



GUIDE FOR HOMESTAY FAMILIES HOSTING LGBTQI+ STUDENTS ABROAD



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

4

About the Guide and Authors

4

Introduction

• 5 •

Guide for Homestay Families
Hosting LGBTQI+ Students Abroad

5

A brief timeline of contemporary LGBTQI+ history in the United States

7

U.S. demographics

7

Common terms and definitions associated with
the LGBTQI+ community in the United States

11

Timeline

11

Before Students Arrive

12

First Days

13

During Student's Stay

14

Saying Goodbye and After

15

Resources

ABOUT THE GUIDE AND AUTHORS

This guide was produced by a subgroup of the 2019-2020 Diversity Abroad Task Force on LGBTQI+ Students. The Task Force is a collection of global education and diversity professionals who provide critical guidance and support to Diversity Abroad initiatives. The guide was developed from the collective advising and program management experience of the Task Force and was designed to provide a resource to homestay families who are hosting LGBTQI+ students on study abroad programs, and to international education professionals who work with these families.

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Introduction

This guide is intended to be referenced when developing and/or updating materials that you share with homestay families. It offers an overview of U.S. historical events, glossary of terms, and reflection questions that help to set the stage for U.S. LGBTQI+ student support. With this context provided, this resource serves as a great foundation for recommendations of inclusive support that homestay families can implement for LGBTQI+ students before, during, and after their stay. We intentionally included broad descriptions and recommendations as we know each student is unique and will have their own set of strengths, challenges, supports, and needs. We would prefer to err on being too broad than overgeneralizing or stereotyping any one person within the LGBTQI+ community.

Disclaimer: If looking to maximize the use of this resource by translating to the language of the homestay family, please ensure you utilize a high quality translation service as terminology and language is very important in supporting the LGBTQI+ community. There is terminology that does not translate across dialects, so ensuring accuracy in the tone and language used is critical.

GUIDE FOR HOMESTAY FAMILIES

HOSTING LGBTQI+ STUDENTS ABROAD

It is the belief of international educators that students' diverse identities enrich overseas study programs. While some students may face challenges abroad, we seek to support all students by helping them understand that their unique identities are a positive and empowering part of their study abroad experience. When we see students' identities as assets rather than problems, we are better positioned to provide a safer and more welcoming environment for them. It is our hope that this resource will empower you to best support your student.

If you are an international education professional using this guide to inform your communication with homestay families, we also recommend the [Diversity Abroad LGBTQI+ Advising Manual](#).

A brief timeline of contemporary LGBTQI+ history in the United States

The LGBTQI+ community in the United States has a diverse, extensive history. Much like other groups, the history of the LGBTQI+ community is marked by moments of triumph and celebration, as well as moments of pain and setback. American colleges and universities have historically been on the front lines of the ongoing movement for LGBTQI+ rights and advocacy, as campuses are frequently locations for public discourse and freedom of expression. The curated timeline below is not comprehensive, but as host families seeking to support students during their terms abroad, it may be beneficial to have some familiarity with a few milestones and events related to contemporary LGBTQI+ history in the United States.

1969 | LGBTQI+ patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City clash with police after a raid of the bar in the early morning hours. Prominent activists and transgender women of color, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, are believed to have been present at the bar and involved in what is now considered a seminal moment in the modern Gay Rights Movement: the Stonewall Riots.

1970 | In commemoration of the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, activist organizations host Christopher Street Liberation Day, which is widely considered the first modern gay pride celebration.

1971 | The first dedicated LGBTQI+ student center on a college campus is created at the University of Michigan.

1987 | ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed in response to the devastation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the LGBTQI+ community in New York and the government's inaction and silence on the issue. The group organizes several high-profile protests and demonstrations to advocate for stronger support and policies for those living with HIV/AIDS.

1999 | The first Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is organized by Gwendolyn Ann Smith. TDOR serves as both of vigil for lives lost to systemic violence and discrimination and as an event to raise public awareness of the disproportionate levels of violence and harassment faced by those in the transgender community, particularly transgender women of color.

2004 | Massachusetts becomes the first state to permit same-sex couples to legally marry.

2010 | The United States Senate repeals the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy, allowing lesbian and gay military members to serve openly.

2012 | Bowie State University, a historically black college/university (HBCU) in Maryland, opens an LGBTQI+ student center on campus. Bowie State's center is regarded as the first dedicated LGBTQI+ student center at an HBCU.

2015 | The United States Supreme Court declares same-sex marriage to be legal in all 50 states. Despite this landmark decision, several states and local governments attempt to subvert or not comply with the ruling.

