



Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation: LGBTQA Climate October 2005

INTRODUCTION

This survey focuses on the campus climate related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Included in the survey are questions concerning students' awareness of and attitudes about people who are LGBT. This survey, conducted by Student Affairs Research and Assessment, was administered by phone and also by Web¹ and was requested by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Allies Resource Center at Penn State.

For the random sample, 1,128 undergraduate students at University Park responded to the survey. By phone, 560 responded for a 21.6% response rate and, of those contacted, 57.9% participated. By Web, 568 responded for a 20.7% response rate. The confidence interval for the total sample is +/-2.87%. Of the respondents, 59.2% are female; 84.7% are white/Caucasian; 45.4% are first- or second-year students; and 52.4% reside off campus.

In addition to the random sample, the survey was sent using a snowball sampling technique to members of the LGBTQA community through available listservs and club and organization membership lists. While these data (n=97) do not allow us to generalize to the population, they do provide an avenue for students who are LGBT to provide feedback on their experiences at Penn State.²

Within this report, comparisons between groups of students from the random sample are provided. Comparisons are based on factors created through statistical analysis.³

FINDINGS

Overall Satisfaction with Penn State

Overall, students in the snowball sample responded more negatively to their overall satisfaction with Penn State than did students in the random sample.

- For example, 78.4% of students in the snowball sample expressed satisfaction with their Penn State experience compared to 88.6% of students in the random sample (data not shown), and
- 67.7% of students in the snowball sample responded they feel as though they belong in the Penn State community compared to 84.4% in the random sample (see Chart 1).
- While students in the random sample who are lesbian, gay or bisexual expressed less satisfaction with their overall experience than did heterosexual students, the differences were not statistically significant (data not shown).

¹ The Web survey administration is utilized in order to account for students for whom local phone information was unavailable.

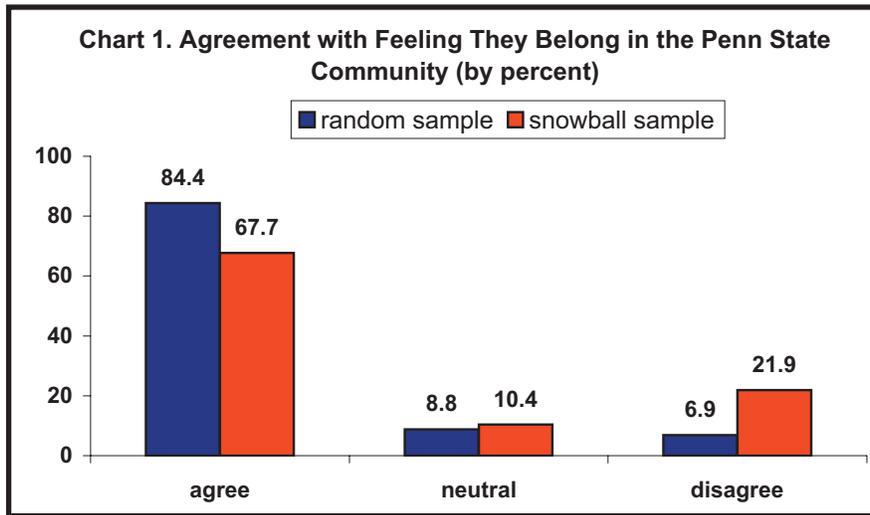
² It should be noted that these students are more likely to be "out" and active in the LGBTQA community than what may be found in the population.

³ Factors are a data reduction tool that combines multiple questions into a larger concept based on logic and statistical analysis. The factor composition is typically found in the corresponding table, and factor names are denoted by the use of SMALL CAPS.

This survey focuses on campus climate as it relates to gender identity and sexual orientation.

For more information please visit Student Affairs Research and Assessment at <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara>





Inclusive Community

Several questions focused on the level to which students perceived Penn State to be an inclusive community.

- Approximately two-thirds (67.1%) of the students from the general population agreed the University Park climate is supportive of students who are LGBT compared to 33.4% of students from the LGBTA community (see Table 1).
- While men and women responded similarly when rating the INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY, first-year students and athletes perceived Penn State to be a more INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY when compared to upper-class students and non-athletes, respectively (data not shown).
- Students who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual and students of color perceived Penn State to be significantly less of an INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY than did heterosexual students and white students, respectively (data not shown).
- In addition, 54.8% of the random sample responded they are aware of University procedures for addressing discrimination/harassment based on sexual orientation, and 53.9% agreed it has been easy for them to get to know people of differing sexual orientations (data not shown).

