



Suggested Best Practices for Asking Sexual Orientation and Gender on College Applications

Suggested Wording

- This information is used for _____.
- Only (name of offices) will have access to this information
- Your responses will be kept private and secure.
- The information will not be used for a discriminatory purpose.
- You can change this information in the future by _____.

Sexual Orientation (optional; choose all that apply):

- asexual
- bisexual
- gay
- straight (heterosexual)
- lesbian
- pansexual
- queer
- questioning or unsure
- same-gender loving
- an identity not listed: please specify _____
- prefer not to disclose

Gender identity (optional; choose all that apply):

- agender
- androgyne
- demigender
- genderqueer or gender fluid
- man
- questioning or unsure
- trans man
- trans woman
- woman
- additional gender category/identity: please specify _____
- prefer not to disclose

Guiding Principles

- Colleges should ask questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation on their admissions application to be able to gather these data for students who apply, who are admitted, and who attend the institution.
- If a college uses the Common Application (which asks “sex: male or female”), questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation should be included among a college’s supplemental questions.
- If asking questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation on an admissions application is not possible, then these questions should be asked on a form filled out by all admitted or enrolled students.
- These questions should be optional.
- These data should never be listed in the visible directory, as they are covered under FERPA/HIPAA.
- An explanation of why these questions are being asked and how the data will be used (including an assurance that the information will not be used to discriminate against them) should accompany the questions [see suggested language above].
- Because sexual orientation and gender identity are separate aspects of identity, colleges should never combine them into one question (not asking, for example, “Do you identify as a part of the LGBTQ community?”).
- Because sexuality and gender are fluid and some LGBTQ+ students are not out when they apply to college, students should have the ability to change these identities on campus records during their academic careers. Ideally, this information would be part of students’ records that they can access and change online, but which would not be visible to the public.
- Because a growing number of students are identifying outside of gender and sexual binaries, the questions on gender identity and sexual orientation should include non-binary identity choices. Specifically, a gender identity question should include “genderqueer” and “agender” among the choices, and a sexual orientation question should include “asexual,” “queer,” and “pansexual” among the choices [see suggested language above].