

# Why Your School Should Track and Report LGBT Enrollment and Best Practices for Doing So

by Gary J. McGinnis

Since NALP added the option for member schools to report statistics for LGBT students in 2011 in the *NALP Directory of Law Schools*, about 30 schools have joined in. While this is great progress, we still have tremendous room for growth. To help encourage more schools to get on board, I want to share some benefits and best practices for collecting and reporting this information. To compile my list, I reached out to the experts — the schools already doing so — to learn from their experiences!

## Why Should You Start Counting LGBT Students?

**To Empower Your Students:** Underrepresented groups can be empowered by increased visibility. If your school has a less-than-active LGBT affinity group and the community is small and scattered, LGBT students might feel isolated and unable to speak up. By counting and reporting the number of LGBT students in your school, you are providing a platform from which they can build a community and find their collective voice.

**To Better Support Your Students:** Knowing your audience is vital to determining how to communicate your message. By getting an accurate picture of the makeup of your school's population, you will be able to better reach your students and to assess and support their needs.

**To Show Your Commitment to Diversity:** By tracking and reporting the number of diverse stu-

dents in your student body, you'll be reinforcing your commitment to successfully recruiting and retaining them.

**To Maximize Employment Opportunities:** As more legal employers are looking to boost diversity within their own ranks, being able to show that your school is making a thoughtful effort to recruit and support underrepresented groups can lead to stronger partnerships and more opportunities.

**To Foster Growth:** Your demonstrable commitment to diversity and your school's stronger, more visible LGBT student groups will help encourage more LGBT students to enroll. Even if your number is currently "0," reporting it shows that you've given thought and effort to tracking and supporting your school's LGBT community. That small signal of institutional support has the potential to make a huge difference.

## How Can Your School Get Started?

**Just Do It!** Sometimes urgency is the best source for inspiration. By treating LGBT data collection as a directive rather than a suggestion, many members forced themselves to think creatively about the logistics of it. Members have developed annual surveys sent out to the entire student body, included demographic information on matriculation forms, allowed students to self-report demographic information in their Symplicity profiles, and used data already being collected by their admissions office.

**Involve Others:** Getting input from your administration and students can help you determine what will work best for your school. Work with your LGBT student group to brainstorm about the best ways to reach students, and explain to them the importance of the project. Enlisting their help is a great way to boost response rates. Also consider partnering with your school's student services office or diversity professional!

**Broaden the Inquiry:** Increase interest by expanding the scope of your data-gathering efforts. Instead of only collecting LGBT identification, broaden the inquiry to allow students to report their ethnicity and disability status as well. Also consider adding a feedback section for students to share ideas about how to better support diverse groups on campus.

**Do It Annually:** Self-identification is fluid. While many people come to law school already knowing their sexual orientation or gender identity, many others only learn to be comfortable with who they are in a supportive, intellectual environment like law school. Also consider that some prospective students may not feel comfortable disclosing this sort of information on an admissions application but would be happy to do so once en-

rolled. Therefore, the number of students who are willing to identify as openly LGBT will almost always change from year to year. While it's fine to start with admissions data, recapturing the information on an annual basis will provide a more accurate depiction of your student body.

**Share Your Methods:** Being open about your methodology can help everyone! By doing so, you can clarify any caveats in the information you've provided and we'll be able to learn more about what works for our member schools. Use the "Notes" option on your NALP form to explain how you gathered your demographic statistics.

Of course, every school's unique needs mean that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to collecting LGBT data. Therefore, in figuring out what methods best fit your school, I hope that you'll use these suggestions as starting points but will feel comfortable branching out from there. Happy data collecting everyone!

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