicated queer-friendly spaces.”*

**POLICY** - Development, or improved enforcement or implementation of, policies such as anti-harassment or preferred name policies.

*“RAs should express that homophobic slurs will not be tolerated.”*

**QUEER REPRESENTATION** - Having more visible LGBTQ+ figures among university staff, faculty, and administration.

*“Hire more openly gay adults, or provide a help line of already queer professors who are comfortable meeting with LGBTQ students who may have questions about what this means.”*

**DISENGAGE** – Not providing specific services or accommodations for LGBTQ+ students

*“Try not to act too sympathetic towards LGBT [students] like they are different from the rest of society and need extra care.”*

Respondents discussed a wide variety of challenges, though exclusion was the most common. Responses about possible solutions were more focused, with additional resources, focusing on inclusive behaviour and language, and introducing LGBTQ+ issues training leading. Though these categories are not mutually exclusive, and several of them go hand in hand, they highlight some important ways to think about the barriers facing students who are LGBTQ+.



# ANALYSIS

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When designing the survey instrument, OUSA hypothesized (based on discussions in focus groups) that certain interactions are especially impactful for LGBTQ+ students’ university experiences – namely, that interactions with faculty and campus healthcare providers influence students’ broader sense of comfort and inclusion on campus. If so, one could expect to see a correlation between these variables. Though such a finding would not be sufficient to demonstrate causation in the hypothesized direction, identifying a correlation at all would be a useful first step for those considering faculty or staff training as a means to improve inclusivity.

The researcher used Chi-squared analysis to test for this relationship. To measure students’ broad impressions of their campus climate, responses to the statement “I feel comfortable and included on campus” were combined and coded into two categories, ‘high’ comfort and inclusion and ‘low’ comfort and inclusion. This variable was then cross-tabulated with questions regarding professors and health services, such as “In my experience, medical providers on campus have been professional and respectful [true or false].” Other Likert scale responses used in these cross tabulations were condensed into 2 or 3 categories.

**TABLE FIVE: SAMPLE CROSS-TABULATION OF STUDENTS’ COMFORT ON CAMPUS AND PERCEPTION OF THE RESPECTFULNESS AND PROFESSIONALISM OF CAMPUS MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS.**

	<b>Medical Practitioners Perceived as Respectful</b>		
<b>Comfort and Inclusion</b>	<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>	<b>Total</b>
High	124	22	146
Low	24	15	39
Total	148	37	

Pearson’s Chi-squared tests for independence were conducted using PSPP, a software program for statistical analysis, testing for significance at a .05 level. The Phi coefficient was calculated for statistically significant relationships to determine relationship strength. Though the non-probabilistic nature of the sample precludes the generalization of any of these findings, relationships found in this data may still suggest what should be studied in the future.

Statistically significant relationships were found at the .05 level, though the strength of the relationships proved very modest in all cases with Phi coefficients between 0.2 and 0.3.

Students who did not feel comfortable and included on campus were more likely than those who did to have had professors whose comments made them uncomfortable regarding their orientation or identity ( $X^2 = 23.11$  (2,  $n=310$ ),  $p < .001$ ,  $\Phi_c = 0.2$ ). They were also more likely to have encountered campus medical providers whom they believed had behaved unprofessionally or disrespectfully ( $X^2$  (1,  $n=185$ ) = 10.53,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.2$ ), and to have encountered both physical and mental healthcare providers on campus who had insufficient knowledge to provide them with good care (respectively,  $X^2$  (1,  $n=180$ ) = 15.24,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.3$ ; and  $X^2$  (1,  $n=157$ ) = 6.96,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $\Phi = 0.2$ ). No significant relationship was found between feelings of inclusion on campus and perceptions of the frequency with which professors use gender-neutral language ( $X^2$  (2,  $n=307$ ) = 5.84,  $p = 0.056$ ). Overall, these results show that among OUSA’s respondents, those who felt low levels of comfort on campus were slightly more likely to have had negative experiences with faculty and health services. This could mean that faculty and medical services play an influential role in setting

a welcoming and inclusive tone for students who are LGBTQ+. Policy focusing on improving these experiences may be critical to improving campus climate for LGBTQ+ students.

