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To: CSU Faculty, Staff, and Administrators


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Topic: Improving LGBTQIA2S+/SOGI Demographic Data Collection within the CSU Using a QuantCrit Framework

The [California State University \(CSU\)](#) system and each CSU campus use student demographic data to gain a better understanding of the population we serve. Data points range from first-generation status to racial and ethnic identities. These data can help us form new policies to support equitable outcomes and create programs that support and empower various populations. For example, the [CSU Graduation Initiative 2025ⁱ](#) uses data to identify equity gaps in graduation rates and determine how we can improve our policies and practices to reduce these disparities. We can also use data to assess the need for new affinity centers, DEI trainings, specialized support programs, and more.

This [Knowledge Center](#) memo is one in a series on supporting LGBTQIA2S+¹ created by the [CSU Student Success Network \(Network\)](#). The Knowledge Center is an online resource created by the CSU Network that will provide curated, synthesized, and succinct information and links to support faculty, staff, and administrators in adopting equity-minded and student-centered approaches on their campus. The CSU Network was created by and for CSU faculty, staff, administrators, and students to advance equitable student learning, engagement, progression, and success. It is facilitated by the [Education Insights Center \(EdInsights\)](#) at [Sacramento State](#), an independent research and policy center devoted to student success and the public benefits of education.

¹ The Network uses the inclusive acronym “LGBTQIA2S+” in reference to both gender and sexual identities, acknowledging that the LGBTQIA2S+ population is diverse in composition and varied in affiliation. When describing a particular LGBTQIA2S+ community or portion of the LGBTQIA2S+ population, we use the naming convention that applies directly to that group.



A significant demographic notably absent from these reports are LGBTQIA2S+ communities, specifically data on Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities (SOGI) within our student body. While the CSU system and individual campuses may collect such data in accordance with [CA AB 620](#),ⁱⁱ accessibility and reporting of the data varies widely among campuses. Among the 23 campuses and the Chancellor’s Office, none provide readily accessible statistics on sexual orientation, though campuses do [report on gender and/or sex](#). The lack of accessible SOGI information on our LGBTQIA2S+ student populations can perpetuate institutional marginalization and influence how each campus recognizes, supports, and empowers the queer community. Additionally, the visibility of these data may impact how queer individuals perceive their sense of belonging within the CSU.


Even when demographic numbers are collected and made accessible, they provide an incomplete understanding of our students and an inadequate basis for creating relevant programs and policies. While these data provide valuable insights, they must be complemented by a multi-faceted and intersectional approach. A Quantitative Critical Theory (QuantCrit) framework, rooted within Critical Race Theory, recognizes that numbers alone do not capture the complex social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape our students’ experiences.ⁱⁱⁱ QuantCrit challenges us to move beyond surface-level statistics and delve deeper into the qualitative aspects of students’ lives while keeping a social justice and equity-oriented mindset.

In this memo, I will bring forth key challenges with SOGI demographic data collection and explore other approaches used to understand the experiences of LGBTQIA2S+ students, using a QuantCrit lens. Through this review, I contribute to ongoing conversations within the CSU community about enhancing policies and practices to better recognize, support, and empower our LGBTQIA2S+ populations.

Key Findings from the Literature

Sexuality, gender, and sex are not the same.

LGBTQIA2S+ communities encompass both sexual orientations and gender identities, which are independent from one another. Sexual orientation refers to a person’s sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to others. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and asexual are just a few examples. Gender identity is how a person understands their own gender, which can include identifying as a man, a woman, someone between the binary, or someone completely outside of the binary. Gender can align with the sex a person was assigned at birth (cisgender) or differ from it (transgender, nonbinary, and more). A person’s sex refers to their physical traits or sex characteristics. Currently, male and female are usually the labels used to assign sex at birth, although some doctors also use the label intersex.^{iv} A commonly-used educational tool, [Genderbread Person version 4](#)^v does a good job of visualizing the differences. It is important to acknowledge that these aspects of identity exist on a spectrum and are not confined



to rigid categories. As society becomes increasingly aware and accepting of diverse identities, the terminology and labels people use to describe themselves continue to expand, reflecting the complexity and richness of human experiences within LGBTQIA2S+ communities.

