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**To:** CSU Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

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**Topic:** Support for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students: Creating Belongingness Through Campus Pride Centers

Despite increased visibility and representation within institutions of higher learning, 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual)<sup>1</sup> students continue to face challenges completing their degrees.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> This paper examines the literature associated with Pride centers, a common tool used to support the academic and personal success of 2SLGBTQIA+, queer and transgender students. It also provides a review of the 23 campuses within the California State University System to analyze the presence of Pride centers; the availability of full-time staff dedicated to supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students; and the programs, services, and resources offered to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the authors have chosen to use 2SLGBTQIA+. Two-Spirit is placed at the beginning of the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym to acknowledge that Native people and Native identities came before any concept of the Western identities represented in the rest of the acronym. Moreover, it brings awareness to the racism and violence Native people have faced and continue to face. This paper will substitute 2SLGBTQIA+ when we reference studies about queer and transgender people, unless it is inappropriate or misrepresents the findings of the study.

This [Knowledge Center](#) memo is second in a series on supporting LGBTQIA2S+<sup>1</sup> students created by the [CSU Student Success Network \(Network\)](#). The Knowledge Center is an online resource created by the CSU Network that provides 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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. In this memo, the LGBTQIA2S+ acronym used by the Network is reordered in accordance with the authors’ choice.



## Key Findings from the Literature


Despite policy changes and high-profile judicial cases, which have increased the legal rights available to 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the United States, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals continue to experience violence and marginalization.<sup>iv</sup> College campuses often offer services for queer and transgender students, including nondiscrimination policies, gender inclusive housing, and 2SLGBTQIA+ specific programs like Pride centers and Lavender Graduations, which can provide safety and belongingness. Still, “It is not evident that the changes happening in collegiate settings have resulted in positive outcomes for queer- and trans-spectrum individuals.”<sup>v</sup> In fact, most of the “best practices” proposed by administrators are not supported by empirical evidence.<sup>vi</sup>

A major barrier to serving 2SLGBTQIA+ students is a lack of data.<sup>vii</sup> Unlike other centers that serve populations of students with trackable demographics, institutions of higher education do not have reliable information on 2SLGBTQIA+ students via admissions departments or federal data. The first national survey to include demographics on sexual orientation and gender identity – the National College Health Assessment – was completed in 2008, just 15 years ago.<sup>viii</sup>

There is some disagreement about the state of 2SLGBTQIA+ scholarship within the field of higher education. One recent study found four top-tier journals in the field of higher education either did not publish any research or published only one article on 2SLGBTQIA+ people between 2009 and 2018.<sup>ix</sup> In contrast, another recent publication found scholarship on 2SLGBTQIA+ students has blossomed.<sup>x</sup> This study reviewed literature since 2010 and identified the following categories in the literature: visibility, campus climate, identity studies and experiences, outcomes for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and 2SLGBTQIA+ programs and experiences. Despite their invisibility in some higher ed journals, Pride centers are nevertheless increasingly present on college campuses. Three hundred twenty colleges and universities host programs that support 2SLGBTQIA+ communities on their campuses.<sup>xi</sup> Further, professional organizations, such as the Consortium of Higher Education LGBTQ Professionals, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and Association of College Student Educators International (ACPA), all offer resources and professional learning for Pride centers, indicating their growing presence in the field.

### **Investment in Pride centers can contribute to student success.**

Not long after the establishment of women’s centers and Black student resource centers, Pride centers began emerging on college campuses. In 1967, Society for the Homophile League (SHL) was started at Columbia University as a student organization. This space, although symbolic, was not staffed with full-time professional employees and lacked financial investment from the campus. The University of Michigan was the first campus to dedicate financial and people resources to Pride centers with their Lesbian Gay Male Programs Office, founded in 1971.<sup>xii</sup> The allocation of physical



space, financial, and other material resources, and, in many cases, the presence of professional leadership, enabled the campus Pride centers to become a prominent fixture on hundreds of college and university campuses across the country.<sup>xiii</sup>


Community-specific interventions, like Pride centers, are critically important counter spaces for traditionally underserved students. Although college campuses have continued to diversify, the unwelcoming and hostile campus cultures facing minoritized students create barriers that make it challenging for these students to succeed. 2SLGBTQIA+ students have different experiences on campus than their peers. For example, queer and transgender students report higher levels of unwelcoming environments and hostility in residence halls, Greek organizations, and sports teams than straight students.<sup>xiv</sup>

Community centers are spaces that promote and foster subcultures and can contribute meaningfully to closing gaps in outcomes. These centers are rare examples of locations on campuses that bridge students' academic and cocurricular experiences in ways that are culturally specific and affirming.<sup>xv,xvi,xvii</sup> Campus subcultures, which consist of specific values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions that differ from dominant culture, can be powerful vehicles for student success. Subculture spaces can foster connections between students and their institution, and ultimately, their academic success. Aspects of subcultures (e.g., physical spaces, culturally validating curricula, and programs) encourage students to engage in cultural community connections.<sup>xviii</sup>

