

# CAREER GUIDE FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS



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## **INTRODUCTION**

A person's sexual orientation and gender identity can have an impact on a number of factors related to career planning, including which career fields are most appealing, how to identify a positive work environment and organizational culture, and how to navigate the job search. The following is a partial list of questions to consider when planning your career. Please schedule a confidential appointment with a Career Services career advisor to discuss these and any issues related to your career search.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

### **Evaluating Potential Employers:**

- Which organizations have policies that support the LGBTQ community, such as inclusive nondiscrimination policies?
- Which organizations have LGBTQ and allied affinity groups for their employees?
- Which employers offer health benefits for domestic partners?
- If I relocate to a new city, will the community climate be welcoming?

NOTE: It can be very difficult to evaluate how open employers are on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. To learn more about your rights and organizations, visit the Human Rights Campaign site at: <http://www.hrc.org/topics/workplace/asp> and OUT for Work at: <http://www.outforwork.org/>

### **Job-Search Process:**

- Have I determined how out I want to be about my sexual orientation/gender identity?
- Is it safer in certain settings to let people think I'm heterosexual? How comfortable am I with this idea?
- If I identify as transgender, am I prepared to negotiate issues related to legal identification, legal names, background checks, and job references?
- If I am taking steps to transition, when should I begin my job search? Should I wait until I have the job to begin my transition?
- How should I present my LGBTQ organizational involvement on my resume?
- What should be discussed, and how, during the interview process?

### **Workplace Issues:**

- Coming out: How do I come out in the workplace? When is the right time to come out? Am I prepared to handle various reactions?
- Transitioning: How do I transition in the workplace? How do I explain my transition to colleagues?
- How do I present my relationship, introduce my partner, and deal with social events with coworkers?

## **RESUME WRITING: HOW MUCH TO INCLUDE?**

Common questions asked by LGBTQ job candidates include: "Should LGBTQ organizations be featured on my resume?" and "Do I have to list my legal name on my resume if it indicates my gender, rather than my preferred name?" The process of identifying how comfortable you feel about disclosing your sexual orientation and gender identity to a potential employer will help determine how you approach this portion of your resume.

First, you can list any name you choose on your resume. Many students list preferred names or nicknames rather than legal names. Some students will abbreviate their legal first name to one letter, and then list their preferred name and last name (i.e., J. Marissa Jones). However, you are required to provide your legal name when completing a formal job application as this serves as a legal document.

Regarding LGBTQ organizations, the first option is to include your involvement, and proudly demonstrate the skills that you have developed as a result. If you're pursuing opportunities with organizations where your sexual orientation/gender identity is a non-issue, then the strengths and skills developed through these organizations will be seen as workplace assets and the activity in which you developed them will also be a non-issue.

The second option is to focus more on the accomplishments and skills developed through participation in the organization, as opposed to the cause itself. The strengths and skills developed will still be seen as workplace assets. This approach would allow you to demonstrate leadership experience and transferable skills such as communication, organizational, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. You might provide a more generic description of the organization, such as describing it as an organization supporting diversity.

The final strategy is to simply omit any reference to LGBTQ organizations. Some recruiters, LGBTQ or straight, will recommend using this approach. It is important to consider the relevance of the activity to the position for which you are applying, and whether or not you are providing information that you are prepared to discuss during the interview. Remember, the purpose of the resume is to get you the interview, and you will need to be comfortable and prepared to elaborate on all achievements and skills in detail, as listed on your resume. For more information on resumes, see the Career Services *Resume Preparation Guide*.

As you can see, there is no right or wrong way to handle LGBTQ activities on a resume. The answer depends on both the audience for the resume as well as your willingness to share and discuss your participation in LGBTQ groups and activities.

## **EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING**

Preparing for interviews is important. You should decide how out you want to be during the process. Research the organization and know the policies and climate so you have additional information to help make the decision.

If you have decided to emphasize LGBTQ involvement on your resume, you should be prepared to talk about how your experiences have developed skills relevant to the employment/internship opportunity. An interviewer might ask, "I see you were president of Common Ground for two years. Can you tell me what kind of organization it is? What do you consider to be your most important contribution as a leader of Common Ground?" Employers highly value substantive experience gained through activities and leadership roles. In preparing for your interview, think carefully about what you have accomplished through your activities and your transferable skills.

If you have not included LGBTQ organizations on your resume, you can still reference the experience if it clearly relates to the position for which you are interviewing. If you prefer to be less open about the nature of the organization, you could refer to it as an anti-discrimination or diversity office or organization and then focus on the achievements that resulted from your involvement. Some students decide to wait to come out until after starting a new job when they can come out to coworkers as they feel comfortable.

If you're still trying to learn more about a company's climate, you can ask the interviewer about the organization's diversity directly or listen to hear if their answers contain information about such issues. These might not be your first questions, but can be added into the conversation. Make sure to focus on the job and how your skills meet the employer's needs first. After this, you can turn to other topics such as the corporate environment and diversity.

What constitutes appropriate interview attire? Professional attire typically means a business suit. Transgender students should dress as they identify. Interview attire is not typically gender specific, so students have a wide range of options to choose from. A basic gender neutral suit can be enhanced by a blouse and simple jewelry or a button-down shirt, as preferred.