Keep in mind that different regions and states within the US can differ greatly in their protections for and attitudes about sexual orientation and gender identity. Try taking a look at [this map](#) and seeing what things are like where your student calls "home" (whether that is their home state, the state where their university is located, or another place they identify with).

Reflection Question: How does this snapshot of the LGBTQI+ community's history in the United States compare to that of your country or region?

LGBTQI+ history certainly doesn't begin in 1969 and end in 2015—history is made daily. Interested in learning more about the history of the LGBTQI+ community in the United States? Consider checking out some of the resources below to keep learning!

- [Making Gay History](#) (Podcast)
- [We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation](#) (Book)
- [The Human Rights Campaign: Our Victories](#) (Website)

U.S. demographics

[According to the University of California at Los Angeles's \(UCLA\) Williams Institute](#), 4.5% of the United States population identifies as LGBTQI+. In addition, the Williams Institute report compiles information related to the gender, age, and employment status of LGBTQI+ Americans. Information is also available by state; for example, 9.8% of Washington D.C.'s population identifies as LGBTQI+ in comparison to 2.7% of North Dakota's population. While this data provides useful insights, it is important to recognize that many members of the LGBTQI+ community may not feel comfortable disclosing this aspect of their identity openly for a variety of reasons, including lack of legal protections in employment and housing for LGBTQI+ individuals in numerous states, so these numbers may be lower than actual numbers.

In regard to American college students, an estimated 10% identify as LGBTQI+ according to a 2016 study by the [American College Health Association](#). Despite growing representation and support on college campuses, some LGBTQI+ students report experiencing greater challenges on campus, including disproportionate levels of [sexual assault and harassment](#) and [mental health concerns and issues](#).

Common terms and definitions associated with the LGBTQI+ community in the United States

We have curated some commonly used terms related to LGBTQI+ identity that may be helpful in understanding diverse and unique LGBTQI+ identities of students. This is not an exhaustive list of all terms related to queer identity, but we believe it is a helpful starting point to have the language needed to support your students.

To begin, we have outlined a few basic terms related to gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Many times, these terms are used incorrectly or confused with one another. Here are some definitions to help differentiate these various concepts:

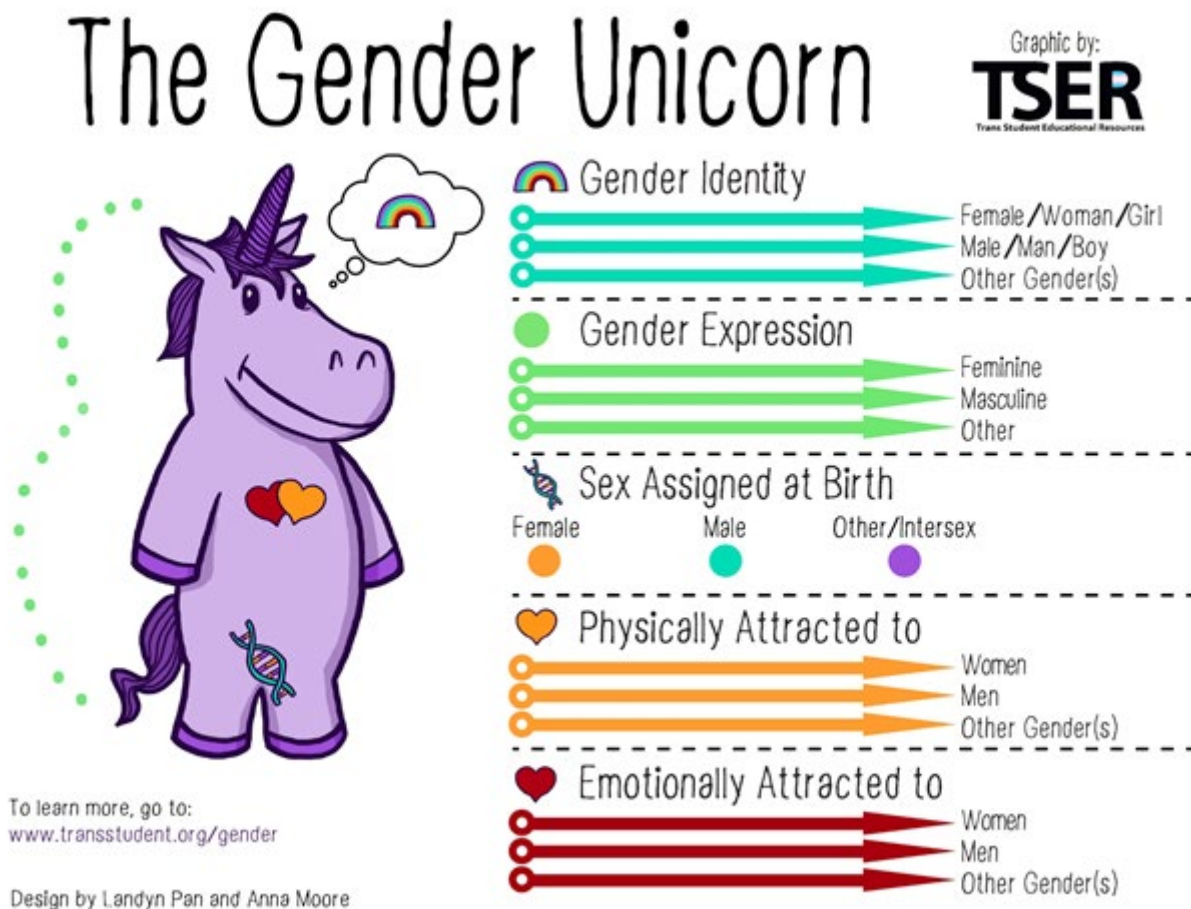
Gender identity refers to “one’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.” ([HRC](#))

