

LGBTQ students fare better at Christian colleges, CCCU says

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Researchers agree LGBTQ students often struggle with isolation, loneliness and fear of assault while in college.

But the Council For Christian Colleges & Universities insists a comparison of two independent studies reveals LGBTQ students have better experiences at faith-based institutions than their peers in American universities overall.

The CCCU—an international association of more than 180 Christian schools—compared data from a 2018 national analysis by [Rutgers University](#) with a recent College Pulse study commission by the [Religious Exemption Accountability Project](#).

In March, REAP [filed a class-action suit](#) against the U.S. Department of Education on behalf of 33 plaintiffs. In *Hunter v. U.S. Department of Education*, plaintiffs claim religious exemptions from nondiscrimination requirements of Title IX are unconstitutional when schools receive federal funds, such as grants or student loans. Baylor University is among more than two-dozen faith-based schools mentioned in the suit.

[Title IX states](#): “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

Faith-based schools are allowed to request a [religious exemption](#) from parts of Title IX to the extent that its application “would be inconsistent with the religious tenets of the organization.”

Organization files motions regarding suit

On May 12, the CCCU [filed a motion](#) to be an official participant in the case so it can defend Title IX religious protections.

“Removing Title IX’s religious exemption, as applied to LGBT students or otherwise, will deprive religious colleges of the oxygen that gives them life by forbidding them, on pain of losing federal assistance for their students, from teaching and expecting adherence to their core religious beliefs,” the motion states.

The organization also submitted a motion to dismiss the suit based on what it termed “frivolous legal claims,” while adding that it “takes reports of student experience seriously.”

“We know the college experience can be stressful, and even more so for LGBTQ students who are working to understand how their sexual orientation or gender identity intersects with their personal faith,” CCCU President Shirley Hoogstra said.

“We also know from national data that this issue is not unique to Christian colleges, and that LGBTQ students experience challenges at colleges and universities nationwide. Research shows that in many important areas, LGBTQ students at faith-based institutions actually have better experiences than LGBTQ students at non faith-based institutions.”

When contacted by the Baptist Standard, REAP Director Paul Carlos Southwick said: “The two studies cannot generate an apples-to-apples comparison, as they were fielded five years apart, used different questions, and the Rutgers study appears to include both religious and non-religious campuses without disaggregating the data. But what both studies show is that LGBTQ+ students experience mental and physical health disparities at

both secular and religious campuses. Moreover, LGBTQ+ students are protected by law and can get help at their secular campuses, whereas they are not protected by law and feel powerless to get help at their non-affirming religious campuses.”

CCCU offers comparison

According to the CCCU comparison of the Rutgers study and the study commissioned by REAP:

- While 4 in 10 sexual or gender minority students are “uncomfortable with their sexual identity on campus” at religious schools, 5 in 10 queer-spectrum students and 7 in 10 trans-spectrum students do not feel “respected” on secular public university campuses.
- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of sexual minority students report isolation and loneliness at religious colleges, about 18 percent more than “straight” students on those same campuses. However, nearly 8 in 10 (79 percent) of queer-spectrum students on public campuses report feeling “very lonely.” That’s 20 percent more than their heterosexual and cisgender peers on those same campuses, and it’s 15 percent more than their sexual minority peers at religious schools.
- Sexual minority students are more likely to be physically assaulted or sexually assaulted on secular campuses versus religious campuses—3 percent vs. 1 percent concerning physical assault and 16.6 percent vs. 5 percent regarding sexual assault.

With respect to issues related to depression and suicidal thoughts among sexual minority students, the two studies produced similar results. At both religious and secular schools, 60 percent of LGBTQ students report depression. Among LGBTQ students at Christian colleges, 20 percent

report suicidal thoughts, compared to 23.5 percent at secular schools.

“The similarity of these numbers is actually surprising, given that the REAP figures regarding the religious colleges were obtained during the pandemic, when the overall levels of anxiety and depression have been considerably higher than when the Rutgers numbers were obtained in 2016 and 2017,” a statement on the [CCCU website](#) reads.

At its most recent meeting, Baylor’s board of [regents adopted a resolution](#) saying it “remains committed to extending Christ-like love and grace in caring for all our students and meeting them where they are, just as Jesus did, and adhering to traditional biblical teaching of Scripture regarding human sexuality.”

Regents opened the door to allow a new chartered group to offer care and support for LGBTQ students, but the board did not change its policy [statement on human sexuality](#), which includes the expectation that “Baylor students will not participate in advocacy groups which promote understandings of sexuality that are contrary to biblical teaching.”

Jason Cook, vice president for marketing and communication at Baylor, noted the regents had spent at least two years discussing ways to meet the needs of LGBTQ students, and the specific data cited by the CCCU “did not factor into the decision process.”

“Baylor is affiliated with the CCCU, and as such, we support the organization’s work,” Cook added.