Finally, Pride centers provide students with an opportunity to connect with faculty and staff members who share their identities, experiences, and backgrounds.<sup>xix</sup> Interactions with faculty outside of the classroom can be predictors of student success for some students.<sup>xx</sup> For Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color along with 2SLGBTQIA+ students, however, these interactions are not always positive, and can have a detrimental impact on student experiences.<sup>xxi,xxii</sup> Students can connect with positive faculty and staff who share their identities in campus community centers. Similarly, because minoritized students are likely to face different challenges in acculturating to college campuses because of cultural norms based on patriarchy, whiteness, and class privilege, students need spaces within which they feel comfortable, familiar, and affirmed of their culture and identity.<sup>xxiii</sup>

### **Pride centers are under-resourced and face challenges serving diverse students.**

Despite the benefits evident in campus community centers, they remain spaces that are under-researched and underfunded in higher education.<sup>xxiv,xxv</sup> Although Pride centers have been formalized over the past several decades and research suggests that these are vital spaces, many Pride center spaces remain managed by a single full-time staff member, or worse, student assistants only.<sup>xxvi</sup> Graduate students, who run some Pride centers in the United States, describe the exploitation, lack of support, and challenges of running a center with only part-time student support.<sup>xxvii</sup> The very nature of being a 2SLGBTQIA+ identified person in a role focused on advocating for the queer



and trans student community can be a significant source of emotional strain.<sup>xxviii</sup> This is amplified for Pride center teams who are understaffed or lack full-time professional staff.

Another challenge faced by Pride centers is that they serve a diverse group of students with a number of sexual orientations, romantic orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and their intersecting identities. As a result of their diverse constituency, the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ movement, and Pride centers specifically, have been critiqued for marginalizing transgender people and bisexual people in their movements and spaces.<sup>xxix,xxx</sup> For example, one study found that many Pride centers provided programs about transgender people, but few programs for transgender students. Notably, in this study, few professional staff members identified as transgender. The lack of representation of transgender staff on Pride center teams and programs for transgender student needs to be addressed and attended to by Pride centers.

In addition to serving a wide range of student experiences related to gender identity, sexual orientation and romantic orientation, Pride centers have also struggled to effectively address white hegemony and racism within center spaces. As one author suggests, many Pride centers are experienced by students as “culturally white spaces imbued with white culture and this dictate[s] how students approached the space and how they chose to engage in the space.”<sup>xxxi</sup> Students can experience “cultural appropriation, indifference, and erasure” in Pride centers. Without a thoughtful approach to organizational structure and intersectional programming, queer spaces have the potential to appear to be just as exclusionary as non-queer spaces, particularly to students of color, transgender, non-binary, and international students.<sup>xxxii,xxxiii</sup>



## Methodology

We completed a broad content analysis of Pride centers within the California State University system by evaluating content on each of the 23 CSU campus web pages. We searched websites by using the following terms: “Pride center,” “LGBTQ Center,” “Multicultural Center,” “LGBTQ Students,” and “Student Diversity Initiatives” along with terms related to specific programmatic resources, which are detailed below. Searches for these terms revealed several findings, including information on: Pride centers, 2SLGBTQIA+ faculty and staff employee resource groups, SafeZones training, importance of pronoun usage, guidelines for changing lived/legal name, and more.

Campuses were assessed first to see if they have a dedicated center for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. A dedicated center was defined as a center that solely focused on supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students and were not combined with efforts to support any other minoritized group. Several campuses had resources available to 2SLGBTQIA+ students that were also shared with other student groups. For example, one campus offered a Multicultural and Queer Resource Center. Centers that shared resources and/or staff with any other minoritized group were coded as not having a dedicated Pride center are mentioned in the Resources section of this memo.

Next, campus websites were analyzed to see if they have dedicated staff to support 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Some campuses have dedicated centers supported by full-time staff members, others had dedicated full-time staff that did not operate a physical space, and still others had physical spaces that were staffed by students. Dedicated staff are defined as staff who serve in a role that is specifically designed for the support of 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Some campuses have positions that support multiple communities (e.g., a director who supports both the Women’s Center and the Pride Center). Those positions, however, were not coded as dedicated staff resources in this analysis.

Finally, each campus was analyzed to see what kinds of programs, services, and resources they offer to 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Local campus websites were searched with the following keywords: “LGBTQ students,” “LGBT staff,” “employee resource groups,” “staff affinity groups,” “SafeZones training,” “gender-inclusive restrooms,” “gender-inclusive housing,” “Lavender Graduation,” and “name-change policy.” These terms were selected because they represent some of the key themes from the literature and span programmatic efforts, campus resources, and policies to 2SLGBTQIA+ students.




