

# **Queer-Spectrum and Trans-Spectrum Student Experience in Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis of NSSE, CIRP, SERU-AAU and ACHA-NCHA Survey Responses**

**Maren Greathouse, M.S.**

Director, Tyler Clementi Center  
Rutgers University, New Brunswick  
[maren.greathouse@rutgers.edu](mailto:maren.greathouse@rutgers.edu)

**Susan “Sue” Rankin, Ph.D.**

CEO and Principal Investigator, Rankin & Associates Consulting  
Faculty Emeritus, Pennsylvania State University  
[sxr2@psu.edu](mailto:sxr2@psu.edu)

**Allison BrckaLorenz, Ph.D.**

Project Manager, Faculty Survey of Student Engagement  
& Research Analyst, National Survey of Student Engagement  
Center for Postsecondary Research  
Indiana University Bloomington  
[abrckalo@indiana.edu](mailto:abrckalo@indiana.edu)

**Mary Hoban, Ph.D., CHES**

Chief Research Officer, ACHA-National College Health Assessment  
American College Health Association  
[MHoban@acha.org](mailto:MHoban@acha.org)

## **Missing From Our Research Team:**

**Ronald Huesman, Jr., Ph.D.**

Managing Director, Student Experience at the Research University  
Association of American Universities Consortium (SERU-AAU)  
Center for Studies in Higher Education  
University of California-Berkeley & University of Minnesota-Twin Cities  
[huesm003@umn.edu](mailto:huesm003@umn.edu)

**Ellen Stolzenberg, Ph.D.**

Assistant Director of Research, Cooperative Institutional Research Prgm.  
Higher Education Research Institute  
University of California-Los Angeles  
[stolzenberg@gseis.ucla.edu](mailto:stolzenberg@gseis.ucla.edu)

Queer-spectrum<sup>1</sup> and trans-spectrum students remain a significantly underserved population within higher education, despite the presence of disparities across measures of campus climate, academic, and health outcomes. As of 2015, less than 15% of American colleges and universities provided dedicated staff and operational support to address the unique needs of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum populations<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of institutional research, quantitative instruments utilized by institutions to measure student experience- both locally and nationally- have historically omitted demographic variables measuring sexual orientation and gender identity. In an increasingly data-driven culture, these omissions have rendered queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students invisible to university decision-makers and program planners. Further, quantitative scholarship addressing sexual orientation and gender identity in higher education is consistently under-represented among higher education journals. A study of quantitative research published among tier-one higher education journals from 2010-2012 found that only 1.88% addressed sexual identity and 0.54% addressed gender identity.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, while qualitative studies provide deep insight into the experiences of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students, their findings offer limited generalizability and present a significant obstacle to demonstrating the need for increased support of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum students.

This landscape is at the precipice of a major shift, as leading higher education research centers increasingly incorporate sexual orientation and gender identity demographic variables into their respective instruments.

*Year Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Variables were Included in National Datasets*

Survey Instrument (Year Established)**	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity
CIRP Freshman Survey (1966)	2015	2015
CIRP Your First College Year (2000)	2011	2011
CIRP College Senior Survey (1993)	2015	2015
CIRP Diverse Learning Environments Survey (2011)	2011	2011
Nat'l Survey of Student Engagement (2000)	2013	2014
Before College Survey of Student Engagement (2009)	2017	2014
Student Experience at the Research Institution (2010)	2010	2010
ACHA National College Health Assessment (2000)	2008*	2008*

\*From 2000-2007, sexual orientation and gender identity were ineffectively collapsed into a single question, "which of the following best describes you? Heterosexual, Gay/Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Other." In 2008, the NCHA revised the survey with two distinct questions.

\*\*Survey information retrieved from the following websites on 3/27/2017: <https://berkeleyu.edu>, <http://nsse.indiana.edu>, <https://seru.umn.edu>, and <http://www.acha-ncha.org>.