Year of study was also examined to determine if feelings of inclusion could be tied to greater familiarity with, and time spent, on campus. No relationship was found, suggesting that no particular cohort is any more or less likely to experience exclusion or discomfort ( $X^2$  (5,  $n=310$ ) = 6.08,  $p = 0.30$ ). This implies that the issues at hand run deeper than familiarity.

Given their increased risk of being marginalized, OUSA also hypothesized that students who are Trans, agender, non-binary, or genderqueer/ gender fluid would be more likely to experience negative interactions and feelings of exclusion. Analysis was conducted to explore these relationships as well.

For the purpose of analysis, the gender identity variable was assigned two categories: students who identify as cisgender, and students who identify other than cisgender (i.e. identify as Trans, non-binary, genderqueer/fluid, agender, or otherwise non-cisgender). This variable was first cross-tabulated with variables relating to campus climate, then with all perception-based questions regarding faculty and service providers, as above.

Trans, non-binary, genderqueer/fluid, and agender students were less likely than cisgender students to have high comfort and inclusion on cam-

pus ( $X^2 = 18.35$  (1,  $n=302$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.2$ ), and were less likely to feel welcome at large university events and activities ( $X^2 = 24.33$  (1,  $n=301$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.3$ ).

These respondents were more likely than cisgender respondents to have been made uncomfortable regarding their orientation or identity by their professors' comments ( $X^2 = 40.18$  (2,  $n=301$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\Phi_c = 0.3$ ). They were also more likely to report that both physical and mental healthcare providers on campus lacked adequate knowledge to provide them with good care (respectively:  $X^2 = 12.24$  (1,  $n=171$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.3$ ; and  $X^2=10.40$  (1,  $n=149$ )  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.3$ ). No relationship was found, however, between gender identity and perceptions that medical practitioners were unprofessional or disrespectful ( $X^2=0.49$  (1  $n=176$ ),  $p = 0.48$ ). Overall, these results suggest that in most cases, non-cisgender LGBTQ+ students are slightly more likely than cisgender LGBTQ+ students to have negative experiences with faculty and health services.

These findings suggest that for students with gender identities other than cisgender, campus communities can be particularly unwelcoming and exclusionary. Moreover, with slight correlations found between non-cisgender identity and negative interactions with staff and faculty in three out of four relationships tested, strategies to promote greater understanding among university employees of diverse gender identities may be warranted.



# DISCUSSION

This project yielded many interesting results, and OUSA is grateful for the high number of participants. The findings point to areas that should receive attention from both policy makers and researchers. This section will note what OUSA considers to be the main themes emerging from this project.

Overall, most respondents expressed that they felt welcome and comfortable in campus life in general, though roughly 20% felt excluded and uncomfortable. Though it is encouraging that those who felt excluded were the minority, it is important not to discount their experiences: 20% is still too many. Regardless, most respondents still felt that there should be more support from universities in several areas, so while this news is largely positive, it is not unqualified.

The need for more resources to support LGBTQ+ friendly groups, staff, and infrastructure came through consistently in the results. Most respondents indicated that they believe the current resources available to LGBTQ+ students are inadequate. The high proportion who desired more spaces, gender-neutral washrooms, and more support staff demonstrates this, as does the open text analysis: 20% of respondents discussed inadequate resources as a major challenge, and 29% called for resource increases, making it the most common suggestion.

The need for education and training about diverse sexualities and gender identities is another key finding of this project. Noted by nearly a fifth of participants in the open-ended questions, ignorance was the third most commonly discussed issue, and relatedly, education was the third most common recommendation, made by 27% of respondents.

Moreover, training should focus on faculty and key service providers such as health practitioners. Chi-squared analyses suggest that (among this sample, at least) interactions with these individuals are slightly predictive of students' overall sense of inclusion on campus. Causation remains unclear, and it is possible that negative impressions of campus

colour individual interactions, rather than vice versa. However, it is also easy to imagine how negative experiences with figures in positions of authority and service could make an environment seem toxic and uninviting, which is the explanation consistent with discussions in focus groups. This relationship should be explored further, but preliminary results hint at the possibility that better-trained and more aware key figures in the university community could set a welcoming tone for students who are LGBTQ+.

