



TheRPGroup

Research, Planning & Professional Development
for California Community Colleges

SM

Bringing Data Out of the Closet and Toward Equity

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Collection and Usage Practices in California Community Colleges

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Executive Summary

There is a chronic lack of reliable and affirming data on populations who are marginalized based on sexualities, gender identities, and/or gender expressions; colloquially described as LGBTQIA+.¹ This study was commissioned by the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC) and conducted by The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group). Its purpose was to understand the perceptions of data access, quality, usage, and satisfaction regarding the sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) of California community college (CCC) students in order to inform the local and statewide practices and policy to collect, analyze, and share SOGI² data so that the system can better serve LGBTQIA+ students.

Using a mixed-methods approach—including a statewide survey of institutional research offices and CCC practitioners who provide direct services to LGBTQIA+ students, coupled with virtual interviews—this study asked how institutions are collecting and using SOGI data, what practices they have found to be effective, and what barriers have they encountered.

The results reveal that SOGI data are:

- Not consistently collected and used locally by colleges, therefore largely incomplete and
- That a lack of institutional buy-in prevents LGBTQIA+ communities from being considered in planning processes.

Recommendations and Future Research

Based on the results of this study, several recommendations are offered for improving the local and statewide LGBTQIA+ data collection practices and processes, along with future research considerations.

¹ “LGBTQIA+” is an umbrella term used throughout this report to refer to the population of people who have been marginalized for their sexualities, gender identities, and/or gender expressions. This population includes but is not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, bigender, biromantic, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, agender, genderqueer, pansexual, pangender, panromantic, and nonbinary people. This term also includes those for whom their genders or sexualities may be a cultural role within their communities including two-spirit, hijra, and muxe, among others. The lexicon of our community is evolving daily, making it impossible to directly include every identity in a comprehensive list; regardless, this report focuses on all marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities, named and unnamed.

² “SOGI” is sometimes expanded to SOGIESC: sexual orientation and gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics. To maintain consistency with the survey and with other statewide efforts, we will use SOGI in this report.

Institutional Level

Recommendation 1: Protect student privacy while proactively engaging with SOGI data to enact practices and policies to raise awareness of LGBTQIA+ students' needs and resources as well as to provide services to support this student group.

Recommendation 2: Foster a community of collaboration among CCC practitioners and students that centers those who work directly with LGBTQIA+ communities, such as Pride Center directors, faculty sponsors of LGBTQIA+ clubs, or members of employee resource groups or student organizations.

Recommendation 3: Standardize and include SOGI demographic questions that allow students to self-identify and check multiple boxes for sexual orientation and gender identity.

Recommendation 4: Adopt CCCApply if institutions have not already done so for their application process.

Recommendation 5: Implement for all CCC employees cultural competency training that includes LGBTQIA+ experiences to create a more culturally competent environment without relying solely on those from marginalized communities to spearhead equity efforts.

System Level

Recommendation 6: Prioritize and allocate statewide funding and supports for LGBTQIA+ students.

Recommendation 7: Ensure policy advocacy efforts are intersectional and center LGBTQIA+ and all intersecting marginalized populations (e.g., race/ethnicity), including culturally competent components.

Recommendation 8: Include LGBTQIA+ demographics in disproportionate impact and Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) analyses to screen for equity gaps at the local and state levels.

Future Research

LGBTQIA+ populations in the CCC system must be monitored closely through expanded statewide research efforts to present a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their experiences and outcomes. The following points are of particular importance:

- More quantitative and qualitative research must be conducted.
- LGBTQIA+ employee experiences and outcomes throughout the CCC system must be examined.

- Qualitative research must center QTBIPOC³ experiences.
- Institutions must disaggregate by SOGI demographics all student success and equity data that explore potential disproportionate impact.
- Investigate LGBTQIA+ experiences in programs for formerly incarcerated students and former foster youth, and in categorical programs such as EOPS.
- Study the effects of campus Pride Centers on LGBTQIA+ student outcomes and climate experiences.

Introduction

There is a chronic lack of reliable and affirming data nationally at nearly all levels of education and government within the United States and the state of California on populations who are marginalized based on sexualities, gender identities, and/or gender expressions; colloquially described as LGBTQIA+. The U.S. Census did not begin collecting sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data until 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), and in that year, the U.S. Census estimated California’s LGBTQIA+ population to be at 9.1%, while Gallup estimated it at 5.3% (The Williams Institute, 2021), and the California Department of Public Health put the number at 5.5% (Miguelino-Keasling, 2021). The fact that national and statewide agencies cannot agree on the size of the LGBTQIA+ population illustrates the issue and indicates an underlying complexity that needs to be understood. The California Community Colleges (CCC) system began to collect limited data related to the LGBTQIA+ populations on its state college application form, called CCCApply, in 2013, though this information is far from complete, accurate, or sufficient to disaggregate LGBTQIA+ populations meaningfully or with confidence.

In recent years, through professional meeting spaces—beginning with the research subgroup of the San Diego Imperial Queer Alliance that convened through the annual CCC LGBTQ+ Summit, and subsequent LGBTQ+ Birds of a Feather gatherings at the RP Conference—queer and trans*⁴ researchers, faculty, practitioners, one student leader, and allies interested in advocating for LGBTQIA+ populations have repeatedly discussed their frustrations with the lack of quality data on queer and trans* populations available to the system, particularly in relation to equity conversations. In advocating for resources to support LGBTQIA+ students, they are forced to do so without access to complete, much less accurate, data that would demonstrate the need, and without a viable method in place to move toward a workable solution. To focus on addressing the lack of quality and reliable LGBTQIA+ data, the aforementioned personnel began organizing

³ “QTBIPOC” is an acronym used to describe queer and trans people of color in a way that centers Black and indigenous people and demonstrates solidarity among people of color. Pronounced “cue-tee-bye-pock.”

⁴ Trans* is used in this report to be inclusive towards all identities under the trans umbrella such as transfeminine and transmasculine (Stryker, 2017).

around this issue by forming the SOGI Coalition to improve questions related to the collection of SOGI data on the CCCApply application (McDaniels et al., 2023).

Subsequently, in 2023, this study was commissioned by the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC) and conducted by The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) to better understand the perceptions of data access, quality, usage, and satisfaction regarding the SOGI of CCC students⁵ in order to inform local and statewide policy and practices for the collection, analysis, and usage of SOGI data to better serve LGBTQIA+ students.

Using a mixed methods approach, the study seeks to answer:

1. How are institutions collecting and using SOGI data?
2. What practices have they found to be effective, and what barriers have they encountered in accessing and using SOGI data?

The answers to these questions will clarify the scope of the problem and call attention to a sizable and growing population of students whose experiences, needs, and barriers are commonly overlooked, especially when considering the many intersections of oppression that exist within LGBTQIA+ communities. This study intends to elucidate that LGBTQIA+ students in higher education are at a critical juncture, due in part to the fact that in this data-driven culture, LGBTQIA+ people are being excluded from being counted accurately, which results in them not being included in most planning and resource allocation discussions and decisions.

In recent years, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) has rightfully placed equity and diversity at the center of its mission, with much of that equity primarily focused on racial and ethnic identities (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2023a). While it is necessary to work toward parity for populations that are marginalized based on race, students of color with multiple marginalized identities are left behind (Conron et al., 2023; González & Cataño, 2021; Sykes Seiverd, 2021). Queerness and transness are traits that are not inherited, thus they transcend racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious categories, ability status, and all other demographic lines. Further, students in the CCC system are 24% White (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2024), so it is reasonable to conclude that LGBTQIA+ students in the CCC system are primarily students of color.

Readers' Guide and Content Notice

This report is organized into four major sections: 1) the general background section, which includes a brief history of LGBTQIA+ student experiences in higher education, the purpose of this study, and the epistemological framework guiding this research; 2) the methodology, which includes a statewide survey and interviews; 3) key findings from the survey and interviews, and

⁵ Faculty and classified professionals will benefit from similar research; however, this study focused on students.

a discussion of the findings; and 4) recommendations, future research considerations, and concluding remarks.

Please note that this report will touch on the effects of discrimination, including mental health impacts such as self-harm and suicide, and describe shockingly high rates of food and housing insecurity and homelessness experienced by CCC community members, but disproportionately by QTBIPOC. Please exercise caution when engaging with this material and utilize resources such as [The Trevor Project](#) for support.

Background

History and Purpose

In 2023, 588 pieces of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation were introduced in the U.S., 35 of those at the national level (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2023). Two weeks into 2024, there were already 278 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills introduced nationwide, including one in California entitled “Gender Identity: Parental Notification”(AB-1314, 2023). One of the areas most affected by these bills is education, including higher education. Only 85 of those 588 bills in 2023 passed, and fortunately for the LGBTQIA+ youth in California, the state is taking steps to protect queer and trans* youth. However, the rhetoric that drives these discriminatory legislative bills impels targeted violence against LGBTQIA+ people and spaces, which in turn has an adverse ripple effect throughout the LGBTQIA+ community (Sylvester, 2023). Examples of the violence directed toward the LGBTQIA+ community on CCC campuses include harassment, graffiti, and burning the pride flag (Echelman, 2023), and incidents have been concentrated in conservative communities, which include rural locations as well as some wealthy coastal cities—the same locations with high concentrations of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation proposals at the local level. In a political environment in which 34% of LGBTQIA+ youth and 41% of QTBIPOC youth cannot envision themselves living past 35 years of age (The Trevor Project, 2023b), LGBTQIA+ youth are understandably more likely than non-queer, non-trans* students to seek a college away from their home communities (Barack, 2015), presumably from a need to escape unwelcoming or unsafe environments.

In addition to experiencing hostile encounters on college campuses (Mitchell et al., 2021; Sykes Seiverd, 2021), LGBTQIA+ students are more likely to be food-insecure, housing-insecure, and homeless than their non-queer, non-trans* counterparts. According to the 2023 RealCollege California Basic Needs Report, statewide in the community colleges, the overall rate of food insecurity (FI) is 47%, housing insecurity (HI) is 58%, and homelessness is 24%. When disaggregated by sexual orientation, however, the rates for bisexual students (FI: 53%, HI: 62%, homelessness: 28%) and gay or lesbian (FI: 57%, HI: 67%, homelessness: 36%) students are much higher. These numbers are already sobering, but the rates for transgender students (FI: 74%, HI: 78%, homelessness: 64%) indicate that these students require immediate and intensive support (The RP Group and the Chief Executive Officers [CEO] Affordability, Food & Housing Access Taskforce, 2023).

Additionally, being subjected to discrimination and rejection on the basis of traits they cannot control pushes LGBTQIA+ youth to disproportionately struggle with mental health and self-harm. According to the Trevor Project (2023a), nationwide LGBTQIA+ college students seriously considered suicide at alarming rates (33% overall, 35% for LGBTQIA+ students of color, and 39% for transgender and nonbinary students). It is clear that LGBTQIA+ students are in crisis and that LGBTQIA+ students who are additionally at the margins due to racial discrimination, ableism, and other systems of oppression are at even higher risk.

However, demonstrating the crisis points experienced by LGBTQIA+ people remains frustratingly difficult due to the dearth of accurate data on these populations. This study aims to shed light on the importance of comprehensively collecting SOGI data, on the complexities around applying the data in search of equitable outcomes for LGBTQIA+ populations, and on the barriers to accomplishing both of these goals. As it stands now, there are no comprehensive, standardized methods of collecting SOGI data at national, state, or local levels in governmental or educational institutions.

