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## ***The Implementation of Gender-Inclusive Housing at ACUHO-I Member Institutions***

GENDER-INCLUSIVE HOUSING (GIH) continues to grow as an option for consideration at colleges and universities across the U.S. A follow-up to a 2016 study by Taub and colleagues was conducted to gauge and assess developmental growth trends of GIH within campus housing. A majority of 184 participants ( $n = 129$ ) reported that their institution has either implemented a full or trial GIH program, while another quarter ( $n = 48$ ) reported being in the discussion stage. Only six respondents reported not having considered GIH at all in their housing procedures. These data show that, compared to the conclusions of previous studies, a more pronounced movement toward implementation of GIH is occurring beyond the stage of simple discussions. The most common obstacles that institutions reported about the implementation of GIH were parent/family concerns, public relations concerns, and lack of suitable housing facilities. Similar to the 2016 study by Taub and colleagues, current policies related to gender-inclusive housing at participating institutions were further analyzed.

*Note: The authors acknowledge the endorsement of ACUHO-I's Research Committee. We also acknowledge the contributions to the study provided by Danny Starvaggi.*

Gender-inclusive housing (GIH) is an option that allows students to select housing independent of their assigned sex or gender (Krum et al., 2013) in order to provide a safer living environment in which they can express their identities (Amos et al., 2021). This form of housing has been a topic of discussion in college and university housing for the past two decades or more (e.g., Bleiberg, 2004; Hobson, 2014; Taub et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2018; Willoughby et al., 2012). Taub and colleagues (2016) produced the first comprehensive, systematic study of the development and implementation of gender-inclusive housing in U.S. colleges and universities. The current study follows up on this work to determine how many campuses offer gender-inclusive housing, the locations and types of institutions offering this option, the types of housing facilities being used, barriers campuses have encountered, and GIH policies that have been developed.

The original study was inspired by the work of DeCoster (1979), who traced the state of coeducational housing as it was emerging from 1967 to 1978. Over that time, the number of colleges and universities offering then-controversial coeducational housing increased from 51% to 85%, and, by 2009, more than 90% of college students lived in coeducational housing (Willoughby & Carroll, 2009, p. 241). Several authors have raised the question of whether the emergence of an often-controversial housing option may be similar to that of coeducational housing (Bleiberg, 2004; Taub et al., 2016; Willoughby et al., 2012).

Several terms are used to describe the practice of allowing students to live with one another in campus housing without regard to their gender identity. Taub and colleagues (2016) used the term *gender-neutral housing*; however, we have chosen the term *gender-inclusive housing* in this study, as we noted an increase in the use of the word “inclusive” by other authors (e.g., Krum et al., 2013; Nicolazzo et al., 2018). In quoting other authors, we will use the terminology they used.

## AN OVERVIEW OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE HOUSING

Many studies have documented that LGBTQ+ students have not always found residence halls to be welcoming or safe environments and that they encounter lack of support, negative attitudes, microaggressions, discrimination, hostility, and bullying from roommates, peers, and even resident assistants in the residence halls (Amos et al., 2021; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Kortegast, 2017). Such hostile environments are associated with negative perceptions of the overall residential environment and with a reduced sense of belonging (Fanucce & Taub, 2010).

Many scholars have advocated for providing GIH as an on-campus housing option to serve LGBTQ+ students (Amos et al., 2021; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bleiberg, 2004; Garvey et al., 2018; Nicolazzo et al., 2018) in order to promote a greater sense of inclusion and safety for them on college and university campuses (Beemyn et al., 2005; Krum et al., 2013). The availability of gender-inclusive housing can influence the decisions of transgender and other gender diverse students to attend a particular institution (Krum et al., 2013), while the lack of GIH policies is associated with lower engagement for transgender students (Woodford et al., 2017). Although gender-inclusive housing does not address all the needs of transgender students, Wagner and colleagues (2018) concluded that it was “better than most” (p. 31) housing options available to them.

GIH can also provide a more comfortable living environment for other students, as the option is typically not offered exclusively to transgender and gender diverse students. For example, GIH can offer a safe space for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer students who would find living with a roommate of the same sex awkward and uncomfortable, or even unsafe (Nguyen et al., 2020). The literature reflects the growth of gender-inclusive housing in terms of the number of campuses offering it as a housing option. In 2012 the number was reported to be “rather limited” (Willoughby et al., 2012, p. 737). As of January 7, 2022, according to the Campus Pride Index (2022) and the Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 425 U.S. colleges and universities provided gender-inclusive housing. No comprehensive, systematic investigation of the

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implementation of gender-inclusive housing has been published since Taub and colleagues (2016). The purpose of the present study was to examine GIH in ACUHO-I member institutions. Specifically, we explored the following research questions:

1. *What is the current state of implementation of gender-inclusive housing at ACUHO-I member institutions?*
2. *At those institutions where GIH has been considered,*
  - a. *What obstacles were encountered?*
  - b. *What type(s) of housing facilities are used to offer this option?*
  - c. *What policies and procedures have been implemented?*
3. *What do responding institutions identify as lessons learned related to offering GIH?*

## METHODS

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to capture the current status of considering and implementing college and university housing policies related to gender-inclusive housing.

