

TRANSCENDU

A COLLEGE SURVIVAL GUIDE



HELP BUILD A PATHWAY FOR TRANS EXCELLENCE!



**GARDEN STATE
EQUALITY**

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*Note: While a lot of the information in this guide is generally applicable to colleges in different states, this guide is designed specifically for colleges in **New Jersey**.

Pre-College: The Affirming College Search

Navigating College Tours

Overview: A college tour is a tour of a school's campus, usually led by a current student. College tours are a great opportunity for prospective students and their parents to explore the facilities, learn about student life, and get a feel for the campus before applying. Trans students can use college tours as an opportunity to gauge the campus climate towards the LGBTQ+ community (and specifically towards transgender individuals).

- Look around the institution: Do you notice any visual presence of queer student groups, activities, or events?
 - Are there queer-friendly or “safe space” stickers on the doors of faculty or residence life staff?
- Check the student newspaper at the university. This would be a newspaper written by the *students themselves*, who often get to choose what they report on.
 - See if there is any news related to LGBTQ+ events or policies at the school
- Ask the tour guide about:
 - Specific programming that occurs within the school, hosted by the school
 - LGBTQ+ student organizations/clubs
 - Do they exist? Are they *active*?
 - Are they culturally competent?
 - *Example:* Montclair State University has a Black LGBTQ+ organization, [Daughta Speaks](#)
 - Is there an LGBTQ+ student center?
 - Their experience with LGBTQ+ issues on campus and the administration's response
 - Specific resources for trans students
 - Again, do they exist?
 - If they do exist, are students genuinely satisfied or are their needs not being met?
 - Faculty/staff and student climate toward LGBTQ+ students
 - Are people respectful of names and pronouns?
 - How does the surrounding community support trans students?

*Note: Although tour guides are often students, they are typically trained by university staff and are only allowed to give specific responses to questions. Take what they say seriously, but take it with a grain of salt – they may be talking up their LGBTQ+ services because they have to, not because they're actually useful.

Scholarships

Overview: Scholarships are awards of money that help students pay for a college degree. They are considered “gift aid” which means that unlike student loans, they do NOT have to be repaid.

- Scholarships help make college more accessible for people that may not otherwise have the opportunity to go to college
- There are many identity-based scholarships for minority groups
 - HRC has created a [LGBTQ+ Student Scholarship Database](#)
 - *Note: This list is not exhaustive. Please make sure to reach out to your personal network to discuss other resources and opportunities (which may not be included on this list)

What to Search for within Academic Life

Overview: Academic life involves attending lectures, participating in discussions, completing coursework, and engaging in research, all designed to facilitate intellectual growth and knowledge acquisition.

- Is there a gender/queer studies department?
 - Are there any queer/feminist studies classes offered as humanities?
 - Are these classes taught by LGBTQ+ professors and allies?
- Many schools list professor bios in their department websites – are any professors openly identifying as LGBTQ+ on school websites?
- If you’re considering a research/teaching institution:
 - Are there professors who are participating in LGBTQ+ research initiatives?
- Are there trans-inclusive events and celebrations hosted by your institution?
 - *Examples:* flag raisings, proclamation readings, TDOV celebrations, etc.

- Are there LGBTQ+ mentorship programs both during college and for alumni?
- Are there supplemental programs/counseling services that this school has access to, outside of the school's own counseling services?
- Are there gender-neutral spaces (bathrooms, locker rooms, etc.) on campus?
- Is there a designated LGBTQ+ center?
 - Do they offer diverse programming? If possible, speak to student leaders within this center about their experiences.
- Has the college recently/historically hosted anti-queer speakers?
- Is there an extant policy on name changes for trans students?
 - Does the school require legal name changes to make internal name amendments?
 - Does the school charge for a new ID in the case of name changes for gender affirmation?
- What are the school's Title IX policies?
 - Title IX is a federal [law](#) that prohibits (amongst other things) gender-based and sex-based discrimination in education programs and activities that receive federal funding
 - Most public and private schools receive some type of federal funding and therefore must abide by Title IX
 - Be sure to look up the Title IX reporting process for the school you are attending
 - All schools have a designated Title IX coordinator
- If you are considering an institution with a religious affiliation:
 - Are there LGBTQ+ affirming clergy/religious leaders?
 - If possible, find them and ask them how they support LGBTQ+ students.