In Spring of 2016, the Tyler Clementi Center initiated a research collaboration with the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University Bloomington, the Higher Education Research Institute/Cooperative Institutional Research Program, the Student Experience At the Research University- Association of American Universities Consortium and the American College Health Association to conduct a meta-analysis of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum responses within the aforementioned datasets. Collectively, this analysis represents the responses of 79,798 queer-spectrum students and 8,361 trans-spectrum students at 902 institutions- the largest analysis of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student experience in the history of higher education.

<sup>1</sup>The terms queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum describe identities that depart from heterosexual and cisgender identities respectively, while honoring that sexual and gender identities are fluid and do not always align with socially constructed, fixed categories commonly conveyed by terms such as "LGBT."

<sup>2</sup> Dedicated staff defined as either one graduate assistant fully dedicated to service of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student support or one professional staff whose job duties are at least 50% dedicated to queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student support. ([The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals](#))

<sup>3</sup> Garvey, J. (2014). "Demographic Information Collection in Higher Education and Student Affairs Survey Instruments: Developing a National Landscape for Intersectionality." In *Intersectionality and Higher Education: Research, Theory, and Praxis*, edited by C.S.D. Mitchell & L. Greyerbiehl, 201–216. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2014.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

<b>RANKIN</b>	<p>Although the categories listed below may not represent your full identity or use the language you prefer, for the purpose of this survey, please indicate which choice below most accurately describes your sexual identity. <i>Bisexual, Gay, Heterosexual, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, Questioning, A sexual identity not listed here (Please specify):</i> _____</p>
<b>CIRP</b>	<p><b>What Is Your Sexual Orientation?</b> <i>Heterosexual/ Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Other</i></p>
<b>SERU</b>	<p><b>Do You Consider Yourself To Be:</b> <i>Heterosexual or Straight, Gay or Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Other (please specify), Decline to State</i></p>
<b>NSSE</b>	<p><b>Which Of The Following Best Describes Your Sexual Orientation?</b> <i>Straight (Heterosexual) Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Queer, Questioning/ Unsure, Another Sexual Orientation, I Prefer Not To Respond</i></p>
<b>ACHA-NCHA</b>	<p><b>What Term Best Describes Your Sexual Orientation?</b> <i>Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, Questioning, Same Gender Loving, Straight/ Heterosexual, and Another Identity (please specify)</i></p>

## GENDER IDENTITY

<b>RANKIN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is your birth sex (assigned)?</b> <i>Male, Female, Intersex</i></li> <li>• <b>What is your current gender identity?</b> <i>Genderqueer, Man, Nonbinary, Transgender, Woman, A gender not listed here (Please specify):</i> _____</li> <li>• <b>What is your gender expression?</b> <i>Androgynous, Feminine, Masculine, A gender expression not listed here (Please specify):</i> _____</li> </ul>
<b>NSSE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What Is Your Gender Identity?</b> <i>Man, Woman, Another Gender Identity (short answer), I prefer not to respond</i></li> </ul>
<b>CIRP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Do You Identify As Transgender?</b> <i>Yes or No</i></li> </ul>
<b>SERU</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What Sex Were You Assigned At Birth, Such As On An Original Birth Certificate?</b> <i>Male, Female, Intersex, Decline to State</i></li> <li>• <b>What Is Your Current Gender Identity?</b> <i>Male/Man, Female/Woman, Trans Male/Trans Man, Trans Female/Trans Woman, Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming, Prefer to Self-Describe (Short Answer), Decline to State</i></li> </ul>
<b>NCHA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Do You Identity As Transgender?</b> <i>Yes, No</i></li> <li>• <b>Which Term Do You Use To Describe Your Gender Identity?</b> <i>Woman, Man, Trans Woman, Trans Man, Genderqueer, Another Identity (Short Answer)</i></li> <li>• <b>What Sex Were You Assigned At Birth, Such As On An Original Birth Certificate?</b> <i>Female, Male</i></li> </ul>

# Campus Climate



Queer-spectrum freshmen felt more unsafe (37.9%) after their first year on campus than heterosexual peers (21.6%).<sup>1</sup>



Queer-spectrum seniors (31.2%) more frequently felt discriminated against at their institution because of their race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, or religious affiliation than their heterosexual peers (12.9%).<sup>2</sup>