Comprehensive, standardized, and universal data collection methods are critical in a community college system that centers data in its equity efforts. The framework under which institutions are able to advocate for equity resources requires that they demonstrate disproportionate impact (DI) or the presence of equity gaps in outcomes across different groups (Sosa, 2022). Yet, demonstrating DI for LGBTQIA+ students with anything other than locally collected data is difficult for many institutions, assuming colleges are able and willing to undertake this voluntary effort in the first place. The impact of not being counted and not being able to demonstrate DI means that LGBTQIA+ students are omitted from important planning documents, including Vision 2030 (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2023b). In the absence of effective LGBTQIA+ data collection, institutions that retain anti-queer and anti-trans* bias within their systems and structures are not required to address their discrimination against this federally protected class of individuals and are easily able to block LGBTQIA+ equity efforts.

For many LGBTQIA+ people, disclosing their queer or trans* identities can endanger their livelihoods, their housing, or even their safety, so data privacy is also a concern. Valdes (1995) notes that this concept of data privacy, however, becomes both “the shield and the sword,” at once protecting the LGBTQIA+ community while being weaponized against it. As this report will demonstrate, some CCCs wield the concept as justification for queer and trans* exclusion under the guise of protecting student privacy.

At a time when the CCCs are focused on rebuilding enrollment and improving retention, gathering accurate data and fostering environments in which all students can thrive seem like logical steps to both attract and retain a sizable and growing demographic of people. For LGBTQIA+ students, an environment in which they can thrive includes seeing themselves reflected in campus reports; having access to single-stall, private restrooms; being socially and emotionally supported through a Pride Center that is regularly available to them; and understanding their own complex struggles with having their basic needs met. The questions remain, however: who are these students, and how large is this community?

Epistemological Framework

In an effort to keep QTBIPOC concerns at the center of this research, the researchers applied a Queer of Color in Education (QOCE) epistemological framework (Brockenbrough, 2015). Although transgender people are not mentioned in QOCE, this study extends the framework to explicitly include trans* experiences. This study hopes to disrupt oppressive narratives regarding the collection and usage of SOGI data, particularly regarding the issue of student data privacy. The survey and interview methods in this study attempted to center the experiences of QTBIPOC practitioners and researchers. QOCE stresses the importance of agency for QTBIPOC in deciding when and how to disclose their sexualities and genders on their terms, and you will find that tenet borne out in this report.

Methodology

To answer the study's questions, we used a mixed-methods approach that included the following:

- A statewide survey to institutional research offices and CCC practitioners who provide direct services to LGBTQIA+ students
- Virtual interviews

This section summarizes each research design and provides general sample characteristic information.

Survey

The survey instrument, entitled "Data Collection and Usage Practices" (Appendix A), was designed to gauge the knowledge of SOGI data collection and usage practices of an institution—the unit of analysis—across various employee groups, as well as those employees' overall satisfaction with and confidence in the data. Respondents were asked about their level of involvement with the LGBTQIA+ population on campus, local efforts to utilize the data, and any barriers they had encountered that were impeding SOGI data collection and usage. They were also asked to submit any official counts, records, or reports of the LGBTQIA+ student population in their institutions. We beta-tested the instrument in summer 2023 with four volunteers who serve in various roles in different institutions and applied the recommended adjustments before wider distribution.

In August 2023, The RP Group distributed the survey to institutional research, planning, and effectiveness (IRPE) personnel at every California community college and district office. With the intent to receive a diverse set of responses, the accompanying email (Appendix B) instructed IRPE practitioners to participate in snowball sampling at their institution by forwarding the survey to other key personnel (e.g., Pride Center directors; faculty advisors to LGBTQIA+ student groups; workgroups, task forces, or employee resource group members;

instructors teaching LGBTQIA+ courses). Any personnel who wanted to respond to the survey were allowed access. A few people reached out to the researchers for a direct link to the survey, indicating that the survey had not been forwarded to them. The survey was open for approximately six weeks—four weeks plus a two-week extension—closing on October 4, 2023.

Description of Respondents

Of the 80 total responses, 91% were from colleges and 9% from district offices. A total of 49 institutions submitted at least one response, including 44 out of 116 colleges (38%). Institutions in cities of all sizes and large suburbs were most likely to respond, while institutions in medium and small suburbs, towns, and rural areas were least likely to respond (Table 1). Institutions in cities of all sizes and large suburbs comprise 75% of responses (Figure 1). Several institutions (n = 14, 29%) submitted more than one response, with institutions from cities or large suburbs being most likely to do so.

Table 1. Response Rate by College

IPEDS Urbanity	In CCC System	Responded	Response Rate
City - Large	24	12	50%
City Midsize	16	6	38%
City - Small	9	4	44%
Suburb - Large	36	16	44%
Suburb - Midsize	7	2	29%
Suburb - Small	4	1	25%
Town	5	1	20%
Rural	13	2	15%
Total	115	44	38%

Note: These data represent individual institutions, not districts, since districts can include institutions in urban, suburban, and rural locations. One college is online only and is therefore not represented in this table.

A total of 80 individuals participated in the survey; however, not all participants answered every question. Respondents represent a variety of employee groups, with administrators (37%) representing the largest group and research practitioners (12%) representing the smallest group (see Figure 1). It is probable that some administrators are directors of research and planning offices at their institutions but identified as an administrator instead of a research practitioner. Around 84% of respondents are involved with the LGBTQIA+ community at their institutions in some way (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Proportion of Respondents by Primary Role at Institution (n = 73)

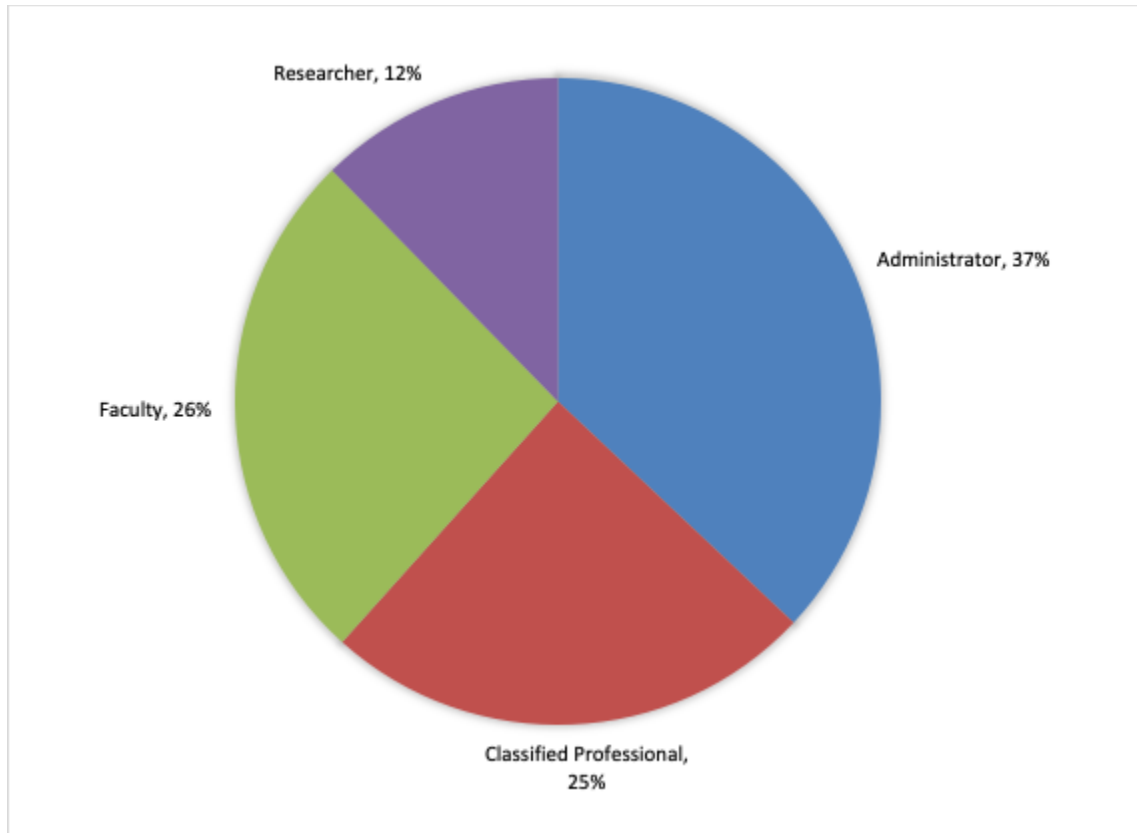
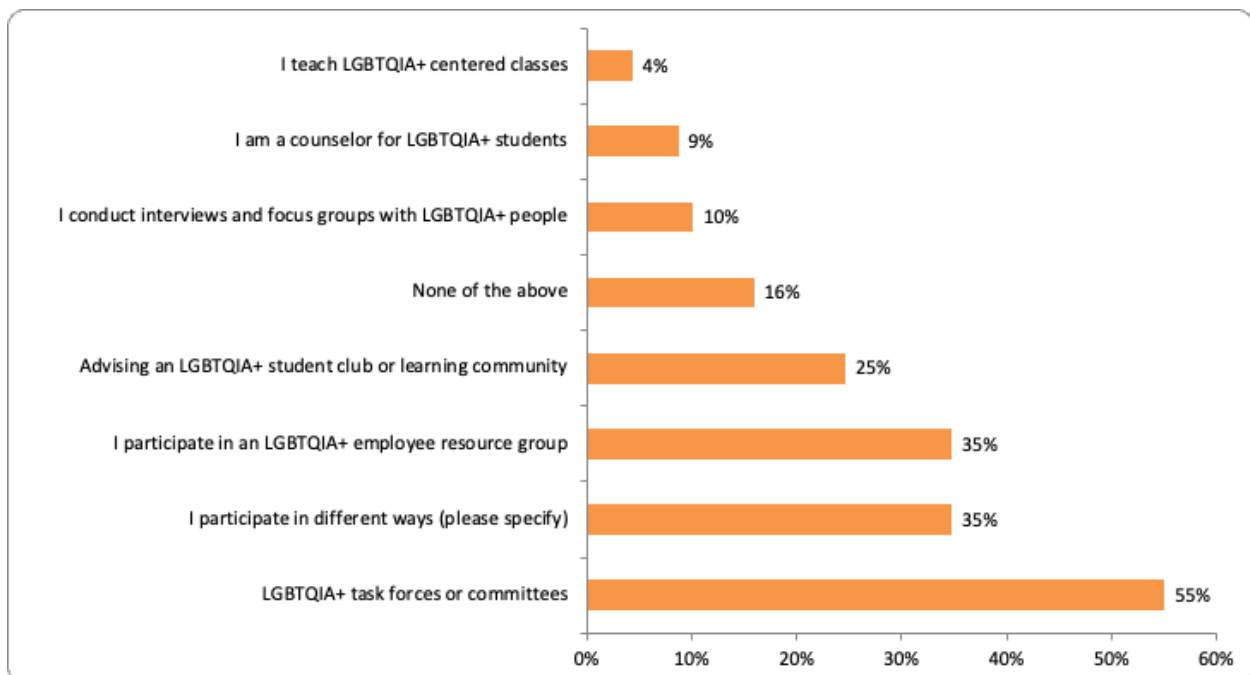


Figure 2. Respondents' Engagement with LGBTQIA+ Population at Their Institution (n = 69)



Note: Respondents were able to check any that applied.

Interviews

Of the 80 respondents, 22 indicated interest in being interviewed. The RP Group researchers applied purposeful sampling by assessing the candidates' employee group, LGBTQIA+ affiliation, and qualitative responses to the open-ended questions, screening for unique positionalities, experiences, and insights into the handling of SOGI data. Of the 22 volunteers, six were invited to interview, with four consenting to be interviewed.