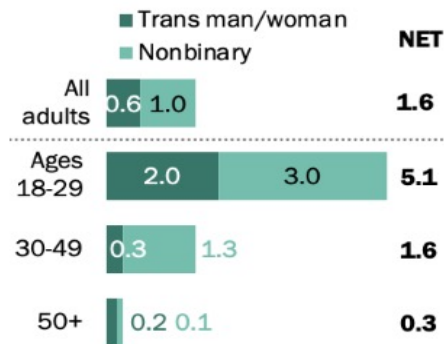
When creating surveys to understand these different aspects of LGBTQIA2S+ communities, it is important not to conflate or aggregate LGBTQIA2S+ identities.^{vi,vii,viii} However, QuantCrit also cautions against excessive disaggregation, as it can result in numerical data that become overly fragmented and detached from the broader context.^{ix} The challenge, then, is deciding which identities to include in surveys and how that decision will impact research outcomes and, subsequently, LGBTQIA2S+ students' experiences.^x For examples of how two CSUs disaggregate their data, see Chico State's [Student Gender Identity Data](#) report and Cal Poly Humboldt's [Gender Diversity Report](#).

LGBTQIA2S+ identities and the queer community have grown over time.

A [recent study](#) conducted by Pew Research shows that an increasing number of young adults in the U.S. are identifying as LGBTQIA2S+. According to their findings, among U.S. adults under 29 years old, 5.1% do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Additionally, 17% in this age group identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In comparison, for those aged 30-49, the corresponding percentages are 1.6% and 8%, respectively (see figures below).^{xi} Moreover, the college years often serve as a pivotal period during which students explore and evolve various aspects of their identities, including their sexuality and gender.^{xii,xiii} It is not uncommon for the identity with which they enter college to undergo significant changes over the course of their higher education journey. Some researchers argue that because LGBTQIA2S+ individuals still represent a relatively small portion of the population, they cannot be properly studied. Moreover, "the very implication that those separated, minoritized identity groups must meet a specific quantification perpetuates a heterogendered norm and begins erasing those experiences on campus."^{xiv} While such cautions are valid, they do not consider differences between reported and actual numbers, given the growing LGBTQIA2S+ communities and challenges that LGBTQIA2S+ individuals may face in understanding and disclosing their identities, even on anonymous surveys. Failing to act on quantitative data, no matter how small, may hinder the advancement of equity-based discussions on LGBTQIA2S+ students' success.

Young adults are more likely than older adults to be transgender or nonbinary

% of U.S. adults who say their gender is different from their sex assigned at birth

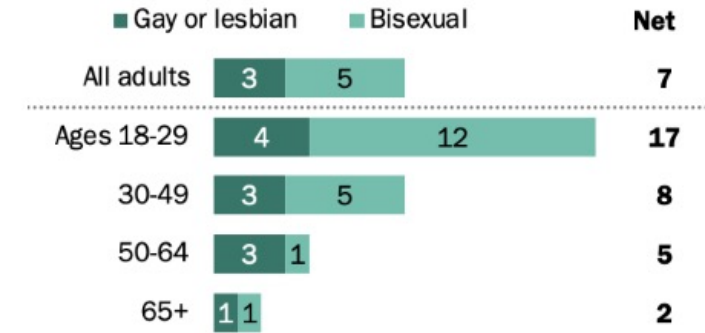


Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. Trans men are those who said they were assigned female at birth and described their gender as a man. Trans women are those who said they were assigned male at birth and described their gender as a woman.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022.

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12% of young U.S. adults describe themselves as bisexual

% of U.S. adults who think of themselves as ...




Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 18-Aug. 21, 2022.

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Demographic data collection is not enough.

QuantCrit asserts that all academic and scholarly research methods are deeply rooted in systems of oppression.^{xv,xvi,xvii} Historical examples, such as eugenicists' misuse of numbers and statistics to propagate white supremacist ideologies, underscore how data and analyses can be manipulated to harmful ends. To disrupt these systems of oppression and maintain a social justice and equity orientation, QuantCrit urges us to recognize that numbers are far from neutral, and cannot "speak for itself."^{xviii,xix} It compels us to confront our assumptions and biases that are always present even when we aim to be objective. QuantCrit suggests that incorporating qualitative approaches and actively involving marginalized communities in the research process can contribute to disrupting these systems of oppression. For example, using counter-narratives and mixed methods triangulation facilitate involvement of marginalized voices in the research process, allowing their perspectives and experiences to shape the findings and ensuing discussions.^{xx,xxi} Approaches such as these provide a model for collaboration between campuses and LGBTQIA2S+ communities to gain a deeper understanding of these communities' intricate experiences and identities.




People in LGBTQIA2S+ communities are more than just their sexual or gender identities. When advancing a social justice and equity-minded agenda, it is important to acknowledge and address the intersectionalities therein.^{xxii} LGBTQIA2S+ individuals often navigate a complex interplay of factors, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, dis/ability, and age, which profoundly shape their experiences and challenges.^{xxiii,xxiv,xxv,xxvi} These intersecting identities can influence access to resources, experiences of discrimination, and varying degrees of privilege. Therefore, it is imperative that any efforts to support and empower LGBTQIA2S+ communities take into account these multifaceted aspects.