Gender expression refers to “external appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially define behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.” ([HRC](#))

Sexual orientation refers to “an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.” ([HRC](#))

Sex assigned at birth refers to “the assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex assigned at birth often based on physical anatomy at birth.” (TSER)

[Trans Student Educational Resources](#) provides a fun and simple breakdown of what these terms mean and how they differ from one another.



The selection of terms and definitions has been curated by the University of California at Davis's LGBTQIA Resource Center:

Allyship: The action of working to end oppression through support of, and as an advocate with and for, a group other than one's own.

Asexual: A broad spectrum of sexual orientations generally characterized by feeling varying degrees of sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy, which is the deliberate abstention from sexual activity, despite sexual desire. Some asexual people do have sex and do experience varying levels of sexual attraction. There are many diverse

ways of being asexual. A person who does not experience sexual attraction can experience other forms of attraction such as romantic attraction, as physical attraction and emotional attraction are separate aspects of a person's identity. These may or may not correlate with each other—for instance, some people are physically and romantically attracted to women. However, others might be physically attracted to all genders and only emotionally attracted to men.

Bisexual: A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender. Some people may use bisexual and pansexual interchangeably.

Cisgender: A gender identity, or performance in a gender role, that society deems to match the person's assigned sex at birth. The prefix cis- means “on this side of” or “not across.” A term used to highlight the privilege of people who are not transgender.

Drag King: A person (often a woman) who appears as a man. Generally in reference to an act or performance. This has no implications regarding gender identity.

Drag Queen: A person (often a man) who appears as a woman. Generally in reference to an act or performance. This has no implications regarding gender identity.

Gay: A sexual and affectional orientation toward people of the same gender.

Intersex: An umbrella term to describe a wide range of natural body variations that do not fit neatly into conventional definitions of male or female. Intersex variations may include, but are not limited to, variations in chromosome compositions, hormone concentrations, and external and internal characteristics. Many visibly intersex people are mutilated in infancy and early childhood by doctors to make the individual's sex characteristics conform to society's idea of what normal bodies should look like. Intersex people are relatively common, although society's denial of their existence has allowed very little room for intersex issues to be discussed publicly. Hermaphrodite is an outdated and inaccurate term that has been used to describe intersex people in the past.

Lesbian: Usually, a woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender. However, some nonbinary people also identify as lesbians, often because they have some connection to womanhood and are primarily attracted to women. (See nonbinary below)

Polyamory: Denotes consensually being in/open to multiple loving relationships at the same time. Some polyamorists (polyamorous people) consider “polyam” to be a relationship orientation. Sometimes used as an umbrella term for all forms of ethical, consensual, and loving non-monogamy.

Pronouns: Linguistic tools used to refer to someone in the third person. Examples are they/them/theirs, ze/hir/hirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his. In English and some other languages, pronouns have been tied to gender and are a common site of misgendering (attributing a gender to someone that is incorrect).

Queer: One definition of queer is abnormal or strange. Historically, queer has been used as an epithet/slur against people whose gender, gender expression and/or sexuality do not conform to dominant expectations. Some people have reclaimed the word queer and self identify in opposition to assimilation (adapted from “Queering the Field”). For some, this reclamation is a celebration of not fitting into social norms. Not all people who identify as LGBTQI+ use “queer” to describe themselves. The term is often considered hateful when used by those who do not identify as LGBTQI+.