An exploratory qualitative approach was applied to the interviews, utilizing a semi-structured protocol that consisted of several open-ended questions (Appendix C). Of the four participants interviewed, two were researchers and two were practitioners. The respondents represented a variety of employee groups—an administrator, a research analyst, a management-level researcher, and a Pride Center director, all from colleges in large cities or suburbs. Three out of the four identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and two identify as people of color. The interviews were conducted in November and December 2023 over Zoom. All four interviewees⁶ were asked to select a professional drag name as a pseudonym for the study.

The interviews were transcribed prior to analysis, which included an in-depth initial inspection cycle for each interview transcript. The RP Group researcher kept paper notes and created both analytical and reflective memos throughout the analysis process. After spending time with the dataset, a review of each memo facilitated the creation of meta-memos and initial coding. Codes and themes were then mapped in Mural and refined visually by the researcher. While major themes remained largely the same across interviewees, there were still interesting differences in the ways in which the researchers and practitioners discussed concepts related to community, data quality, and institutional buy-in, to name only a few. As a result, maps were created at both the [researcher](#) and [practitioner](#) levels to preserve this nuance prior to creating a streamlined and integrated map without response-level detail. [View the maps](#).

Limitations

First, responses to the survey were all voluntary. As this was an exploratory study rather than an assessment, however, voluntary responses can be used to guide the development of future research directions. Second, this study relied on snowball sampling that began with campus institutional research offices, yet occasionally, the survey link may not have reached other campus personnel whose insights would have been valuable to this research. The RP Group research team made sure to announce the release of this study in several other non-research spaces, including at SOGI Coalition meetings and the Regional Convenings of the CCC LGBTQ+ Summit to encourage participation by non-research personnel. Third, only four individuals were interviewed; however, they represent different racial and ethnic backgrounds, institution sizes, and geographic regions, and they embody several different roles on campus, yielding a cross-

⁶ To protect participant confidentiality, some details from response-level data the thematic maps produced from the interview and synthesis throughout this report have been slightly modified.

section of positionalities. Finally, none of The RP Group research team members hold QTBIPOC identities, limiting the perspectives that were involved in the creation and analysis of this study. We acknowledge that we lack the positionality necessary to analyze all the nuances of the data outcomes. Future research projects should be led by queer and/or trans* BIPOC researchers.

Findings and Discussion

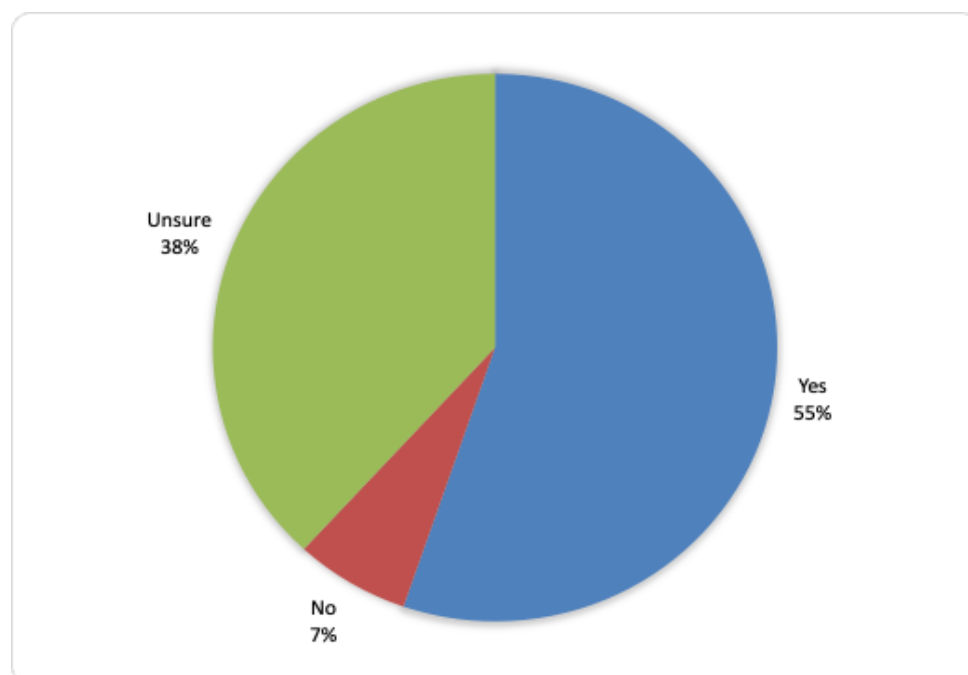
Survey Responses

SOGI Data Collection Methods Are Insufficient

According to survey respondents, SOGI data collection methods are insufficient across the system and vary widely from one institution to another. A little over half of responding institutions reported collecting any SOGI data, usually through CCCApply. Only a quarter reported including SOGI questions alongside other demographic questions on local surveys, and less than a third included SOGI questions on program- or department-level assessments. A little over a third of responding institutions reported collecting local SOGI information only on LGBTQIA+-specific surveys, leaving LGBTQIA+ students out of disaggregated data in institution-wide reporting.

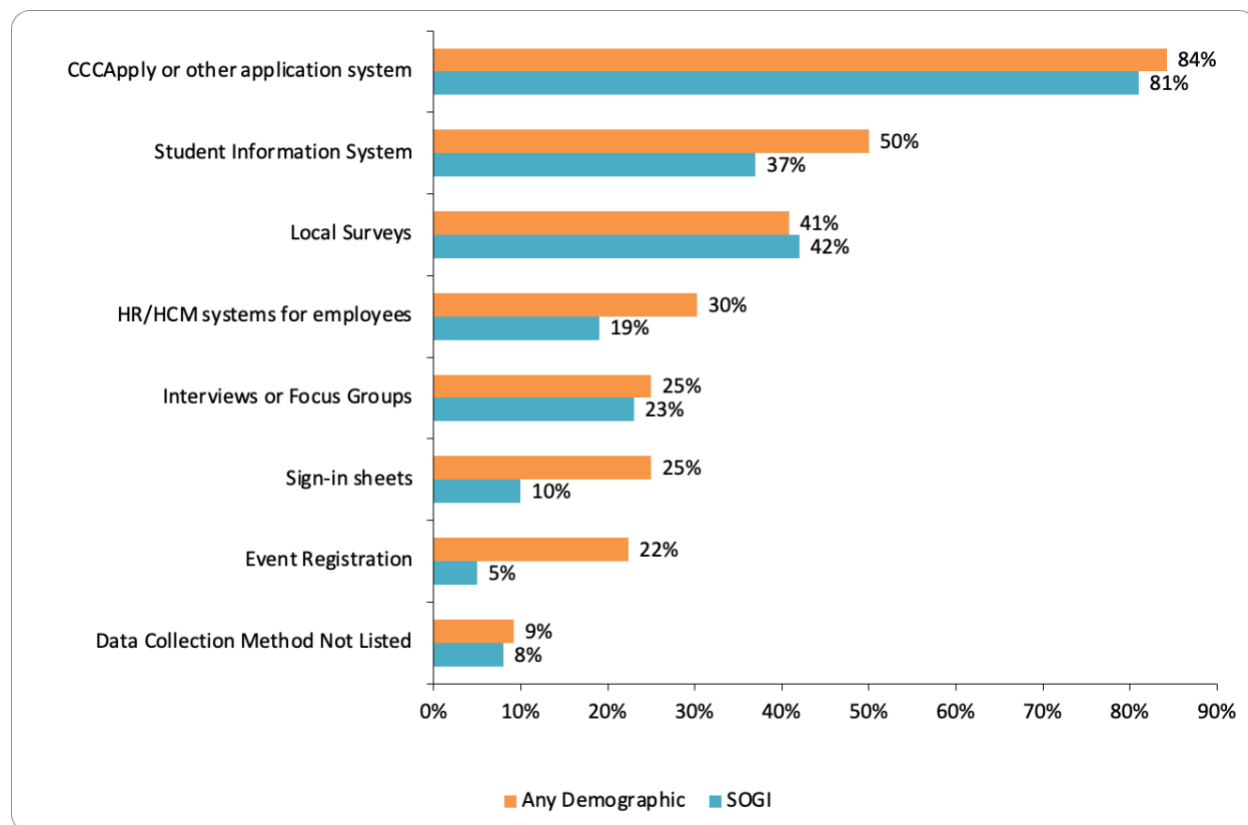
When survey participants were asked if their institution collects SOGI data using any of the methods (e.g., CCCApply, surveys, focus groups) they use to collect other demographic data, just over half (55%) reported with certainty that they do, with over one-third (38%) reporting that they are not sure (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Does your institution collect SOGI data? (n = 76)



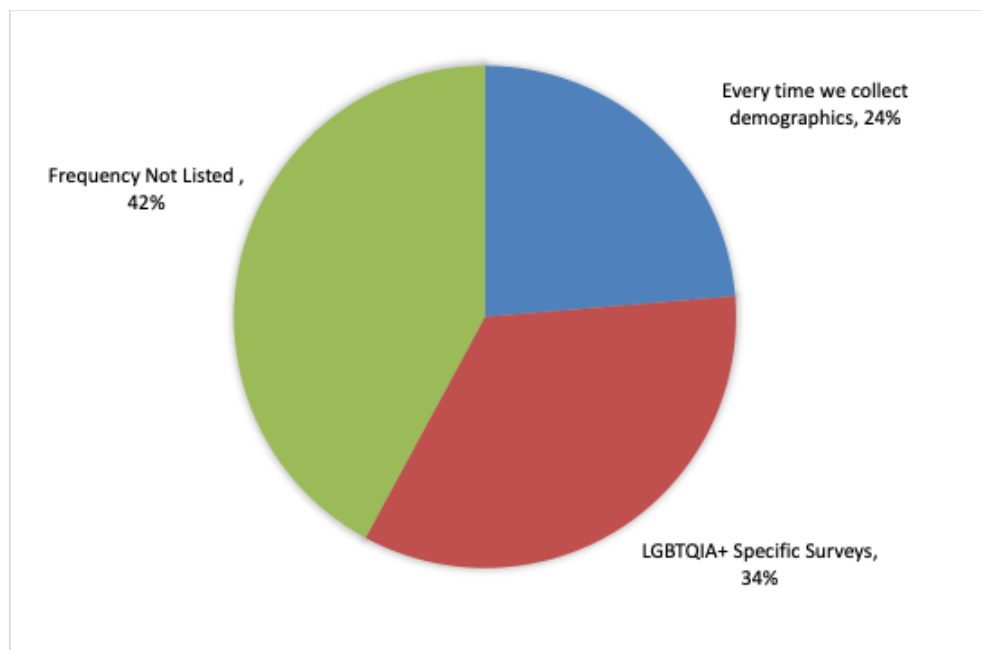
When comparing the data collection methods used to obtain SOGI data to those used to obtain other demographic variables, there are gaps for nearly every data collection method. Local surveys were the only method where SOGI data collection was higher, although only by one percentage point (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Comparison of Data Collection Methods for Any Demographic and SOGI Information (n = 76)



