

Dear Colleague,

When assessing a law school's demonstrated commitment to diversity, demographic information is useful to many different groups, including prospective law students, their parents, and employers. To assist in relaying this data, every year the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) collects demographic information on the composition of law school students. In the past, the information collected has included race, gender, age, and ethnicity. Beginning last year, NALP added the number of students who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) to this demographic information. The LGBT Section of NALP encourages your school to fully collect and report the number of openly-LGBT students in your school.

We would also like to offer you our assistance in making the information gathering process efficient, professional, and appropriate. Many schools have made great strides in gathering and reporting data regarding their openly-LGBT students. Some, however, struggle with the question of how to effectively gather data. As is the case with ethnicity and disability, a person's LGBT status must be self-reported. Accordingly, the NALP LGBT Section would like to offer the following advice:

Don't Rely on Assumptions: When gathering this demographic information, it is important not to operate on assumptions or informal knowledge alone. Some schools believe that they would know whether any of their students identify as LGBT and, relying on this assumption, presume that they do not have any LGBT students or that all self-identified LGBT students are known. This is not necessarily the case.

Don't Solely Rely on Admissions Data: Admissions data is a great place to start, but LGBT status can be fluid and willingness to self-identify can change person-to-person, year-to-year. Do not rely solely on this data as it is likely out-of-date.

Broaden the Inquiry: Rather than requesting that students identify solely their LGBT status, use this information-gathering opportunity to also solicit voluntary self-identification of disability and ethnicity. It is also a best practice to communicate with all of your students when seeking this information rather than distributing the communication to a subset of students, *e.g.* your student LGBT group.

Empower the Students to Self-Identify: You may recall that the LGBT Section sent out a sample email in the past for your use, asking students to "Stand up and be Counted". This email requested that schools explain to students the benefits of accurately reporting demographic information and ask for their help in so doing. This involved adding this demographic data to Symplicity or like programs for students to self-select, with the caveat that when schools report the data to NALP, students' identities will be protected; only the aggregate numbers are reported to NALP.

Use the Opportunity to Promote Your Diversity Initiatives: While inviting students to self-identify as members of diverse groups, take the opportunity to reinforce your school's commitment to diversity. Let everyone know that you are committed to diversity, tell them new initiatives you've developed, and welcome their input and contributions in fostering diversity.

Zero is better than “NC” or “UNK”: It is possible that after a comprehensive inquiry your final numbers reflect no students self-identifying as LGBT. Listing a zero on your NALP form is better than listing NC (not collected) or UNK (unknown). By listing zero, you are indicating to law students and employers that you have conducted a thoughtful inquiry into the representation of LGBT students at your school and that you would welcome applications from qualified students who do identify as LGBT. A report that states that the information is not collected or is unknown suggests the opposite.

For your planning purposes, as in past years, NALP will collect demographic data counts in early March. As you may already know, this data will be published in the NALP Directory of Law Schools (www.nalplawsonline.org). As a reminder, each year we also ask employer institutions to collect and report up-to-date demographic data which is published in the online directory (<http://nalpdirectory.com/>). If you would like further or specific advice on gathering LGBT information for your annual NALP Form, please feel free to contact either of us and we will put you in touch with a fellow NALP member who can share their experience and success in conducting this inquiry. If you have questions about the reporting process and the NALP Form, please contact Fred Thrasher at fthrasher@nalp.org or Lisa Quirk at lisa@nalp.org.

In closing, we want to bring to your attention the list of employer organizations that have endorsed this letter. Each group represents a membership composed of talented attorneys who are committed to a profession that actively welcomes and supports LGBT colleagues. Their collective membership represents only a small sample of the attorneys who seek workplaces that share their interest in a diverse and equal workplace.

Sincerely,

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