The interview will be your opportunity to communicate your value to the employer, and convince them that you are the best person for the job. Additionally, the interview will allow you to learn more about the organization's culture. Some general interviewing tips include: be prepared, be authentic, accentuate positives, emphasize accomplishments, and ask intelligent questions. For more information on interviewing, access the Career Services *Interviewing Guide* on the Career Services website or pick up a copy at UC 225. You can also schedule a mock interview with a Career Services staff member to practice your responses.

## **COMING OUT AT WORK: BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS**

What should a person consider when deciding to come out at work? Consider some of the following:

### **What are the benefits of coming out?**

- Allows you to develop as a whole individual on a personal and professional level.
- Ends the hiding game! You are more able to share your genuine self with others and express who and what is important to you.
- Able to establish a network of friends and colleagues who can support and encourage you.
- You are more authentic in your professional work and contribute on a higher level.
- You experience and feel value and self-worth and are able to share significant life experiences with others, as others do.
- Able to be viewed as a role model, a mentor, and source of support for other professionals. You may challenge false perceptions and help develop an open, supportive work culture.

### **What are the drawbacks of staying in the closet?**

- Stagnates your development on personal, interpersonal and professional levels.
- You live a dual identity, hiding your “true self” from others.
- You may filter and screen comments, behaviors, actions and attitudes that may “out” you. Energy is focused on covering up.
- You may experience isolation and sometimes decline to participate in group functions and activities.
- You may hesitate to share significant life experiences as colleagues do, making others reluctant to be open as well.
- Perpetuates the myth that there are “only a few” LGBTQ individuals at work and presents a limited view of the diversity of the culture.

At the same time, coming out may involve certain personal or professional risks that you may not be willing to take in your first job/career. Some employers and career fields are more open/accepting than others. Ultimately, the choice to disclose your identity is your own.

## **INVESTIGATING A PROSPECTIVE ORGANIZATION OR COMPANY**

In researching if an organization is open, safe, and accepting, you may wish to look for the following signals:

- Organization's Affirmative Action Statement specifically includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
- Recruitment and retention of openly, self-identified LGBTQ staff.

- Hiring policies and benefits programs include same-sex partners.
- Health benefits cover transition-related medical care for transgender people.
- Information sessions and career fairs focused on LGBTQ students.
- Publications, handbooks, policy and procedure statements and other official documents contain inclusive language for all individuals.
- Employee orientation programs include information related to LGBTQ support issues and concerns in the organization.
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Allies groups exist within the organization, and are supported by the organization.
- Staff training and development programs are inclusive of LGBTQ issues.
- Security officers participate in training sessions regarding bias-related incidents and hate crimes.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit the Career Services website at: <http://careerservices.nku.edu> and the LGBTQ Programs & Services site at: <http://lgbtq.nku.edu/>.

### Major Resources:

- ***Your Queer Career*** (a book housed in Career Services' career library)  
A comprehensive career book for LGBTQ job seekers by Riley B. Folds
- **OUT for Work**  
OFW's programs, resources and services provide assistance to students in the cultivation and enhancement of skills to explore career options, master job-search techniques and strategies, and research employment opportunities. OFW sponsors an annual national career conference for LGBTQA students in September; register on their website.  
<http://www.outforwork.org/>
- **Human Rights Campaign**  
Source of information on workplace and corporate attitudes and policies surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity.  
<http://www.hrc.org/> and <http://www.hrc.org/issues/transgender>
- **Corporate Equality Index**  
Rating U.S. workplaces on LGBT equality.  
<http://www.hrc.org/topics/workplace/cei>

### Also See:

- **ACLU**  
The ACLU National Office in New York City offers the Crawford Fellowship focusing on lesbian and gay rights and AIDS Projects.  
<http://www.aclu.org/careers>
- **Equality Ohio**  
A non-profit organization that advocates and educates to achieve fair treatment and equal opportunity for all Ohioans regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.  
<http://www.equalityohio.org>
- **The Fairness Campaign**  
A broad-based community effort dedicated to equal rights. Its primary goal is comprehensive civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.  
<http://www.fairness.org>
- **Federal Globe**  
Organization (and agency contacts) for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees of the federal government.  
<http://www.fedglobe.org/home>

- **Idealist.org**  
This website has thousands of job listings, most in the non-profit sector. Users can search by interest and "LGBT" is an area of focus.  
<http://www.idealist.org/>
- **The National Center for Lesbian Rights**  
The NCLR works to advance the civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families through litigation, legislation, policy, and public education.  
<http://www.nclrights.org/>
- **National Center for Transgender Equality**  
The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) is a social justice organization dedicated to advancing the equality of transgender people through advocacy, collaboration and empowerment.  
<http://transequality.org/>
- **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF)**  
Employment and internship opportunities with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) are listed.  
<http://www.thetaskforce.org/> and <http://thetaskforce.org/issues/transgender>
- **National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education**  
Includes job listings for college and university positions.  
<http://www.lgbtcampus.org/>
- **Out Professionals**  
LGBTQ networking site.  
<http://www.outprofessionals.org/>
- **ProGayJobs**  
Connects diversity-focused employers with the LGBT workforce.  
<http://www.progayjobs.com/>
- **Transgender Law and Policy Institute:**  
Non-profit organization dedicated to engaging in effective advocacy for transgender people, bringing experts and advocates together to work on law and policy initiatives designed to advance transgender equality.  
<http://www.transgenderlaw.org/> .

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

Career Services would like to thank Nancy Burkett, Director of Career Services at Swarthmore College for her generous permission in allowing us to base our *Career Guide for LGBTQ Students* on Swarthmore's guide *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Career Development*.