Table 1: Inclusive Community

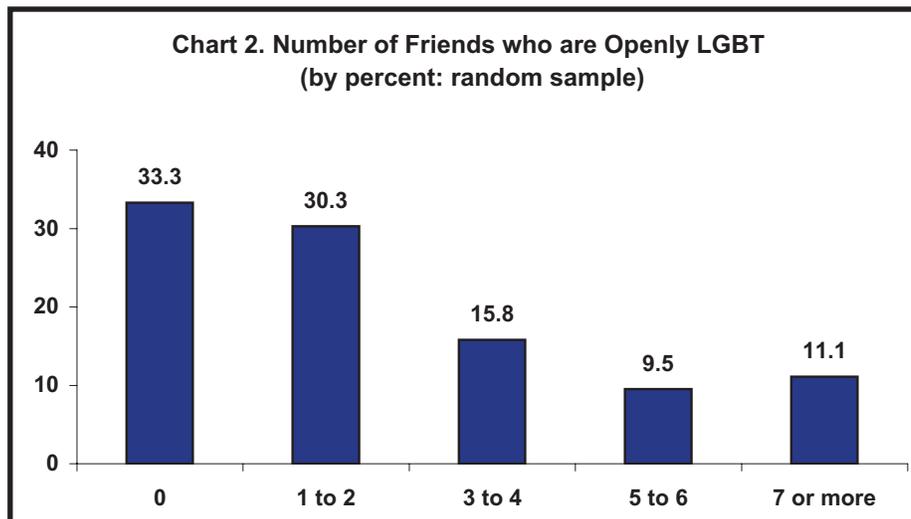
Percent who agreed:	Random Sample	Snowball Sample
Penn State provides a safe environment for freedom of expression.	82.2	49.5
Overall, Penn State promotes understanding of differences.	76.4	42.8
The University Park climate is supportive of students who are LGBT.	67.1	33.4
INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY (averages)	3.99	2.99

Scale: 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree

LGBTA Presence on Campus

Students were asked to identify their own sexual orientation and knowledge of openly LGBT persons on campus.

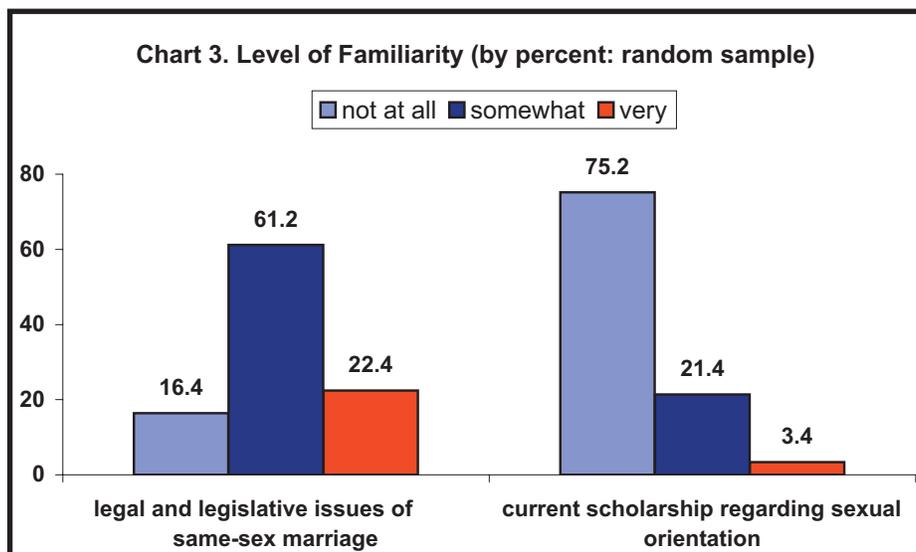
- Among the general population, 4.5% of students identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure about their sexual orientation (compared to 3.8% in a similar survey in 2002). None of the respondents identified themselves as transgender in either the random or the snowball sample (data not shown).
- Among heterosexual students from the random sample, 65.4% identified themselves as being an ally, a heterosexual who supports the issues and struggles of the LGBT community (data not shown).
- When asked how many openly LGBT professors, teaching assistants and/or staff members students knew, 24.0% of the general population knew at least one (compared to 85.5% of the snowball sample) (data not shown).
- In addition, 79.4% of the random sample indicated they knew at least one student who is openly LGBT. In 2002, a similar question revealed 42.6% of students knew at least one openly LGBT student (data not shown).
- Furthermore, two-thirds of students from the general population indicated they had at least one friend who is openly LGBT (see Chart 2).



Awareness of LGBT Issues

Students were asked their level of familiarity with LGBT issues.

- Students from the general population were most likely to be aware of legal and legislative issues related to same-sex marriage and civil unions and least likely to be aware of the current scholarship regarding sexual orientation, queer theory, and gender theories (see Chart 3).
- Not surprisingly, students in the snowball sample were more likely to be aware of LGBT issues than were students in the random sample (data not shown).
- Women, LGB⁴ students, upper-class students, and non-athletes reported significantly higher levels of AWARENESS OF LGBT ISSUES when compared to their respective counterparts (data not shown).



