

Letter to the Common Application to add optional questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation to standard form for college admissions

Friday, August 31, 2015

TO: Paul Mott, Interim CEO, The Common Application

Eric Furda, Chair, The Common Application

Jennifer Desjarlais, Chair-Elect, The Common Application

Thyra Briggs, Past Chair, The Common Application

Dear The Common Application CEO & Chairpersons:

Twenty-five national LGBTQ youth, higher education and youth advocacy organizations join together to formally submit this letter requesting that The Common Application add optional questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation to its standard form for college admission.

A growing number of colleges and universities are asking students their gender identity and sexual orientation on admissions forms, either by having a question(s) on their own application materials or by adding a supplemental question(s) to their Common Application. These institutions include Dartmouth College, Duke University, Elmhurst College, Elon University, MIT, Northeastern Illinois University, the Ohio State University, Purdue University, the University of Iowa, the University of Maryland, the University of Rochester, and all two-year colleges in California and Washington. In addition, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the most comprehensive source of information on college students, has begun to ask questions about sexual orientation and gender identity.

It is time for the Common Application to add optional questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation to its standard form. The Common Application was founded on the principles of promoting equity, access, and integrity in the college application process. This mission will be better realized by adding optional questions on gender identity and sexual orientation to the application. By better knowing the students who complete the Common Application, colleges and universities can better provide for the needs of students, create more inclusive campus climates, and further respect the various identities that make each student unique.

Questions on gender identity and sexual orientation are needed for the following reasons:

- More and more LGBTQ students are living openly when they apply to college and want to be able to self-identify—just as they do with their race, ethnicity, and religion. The questions that we are proposing on gender identity and sexual

orientation would be optional, so that LGBTQ students who are not living openly or not comfortable disclosing do not have to do so.

- A growing number of colleges and universities are seeking to track data related to openly LGBTQ students applying, being accepted, and enrolling in their institutions. The lack of questions on LGBTQ identity on the Common Application makes obtaining this data more difficult, which hinders the ability to address their academic retention and success
- LGBTQ youth, specifically LGBQ youth of color and transgender youth of all races, experience multiple oppressions and are much more likely than other students to struggle academically and personally in college. In order to positively impact their college experience, institutions must have the ability to identify these students.
- Some colleges and universities have scholarships for students in underrepresented groups or specifically for LGBTQ students or want to do special outreach to prospective LGBTQ students. Again, institutions would benefit from having an easier way to identify these students.
- Title IX requires institutions to protect students from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. Giving students the option to identify as transgender may help colleges formulate materials and programs to support students of all gender identities.

Campus Pride and the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals have advocated for these changes nationally for several years. Suggested language for admission forms that is inclusive of the wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities is available at <http://www.lgbtcampus.org/policy-practice-recommendations>. A number of colleges and universities, including UMass Amherst and Purdue University, have or are in the process of adopting this or similar language for their admissions forms. Both Campus Pride and the Consortium of Higher Education LGBTQ Resource Professionals would welcome working with designated person(s) to devise the most appropriate language for asking sexual orientation and gender identity questions on the Common Application.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to your response.

Signed,

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

ACPA-COLLEGE STUDENT EDUCATORS INTERNATIONAL

ATHLETE ALLY

CAMPUS PRIDE

THE CENTER FOR BLACK EQUITY

CENTERLINK: THE COMMUNITY OF LGBT CENTERS

CONSORTIUM OF HIGHER EDUCATION LGBT RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

EQUALITY FEDERATION

GLAAD

GLSEN INC

GO! ATHLETES

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

JAPANESE AMERICANS CITIZENS LEAGUE

LAMBDA LEGAL

MARRIAGE EQUALITY USA

MATTHEW SHEPARD FOUNDATION

NATIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN WOMEN'S FORUM

NATIONAL BLACK JUSTICE COALITION

NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE

NIRSA: LEADERS IN COLLEGIATE RECREATION

POINT FOUNDATION

RANKIN & ASSOCIATES CONSULTING

TEACH FOR AMERICA

TRANS YOUTH EQUALITY FOUNDATION

TREVOR PROJECT

TYLER CLEMENTI FOUNDATION