Only 34.1% of queer-spectrum students reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their institution's administrative response to instances of discrimination, compared to 46.4% of heterosexual peers.<sup>3</sup>

Queer-spectrum students who SA/A that students of their sexual orientation were respected at their research university (49.5%).<sup>4</sup>



Queer-spectrum students who felt a sense of belonging at their research university (74.8%).<sup>5</sup>



Nearly one-quarter of queer-spectrum students reported being verbally threatened (23.4%) within the last 12 months, compared to 15.2% of heterosexual peers.<sup>6</sup>



Queer-spectrum students (52.2%) were more likely to report that they had difficulty getting along with their roommate than heterosexual peers (44.2%).<sup>7</sup>



Queer-spectrum students were slightly more likely (28.6%) to take a break of at least one term because they did not feel that they "fit in" at their college than heterosexual peers (23.5%).<sup>8</sup>



Trans-spectrum freshmen felt more unsafe (53.0%) after their first year on campus than non-transgender peers (23.4%).<sup>1</sup>



Trans-spectrum seniors (43.6%) more frequently felt discriminated against at their institution because of their race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, or religious affiliation than their non-transgender peers (14.4%).<sup>2</sup>



Only 31.1% of trans-spectrum students reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their institution's administrative response to instances of discrimination, compared to 44.9% of non-transgender peers.<sup>3</sup>

Trans-spectrum students who SA/A that students of their gender identity were respected at their research university (30.8%).<sup>4</sup>



Trans-spectrum students who felt a sense of belonging at their research university (65.2%).<sup>5</sup>



Nearly one-quarter of trans-spectrum students reported being verbally threatened (24.9%) within the past 12 months, compared to 16.0% of non-transgender peers.<sup>6</sup>



Trans-spectrum students (58.3%) were more likely to report that they had difficulty getting along with their roommate than non-transgender peers (45.0%).<sup>7</sup>



Trans-spectrum students were significantly more likely (52.6%) to take a break of at least one term because they did not feel that they "fit in" at their college than non-transgender peers (23.5%).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ACHA-National College Health Assessment (2016) 137 institutions, total n=95,761, Queer-Spectrum n=11,825 (12.3%), Trans-Spectrum n=2,942 (3.1%)

<sup>2</sup> National Survey of Student Engagement (2017) 637 institutions, total n=397,232, Queer-Spectrum n=36,806 (9.2%), Trans-Spectrum n=3,879 (<1%)

<sup>3</sup> Student Experience at the Research University—AAU (2016) 18 institutions, total n=87,584, Queer-Spectrum n=9,879 (11.3%), Trans-Spectrum n=1,526 (1.7%)

<sup>4</sup> The Freshman Survey, CIRP (2015) 253 institutions, total n=202,033, Queer-Spectrum n=13,187 (6.5%), Trans-Spectrum n=678 (<1%)

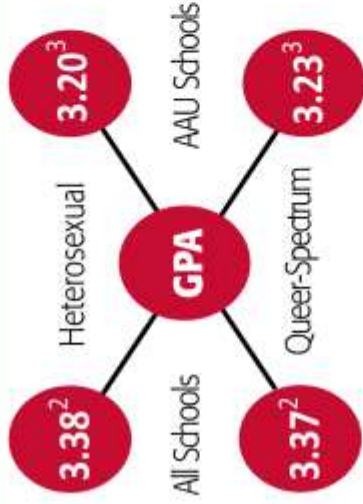
<sup>5</sup> Your First College Year, CIRP (2016), 54 institutions, total n=18,529, Queer-Spectrum n=2,047 (11%), Trans-Spectrum n=157 (<1%)

<sup>6</sup> The Diverse Learning Environments Survey, CIRP (2016) 30 institutions, total n=35,115 Queer-Spectrum n=3,184 (9%), Trans-Spectrum n=272 (<1%)

<sup>7</sup> College Senior Survey, CIRP (2016) 79 institutions, total n=22,700 Queer-Spectrum n=1,940 (8.5%), Trans-Spectrum n=84 (<1%)