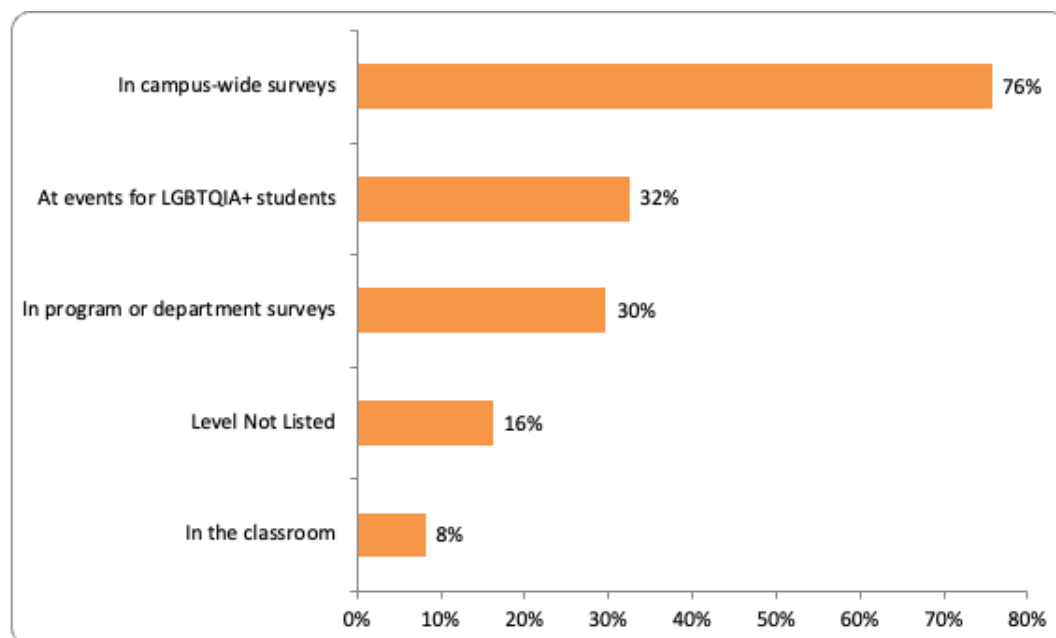
Regarding how frequently they collect SOGI data via local surveys, 24% of respondents stated that they ask for SOGI data on any survey that collects any demographic data, 34% stated they collect the information on surveys that are specifically related to LGBTQIA+ populations, and 42% chose to describe the frequency on their own. These qualitative comments (n = 13) were placed into five groups (*in vivo* codes are in quotations): “we don’t” (31%), “it depends” (31%), “unsure” (23%), and specific frequency (15%). Participants who stated they had a specific frequency for collecting SOGI data via surveys reported that they collect these data annually or on their pre-registration survey (see Figure 5). Those whose responses were in the “it depends” category reported it varies by college within a multi-college district, varies by program or department, or that the frequency of collecting SOGI data via surveys was largely undefined.

Figure 5. Frequency of SOGI Data Collection via Local Surveys (n = 38)



When asked where SOGI information is collected via surveys, respondents reported that they collect SOGI data on campus-wide surveys (76%), during LGBTQIA+ events (32%), in program or departmental surveys (30%), and in the classroom (8%) (see Figure 6). Sixteen percent of respondents chose to further elaborate qualitatively, and their responses were related to two broad categories: “unsure” and specific frequency. Specific frequencies included online registration surveys and equity-focused surveys.

Figure 6. Where SOGI Data Are Collected Via Local Surveys (n = 37)



SOGI Question Wording and Methods Are Inconsistent and Incomplete

To gather information about how SOGI questions were worded and used locally, participants were asked in an open-ended survey question to describe the ways in which they collect SOGI data at their institution. Only about one-fifth of institutions attempted to use more inclusive wording with fewer than 10% applying a method that allows for respondents to write in their self-identification. Institutions largely base their wording on that found in CCCApply or the U.S. Census Pulse Survey. When including those who skipped the question, only 11% of respondents reported including a queer or trans* person in the development of their SOGI question wording.

- The 62 responses to this question were coded into seven categories as follows:
- CCCApply or other standard method (44%)
- Unsure (18%)
- Attempt to expand beyond standardized methods (13%)
- Confused by question (10%)
- Expansive with self-identification (8%)
- It depends (5%)
- Does not ask (3%)

Respondents largely reported that they follow standardized wording and methods such as those from CCCApply and the U.S. Census when collecting SOGI data. Almost one-fifth of respondents stated that they were unsure if or how their institutions collect SOGI data. Thirteen percent shared collection methods with wording that attempted to expand upon standardized collection methods to varying degrees of success, while 8% provided an expansive list of options while also allowing students to self-identify and/or select multiple responses that resonate with their identities. The responses of 10% of participants suggested that they did not understand the question, as they appeared to disclose their own identities instead of providing the methods by which their institutions collect SOGI data. Those who reported “it depends” stated that the ways in which they ask depend upon who is asking the question, while others disclosed that they have “lax” collection practices or that they feel collecting SOGI data is an afterthought.

In response to questions about establishing SOGI data collection practices at their institution, only 24 participants chose to disclose this information. A review of the 24 responses found the following six themes:

- Includes queer people (38%)
- Unsure (25%)
- No formal process (13%)

- Minimal collaboration (13%)
- Does not collect (8%)
- Confused by question (4%)

Among respondents whose processes include queer people, they shared that they work with their LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups, student organizations, or culturally competent or LGBTQIA+ identifying colleagues to create their process for collecting SOGI data. Those who reported “no formal process” responded that they try to use “best practices,” while others described that they could do a better job in creating a process as an institution. Those in the “minimal collaboration” grouping reported that they allow survey requestors to determine this process, or that they primarily collaborate with cabinet-level leadership to determine how to ask SOGI questions.

Confidence Varies Based on the Complexities of SOGI Data

To quantify and assess the completeness of local SOGI data, we asked respondents to submit their counts of LGBTQIA+ and trans* students.⁷ Of the 36 respondents who answered the question, over half (53%) said they were unsure, 22% provided contextualized numbers at the institutional level that came from CCCApply, 14% provided raw numbers without sources or clear parameters, and 8% provided data they collected from their program. Of those respondents who provided counts, many provided caveats such as “536 per CCCApply but we know there are more” or “This number is not accurate as only 448 were counted.” Similar results were observed for gender identity. Thirty-five institutions responded, and their responses fell into the same categories as those for sexual orientation data: unsure (54%), contextualized institutional data (23%), raw or unclear numbers/sources (17%), and program-level numbers (6%).

When participants were asked how satisfied they were with their **access** to SOGI data, three out of four participants (75%) reported some level of dissatisfaction. Upon further analysis, some differences in reported satisfaction by role and institutional area were uncovered. Administrators (43%) and faculty (29%) were more likely to report satisfaction with their SOGI data access compared with classified professionals (14%), researchers (7%), and those who did not report their role (7%) (see Figure 8). In regard to satisfaction by institutional area, respondents from large suburban institutions were most likely to report satisfaction with access to SOGI data (57% satisfied), and respondents from institutions in large cities were the least likely to report satisfaction with SOGI data (50% dissatisfied) (see Figure 9).

⁷ Additionally, the survey encouraged responding institutions to share reports that demonstrate the SOGI data collection or usage efforts on their campuses. Four institutions submitted reports: one was a purely quantitative report of SOGI headcounts with a narrative analysis, two were qualitative, and one was mixed methods. Two were from research offices, one from an equity office, and one was a product of a campus-wide committee exploring DI for LGBTQIA+ students at their college.

Figure 8. Satisfaction with Access to SOGI Data by Respondents' Primary Role at the Institution (n = 56)

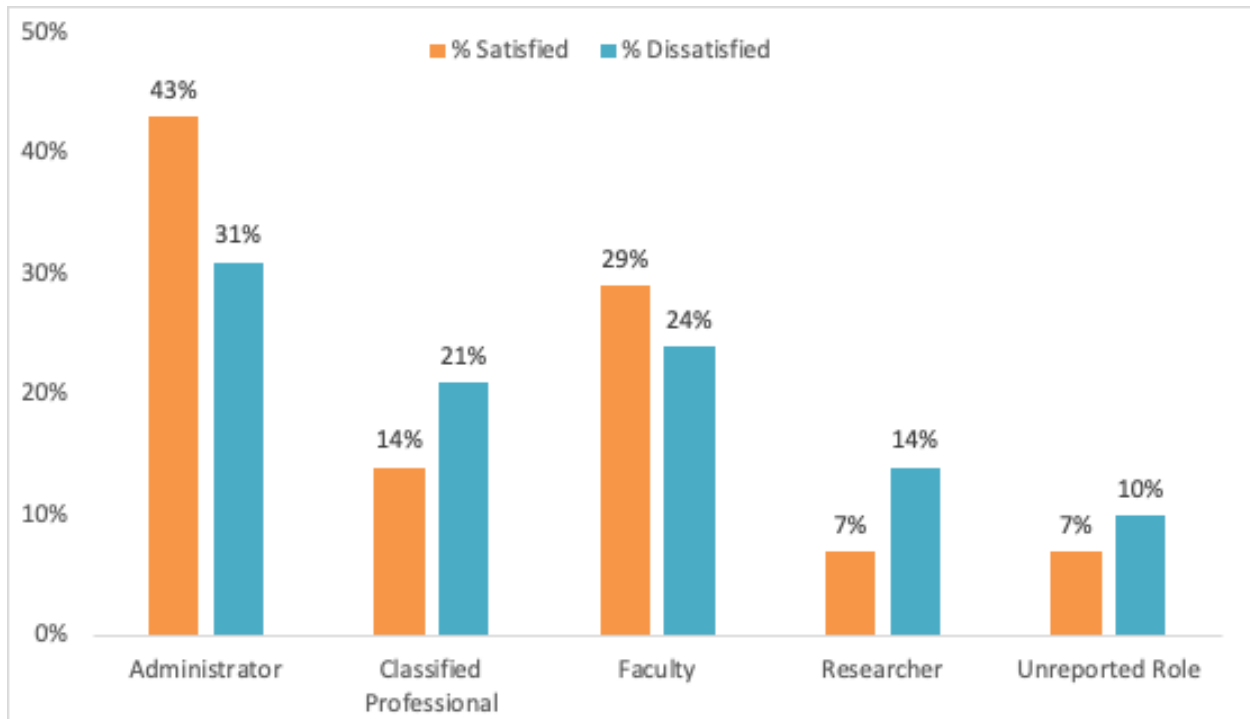
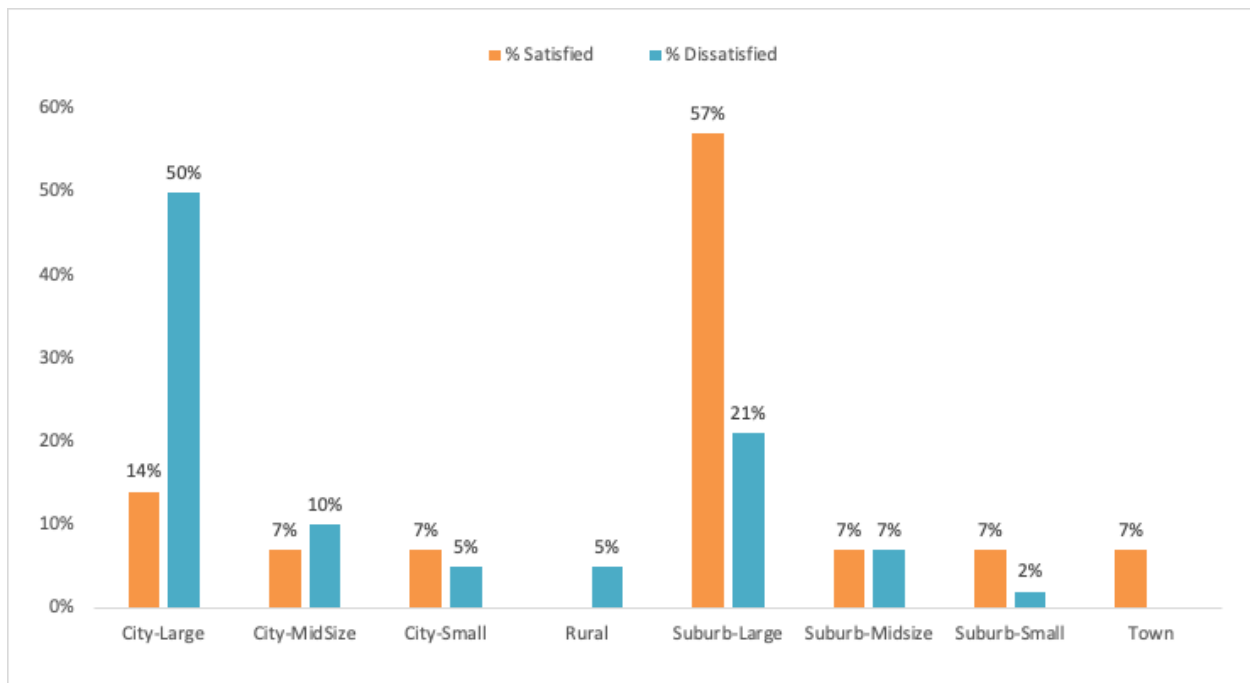
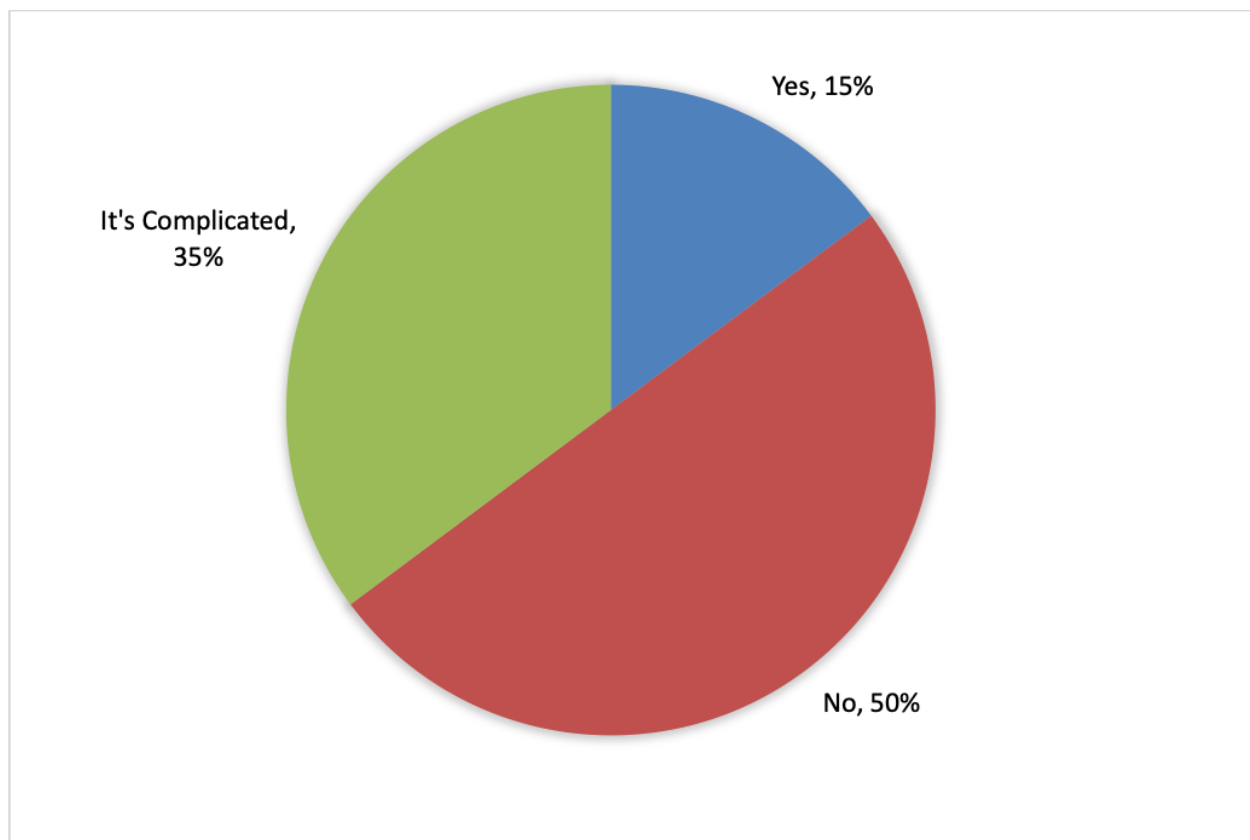