## Findings

This analysis found that 13 of the 23 CSU campuses have dedicated spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and 11 of the 23 campuses have at least one dedicated staff member to support students. These results are promising but leave room for growth. Especially significant is that, of the 11 campuses that have dedicated staff, *eight campuses only have one dedicated staff member* devoted to supporting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Just three campuses within the CSU have more than one dedicated staff member devoted to these efforts. The presence of Pride centers signals institutional support to 2SLGBTQIA+ students and their families. Full-time staff members can support students, coordinate campus efforts, and advocate for policy change. It is concerning that so few full-time resources are dedicated to supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students within the system. Campuses should consider how their institutions are supporting queer and transgender students and what financial and human resources are available to build capacity for these efforts.

Despite the limited full-time staff available to support 2SLGBTQIA+ students, campuses within the CSU tend to offer robust programs, services, and resources to support 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Research from this project found that 18 of the 23 campuses have active Pride employee resource groups for faculty and staff members (one of the 18 campuses cited here has a Pride group in the process of forming). This signals broad involvement of 2SLGBTQIA+ faculty and staff on campuses throughout the state. Employee resource groups are spaces for community building, mentorship, and professional development. They are also often engaged in campus-wide events like Pride celebrations, Lavender Graduations, fundraising for student scholarships, and educational training. Like Pride centers, Pride employee resource groups communicate to the wider campus that campuses have a strong and vibrant 2SLGBTQIA+ faculty and staff community who are eager to also support the academic and personal success of students.

Many campuses within the system also offer programs and events that aim to create a campus culture that supports 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Fifteen of the 23 CSU campuses provide SafeZones Ally Training. These offerings differ in structure and content from campus to campus, but ultimately aim to provide education on 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and allow allies to learn how they can create an inclusive campus environment. Eighteen of the 23 CSU campuses offer Lavender Graduation celebrations, which are activities associated with commencement to recognize the degree completion of 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Both SafeZones ally training and Lavender Graduation celebrations publicly support queer and transgender students by encouraging the campus community to engage in allyship and celebrate the successes of 2SLGBTQIA+ students.



Facilities are also available to many students within the CSU through gender-inclusive restrooms and gender-inclusive housing. Twenty of the 23 CSU campuses have gender-inclusive restrooms lists and/or maps that are easily located online. Significantly, 16 of the 23 CSU campuses offer gender-inclusive housing options. A recent study found that 2SLGBTQIA+ students experienced more bullying, harassment, or assault in campus housing than non-2SLGBTQIA+ participants, 25.2% vs. 11.3%, respectively.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This speaks to larger housing challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ students related to their safety. The availability, and expansion, of gender inclusive housing options may provide relief to students who can experience bullying, harassment, or assault in other housing options.

Finally, this analysis found that every campus in the CSU had a robust name-change policy that was easily searchable from their respective websites. Name-change policies often lived on the registrar's website but were cross-referenced on the Pride center pages or on pages with resources for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Most of the name-change policies included information on how students can set their lived name within campus systems, update their pronouns, and the process for legally changing their names with the university. Many of the campuses also took care to explain where lived names and legal names would be displayed within university systems and platforms. These policies were detailed, clear, and consistent across the CSU. Name-change policies can serve as a model for how campuses can create coordinated resources for students across the system.

## Implications for Practice

### Data Collection

The California State University educates the most ethnically, economically, and academically diverse student body in the nation. Nearly one-third of CSU students are the first in their families to attend college and nearly half of CSU students are underrepresented minorities. Many campuses, including the CSU system, need better data collection tools to understand the needs and educational trends of their 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Currently, local campuses are not able to track academic outcomes for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, despite research that suggests that this population faces challenges in degree completion compared with their peers.<sup>xxxv</sup> As the CSU works to close gaps in degree completion for minoritized students, 2SLGBTQIA+ students should be included in these efforts. There may be valid concerns with sharing individual 2SLGBTQIA+ data, but campuses should be able to better understand their data on 2SLGBTQIA+ students and how these students are making progress to their degrees.