Health and Safety

Overview: Health and safety services ensure the well-being of students through medical care, mental health support, campus security, and emergency response systems, promoting a safe and healthy campus environment.

*Note: Health services can be different for in/out-of-state students.

- **Non-discrimination policies**

- Does your school have clear policies prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity and expression?
 - *Examples:*
 - Montclair State University's [Notice of Non-Discrimination Policy](#)
 - Rutgers University's [Non-Discrimination Statement](#)

- Does your school offer insurance coverage?

- You can check by searching your school's name and "SHIP insurance" or "Student Health Insurance Plan"
- An example for state schools can be found [here](#), and for an individual school [here](#)
- Does it cover trans-related healthcare needs?
 - What degree of coverage is offered and for what services
 - *Example:* Blood tests for those on hormone therapy

- What services does the school health center provide?

- Hormone therapy? Protections for safe sex? Resources for other service providers?
- Is there LGBTQ+ trained on-campus mental health support?
- Is there infrastructure to support medical transitions?

Residential Life Policies & Student Services

Overview: Student services and residential life include housing, counseling, career services, and student organizations, focusing on supporting students' personal, social, and academic needs while fostering a sense of community.

- Does the school have trans-affirming residential life and student services policies?
 - Are you able to switch/pick roommates based on gender identity, if necessary?
 - Is there a process for trans students to apply for housing?
 - Is there LGBTQ+ sensitivity/awareness training for Residential Advisors and/or other staff?
- Does the school offer gender-inclusive (co-ed) living/dorm spaces?
 - *Examples:*
 - Montclair State: [Gender Inclusive Housing](#)
 - Princeton University: [Rainbow Living Community](#) / [Butler College](#)

- Rutgers University (New Brunswick): [Rainbow Perspectives Housing](#)
- The College of New Jersey: [Trans and Gender Nonconforming Housing](#)
- Stevens Institute of Technology: [Gender Inclusive Housing](#)
- Ramapo College of New Jersey: [Gender Inclusive Housing](#)
- NJIT: [Gender Inclusive Housing \(LGBTQ+ roommate matching\)](#)
- Fairleigh Dickinson University: [Gender Inclusive Housing](#)
- Greek life
 - If the school has Greek life, does it have gender-inclusive options?
 - *Examples:*
 - Delta Lambda Phi at TCNJ: DLP is an international social fraternity for gay, bisexual, transgender, and progressive individuals
 - Theta Delta Sigma at Rutgers: TDS is a LGBTQ-focused, gender inclusive Greek Life society.
- Are there social support groups available to you, as a trans student?
 - Ability to connect prospective students with current LGBTQ+ students?
 - Active social media for student support groups / organizations?

Great resource: [This website](#) tracks trans-supportive campus policies at colleges throughout the nation. Colleges are sorted by state:

- [Have Nondiscrimination Policies that Include Gender Identity/Expression](#)
 - [Cover Transition-Related Medical Expenses Under Student Health Insurance](#)
 - [List Campus Gender-Inclusive Restrooms on Their Websites](#)
 - [Provide Gender-Inclusive Housing](#)
 - [Allow Students to Have the Name and Pronouns They Use for Themselves on Campus Records](#)
 - [Have Trans-Inclusive Athletic Policies](#)
 - [Trans Admissions Policies at Historically Women's Colleges and Men's Colleges](#)
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During College: How the School Affirms YOU

Faculty-Student Relationships:

Overview: Faculty and staff are the educators, administrators, and support personnel who facilitate learning, provide academic guidance, and maintain the operational functions of the college.