Comfort Levels

Students were also asked about their comfort level with people who are LGBT and with behaviors related to sexuality.

- Approximately 69% of students from the general population and 81% of students from the LGBTQA community reported being comfortable with women who are lesbian, men who are gay, and people who are bisexual (see Table 2).
- Less than half of the respondents from the random sample indicated they are/would be comfortable with people who are transgender and with a roommate who is LGBT (see Table 2).
- While students from the general population were generally less comfortable with public displays of affection than were students from the LGBTQA community, they were least comfortable with seeing same-sex male partners display affection in public (see Table 3).

⁴ There were no students who identified as transgender in the sample.

- Women expressed a significantly higher COMFORT LEVEL WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBT than did men (data not shown).
- Consistently, students who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual reported a significantly higher COMFORT LEVEL WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBT and COMFORT LEVEL WITH BEHAVIORS RELATED TO SEXUALITY (data not shown).
- While white students and students of color reported a similar COMFORT LEVEL WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBT, white students had a significantly higher COMFORT LEVEL WITH BEHAVIORS RELATED TO SEXUALITY than did students of color (data not shown).

Table 2: Comfort Level with People who are LGBT

Percent who are comfortable with:	Random Sample	Snowball Sample
Women who are lesbian	70.5	80.4
Men who are gay	69.3	82.4
People who are bisexual	67.2	79.3
People who are transgender	46.2	64.9
A roommate who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender	48.9	85.0
A faculty member / instructor who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender	71.0	88.6
COMFORT LEVEL WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBT (averages)	3.72	4.22

Scale: 1=very uncomfortable, 5=very comfortable

Table 3: Comfort Level with Behaviors Related to Sexuality

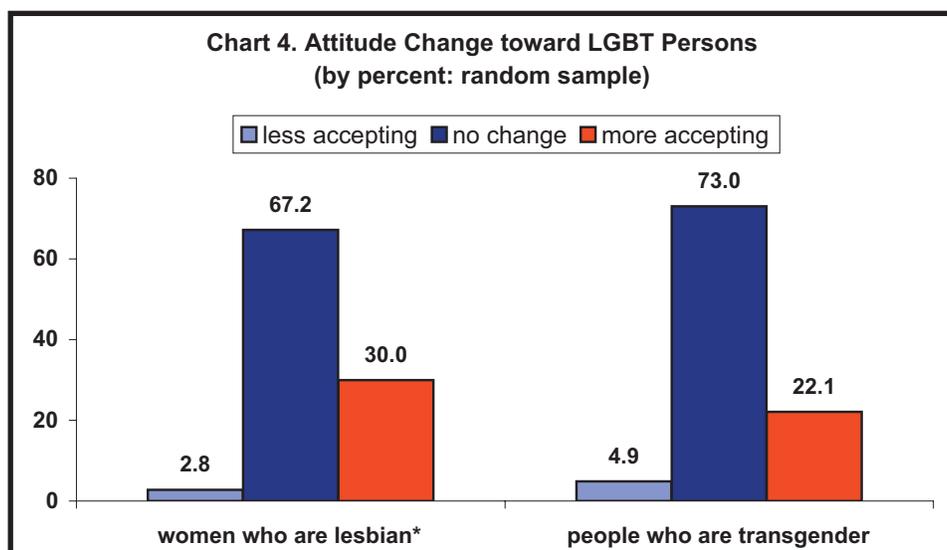
Percent who are comfortable with:	Random Sample	Snowball Sample
Taking part in a class discussion on sexual orientation or gender identity	74.2	85.6
Seeing heterosexual partners display affection in public	59.2	68.0
Seeing same-sex female partners display affection in public	50.8	63.9
Seeing same-sex male partners display affection in public	41.2	64.9
COMFORT LEVEL WITH BEHAVIORS RELATED TO SEXUALITY (averages)	3.54	3.97

Scale: 1=very uncomfortable, 5=very comfortable

Attitude Change toward LGBT Persons

The survey also addressed how students' attitudes related to LGBT persons have changed since coming to Penn State.

- The majority of students from the general population indicated their attitudes toward LGBT persons have not changed since coming to Penn State (see Chart 4).
- Women, LGB students, and upper-class students reported a significantly more positive ATTITUDE CHANGE TOWARD LGBT PERSONS than did their respective counterparts (data not shown).
- There were no differences based on athletic status or Greek status for students' ATTITUDE CHANGE TOWARD LGBT PERSONS (data not shown).



* Responses were similar for men who are gay and people who are bisexual.

Likelihood of Supporting LGBT+ Persons

In another series of questions, students were asked about the likelihood of them supporting LGBT+ persons in a variety of ways.