Same Gender Loving: a term used by some African American people who love, date, have attraction to people of the same gender.

Transgender: An adjective used most often as an umbrella term and frequently abbreviated to “trans.” Identifying as transgender, or trans, means that one’s internal knowledge of gender is different from conventional or cultural expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth. While transgender may refer to a woman who was assigned male at birth or a man who was assigned female at birth, transgender is an umbrella term that can also describe someone who identifies as a gender other than woman or man, such as non binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, no gender or multiple genders, or some other gender identity.

Two Spirit: An umbrella term encompassing sexuality and gender in Indigenous Native American communities. Two Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. It may refer to an embodiment of masculinity and femininity but this is not the only significance of the term. There are a variety of definitions and feelings about the term two spirit—and this term does not resonate for everyone. Two Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous Native American. Although the term itself became more commonly used around 1990, two spirit people have existed for centuries.

Reflection Question: What terms or words are used by the LGBTQI+ community in your country or region? Are there certain words or phrases specific to your country or region that may be useful for an LGBTQI+ study abroad student from the United States to be aware of?

TIMELINE

This timeline is divided into sections corresponding to different stages of the homestay process: preparing to host your student, hosting your student while they are on the program, and after they depart. Each subsection will include recommendations for how to have conversations about your student's identity and advice for how to best support your student in that stage of their study abroad journey.

Above all, throughout all of these steps, it is important to treat your student's identity with respect and privacy. Do not share your student's LGBTQI+ status with others without permission, as this could jeopardize their relationships with others, potentially put their safety at risk if people who find out are not accepting of the student's identity, and may make the student feel as though you have broken the trust they put in you by "coming out" to you.

Before Students Arrive

Much of what you find in this guide can be more widely applied to hosting students of all identities, not just LGBTQI+ students. This is especially true when considering how you might prepare for hosting students before they arrive.

In the months leading up to your study abroad student's arrival, it can be a good idea to start conversations around diverse identities with family and friends who will be interacting closely with the student. This way, everyone can come to understand where the student might be coming from, what identities they might hold, and to think through how that might impact the student's transition to a new culture. This preparation is important regardless of whether or not you know the exact way that a student identifies (LGBTQI+ or otherwise). If there are questions about certain identities or cultural contexts, you can also start seeking out answers to those before students arrive. Having some of that background information in advance will help you feel more prepared to host students whose identities might not be as familiar to you, and doing research in advance will help alleviate the burden on the individual student in having to answer basic questions about their identity, which they may not feel comfortable with or might still be figuring out.

If you know of local resources, LGBTQI+ organizations, or other ways to connect with the community in your city, it might be helpful to have a list on hand in case your student is interested in engaging with them while abroad. Not all students might be comfortable reaching out or finding these resources on their own (or interacting with them at all), but having a host who has thought about this in advance can be really meaningful to students.

First Days

When a student first arrives, it can be good to lead with questions about what the student needs or wants from their homestay experience. Every student will be different and have unique experiences and interests that they bring to their study abroad experience. It is important not to make any assumptions about how a student may identify in terms of gender or sexual orientation based on their appearance, habits, or other characteristics during these first impressions. At the same time, it can be very helpful to pay attention to students' cues and signals to understand where they may be coming from, especially in terms of the language that they use to describe themselves. For example, some students may introduce themselves with their gender pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them, or others) and it is important to respect these and use them when referring to the student.

Because some students may be unsure or nervous about how their LGBTQI+ identity may be perceived in their homestay, during the first few days it is important to be welcoming and, if possible, explicitly express support for LGBTQI+ identities. This does not mean you need to know everything or even ask the student to disclose their own identity, but generally expressing positive affirmations about the LGBTQI+ community can mean a lot.

Some students choose to “come out” as LGBTQI+ for the first time while they are abroad. This means that when you first meet them, they may or may not be sure of their own LGBTQI+ identity. This is all the more reason to establish a welcoming atmosphere from the very beginning, regardless of how a student may outwardly identify.

If your student does explicitly tell you that they identify with a label within the LGBTQI+ umbrella, you can ask them some questions like:

- What does this identity mean to you?
- Whom do you feel comfortable with me sharing this information with, and whom do you not feel comfortable with me sharing it with?
- How would you like me to refer to your identity when talking about it to others?
- Is there anything important that I should know about how to support you in this identity while you are studying here?