Figure 9. Satisfaction with Access to SOGI Data by Institution's Urbanicity (n = 56)



When participants were asked about their confidence in the quality of their college’s SOGI data, 50% answered that they were not confident, and only 15% were confident. The remaining 35% stated that “it’s complicated” and elucidated their thoughts qualitatively (see Figure 10). Fifty-three percent of the qualitative comments were related to the incompleteness of students disclosing their identities in the data, the vision for using SOGI data, and how the CCCApply questions are structured. Thirty-two percent were “unsure” of their level of confidence, as they did not have enough information about SOGI data at their institutions or in general to feel confident. Eleven percent reported that they rely upon or are confident in their qualitative data more than their quantitative data, and five percent stated they do not collect or use SOGI data.

Figure 10. Confidence in Institution’s SOGI Data Quality (n = 54)



Barriers to SOGI Data Collection and Usage Are Widespread

The survey next sought to elucidate barriers respondents face regarding collecting and using SOGI data. Student privacy concerns were at the top of the list. The remaining responses indicate that institutional and systemwide barriers are structural and procedural in nature and stem from a lack of guidance and leadership on the matter. One institution’s response indicated the likely existence of anti-queer, anti-trans* bias by responding that they “do not need [SOGI] information.” Of the institutions that collect and share data, less than a quarter of them apply SOGI data toward tangible changes on campus such as connecting students to resources,

informing student equity plans, or informing LGBTQIA+ planning on campus. A full 25% do not use the data that they have for any analysis, planning, or allocation of resources.

Student privacy concerns were reported as the largest barrier to data access (61%), followed by personnel capacity (41%), institutional data access policies (32%), institutional buy-in (29%), personnel expertise (27%), or other unlisted barriers (21%). Only 14% of participants reported that they did not face any barriers to accessing SOGI data.

Qualitative responses regarding unlisted barriers fell into five categories as follows:

- Unsure (42%)
- Structural barriers (25%)
- Data accuracy concerns (17%)
- Students declining to disclose (8%)
- Don't need SOGI information (8%)

Some of those who were unsure stated that they did not even know where the data existed, who had access to it, or how they could learn more about it. Other participants reported structural barriers such as anti-queer and anti-trans* bias within their institutions. Those who reported data accuracy issues stated concerns with the legitimacy of CCCApply SOGI data broadly or in their institution's ability to appropriately maintain and use these variables.

When participants were asked to share any additional access concerns, qualitative responses were coded into five categories as follows:

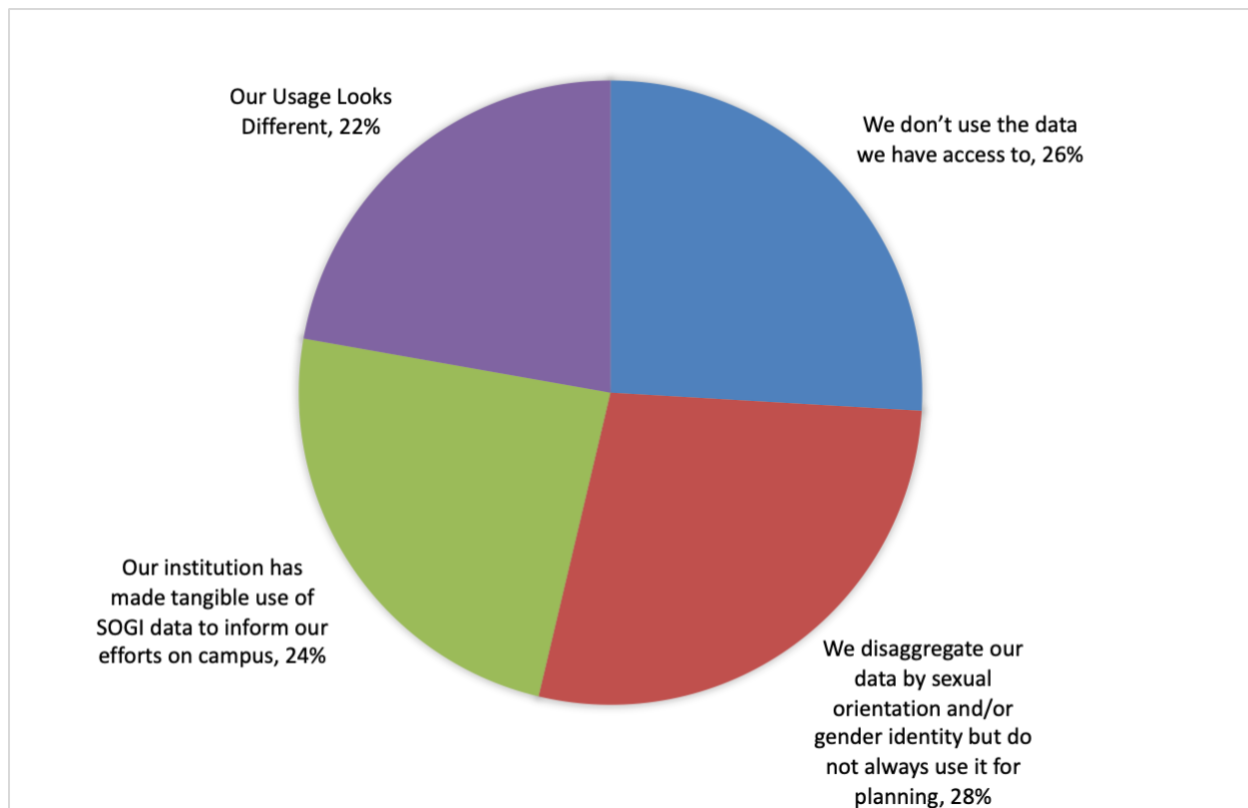
- Local college-level issues (41%)
- Concerns not related to access (35%)
- Unsure (12%)
- Systemwide issues (12%)
- No concerns (6%)

Local college-level issues included lack of buy-in from college leaders, coding issues in information technology (IT) departments that make it difficult to appropriately utilize the data, siloing and gatekeeping of information, and lack of interest in trying something that "has never been done in the past." Concerns that did not relate to access spoke to a need for a clear vision of how to use the data to affect change on campus, issues related to quality, fears related to student privacy and safety, and a lack of appropriate professional development. Systemwide challenges primarily pointed toward a lack of clear guidance from the CCCCO regarding the appropriate usage of CCCApply data, making it challenging for institutions to feel confident in the possibilities for SOGI data in reporting let alone using these data to create change.

SOGI Data Usage Is Low

Respondents were asked to describe how they use the SOGI data they collect in their institutions. Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported that they disaggregate their data using SOGI elements but that they do not always use the information for planning purposes; 26% stated that they do not use the data they have access to; and 24% reported that their institutions make tangible use of their SOGI data. Twenty-two percent indicated they used SOGI data in a way that was not listed among the answer options (see Figure 11). Two-thirds of the respondents who described their usage as “different” were unsure about what data usage looks like on their campuses. Of the remaining respondents, 17% noted that they only recently began to work with SOGI data and therefore had not used it at the time the survey was taken, and another 17% reported that they use the data for very specific purposes such as student equity plans or that they use an additional element their campus implemented for outreach.