- While 60.2% of students from the general population reported they were likely to report an LGBT-related hate/bias incident, only 28.5% indicated they were likely to attend educational programs on sexual orientation and gender identity topics (see Table 4).
- Approximately 59% (58.7%) of students from the LGBT+ community responded they were likely to visit or contact the LGBT+ Student Resource Center (compared to 11.9% of the general population) (see Table 4).
- Women and LGB students reported a significantly higher LIKELIHOOD OF SUPPORTING LGBT+ PERSONS than did men and heterosexual students, respectively (data not shown).
- When comparing students' responses in 2005 to similar questions asked in 2002, evidence suggests that students from the general population are more likely to support LGBT+ persons. However, when comparing students' responses from the LGBT+ community, the opposite is true. In 2005, students in the snowball sample reported being less likely to report an LGBT-related hate incident, attend educational programs, and attend social activities hosted by LGBT+ persons than in 2002 (data not shown).

Table 4: Likelihood of Supporting LGBT+ Persons

Percent who are likely to:	Random Sample	Snowball Sample
Report an LGBT-related hate/bias incident you witnessed/experienced	60.2	79.1
Attend social activities hosted by people who are LGBT+	38.6	75.0
Take a class that focuses on sexual orientation	34.8	78.2
Attend educational programs on sexual orientation/gender identity topics	28.5	76.3
Visit or contact the LGBT+ Student Resource Center	11.9	58.7
LIKELIHOOD OF SUPPORTING LGBT+ PERSONS (averages)	2.78	3.97

Scale: 1=very unlikely, 5=very likely

Indicators of a Negative Climate

Areas that measure aspects of a negative climate for LGBT+ students were also included in the survey.

- Overwhelmingly, respondents were more likely to report hearing students making disparaging comments about others because of their sexual orientation than they were faculty or staff members (see Table 5).
- Approximately 17% (16.6%) of students in the snowball sample indicated they have at least "sometimes" stayed away from areas of campus where LGBT+ people congregate for fear of being labeled (compared to 6.3% of the random sample) (data not shown).

Table 5: Frequency of Disparaging Remarks

Percent who have at least "sometimes" heard the following people make insensitive / disparaging remarks about others because of their sexual orientation:	Random Sample	Snowball Sample
A student	66.5	89.5
A university faculty member, instructor, or T.A.	7.8	23.7
A university staff member	5.3	27.2

Similarly, students who identified as LGB were asked several questions about their own experiences.

- Fifty-three percent of LGB students in the random sample and 71.9% of LGB students in the snowball sample indicated they have at least "sometimes" concealed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to avoid harassment or discrimination (see Table 6).
- Of LGB students, 23.8% of the random sample and 52.5% of the snowball sample responded they had been a victim of harassment or discrimination due to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression within the past year (data not shown).
- Approximately 61% (60.9%) of LGB students in the random sample and 53.1% of LGB students in the snowball sample believe university administrators are at least "moderately" interested in their thoughts and/or concerns about the climate experienced by LGBT+ students (data not shown).

Importance of LGBT+ Student Resource Center Services

In addition, all students were asked to rate the importance of several functions or services of the LGBT+ Student Resource Center.

- Over 75% of students from the general population believed each of the services is important (see Table 7).

- Most frequently students from the random sample rated providing a safe place for LGBTA students as important (86.6%), and they were least likely to place importance on raising awareness of LGBT issues among heterosexuals (76.8%) (see Table 7).
- Most frequently students from the LGBTA community rated raising awareness of LGBT issues among heterosexuals as important (94.6%), and were least likely to place importance on providing a safe place for LGBTA students (90.2%) (see Table 7).
- Women and LGB students reported a significantly higher IMPORTANCE OF LGBTA STUDENT RESOURCE CENTER SERVICES than did men and heterosexual students, respectively (data not shown).

Table 6: Frequency of Unsupportive Climate

Percent who have at least “sometimes”:	Random Sample (n=49)	Snowball Sample (n=64)
Concealed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to avoid harassment or discrimination	53.0	71.9
Felt the climate for LGBT students was less welcoming and supportive than they thought it would be	49.0	76.2
Feared for their physical safety because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression	18.4	48.4

Table 7: Importance of LGBTA Student Resource Center Services

Percent who felt the following are important:	Random Sample	Snowball Sample
Provide a safe place for LGBTA students	86.6	90.2
Foster a sense of community for students who are LGBTA	84.2	91.2
Provide library and research materials on sexual orientation and gender identity	79.2	92.4
Provide ways to highlight LGBTA activities, events, and meetings	77.4	94.5
Raise awareness of LGBT issues and concerns among heterosexual students, staff, and faculty	76.8	94.6
IMPORTANCE OF LGBTA STUDENT RESOURCE CENTER SERVICES (averages)	4.23	4.63

Scale: 1=very unimportant, 5=very important