## Investment in Pride centers and Full-Time Staff

This analysis found that campuses within the CSU can better support their Pride centers and can invest in full-time staff to serve the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Though over half of CSU campuses have Pride centers, they are understaffed and under-resourced. This is common for Pride centers and provides an important opportunity for growth within the CSU. Pride centers can offer students a reprieve on campuses where their identities may not always be embraced in other spaces. Campuses should have highly visible Pride center spaces that communicate belongingness to 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

Diverse student enrollment is not sufficient to adequately support the success and achievement of students of color, women, and queer and transgender students. Culturally enhancing programs and experiences are also critical to ensure that students can connect with others who share similar backgrounds. Campuses can also carefully highlight Pride centers as key resources for the campus community. Centers should have dedicated full-time staff who can serve as institutional agents for students, and an appropriate budget to provide culturally enhancing programming. Centers should be utilized in the recruitment of students to campus and in their retention through mentorship programs, faculty supported research, and other high-impact practices. Administrators should be careful that community centers do not become as Anzaldúa described, “A superficial overlay that [do] not disrupt any comfort zones”<sup>xxxvi</sup> where they are symbolic rather than meaningful “third spaces” that can contribute to the learning and holistic achievement of students.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Raising the profile of community centers by increasing the resources allocated to these spaces can serve as a tangible signal to students that their specific communities are important on campuses.





## Conclusion

The California State University has promising practices in place to support 2SLGBTQIA+ students. There are thoughtful programs, like SafeZones Training and Lavender Graduations, to promote learning and visibility of queer and transgender students on campus. Many campuses throughout the system also offer facilities like gender-inclusive restrooms and gender-inclusive housing options and publicize these offerings widely. All campuses also offer highly detailed and visible information on how students can change their legal names, lived names, and pronouns within university platforms. Finally, faculty and staff are engaged and active on campuses through employee resource groups. Nearly all campuses, however, can work to better support Pride centers and the availability of dedicated full-time staff to serve as resources to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. As previously mentioned, additional research is needed on the effectiveness of 2SLGBTQIA+ programs and initiatives. Campuses, however, can begin to think about data collection on 2SLGBTQIA+ students and how to best assess degree completion for this population of students.







Pride centers are examples of institutional efforts that can work to create equity for this minoritized population. As discussed throughout this memo, Pride centers signal important institutional support to minoritized communities and dedicated staff are needed to support these efforts. In a period when there are increased anti-2SLGBTQIA+ policies and rhetoric across the United States,<sup>xxxviii</sup> dedicated spaces for queer and trans students are needed to promote academic and personal success, liberation, love, and joy.

## Reflection Questions






- What resources does your campus have to support 2SLGBTQIA+ students? Does your campus have a dedicated Pride center? What about dedicated staff?
- What kinds of programs and services exist to support 2SLGBTQIA+ students? Is there an active Pride employee resource group that engages faculty and staff? SafeZones Training? Access to gender-inclusive restrooms and housing?
- Does your campus currently collect any data on 2SLGBTQIA+ students? Do you have metrics in place to assess academic achievement of 2SLGBTQIA+ students? If not, what are some steps you might be able to take to collect this information?
- What challenges do 2SLGBTQIA+ student face in obtaining their degrees on your campus?
- What is the local climate in your community related to 2SLGBTQIA+ issues? How can your university demonstrate commitment and support to students, with the climate in mind?

# Resources

## Dedicated Pride Center

-  Cal State LA, [Gender & Sexuality Resource Center](#)
-  CSU Dominguez Hills, [Queer Culture and Resource Center](#)
-  CSU Fullerton, [LGBTQ & Queer Resource Center](#)
-  CSU Long Beach, [LGBTQIA + Campus Climate Committee](#)
-  CSU Northridge, [Pride Center](#)
-  Cal Poly Pomona, [Pride Center](#)
-  CSU Sacramento, [Pride Center](#)
-  CSU San Bernadino, [Queer and Transgender Resource Center](#)
-  San Diego State University, [Pride Center](#)
-  San Francisco State, [Queer & Trans Resource Center](#)
-  San José State, [Pride Center](#)
-  Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, [LGBTQ Campus Life](#)
-  CSU San Marcos, [LGBTQA Pride Center](#)

## Pride & Multicultural Centers

-  Cal Poly Humboldt, [Eric Rofes Multicultural Queer Resource Center](#)
-  CSU Bakersfield, [Multicultural Alliance and Gender Equity Center](#)
-  CSU Chico, [Gender & Sexuality Equity Coalition](#)
-  CSU Monterey Bay, [Cross-Cultural Center](#)
-  Fresno State, [Cross-Cultural and Gender Center](#)



## Limitations

This analysis focused on information that was available on local CSU campus websites at the time of the review. It is possible that some campuses do, in fact, offer the resources discussed here, but this information was not available online at the time of the review. Although thorough search terms were used to identify information on Pride centers; dedicated full-time staff; and programs, resources, and services, it is possible that these services do exist on some campuses but under other key terms. Finally, this review of programs, resources, and services is limited. There are other support resources that deserve further examination. Additional research can explore the availability of gender affirming health care; programs dedicated to transgender students; and lived names to be printed on diplomas, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations; to name a few additional examples.


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## Endnotes

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