Implications

Taking a QuantCrit approach to understanding the populations of LGBTQIA2S+ students within the CSU requires engagement from individuals at all levels to critically assess current demographic data collection and reporting practices. This approach can aid in discussions aimed at improving these practices in line with the institution's values of equity and social justice. Campuses should consider how the collection and presentation of these data may affect the perceptions of those in the community and those considering joining the community, but also perceptions of state and federal agencies that oversee institutional funding. Those who wish to be a part of current system-wide discussions related to this issue should consider getting involved with ongoing initiatives. Additionally, those who do not work directly with or closely to SOGI demographic data may be called on to identify other ways LGBTQIA2S+ students can be recognized, supported, and empowered, within their spheres of influence.

Changes in LGBTQIA2S+ demographic data collection and reporting practices will impact students. Ideally, such changes will foster a sense of belonging within the CSU and its campuses, validating and supporting students' identities. As we seek to better understand the LGBTQIA2S+ community on our campuses, queer culture may become more normalized, creating a stronger sense of community. Additionally, the data provided can inform the development of inclusive and LGBTQIA2S+ affirming programs for future generations. However, it is crucial to recognize the sensitivity of this data and the potential vulnerability it may create for LGBTQIA2S+ students. Given existing and growing hostilities toward LGBTQIA2S+ communities, any potential exposure of personally identifiable information should be handled with care and scrutiny. Consider how qualitative approaches might mitigate some of the dangers of quantitative data collection. Furthermore, take note of available student support resources. It is important that LGBTQIA2S+ students' voices are not only heard but actively supported in related conversations to prevent potential harm.



Collecting both qualitative and quantitative SOGI data and involving students in the research process will contribute to a more informed, inclusive, equitable, and social justice-oriented higher education landscape where LGBTQIA2S+ students are better understood, supported, and empowered in their academic journeys. It will also inspire practitioners to adapt their approaches to meet the evolving needs of LGBTQIA2S+ communities.

Reflection Questions


For those interested in developing strategies to understand LGBTQIA2S+ populations on your campus, I offer the following questions for reflection:

- How does my campus currently collect, use, and disseminate SOGI demographics? What are my campus policies around SOGI demographic data collection?
- Do we conflate or aggregate sexual orientations and/or gender identities in our surveys, and if so, how might this impact our LGBTQIA2S+ students? In what ways can we avoid excessive disaggregation while still capturing the diversity of LGBTQIA2S+ identities?
- How often does our campus collect demographic information? Does the frequency of data collection prepare us to support students who may be exploring and evolving their LGBTQIA2S+ identities during their college years?
- How can we ensure that we maintain a social justice and equity orientation in our data collection and research practices?
- What policies, programs, and resources does my campus/department have in place to support and empower LGBTQIA2S+ students? How does my campus/department determine if new policies, programs, or resources are needed?
- How does my campus communicate to both internal and external audiences that LGBTQIA2S+ students are welcome and supported on our campus? Conversely, what information might inadvertently convey an unwelcoming or unsupportive atmosphere for LGBTQIA2S+ students? How might reported data influence these perceptions?

Recommendations

Based on the work of the scholars cited here, I recommend that CSU faculty, staff, and administrators take the following steps to support equitable student outcomes:

- Proactively and intentionally include LGBTQIA2S+ students in conversations around policies and programs that will directly impact their community. Also, involve LGBTQIA2S+ staff, faculty, and administrators. Be aware of including and empowering voices that encompass marginalized intersectional identities.
- Develop mixed methods research that can better capture complex identities than quantitative data alone. Consider ways to capture this information throughout a student's time at your campus.

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- Evaluate current perceptions of campus support and inclusion for the LGBTQIA2S+ populations from both inside and outside the campus community. If your role encompasses working with students, consider checking in with LGBTQIA2S+ students and asking what you can do to better support them.
 - Create spaces, policies, and programs that support LGBTQIA2S+ and intersecting identities, including but not limited to racial, ethnic, dis/ability, and spiritual identities.

Resource List

I include the following resources to highlight some of the challenges and strategies referenced throughout this memo, and to provide LGBTQIA2S+ students' perspectives on campus support.