# Academic Outcomes



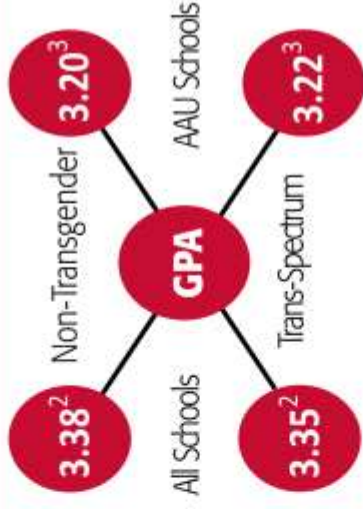
1 of 3 queer-spectrum students (30.4%) said that depression impacted their academic performance!



49.9% of queer-spectrum students turned in course assignments late either occasionally or frequently during their freshman year, compared to 37.1% of their heterosexual peers<sup>5</sup>



29.1% of queer-spectrum students have considered dropping out of college<sup>6</sup>



1 of 3 trans-spectrum students (32.1%) said that depression impacted their academic performance!

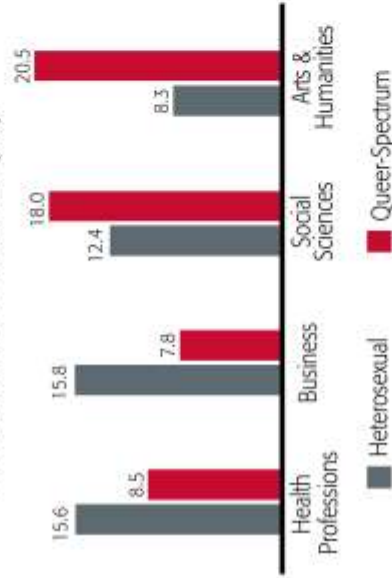


62.9% of trans-spectrum students turned in course assignments late either occasionally or frequently during their freshman year, compared to 38.5% of their non-transgender peers<sup>5</sup>

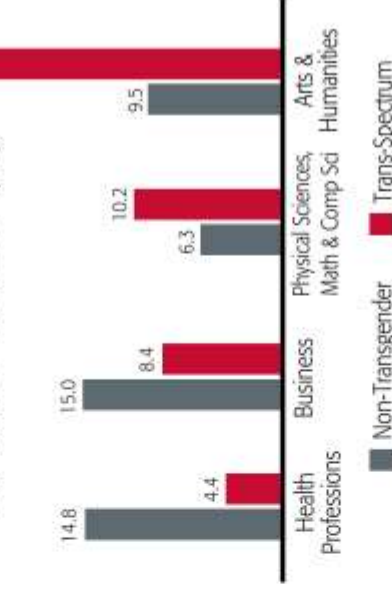


39.9% of trans-spectrum students have considered dropping out of college<sup>6</sup> and 34.5% of seniors report failing one or more college courses, compared to 18.7% and 16.5% of non-transgender peers, respectively<sup>7</sup>

REPORTED MAJORS (%)<sup>2</sup>



REPORTED MAJORS (%)<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>ACHA-National College Health Assessment (2016) 137 institutions, total n=95,761, Queer-Spectrum n=11,825 (12.3%), Trans-Spectrum n=2,942 (3.1%)

<sup>2</sup>National Survey of Student Engagement (2017) 637 institutions, total n=397,232, Queer-Spectrum n=36,806 (9.2%), Trans-Spectrum n=3,879 (<1%)

<sup>3</sup>Student Experience at the Research University—AAU (2016) 18 institutions, total n=87,584, Queer-Spectrum n=9,879 (11.3%), Trans-Spectrum n=1,526 (1.7%)

<sup>4</sup>The Freshman Survey, CIRP (2015) 253 institutions, total n=202,033, Queer-Spectrum n=13,187 (6.5%), Trans-Spectrum n=678 (<1%)

<sup>5</sup>Your First College Year, CIRP (2016), 54 institutions, total n=18,529, Queer-Spectrum n=2,047 (11%), Trans-Spectrum n=157 (<1%)

<sup>6</sup>The Diverse Learning Environments Survey, CIRP (2016) 30 institutions, total n=35,115 Queer-Spectrum n=3,184 (9%), Trans-Spectrum n=272 (<1%)