Figure 11. Usage of SOGI Data Locally (n = 54)



While very few respondents (n = 5) reported initially that their institutions do not collect SOGI data, those that did provide some interesting insight into why. Dubious data quality, lack of executive buy-in, and student privacy concerns were among the top reasons cited for not collecting SOGI data. When prompted to further elaborate on other reasons they do not collect these data, all responses could be described in terms of a “lack of:” executive buy-in, sufficient student counts, and personnel capacity.

Interview Findings

Information relayed across four key informant interviews both validated findings in the survey and wider literature while providing more nuance and depth to the conversation surrounding SOGI data practices and barriers within the CCC system from the perspectives of interviewees serving in various roles within different institutions. To better protect the confidentiality of the interviewees, they were asked to provide a professional drag name as a pseudonym for the study, as follows:

- Kelsey Tension is an LGBTQIA+ IRPE administrator
- Ma’am Candy is an LGBTQIA+ research analyst
- Enzy Meadows is an LGBTQIA+ Pride Center director
- Captain Pomeroy is an LGBTQIA+ Pride Center director/college administrator

From these interviews, three major—and overlapping—themes emerged: institutional buy-in matters, data-specific concerns impact SOGI data access and usage, and collaboration and coordination are critical for furthering SOGI data access and usage.

Institutional Buy-In Matters

[Researchers and practitioners alike](#) discussed the impact of leadership, institutional buy-in, business practices, and climate within the college and their surrounding regions on their experiences related to SOGI data collection and usage. According to respondents, culturally competent leaders who provide clear guidance and demonstrate a commitment to LGBTQIA+ students can be the difference between engaging in effective SOGI data collection and usage practices and not engaging well or at all.

Both [researchers](#) interviewed noted that their institutions are becoming more data-driven in their leadership. However, this data-driven perspective does not always mean institutional priorities for SOGI data. As Kelsey Tension noted in his interview, SOGI data are considered as “nice to have” but are not prioritized by his institution.

In contrast, Ma’am Candy noted that her institution makes it a priority to disaggregate their staple reports (e.g., program review) at multiple levels with SOGI data elements from CCCApply. She shared that her college integrates sexual orientation and gender identity data into their board reports and program review in addition to tying these findings to professional development offerings. Ma’am Candy attributed this prioritization of SOGI data inclusion in staple reporting in part to the college’s commitment to creating a safe space for LGBTQIA+ students that pushes back against a region that is considered hostile towards queer and transgender students, and she stated that she is proud of this institutional commitment and culture. This type of “rainbow refuge” illustrates the positive influence that strong executive leadership and institutional buy-in can have on a college’s inclusivity regardless of the surrounding community.

Even in a supportive environment that makes use of SOGI data like the one Ma'am Candy describes, there are still significant challenges with using these elements, in particular past business decisions that disallow flexibility as SOGI variables change over time. She elaborated that in prior years, the college had third-party consultants establish coding in their student information system that essentially fixed the gender identity variables as they were prior to CCCApply adding the nonbinary gender marker, pulling nonbinary students into the "unreported" category. Despite a good working relationship with their IT department, this logic has been difficult to update, presenting a challenge in working with existing SOGI variables as they evolve over time.

The two [practitioners](#) interviewed also discussed the ways in which the environments at their institutions impact their ability to access, use, and/or engage colleagues on the topic of SOGI data. Unlike the researchers interviewed, practitioners spoke more about structural issues in their institutional contexts, such as statewide funding structures, a lack of clarity around institutional business practices or priorities, institutional climates, a lack of intersectional representation of LGBTQIA+ colleagues (e.g., QTBIPOC), and how the competency of their leaders and colleagues in relation to LGBTQIA+ issues influences the prioritization of SOGI data needs or the importance of programming for queer and transgender students on campus.

Enzy Meadows spoke to the difficulty of trying to parse out who is really invested from those who merely perform allyship, and how confusing it has been for him to try to get answers when he attempts to get insight into his college's SOGI data. He notes how practices related to SOGI data are arbitrary and even conflicting, and he largely gets "crickets" when he tries to get answers. This apathy is what he believes contributes to a climate that he does not consider affirming, in addition to some of his colleagues attempting to opt out of Pride-related communications that he shared campuswide. Although he acknowledges that there are supportive people on campus, not all of them are culturally competent when dealing with queer and transgender students, which he finds challenging to navigate.

Captain Pomeroy shared similar reflections on the climate of their college. They noted that their campus lacks intersectional LGBTQIA+ representation, which means that LGBTQIA+ initiatives are largely led by White community members and allies who do not always have the cultural competency or sensitivities to effectively address and respond to hate and violent crimes against queer or trans* students of color. The lack of representation also affects important decisions related to student housing and disciplinary processes that, more often than not, do not take queer and trans* students into consideration, potentially leading to harmful outcomes for affected students. These issues are situated within a climate in which SOGI data access is largely nonexistent for students or employees, and even LGBTQIA+ student-led data collection efforts were shut down by the institution. Despite Captain Pomeroy's institution appearing to have many of the same tools, resources, and similarly engaged employees as Ma'am Candy's, the climate they are experiencing seems to stem from college leadership's resistance to de-closeting SOGI data.

Data-Specific Concerns Impact Access and Usage

All four interviewees expressed concerns related to SOGI data. The researchers discussed data quality, resources, and capacity, expressed concerns related to student privacy, and mentioned a need for both better quantitative data and a desire to use and see more qualitative data.

In regard to resources, Kelsey Tension desired to see more resources going toward compensating students to participate in qualitative studies, particularly given the difficulty he has collecting SOGI data on the student application. Ma'am Candy also wants to see more qualitative studies, noting that a faculty member at her college actively collected student voices in marginalized groups on campus, including LGBTQIA+ students, but that this work has not been updated in some time. Related to needed resources, Ma'am Candy advocated for more time dedicated to data quality assurance so that these variables are more reliable and valid.

Ma'am Candy further discussed data quality, noting that there are many students who do not report their information, which results in missing or low data reporting. Ma'am Candy dug into the structural issues at play that contribute to low reporting, such as logic that disallows students under 18 years old from being able to answer SOGI questions in CCCApply. As the system continues to emphasize dual enrollment programs, more students are applying before they are considered old enough to self-identify, and unless they reapply in later years, this lack of information will follow them throughout their community college careers. In addition, Kelsey Tension noted that the exclusion of certain identities and the inability to self-identify in the application may further deter students who are deciding whether they want to disclose this information.

When practitioners talked about data quality, they noted the ways in which they are largely excluded from these decisions and how issues of data quality and student privacy are used as excuses to disengage from improving the quality and uses of SOGI data. Captain Pomeroy shared that while student privacy concerns are understandable, students at their college actively called upon the administration to collect and use SOGI data, but their efforts were shut down. They further discussed that their requests for SOGI data were dismissed by college leadership because the data were considered "unclean" due to the perceived incompleteness and low quality of the data. Captain Pomeroy then pointed out that this response is unique to SOGI data because the same excuse is not wielded against other marginalized student populations.

Enzy Meadows similarly shared that they get "crickets" when they ask questions related to how demographic questions are structured in surveys or what student populations are excluded from their application. In response to these challenges, he shared that the LGBTQIA+ program is committed to better representing student identities when it collects student data, which he sees as a silver lining to the lack of clear policies and procedures related to demographic data on campus.

Beyond the issue of data quality and sharing, practitioners were primarily concerned with data access. Captain Pomeroy noted, "I feel like it has been like a feat of insurmountable proportions to try to get access to that data for our queer students." Enzy Meadows had similar issues

accessing SOGI data, let alone information on what data were available to the research office, repeatedly using the term “crickets” to describe the lack of communication and investment he faces when attempting to engage at his institution and that he does not “have the tools” to know where to begin to help resolve this problem. Captain Pomeroy noted how good the data sharing is for the Black student success program at their institution, which they are very supportive of, while also noting that they are unable to get information related to queer and transgender cohorts of students due to privacy concerns, leaving LGBTQIA+ students without the same level of intentional outreach and resource sharing.

Collaboration and Community Are Critical to Further SOGI Data Collection and Usage Efforts

Researchers and practitioners alike emphasized a need for collaboration and community to further SOGI data collection and usage efforts. Researchers focused on the need to build rapport with practitioners and the community and collaborate with experts when needed. Practitioners further emphasized a need to find your “worms” (meaning like-minded people who are willing to do the necessary work of remediating the structural “soil” in community so that something beautiful can grow) while also digging into the need for representative affinity groups, to practice self and community care, and to make space for students to be a part of this collaboration and drive the change they want to see.

Kelsey Tension spoke to the importance of rapport building and learning from experts to improve the ways in which research offices collect demographic information. He states that it is imperative that research offices “cultivate the type of environment where people feel comfortable in coming back to you and telling you ‘You could do better.’” Further, he suggests working with members of the LGBTQIA+ community or subject matter experts to help ensure that demographic data are collected using best practices, emphasizing that the intent here is not to tokenize anyone or rely on them solely, but to listen to knowledgeable colleagues and students to do better. On a related note, Ma’am Candy advocated for researchers or any practitioner interested in change-making, stating, “Build your network. Find your co-conspirators. Find your troublemakers. And make noise and use the system that’s in place to make that noise. Find your committees that are friendly to you. Use your public comments [in Board meetings, etc].”

Like Ma’am Candy, Captain Pomeroy placed a great deal of importance on establishing community and leaning on one another. They discussed how inclusive and intentionally constructed affinity groups could facilitate building community, create change, and prevent burnout through shared labor and collective care. Enzy Meadows also emphasized a need for both self and community care, sharing that not only does care facilitate the work, but it also provides queer and transgender students with authentically human role models from whom they can learn to take care of themselves while they also advocate for their communities.

Along the lines of student engagement or collaboration, Captain Pomeroy advocated for students to be involved in community and institutional decision-making. They further emphasized that institutions often say they are student-centered without involving students in

co-creating their own educational experiences and reshaping institutions to better serve them. Finally, they emphasized that if we involve students in these processes, we must honor their involvement and listen to them.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study suggest that SOGI data are inconsistently collected, inaccurate, underutilized, and deprioritized at many CCCs. Only 55% of the participants across 49 institutions reported that they regularly collect SOGI data, suggesting, at a minimum, a lack of guidance within institutions about what SOGI data are available and, at worst, a lack of buy-in on the importance of this student population. Survey respondents **expressed frustration with the lack of clarity around what SOGI data are available to them.** Further, over one-third of survey respondents were unsure what SOGI data are collected at their institutions, with faculty respondents more likely to indicate they were unaware of how and through what means SOGI data are collected at their institutions, how to access these data, or if/how these data are used in decision-making.

When comparing the methods used to collect SOGI data with data from other student groups, SOGI data were reportedly collected less frequently across all data collection methods with the exceptions of local surveys. Even in local surveys, only 24% of respondents reported that their institutions include SOGI questions on surveys any time they include demographic questions, which suggests that even with one of the more frequently used and reliable opportunities to collect demographic data, LGBTQIA+ populations are often excluded, effectively closeting the data and the students.

As noted earlier in this report, a lack of meaningful and inclusive wording and a lack of clear processes to establish SOGI data collection practices have impeded local SOGI data collection and usage efforts. Given these challenges, it is not surprising that only 25% of respondents reported some level of confidence in their SOGI data, though there are some complexities even within this sentiment, with participants sharing that they are confident in some of their SOGI data (e.g., student voices) and not others (e.g., CCCApply data). It is also worth noting the differences in satisfaction with SOGI data, with administrators reporting notably higher rates of satisfaction compared to researchers and practitioners. The differences in satisfaction between these groups may be related to a lack of collective understanding and vision for SOGI data at some respondents' colleges.

