Hello,

Do you know if universities in the United States or elsewhere do anything specific to help integrate students who consider themselves bi-gender? How can these students best be helped? Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

More and more colleges and universities are working to become safe and accessible to bigender, transgender, and other gender nonconforming students. These changes are greatly needed because discrimination against and mistreatment of these communities not only affects them; safety and accessibility of higher education affects everybody.

The term "bi-gender" or "bigender" is often used by people who identify with aspects of both male and female, and who may shift their gender presentation from masculine to feminine, or vice versa. Many bigender people identify as part of the transgender community, transgender being a term that can refer to anyone who identifies differently from the sex they were assigned at birth.

People may question their gender identity at any time in their life and college is often a time where this questioning occurs openly because people may have more freedom to explore than they had in their lives previously. College campuses vary widely with regard to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) sensitivity, but LGBTQ affirming schools abound and a majority of colleges and universities have LGBTQ student organizations, though the levels of safety and acceptance that transgender students experience in these groups also varies.

If you are looking for bigender, transgender, and/or LGBQ friendly schools, some qualities to look for include:

- Gender neutral, unisex, single-stall, or transgender accessible restrooms and locker rooms
- Policy statements about gender identity and sexual orientation-based harassment and bias violence
- Co-ed and LGBTQ friendly residential options? dorms, halls, houses, and/or wings
- Active LGBTQ student organizations that are trans inclusive and aware
• Queer Studies departments or Queer Studies as a subset of another department (e.g., Women's Studies or Gender Studies)
• Single sex institutions with transgender inclusive policies (e.g., Smith College)

How does one locate the people who are the keepers this information? Often, current trans or other gender variant students are the best sources of information. One of the most informative ways to get a sense of the campus climate itself is to visit, although that is not always a possibility. Some other ways to get the answers you are looking for include:

• Campus websites. Links to LGBTQ groups, multicultural offices, counseling centers, health centers, or other student life-related resources.
• Connect with a student or faculty sponsor of an LGBTQ representative. They can often be located via websites or through a director of student activities or a dean of student life.
• Social networking sites. If you feel comfortable, put a call out through your social networking site (e.g., Facebook) as a status update, a message to a group, or a note.
• Trans and trans ally listservs. Do a search for them and join! Then ask a question or two.
• There are organizations with websites dedicated to creating safer schools and helping you find them Check out the Safe School Coalition [2] and Campus Pride [3].
• Word of mouth. Ask around wherever you can; you never know what people know.

Many bigender, gendervariant, genderqueer, gender questioning, gender nonconforming, cross dressing, intersex, and transgender students are searching for educational opportunities that are safe and affirming. Institutions that make an extra effort in this arena often end up being safer and more inclusive for all students.

Here's to gender inclusion!

Alice!
Category:
Relationships [4]
Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, or Questioning [5]
Life issues and resources [6]

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