- Are school faculty and staff trans-affirming?
 - Keep track of people who were not respectful and report them as needed using your school's reporting system.
 - Undergraduate dean/office for student life/queer student org
 - How do staff and faculty interact with and respect trans students and their diverse identities?
 - How do they respond to changes in their students' identities?
 - How do they respond to asking for accommodations based on their identity?
 - How do they respond to criticism about past behavior, and do they adjust accordingly?
 - If you are uncomfortable sharing your name and pronouns in class, tell your professor in advance to keep it confidential
- Are school faculty and staff educated/knowledgeable?
 - Do faculty undergo any training(s) to become more aware and be more sensitive to trans issues?
 - How often are cultural competency trainings updated?
 - Are all new staff trained as part of onboarding?
 - Are advisors knowledgeable about the specific needs and concerns of trans students?

Affirming Campus Spaces

Overview: Campus spaces are the spaces where students live, learn, work, and interact. There are both academic spaces (such as your classes) and social spaces (such as clubs, sports, dorms, etc.)

- Find and join both socially and academically affirming campus spaces
 - Reach out to different campus departments to ask about programming
 - Connect with other LGBTQ+ students through the campus center
- Does the school have a gender affirming closet?
 - Some schools gender affirming closets, or places where students can access gender affirming clothing and supplies (such as binders and tucking underwear) for free:
 - [NJCU's Gothic Rack](#) (NJ)
 - [Cornell's Binder and Tucking Supplies](#)
 - [Brown University's Gender Affirming Closet](#)
 - [George Mason University's Trans Clothing Closet](#)
 - [Johns Hopkins University's Gender Affirming Closet](#)
 - While few colleges in NJ currently appear to have gender affirming closets, there are some within community centers throughout the state:
 - Pride Center of NJ [Community Closet](#) (Highland Park, NJ)
 - HiTOPS [The Closet](#) (Princeton, NJ)
- Are there any trainings that students have to attend to contribute to the cultivation of an inclusive environment?
- What do you do if your school is NOT affirming you?
 - **ORGANIZE!**

Organizing in College Spaces

Overview: Some schools have many resources for LGBTQ+ (and specifically trans) students while others do not. If resources for trans students are lacking, there are steps you can take to begin creating these resources.

On Campus

- Organize for a change in policies
 - Clearly identify your goal(s)
 - Important areas for policy change may include:
 - Facilitating processes of identification
 - Health
 - Housing

- Campus facilities (bathrooms + locker rooms)
 - Athletics
 - Faculty/Staff awareness
 - Learn about the leadership structure of your school
 - Who makes decisions? How are decisions made?
 - Start your own group or program/initiative!
- Starting your own group
 - Starting an organization, club, initiative, or movement on college campuses varies between school but the general process includes:
 - 1. Creating a proposal
 - 2. Recruiting a minimum number of members
 - 3. Finding a faculty advisor
 - 4. Contacting Office of Student Life for required paperwork and funding opportunities
- Start programs/initiatives to alleviate disparities within trans community on campus
 - *Example:* Gender Affirming Closet to support BIPOC students in facilitating access to gender affirming care
- Starting a program/initiative typically requires the following steps:
 - 1. Gather quantitative/qualitative data about injustices around campus through surveys, interviews, and direct outreach
 - 2. Get support from a faculty advisor that can help in getting administrative support
 - Women and Gender Studies department or staff at LGBTQ+ student center may be good place to start
 - 3. Find a donor/funder/grant giver
 - *In school*
 - Alumni
 - Trusted professors or directors of existing programs at your school or other schools around the country
 - Affinity groups, intersectional approach: ex → Latinx/black student groups + queer student groups or grants specifically for queer initiatives
 - *Out of school*
 - External grant organizations

- Visit SAGE (System for Administering Grants Electronically) to find available grants to support initiatives in higher education [DCA SAGE - Portal \(intelligrants.com\)](https://dca.sage-portal.intelligrants.com)
 - [Grant Opportunities \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/grants/)
- Grow your network → Encourage students to join. There is STRENGTH IN NUMBERS!