During Student's Stay

Whether you have been hosting students for years or you are new to being a host family, you will notice that all students are different and each individual will vary in terms of how much they will be willing to share with you about their identity. Studying in another country can be a stressful experience, but it can also provide students with the space to explore and develop more of their sense of self in relation to these new experiences. Having prepared before the student's arrival will be a helpful step; however, each student is on their own educational and personal journey while abroad and you should be flexible to both give the student space and support when necessary.

Now it's time to put your preparation into practice! Just as you would with any other student, be authentic in your conversations about their experiences. As you know, every student is different, and so too is each student that may identify as LGBTQI+. Be careful not to generalize or assume because a student comes out to you by identifying with a diverse gender identity or sexual orientation that they will be interested in the same activities as other students who you may have hosted with a similar identity. Follow their lead and offer them a safe and open space to talk about their experience. Remember to ask the student for permission before disclosing their identity to other people.

As mentioned in the previous section, some students choose to “come out” as LGBTQI+ for the first time when they are abroad. If your student falls under this category, it can be a very powerful and meaningful experience to “come out” during a time that is already often a personally significant experience (studying abroad). Offering your support to them when this happens will be much appreciated—both in terms of affirming the identity that they are newly “out” as, in addition to providing care and compassion if the student is exploring new identities that they may not feel completely sure of yet. Again, if your student has not yet “come out” publicly to every person in their lives, take extra care to treat their identity with respect and privacy, and do not share their identity with others unless they have told you they are okay with it.

Saying Goodbye and After

Your student may have been with you for one week or for one year at this point! Regardless of how long you have hosted your student, the time leading up to when they leave your country will likely be full of different emotions as well as logistics for their departure.

How you navigate conversations about your student's identity during this time period will depend greatly on the ways that you have engaged with them about it thus far, as well as what their personal experience with their identity in-country has been like up to this point. Here are some prompting questions to start thinking about how you might want to best support or have conversations with your student at the end of their visit:

- Has your student “come out” for the first time while abroad? What might they be thinking about when preparing to return to a home where they are not out?
- Did your student experience any type of discrimination or negative experiences due to their identity while abroad? How were these handled? How might this affect how they feel when they reflect back on their time here?
- Did your student make any important connections with people that made them feel affirmed in their LGBTQI+ identity? How are they planning to maintain these connections after they leave, if they wish to do so?
- What was your student expecting to experience with their LGBTQI+ identity in your country before they came? How has their experience compared to that expectation—was there anything surprising (positive or negative) that happened?

After your student has departed, they may appreciate you keeping in contact with them if you built a strong relationship during their time staying with you. Depending on how much you talked about their LGBTQI+ identity during their stay, it may be helpful for you to mention it in conversation in an affirming way, or to ask them questions about what the transition back to their home environment is like with regard to their identity.

Many people are aware of the culture shock that can happen when a person studies in a foreign country, but fewer people know about the “reverse culture shock” phenomenon that can also happen when that person returns home. Supporting your student in general, not only with their identity, through this period can mean a lot to them as they search for ways to integrate what they learned while abroad into their life back home. Sometimes, returned study abroad students can feel disconnected from their host culture after they return home and thus appreciate the opportunity to keep a connection back to the culture through contact with their host family.

RESOURCES

Thanks so much for taking the time to consult this quick guide! For more information and further reading, please check out any or all of the resources below:

Student Perspectives

- [“Ni él, ni ella: Being Nonbinary in Spain”](#) (IES Abroad): Student blog post
- [“An Emerging Scene: Gay Culture in Jordan”](#) (Gilman Scholarship Blog): Student blog post
- [LGBTQ+ Student Stories](#) (NC State University)

Organizations and General Resources

- [PFLAG](#): PFLAG is the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies.
- [IES Abroad](#): LGBTQ Resources Page
- [Rainbow SIG Resources](#): Resources from the official LGBTQI+ special interest group of NAFSA: The Association for International Educators in the US
- [ILGA World](#): The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
- [Diversity Abroad LGBTQI+ Advising Manual](#): For professionals working in international education

Research and Data

- [ILGA Global Attitudes Survey](#): Comprehensive data about sexual orientation, gender, and other attitudes in countries around the world
- [Amnesty International Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Page](#): Information about sexual and reproductive rights internationally
- [Transrespect Versus Transphobia Worldwide](#): Comparative research data on 190 countries
- [HRC State Maps of Laws & Policies in the US](#): Information about differences from state to state in the US for reference on the context your student is coming from



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