- The CSU [Diversity/Inclusivity Style Guide](#)
- Chico State's [Student Gender Identity Data](#) report
- Cal Poly Humboldt's [Gender Diversity Report](#)
- [San Jose State University's PRIDE Center Resources](#) page
- [What is QuantCrit?](#) report by STEM Equity
- [Counter-Narrative](#), an overview of the qualitative method by the Center for Intercultural Dialogue
- [Collecting Data About LGBTQI+ and Other Sexual and Gender-Diverse Communities](#), a report by the Center for American Progress
- [LGBTQ-Inclusive Data Collection: A Lifesaving Imperative](#), a report by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation
- [Counting the LGBTQ Community: Why the Census Needs to Be More Inclusive](#), a video in UCLA's Fig. 1 video series on groundbreaking research
- ["Ask Me": What LGBTQ Students Want Their Professors to Know](#), a video by the Chronicle of Higher Education

Limitations

This memo provides an overview but not a comprehensive review of all existing research on the topic of LGBTQIA2S+ college students, nor does this memo provide extensive information about methodologies of the literature included. The literature cited was also not from within the CSU or from California generally. Due to these and other limitations, the CSU Network does not endorse the strategies presented in this memo as "best practices," and the strategies presented may need to be tailored to specific contexts within CSU campuses.



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Endnotes

- ⁱ California State University (n.d.) Graduate Initiative 2025. <https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/why-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025/Pages/default.aspx>
- ⁱⁱ AB 620 AMENDED, 2011 Assembly Member Block. (Ca. 2011). http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab_0601-0650/ab_620_bill_20110322_amended_asm_v98.html
- ⁱⁱⁱ Gillborn, D., Warmington, P., & Demack, S. (2017). QuantCrit: Education, policy, 'Big Data' and principles for a critical race theory of statistics. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(2), 158-170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2017.1377417>
- ^{iv} Planned Parenthood (n.d.). What's intersex? <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity/whats-intersex#:~:text=Sometimes%20doctors%20do%20surgeries%20on,1%20grow%20up%20to%20have>
- ^v Killermann, S. (2017). The Genderbread Person version 4. <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2018/10/the-genderbread-person-v4/>
- ^{vi} Garvey, J. C., Hart, J., Metcalfe, A. S., & Fellabaum-Toston, J. (2019). Methodological troubles with gender and sex in higher education survey research. *The Review of Higher Education*, 43(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0088>
- ^{vii} Hoffman, G. D. & Pryor, J. T. (2018). Chapter 8: Reframing campus climate data to advocate for institutional transformation, praxis, and activism for LGBTQ+ college students. In K. M. Soria (Ed.), *Evaluating Campus Climate at US Research Universities: Opportunities for Diversity and Inclusion* (pp. 169-184). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94836-2_8
- ^{viii} Renn, K. A. (2015). Chapter 8: Higher Education. In G. L. Wimberly (Ed.), *LGBTQ Issues in Education: Advancing a Research Agenda* (pp. 141-160). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1s474qz.12>
- ^{ix} Gillborn et al., 2018
- ^x Wimberly, G. L. & Battle, J. (2015). Chapter 11: Challenges to doing research on LGBTQ issues in education and important research needs. In G. L. Wimberly (Ed.), *LGBTQ Issues in Education: Advancing a Research Agenda* (pp. 219-235). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1s474qz.15>
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- ^{xii} Greathouse, M., BrckaLorenz, A., ... & Stolzenberg, E. B. (2018). Chapter 3: A Meta-analysis of queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum student experiences at US research universities. In K. M. Soria (Ed.), *Evaluating Campus Climate at US Research Universities: Opportunities for Diversity and Inclusion* (pp. 49-75). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94836-2_3
- ^{xiii} Renn, 2015
- ^{xiv} Hoffman & Pryor, 2018
- ^{xv} Gillborn et al., 2018
- ^{xvi} Tabron, L. A. & Thomas, A. K. (2023). Deeper than wordplay: A systematic review of critical quantitative approaches in education research (2007-2021). *Review of Educational Research*, 93(5), 756-786. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221130017>
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- ^{xviii} Gillborn et al., 2018
- ^{xix} Garcia et al., 2018
- ^{xx} ibid
- ^{xxi} Tabron & Thomas, 2023
- ^{xxii} Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>



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^{xxiv} Hoffman & Pryor, 2018

^{xxv} Kilgo, C. A. (2022). Methodological challenges of studying high-impact practices for minoritized populations. In J. Zilvinskis, J. Kinzie, J. Daday, K. O'Donnell, & C. V. Zande (Eds.), *Delivering on the Promise of High-Impact Practices: Research and Models for Achieving Equity, Fidelity, Impact, and Scale* (pp. 40-49).

^{xxvi} Miller, R. A. & Dika, S. L. (2018). Chapter 4: Perceptions of campus climate at the intersections of disability and LGBTQIA+ identities. In K. M. Soria (Ed.), *Evaluating Campus Climate at US Research Universities: Opportunities for Diversity and Inclusion* (pp. 77-101). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94836-2_3

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