Off Campus

- Vendors and businesses may be able to help provide support when planning a trans-friendly event – reach out to them!
 - Ask if they would like to donate materials or show up at campus events
 - *Example:* Vendors may be able to provide food, materials, garments, etc.
 - Try to focus predominantly on queer and/or BIPOC businesses – mutual aid! Refer to the lists below:
 - [LGBTQ+ Businesses](#) in NJ
 - [BIPOC-Owned Businesses](#) in Northern NJ
 - *Note: These lists are not comprehensive, but they can provide a good starting point.
- Queer community centers can provide social support and community
 - [Queer Centers in NJ](#)
- Organizations may be able to assist with policy and advocacy
 - Consider reaching out to nonprofits focused on promoting trans safety
 - *Examples:* Garden State Equality, ACLU of New Jersey, Lambda Legal, Transgender Law Center
- Consider partnering with businesses/organizations that support other minority groups
 - Fostering solidarity between minority groups can strengthen your organization and amplify your impact!
 - Some organizations you may consider supporting/partnering with:
 - [Disability Rights NJ](#)
 - [Latino Action Network Foundation](#)
 - [Sierra Club NJ](#)
 - Garden State Equality is also always looking for [volunteers](#)!

Starting a Queer Alumni Network

- 1. Reach out to an alumni relations coordinator OR a faculty member who has access to alumni records
- 2. Compile email addresses and create a survey to send out
 - Ask them of their sexuality/gender identity and if they would be interested in joining and connecting with current students and other alums
- 3. Create a directory with easily accessible careers, names, emails, and phone numbers
- 4. Ask their support for strengthening current and enacting more inclusive policy

Questions to Ask

- Are advisors knowledgeable about specific needs and concerns of trans students?
- Are there any training that students have to attend to contribute to the cultivation of an inclusive environment? **If not...**
 - **Present specific instances or data that highlight the importance of such training**
 - Reaching out to the following departments, as they are key contacts for creating more inclusive training opportunities and training programs for college students, faculty, and staff (if applicable to your specific school)
 - HR (Human Resources) Department
 - Primarily responsible for faculty and staff training and development
 - Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
 - LGBTQ+ Resource Center/Office
 - Dean of Students or Student Affairs Office
 - Oversee student wellbeing
 - Title IX Office
 - Responsible for ensuring non-discriminatory campus environment
 - Department Heads& Deans
 - Pertaining to a department issue, contact these folks to address concerns
 - Counseling Services

- This group can advocate for the need of students to feel supported and understood (emphasizing the importance of these trainings for mental health)
- Student Government
 - Dedicated to advocating for student needs to faculty and administration
 - Often include a committee focused on diversity
- Are there trans inclusive events and celebrations hosted by your institution? **If not.. what to do?**
 - Contact above as well as campus event planning office
 - Use student organizations to help campaign for the creation of these events. There is strength in numbers!

Reporting Discrimination

Overview: Transphobia exists everywhere, even on affirming campuses. In some cases, it may be necessary to report this discrimination and get others involved.

- NJ has an [Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights](#)
 - Colleges in NJ should have anti-bullying policies that reflect these standards
- In some cases, it may be necessary to file a claim to report discrimination
 - NJ Law Against Discrimination ([NJLAD](#))
 - [File a complaint](#) with the NJ Division on Civil Rights
 - Same process for public and private colleges
- [Report Anti-LGBTQ+ Discrimination](#) to Garden State Equality

Post-College: Your Trans Experience in the Professional World

Overview: Post-college life refers to the phase after graduation where individuals transition into the workforce, pursue further education, and apply the skills and knowledge gained during their college years to their careers and personal lives

- What to remember after graduation:
 - Name changes for diplomas if necessary
 - Check that official transcripts don't have deadname, and request a change.
 - Maintain connections with supportive professors and report discriminatory or transphobic professors

Work Search

- Consider job searching on queer-specific job listing forums
 - [CenterLink LGBTQ Jobs and Careers Board \(lgbtqcenters.org\)](https://lgbtqcenters.org/centerlink)
- When applying, check non-discrimination policies, reach out to previous employees if possible, and check if the healthcare plan and benefits are trans-inclusive
 - [Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index](#)
 - [GlassDoor](#)
 - [Cold call/message](#) previous employees on social media
- It's sometimes difficult to be sure if employers are actually gender inclusive or trans affirming until you actually start working there. However, here are some good indicators to gauge the policies of a company prior to employment:
 - The company has obvious or clear language about their LGBTQ+ policies on their website
 - The job application has a box which asks for preferred name or pronouns
 - The company demonstrates or lists participation in LGBTQ+ trainings
 - The health insurance plan for the company includes coverage for HRT or other gender affirming care
- Some job applications will directly ask prospective hires whether or not they are transgender. Answering this question is usually a personal choice, but this is generally a red flag when it comes to employers, and can sometimes (on rare occasions) be used discreetly to reject applicants
- During your interview, ask about:

- Company commitment to diversity and inclusion, specifically for trans folks
- Procedure for handling discrimination
- Training programs on DEI initiatives and topics
 - [Learn to differentiate between a company checking a box and actual enthusiasm for DEI](#)
- Healthcare Packages/Offerings
 - [Built in list of top companies with comprehensive LGBTQ+ healthcare packages](#)
 - [Which](#) insurance does the company offer? (e.g. day to day difference between BCBS-NJ and BCBS-TX)
- Look out for pronouns in email signature
- Look for ERGs (Employee Resource Groups) for queer employees
- If the job you are researching is in-person, check for or inquire about gender neutral restrooms or restroom policies
- In an interview, feel free to share your preferred name and pronouns if they were not listed on your job application.
 - It is generally advised to use your legal name on job applications and clarify your preferred name later, as HR departments sometimes conduct background checks prior to or immediately after an interview

Moving to a new place

- If you'll be moving to a new area, consider the following:
 - Does this area have job opportunities in the field I am interested in?
 - Will I have a car/other transportation, and if not, what does the public transportation system look like?
 - Are there LGBTQ+ organizations in my area that I can visit or join?
 - Does the city or town have an LGBTQ+ liaison?
 - Who are the elected officials of that area, and what does their track record with the LGBTQ+ community look like?
 - Are there LGBTQ+ hobby groups in my area that I can join? (book club, roller derby, skate group, knitting circle, etc.)
- Check the equality metrics of the city or town you are planning on moving to
 - [Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index](#)

Graduate school

- When choosing where to continue your education, your first priority should be a program that feels like a good fit for you and one which could help advance your career. However, here are some things to consider when deciding on graduate school:
 - Is this school located in a state where I would be able to access HRT or other gender affirming care?
 - What are this school's transgender policies?
 - Are there trans specific or LGBTQ+ specific student organizations, and are they open to graduate students?
 - Are there positions within the school's LGBTQ+ Student Center, DEI Office, or Title IX Office that I would be able to apply for? (Especially if they offer tuition remission)
- Graduate school is inherently different from undergraduate education because your life will become much more detached from your institution. For example, you will most likely *not* live in a dorm on campus, eat most of your meals in a dining hall, or spend most of your evening or leisure time on your campus
 - Therefore, some school wide policies which may affect TGD+ undergraduates may not be felt to the same degree by you – although **they very much matter, and are important to your experience** and graduate school selection
- Health care
 - Many people pursuing graduate degrees are also working, and receive health care benefits from their employers. As a graduate student, you may also be working at a company who pays for your health insurance, and may elect to bypass the student health care plan.
 - However, many people still may elect to use the student healthcare plan as graduate students. This is completely normal.
 - As a graduate student, however, coverage may change depending on whether you are a full time student or not, so be sure to check coverage options to find a plan that's right for you.
- Choosing professors/mentors
 - Another unique part of graduate school is the degree to which you develop relationships with professors. Many graduate programs include a cumulative component, whether that be a dissertation, research project, thesis, or capstone. Choosing professors who respect your gender identity while also offering professional insight is imperative as a TGD+ graduate student.

- Before choosing a mentor, read some of that professor's other work to see if it includes research on LGBTQ+ people or other marginalized groups
- Read news articles or interviews with that professor and pay attention to how they treat LGBTQ+ issues
- Read the professor's research interests or biography on the university's website to see if their interests align with yours
- Check external websites like RateMyProfessor to see if other students have encountered transphobic language or treatment in the classroom

If you have any feedback on this guide or information you would like to be shared, please fill out [this feedback form](#).

We got this because we got us.