The role of strong leadership and executive buy-in is clearly illustrated by one campus committing itself to being a “rainbow refuge” in a conservative area. Rurality may be a predictor of anti-queer and anti-trans* bias, but strong leadership can offset this for community college campuses. More qualitative research is needed to better understand the complexities of urbanicity on efforts to support queer and trans* populations. When disaggregated by urbanicity, it is notable that participants from large cities were more likely to express dissatisfaction with access to SOGI data and participants from large suburbs were more likely to express satisfaction. While participants from rural schools comprised a small

proportion of the responses to the survey, all of them reported that they are dissatisfied with the data they have on their LGBTQIA+ populations.

Data quality came through in the interviews as a major concern for researchers, while data access appeared primary for practitioners. The interviews demonstrate that both data quality and data access are clearly impacted by institutional (and systemwide) priorities and buy-in. Ma'am Candy's institution created an intentional culture of LGBTQIA+ inclusion that extends to a consistent use of SOGI data in staple reporting, while both practitioners interviewed reported dismissal or refusal from their institutions to engage with their calls to action for data access and improved data quality when it was collected on surveys. Both practitioners connected their experiences with being dismissed at their institutions to how they experience campus climate as LGBTQIA+ employees. As researcher Kelsey Tension also noted, SOGI data are largely considered "nice to have" but are not prioritized in their IRPE office. Even Ma'am Candy, who reported a very supportive environment on campus for SOGI data collection and usage, noted that there are still challenges with resourcing proper validation for these elements as well as IT-related fixes that limit changes to SOGI data elements as they evolve over time.

Respondents in both the surveys and interviews discussed the **ways in which data quality concerns—to a lesser extent—and the very real concern of LGBTQIA+ student privacy related to SOGI data are used as a refrain to dismiss calls for SOGI data collection and usage on CCC campuses.** Captain Pomeroy explained that they were once told that SOGI data were too "unclean" to use and challenged the CCC system to consider what demographic data we collect on any student population that is truly "clean." In relation to student privacy, there are rightly very serious concerns related to using CCCApply data to perform outreach, as students are effectively outed to staff without explicitly consenting to be contacted. Yet, as Ma'am Candy's college demonstrates, when there is institutional will and commitment, creative solutions to student privacy issues can be employed. In this case, they added a question to their application that asks if students would like to receive information related to LGBTQIA+ programming, providing a way for students to give their consent. Even for students who may feel uncomfortable responding to this question due to their home environment or where they are in their coming out journey, its inclusion on the application signals that the college is a safe place for them to seek support and community. Ma'am Candy, Kelsey Tension, and some survey respondents also discussed the importance of qualitative data for understanding LGBTQIA+ student experiences and needs, and advocating for more resources to support efforts to gather and uplift student voices.

The interview data deeply illustrate the **importance of collaboration between researchers and practitioners at both the local and statewide levels throughout the CCC system to improve SOGI data collection and usage efforts.** Establishing trust and authentic relationships across roles, **involving LGBTQIA+ people with diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and institutional roles—especially students—in decisions related to their communities on campus were all cited as important components for these efforts.** With all individuals working within their spheres of influence while maintaining communication and support from each other, they can begin addressing systemwide and institutional structural barriers to effective LGBTQIA+ data practices and student support services while centering QTBIPOC.

Beyond collaboration, community is deeply necessary for queer and trans* people to thrive on CCC campuses, as interviewees shared. One researcher and both practitioners interviewed shared the importance of finding “co-conspirators” in furthering SOGI data collection and usage efforts, and emphasized that the work is impossible to do sustainably without community and self-care. As Enzy Meadows noted in his interview, it is important for LGBTQIA+ students to have role models who take care of themselves while they fight for meaningful change. Further, a diverse community of out LGBTQIA+ employees on campus serves a dual purpose. First, it provides employees with a care network that prevents burnout and distributes labor that is often done out of commitment to queer and trans* people rather than job function. Second, it provides queer and trans* students with mentors reflect at least one aspect of their identities and who can not only empower them to take part in change on campus but can also facilitate a sense of belonging and queer joy.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

This section synthesizes the key findings from the surveys and interviews into a set of actionable recommendations and future research that the CCC system can use to facilitate the de-closeting of SOGI data and the creation of a more supportive environment in which LGBTQIA+ students and employees from all communities can thrive.

Recommendations

The findings of this study illuminate opportunities for growth and improvement at the institutional and statewide levels, and The RP Group offers the following recommendations within each level.

Institutional Level

RECOMMENDATION 1: PROTECT STUDENT PRIVACY WHILE ENGAGING WITH SOGI DATA

A salient theme throughout the research is that of student data privacy, which Valdes (1995) calls “the sword and the shield.” Institutions cite data privacy as a reason to block practitioner access to institutional SOGI data; sometimes this reason is founded in good faith and sometimes not. Institutions should adopt policies that preserve the shield and lay down the sword, so to speak.

First, LGBTQIA+ students’ agency around self-disclosure should be shielded—thus, institutions must not allow any outreach efforts that explicitly target LGBTQIA+ students because emails or invitations to join LGBTQIA+ organizations, events, or clubs can be intercepted by parents, teammates, employers, religious congregants, and others close to students, potentially endangering closeted students’ housing, livelihood, community ties, or even bodily safety. Therefore, any outreach efforts should be campus-wide and in a general format that includes

several other groups, services, or events that are not explicitly queer or trans* in nature. Another way to preserve the shield is to enact practices that allow students to opt in or out of receiving notifications about LGBTQIA+ services and events, which allows practitioners to outreach to students while balancing valid privacy concerns related to sharing the identities of queer and trans* students.

At the same time, institutions must “lay down the sword” of refusing to engage with SOGI data in collection or usage practices. Continuing to do so keeps SOGI data in the closet and facilitates harmful environments for LGBTQIA+ students. Furthermore, when they do not see their community represented among institutional priorities, LGBTQIA+ students may not enroll, stop out, or transfer to another school before completion (Barack, 2015; Battle & Linville, 2006; Conron et al., 2023; Strayhorn et al., 2008). Unfortunately, SOGI data for some schools are incomplete or unreliable due to extremely small population sizes for a variety of reasons. Despite this reality, it is recommended that institutions start with the data they currently collect and can access, which may include leveraging local surveys, program-level data, qualitative studies, and/or using existing information in CCCApply to further efforts to support LGBTQIA+ students.

RECOMMENDATION 2: FOSTER A COMMUNITY OF COLLABORATION AMONG CCC PRACTITIONERS AND STUDENTS

Any institution’s efforts to understand and plan for LGBTQIA+ communities must be a collaborative one that involves the active participation of community members, especially of QTBIPOC. Minoritized communities must not be made to compete for resources but should be encouraged to work together toward actionable solutions, as the struggles of all marginalized peoples are interconnected. The SOGI Coalition and one interviewed practitioner have utilized philosophies such as adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy* (2017) to support change-making in a community-centered and non-hierarchical way—a resource that justice-minded institutions may consider as they carve their paths forward.

Regardless of the framework used to drive change, this collaborative process must include students and CCC practitioners such as administrators, faculty, and classified professionals, and it should center those who work directly with LGBTQIA+ communities such as Pride Center directors, faculty sponsors of LGBTQIA+ clubs, or members of employee resource groups or student organizations. QTBIPOC are experts on the systems of support that an institution must provide to ensure healthy and successful students at a California community college, and their input must be prioritized. Moreover, it is important to involve LGBTQIA+ students in decisions related to demographic data collection and to guide change on campus and at the system level and include a feedback loop from students on how these data are collected at the local and statewide levels.

RECOMMENDATION 3: STANDARDIZE AND INCLUDE SOGI IN DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

SOGI questions must be standardized and must apply inclusive practices that allow students to self-identify and check multiple boxes for sexual orientation and gender identity questions (see Appendix D for a suggested language). Applying this practice allows for more authentic and nuanced identification by students who choose to disclose this information and may decrease non-respondents. In addition, SOGI questions must be included among demographic questions on all data collection tools such as applications and surveys, and it must be standardized at the statewide level—especially in CCCApply. Once these data are collected, institutions must disaggregate student outcomes accordingly and at all institutional levels from faculty evaluations and program review to annual planning and on public-facing dashboards. If institutions have unreliable data from CCCApply or other application systems, they must commit to acquiring SOGI information through local surveys. All institution-wide data should be disaggregated along SOGI demographics so that institutions may begin to understand student outcomes, climate responses, and classroom experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. These data should be used as part of the resource allocation portion of the annual planning process including at the statewide level.

RECOMMENDATION 4: ADOPT CCCAPPLY

To begin de-closeting SOGI data throughout the system, institutions that have not already done so should adopt CCCApply for their application process. Although the application as it currently stands is not ideal, CCCApply is working with the SOGI Coalition to craft the most comprehensive and flexible SOGI questions possible as part of a general overhaul to the application. The SOGI Coalition has worked diligently for over two years to craft a comprehensive set of questions (see Appendix D) designed to use inclusive wording to maximize response rates and accuracy for LGBTQIA+ applicants. While SOGI data may never be perfect considering the vast and fluid diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community, quickly evolving terminology related to queer and trans* identities, and the fact that there will always be students who choose not to disclose, if adopted by CCCApply, the state and colleges will have more consistent SOGI data collection and reporting, which will increase the CCC system's understanding of LGBTQIA+ students by bringing SOGI data out of the closet and into more public-facing reports and tools such as dashboards.

RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPLEMENT CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING FOR ALL CCC EMPLOYEES THAT INCLUDES LGBTQIA+ EXPERIENCES

As with all equity work, individuals must work on their own implicit biases—including racism, homophobia, and transphobia—by accessing resources such as [Anti-Racism Daily](#), [Trans Student Educational Resources](#), and [The Trevor Project](#). Institutions may consider leaning on subject matter experts for support to create a more culturally competent environment without relying solely on those from marginalized communities to spearhead equity efforts. Beyond this individual work, CCCs must commit to providing LGBTQIA+ cultural competency training to all employees, ensuring that these trainings do not center dominant Western and Eurocentric

ideas of queerness or transness. We further recommend that cultural competency training must encompass race, ethnicity, ability, citizenship status, and English language learners, as all liberation struggles are interconnected.

System Level

RECOMMENDATION 6: PRIORITIZE STATEWIDE FUNDING AND SUPPORTS FOR LGBTQIA+ STUDENTS

As revealed by the results of this study, a common barrier to using collected data is the lack of institutional buy-in. Therefore, providing institutions with earmarked resources would encourage them to provide needed support for LGBTQIA+ students. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office must formalize a dedicated, sustained funding stream for LGBTQIA+ resources for every campus that includes resources as a means for campuses to be a "rainbow refuge" for LGBTQIA+ students. This funding could be used to support general cultural competency and [Safe Zone](#) training for college employees, for building and/or sustaining a Pride Center on campus that is open and accessible to all students, and providing for at least one full-time position to operate the center, plan activities, provide Safe Zone training, and advocate for equity on campus. Pride Center staff would ideally be representative of the LGBTQIA+ students they are serving (Duran et al., 2020) and must demonstrate intersectional cultural competencies to mitigate racism, ableism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression in LGBTQIA+ spaces.

RECOMMENDATION 7: ENSURE POLICY ADVOCACY EFFORTS ARE INTERSECTIONAL

Comprehensive SOGI data collection and usage practices for the CCC system must be reflected in statewide policy, and supporters must advocate that similar practices be implemented in other statewide educational systems. Policy recommendations should be accompanied by funding that supports data collection efforts, Pride Centers and other programs for LGBTQIA+ students, and require rigorous data privacy stipulations and the reporting of student outcomes disaggregated by sexual orientation and gender identity. Any policy advocacy on behalf of the LGBTQIA+ community should be intersectional in nature, centering QTBIPOC and all intersecting marginalized populations and including culturally competent components. As Duran and colleagues argue (2020), structural intersectionality is required when building resources for LGBTQIA+ students.