<sup>7</sup>College Senior Survey, CIRP (2016) 79 institutions, total n=22,700 Queer-Spectrum n=1,940 (8.5%), Trans-Spectrum n=84 (<1%)

# Health Outcomes



39.2% of incoming queer-spectrum freshmen rated their emotional health as below average or in the lowest 10%, compared to 11.5% of heterosexual peers<sup>1</sup>



Queer-spectrum students felt more isolated (25.0%) from campus life than heterosexual students (15.3%)<sup>2</sup>



4 out of 5 queer-spectrum students felt "very sad" in the last 12 months, and 3 out of 5 reported that they were so depressed it was difficult to function<sup>1</sup>



52.1% of incoming trans-spectrum freshmen rated their emotional health as below average or in the lowest 10%, compared to 13.5% of non-transgender peers<sup>4</sup>



Trans-spectrum students felt more isolated (32.2%) from campus life than non-transgender students<sup>2</sup>



3 out of 4 trans-spectrum students felt "very sad" in the last 12 months, and 1 out of 2 reported that they were so depressed it was difficult to function<sup>1</sup>



Queer-spectrum freshmen (76.1%) were less likely to interact with parents on a weekly basis than heterosexual peers (80.7%)<sup>5</sup>

Queer-spectrum students (54.9%) were also less likely to interact with siblings or extended family on a weekly basis than heterosexual peers (66.2%)<sup>5</sup>

Trans-spectrum freshmen (67.3%) were less likely to interact with parents on a weekly basis than non-transgender peers (80.2%)<sup>5</sup>

Trans-spectrum students (41.8%) were also less likely to interact with siblings or extended family on a weekly basis than non-transgender peers (64.9%)<sup>5</sup>



15.4% of queer-spectrum students smoke cigarettes, compared to 8.3% of heterosexual peers and 29.3% of queer-spectrum students smoke marijuana, compared to 17.4% of heterosexual peers in the last 30 days<sup>1</sup>



Queer-spectrum students engaged in self-injury in the previous year at 3X the rate (16.8%) of heterosexual students (5.0%)<sup>1</sup>



1 out of 5 queer-spectrum students (22.1%) had seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months<sup>1</sup>



13.7% of trans-spectrum students smoke cigarettes, compared to 9.0% of non-transgender peers and 23.1% of trans-spectrum students smoke marijuana, compared to 18.5% of non-transgender peers in the last 30 days<sup>1</sup>



Trans-spectrum students engaged in self-injury in the previous year at over 3X the rate (20.3%) of non-transgender students (6.3%)<sup>1</sup>



1 out of 4 trans-spectrum students (25.2%) had seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ACHA-National College Health Assessment (2016) 137 institutions, total n=95,761, Queer-Spectrum n=11,825 (12.3%), Trans-Spectrum n=2,942 (3.1%)  
<sup>2</sup>National Survey of Student Engagement (2017) 637 institutions, total n=397,232, Queer-Spectrum n=36,806 (9.2%), Trans-Spectrum n=3,879 (<1%)  
<sup>3</sup>Student Experience at the Research University—AAU (2016) 18 institutions, total n=87,584, Queer-Spectrum n=9,879 (11.3%), Trans-Spectrum n=1,526 (1.7%)  
<sup>4</sup>The Freshman Survey, CIRP (2015) 253 institutions, total n=202,033, Queer-Spectrum n=13,187 (6.5%), Trans-Spectrum n=678 (<1%)  
<sup>5</sup>Your First College Year, CIRP (2016), 54 institutions, total n=18,529, Queer-Spectrum n=2,047 (11%), Trans-Spectrum n=157 (<1%)  
<sup>6</sup>The Diverse Learning Environments Survey, CIRP (2016) 30 institutions, total n=35,115 Queer-Spectrum n=3,184 (9%), Trans-Spectrum n=272 (<1%)  
<sup>7</sup>College Senior Survey, CIRP (2016) 79 institutions, total n=22,700 Queer-Spectrum n=1,940 (8.5%), Trans-Spectrum n=84 (<1%)