Regarding training, a focus on inclusive language might be especially useful. Nearly a third of respondents who answered the open-ended questions highlighted a need for training in the usage of proper terms. High proportions of respondents reported troubling comments and non-inclusive language from their professors. Likewise, though most users of healthcare services were satisfied, those who were not encountered a similar lack of understanding, sensitivity, or knowledge.

These findings also provide directions for additional research. Future projects should consider employing representative, probability samples for more generalizable findings, and should employ methods that allow for analysis of causation. Additionally, they should include a deeper exploration of perceptions surrounding inclusive language use and what that entails, given how few respondents felt that it was often employed.

Furthermore, studies to examine the efficacy and effects of the kinds of training and education interventions called for by many respondents could help drive policymaking in the future and determine if such measures are successful in improving the overall university experience for LGBTQ+ students.

# APPENDIX

## LGBTQ+ STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

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### Eligibility

Eligible participants for this survey are Ontario university students who:

- identify as something other than the gender they were assigned at birth, or
- identify as something other than heterosexual, or
- both

1) Based on this, are you an eligible participant?\*

- ☐ I am eligible  
☐ I am not eligible (I identify as both cis-gender and heterosexual, or I am not an Ontario university student)
- 

### Basic Information

2) Are you a currently a part-time or full-time student?

- ☐ Part-time  
☐ Full-time

3) What is your current year of study?

- ☐ First Year  
☐ Second Year  
☐ Third Year  
☐ Fourth Year  
☐ Fifth or more  
☐ Graduate Student

4) What is your age?

Please feel free to skip these questions if you wish. Any information you offer is helpful to our analysis.

5) Please write-in or select the sexual orientation(s) that you identify with most.

☐ or please write in:

- ☐ Asexual  
☐ Androgynosexual  
☐ Bisexual  
☐ Bi-curious  
☐ Demisexual  
☐ Heterosexual/Straight  
☐ Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian  
☐ Queer  
☐ Pansexual  
☐ Polysexual

6) Please write-in or select the gender identity(ies) that you identify with most.

- ☐ Agender  
☐ Cisgender (you identify with the gender assigned to you at birth)  
☐ Gender-fluid  
☐ Genderqueer  
☐ Non-binary  
☐ Trans  
☐ or please write in:
- 

7) I feel comfortable and included on campus.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Strongly Agree

8) I feel welcome at large university events or activities.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Strongly Agree

9) I find it hard to meet and connect with like minded students on my campus.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Strongly Agree

10) I wish there were more student areas on campus (such as student lounges or club rooms) that were permanently designated as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

11) I would prefer to use gender neutral washrooms on campus.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

12) I wish the university employed more full-time staff to run LGBTQ+ groups, events, and spaces.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

13) Professors say or assume things in class that make me feel excluded or uncomfortable regarding my sexual orientation or gender identity.

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

14) Materials and curricula (outside of gender studies courses) include LGBTQ+ people/characters.

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

15) My professors use gender neutral and inclusive language.

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

16) In my experience, medical providers on campus (e.g. physicians or nurses) have been professional and respectful.

☐ True

☐ False

☐ I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 17) If you wish, please elaborate:

18) In my experience, medical providers on campus have had the knowledge necessary to provide me with good care.

☐ True

☐ False

☐ I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 19) If you wish, please elaborate:

20) In my experience, mental health workers on campus (i.e. counsellors, therapists) have had the knowledge necessary to provide me with good care.

☐ True

☐ False

☐ I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 21) If you wish, please elaborate:

22) Does your campus has a pride centre, pride group, or similar group that provides services, resources, or peer support for LGBTQ+ students?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

23) Are you involved with it as either a member/user or staff/volunteer?

☐ Yes

☐ No

24) What do you think is the biggest barrier, disadvantage, or issue facing LGBT or Queer university students in particular? Feel free to give examples from your own experiences.

25) What actions can university administrators or faculty take to improve the university experience for LGBT or Queer students in particular?





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