RECOMMENDATION 8: INCLUDE LGBTQIA+ DEMOGRAPHICS IN STUDENT EQUITY AND ACHIEVEMENT ANALYSIS

Sexual orientation and gender identity are federally protected under Title IX (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). To ensure that institutions are not discriminating against LGBTQIA+ students, student outcomes must be disaggregated and screened for disproportionate impact (DI) at the state and college levels. If DI is present for LGBTQIA+ students, we recommend that institutions implement the previous recommendations and establish a Pride Center with robust programming at their campus(es) to begin closing these equity gaps.

Future Research

As the CCC system continues to make improvements to the SOGI questions locally and statewide, **more quantitative and qualitative research must be conducted** to assess the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQIA+ students. Further, data collection and improvement initiatives must also **consider LGBTQIA+ employees throughout the CCC system** and proceed with the same cautions in terms of using the same inclusive question wording for employees to disclose their LGBTQIA+ status, and ensuring that LGBTQIA+ employees have a workplace free from discrimination on the basis of sexuality and gender identity or expression. In addition, more **qualitative research that centers QTBIPOC student and practitioner experiences** is needed to understand their struggles and triumphs and to explore the potential effects of disidentification to inform student and institution-level improvement efforts.

To further de-closet SOGI data and uplift LGBTQIA+ students' experiences, institutions must **disaggregate by SOGI demographics** all student success and equity data that explore potential disproportionate impact. By doing so, LGBTQIA+ populations will then be better factored into systemwide and local planning processes and supports.

In addition, **investigating LGBTQIA+ experiences in programs for formerly incarcerated students and former foster youth, and in categorical programs such as EOPS**, will give valuable insight into opportunities to implement culturally competent services. Due to familial rejection, QTBIPOC are overrepresented among homeless youth (LAHSA, 2020), foster youth (Wilson et al., 2014), and incarcerated individuals (Jones, 2021). Therefore, institutions must gauge the inclusivity of LGBTQIA+ students in programs that support those communities to maximize culturally responsive care and service for QTBIPOC.

Finally, studies on **the effects of campus Pride Centers on LGBTQIA+ student outcomes** (Trimble, 2019) **and climate experiences** are needed to further surface and advocate for effective structures that support LGBTQIA+ students. Many students, especially QTBIPOC, remain totally or selectively closeted, yet still benefit from the presence of a Pride Center (Brockenbrough, 2015). Previous qualitative research with LGBTQIA+ students within the system also supports that students either benefit from or would like to have access to a Pride Center (Sykes Seiverd, 2021). Prior research and reason suggest that Pride Centers increase students' sense of belonging and perceptions of increased safety. Additional reasons that students use or benefit from Pride Centers may be uncovered through further research.

Concluding Remarks

LGBTQIA+ populations in higher education are in dire need of support due to the onslaught of anti-queer and anti-trans* political sentiment and the impact of subsequent targeted acts of violence. Queer and trans* students, especially those who are people of color, are looking to college campuses for support in processing the violent rhetoric aimed at them and to feel safe in their sexual and gender identities. What they encounter when they arrive at many California community colleges, however, is a system that does not fully see their identities and does not prioritize providing culturally competent or sustainably funded resources to them.

At the root of this problem is a lack of guidance on how to standardize SOGI data collection processes as well as a lack of resources for physical spaces and programming to support LGBTQIA+ students. Without guidance or clear commitments from the system, colleges without institutional buy-in can easily de-prioritize efforts made toward LGBTQIA+ equity on campus by citing student privacy concerns, issues with “unclean” data, or any number of other reasons that serve to obstruct progress. Allowing college leadership to choose not to invest resources in the health and safety of queer and trans* students is unacceptable, as those who opt out perpetuate harmful systemic biases.

With clear guidance that is developed by centering input from QTBIPOC students, faculty, researchers, and classified professionals, the CCC system can begin moving toward equitable solutions for LGBTQIA+ students while simultaneously furthering their commitment for racial justice. Some institutional executive leaders have begun demonstrating buy-in on their campuses by finding creative solutions that facilitate higher quality data, implementing new SOGI questions without compromising student privacy, involving LGBTQIA+ students and employees in the conversation on what to do moving forward, and providing needed services. These leaders should be looked to for guidance on standardizing statewide policies. Moving forward, all efforts should be supported by research that is ongoing, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and that centers QTBIPOC students and employees. Implementing inclusive, well-funded, and intersectional SOGI data collection and usage practices will move LGBTQIA+ populations out of the closet and toward equitable outcomes in the California community colleges.

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Appendix A - Survey Instrument

Access the [survey instrument at this link](#) or use the QR code below.



Appendix B - Recruitment Message

Sent 8/28/23

SUBJECT LINE: The RP Group - Invitation to Complete the LGBTQ+ Data Practices Survey

TO: IRPE Offices

Dear IRPE Colleagues,

In partnership with the Foundation for California Community Colleges, The RP Group is administering a statewide survey to document existing data collection and usage practices for *LGBTQIA+ populations. We are gathering multiple responses per college and district as this survey aims to understand how LGBTQIA+ data are collected and used in various spaces in our institutions.

Please assist with this effort by completing the survey and sharing the survey and instructions with personnel on your campus who work with LGBTQIA+ students, faculty, and classified professionals in any capacity. This can include Pride Center directors, the Lavender Graduation committee, a faculty advisor for a student group, members of an LGBTQIA+ task force, leaders of an employee resource group, instructors of LGBTQIA+-centered courses, vocal campus advocates, etc.

If your district has not accessed, collected, or used data related to LGBTQIA+ populations, please still complete the survey and forward it to the appropriate people. The survey includes a few items designed to gather your perspectives around concerns and barriers to accessing, collecting, and using these data that would be meaningful to our efforts to support LGBTQIA+ data practices in the CCC System.

Attached is a PDF copy of the survey to assist your effort to gather and submit information on your LGBTQIA+ data collection and usage practices. We recommend that you review this copy and gather relevant information before commencing the online survey.

The link to the survey can be found here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LGBTQIAdata>

We kindly request you complete this survey by Wednesday, September 20, 2023.

For any questions regarding the survey, please contact Mx. Hawk McFadzen, Project Lead, at hmcfadzen@rpgroup.org.

Thank you, and stay well!

Appendix C - Interview Instrument

Introductions

To get started, we would like to do a quick round of introductions. To keep it simple and ensure no one is skipped, we will call on people to introduce themselves.

Icebreaker: Subjectivity statement plus “What’s your favorite dinosaur?”

Interview Instrument: Feel free to interrupt!

1. Talk to me about what it’s like to work with these data.
2. What’s been working well for you?
3. What has not been working well?
4. What is the culture around SOGI data on your campus?
5. How is your college fostering trust in the face of concerns with sensitive data with these?
6. What challenges did you have to overcome to establish a successful SOGI data culture at your campus?
7. Have leadership (execs, board) ever asked about SOGI data? In what ways and to what extent?
8. If you had a magic wand...
9. What advice do you have for other practitioners in this position?
10. Is there anything else you want to add we did not cover?

Appendix D - SOGI Coalition's Recommended Wording

The SOGI Coalition's recommendations will be finalized in May 2024. See the [living document containing the SOGI Coalition's recommendations](#) to be finalized around May 2024.

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

As the representative organization for institutional research, planning, and effectiveness (IRPE) professionals in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, The RP Group strengthens the ability of CCC to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

www.rpgroup.org

Project Team Biographies

Hawk McFadzen (they/them) - hawkmcfadzen@rpgroup.org

Hawk McFadzen is a white, nonbinary, genderqueer, and pansexual research analyst who is a working student-parent from a middle-class family but who was an unhoused person experiencing food insecurity for a short time.

I hold privilege in some of my identities and lack privilege in others. I, like many LGBTQIA+ people, have mental and physical disabilities, although I am mostly able-bodied and require few accommodations. While I do not claim to represent all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, I am experientially and academically versed in many of the issues that our community faces. Such insider positionality enables me to give a deeper analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data as I am familiar with the underlying nuances of queerness and transness. Like me, quite a number of the students we discuss here exist at the intersection of disability, queer/transness, and food/housing insecurity. My whiteness means that I lack the lived experiences and frames of reference of the people of color that are central to the issues that we are raising; however, I have in the past and continue to formally and informally educate myself on the reciprocal impacts of race/ethnicity on queerness/transness in higher education and more broadly in society. I do my best to apply cultural humility in my personal and professional life to facilitate this learning process. I am one of the original members of the SOGI Coalition; I serve on the Co-Planning Team and act as notetaker. My role as project lead was largely administrative and logistical; I have endless gratitude to my co-lead, Jaime, for shouldering the bulk of the analytical load.

Jaime Sykes (they/them) - jseiverd@rpgroup.org

Jaime Sykes is a white, chronically ill, nonbinary transmasculine queer person who is an Applied Anthropologist by training and Research and Planning Analyst by title.

I grew up in an upper-middle-class family with two college-educated parents in a conservative and predominantly white town in Southern California. Like Hawk, I am steeped in privilege due to my whiteness while also experiencing marginalization as a gender and sexual minority,

though there is nuance in how my whiteness also mitigates these experiences of oppression. For nearly a decade, I have engaged at varying degrees of involvement in community organizing in both Florida and California for queer and trans* liberation, racial justice, and disability inclusion. Most relevant to the current study, I am a co-founder, co-facilitator, and co-organizer for the SOGI Coalition, which is a grassroots group of LGBTQIA+ identified and allied CCC educators and even a few awesome students who seek to update the CCCApply methods for SOGI data collection to be more student-centered and inclusive. My academic and personal experiences position me well to do this work, though it is critical to note that a lack of QTPOC (queer trans* people of color) representation in the creation and analysis of this project is a major limitation of this study. My role on this project was largely related to the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and my positionality is impossible to fully separate from this process. I hope that this brief window into my experiences and who I am assists readers in unpacking the ways in which this knowledge was produced. I am grateful to my colleague Hawk McFadzen, who handled the bulk of the administrative work for this project in addition to being a co-designer of this study.

Alyssa Nguyen (she/her)

Alyssa Nguyen is a Vietnamese cisgender woman, from a low-income and immigrant background, who was the first in her family to attend and graduate from college.

As a community college graduate myself, I have experienced first-hand how unwelcoming and oppressive systems of higher education can be, but also how powerful it can be in transforming one's socioeconomic standing and opportunities. As a sibling and ally of a QTPOC, I have personally witnessed the emotional and mental trauma and confusion my sibling experienced while trying to navigate familial and societal systems that are not always understanding and/or welcoming to QTPOC. My academic and personal experiences position me well for this work because of my deep commitment to uplifting and eliminating barriers for students and surfacing student-centered practices and policies that can equitably benefit everyone, especially for those who have been historically marginalized from opportunities to advance their academic, work, and life goals. My role on this project has been to provide general guidance and advice in support of the entire project lifecycle which includes design, implementation, and summary.

Acknowledgments

We would also like to recognize the individuals from the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC), the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), and the California community college practitioners who supported and contributed to this statewide effort to understand the current SOGI data collection practices, needs, and challenges. Thank you to the collaborative efforts of the entire SOGI Coalition, including key personnel from CCCApply, for crafting the recommended wording. Deepest thanks of all to the interview participants for their honesty and insights. The knowledge gained from this effort will be used to inform local and statewide efforts for de-closeting SOGI data to better serve the LGBTQIA+ CCC students.