### Participants and Data Collection

This study was endorsed by ACUHO-I's Research Committee. ACUHO-I emailed the invitation to participate in the research study (including a link to the survey instrument) to its listserv of senior housing officers (SHOs) or their designated contacts at member institutions ( $N = 931$ ). Overall, 184 institutions completed the survey, for a response rate of 19.76 %. Table 1 (*see page 14*) provides a more detailed look at state and territory representation; in the table we have grouped states that have identical numbers of participating institutions (for example, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Oregon each have three institutions that participated in the study).

### Instrument

The *Gender-Inclusive Housing Survey* instrument used in this study was a modification of the survey instrument utilized in Taub and colleagues' (2016) study of gender-neutral housing. The present researchers added questions asking for information about who initiated the discussion of GIH, the term used to refer to this type of housing, the year GIH was introduced, the percentage of residents living in this type of housing, and lessons learned from implementing GIH. Additionally, descriptions of residential facilities used by Taub and colleagues were updated to avoid confusion and better reflect the various types of housing inventory present on campuses today. Finally, the term *gender-inclusive housing* replaced *gender-neutral housing* to better reflect the term in current use.

TABLE 1  
Institution Participation by U.S. State/Territory

| State/territory                                                                                                                                                                        | N for each state/territory* |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, District of Columbia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island                                                                         | 1                           |
| Arkansas, Connecticut, Iowa, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Utah, West Virginia                                                                                               | 2                           |
| Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon                                                                                                                                                        | 3                           |
| South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia                                                                                                                                                    | 4                           |
| Colorado, Washington, Wisconsin                                                                                                                                                        | 5                           |
| Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, Texas                                                                                                                                                      | 6                           |
| Michigan                                                                                                                                                                               | 7                           |
| Florida                                                                                                                                                                                | 8                           |
| Illinois, New York, North Carolina                                                                                                                                                     | 9                           |
| Pennsylvania                                                                                                                                                                           | 10                          |
| Ohio                                                                                                                                                                                   | 11                          |
| California                                                                                                                                                                             | 12                          |
| American Samoa, Delaware, Guam, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Northern Marianas Islands, Puerto Rico, South Dakota, Vermont, Virgin Islands, Wyoming | 0                           |

\*Note: States/territories are grouped together based on the number of responses from each state/territory.

A common sentiment was an emphasis on collaborating with campus partners to ensure the success of gender-inclusive initiatives.

Three distinct areas of information were collected in the survey: descriptive data on institutions; the nature of discussions about GIH; and the form, function, policies, procedures, and lessons learned related to GIH—the same areas established and analyzed in the 2016 study. When reporting their level of GIH consideration, institutions were asked to select the most comprehensive option they had considered or achieved (scale: *Not at all* to *Full implementation*).

## Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as counts and correlations. Qualitative data were analyzed to establish initial codes that were then discussed, utilizing a constant comparative approach (Lichtman, 2013). This approach involved each qualitative response being coded and analyzed and then compared continuously to other responses to determine categories and themes. Findings are divided into quantitative and qualitative components. Responses to questions relating to institutions' consideration and implementation of GIH, as well as demographic data, are presented in the quantitative section, whereas responses to questions concerning GIH policies and lessons learned are presented in the qualitative section.

## RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

In the following sections, we report the quantitative findings from the study related to the current state of GIH implementation, obstacles encountered, and types of facilities used for GIH.

### Current State of GIH Implementation

Analyses related to implementation focused on five elements: consideration, names and terms used, year of implementation, percentage of students living in GIH, and initiation of GIH discussions.

**Consideration.** The extent to which an institution had considered GIH implementation yielded 183 responses from 184 participants. A full gender-inclusive housing program was implemented by 106 institutions. A trial or pilot GIH program was implemented by 23 institutions, whereas another 24 explored the idea of GIH with upper-level administration or legal counsel and/or examined policies at other institutions. Formal staff discussions occurred at 10 institutions, whereas informal discussions about GIH occurred at 14 institutions. Only six of responding institutions indicated that no consideration of GIH had occurred.

Review of GIH consideration by ACUHO-I region (179 responses from 184 participants) detailed that the majority of responding institutions within each region had fully implemented a GIH program; the only exception was the SEAHO region, which had more variability of consideration across all categories than the other regions (*see Table 2, page 16*). The distribution of consideration levels across institutional size with respect to implementing a full GIH program (183 responses from 184 participants) was almost even across all size categories (*see Table 3, page 16*).

**TABLE 2****Consideration of GIH Implementation by Regional Association**

| Region    | N   | Not at all | Informal discussions | Formal discussions | Explored options | Trial/pilot program | Full program |
|-----------|-----|------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| AACUHO    | 0   | 0          | 0                    | 0                  | 0                | 0                   | 0            |
| ACUHO-SAC | 0   | 0          | 0                    | 0                  | 0                | 0                   | 0            |
| AIMHO     | 10  | 0          | 0                    | 1                  | 0                | 2                   | 2            |
| GLACUHO   | 33  | 1          | 0                    | 2                  | 2                | 3                   | 25           |
| MACUHO    | 19  | 0          | 3                    | 1                  | 1                | 1                   | 13           |
| NEACUHO   | 17  | 0          | 0                    | 1                  | 2                | 2                   | 12           |
| NWACUHO   | 15  | 0          | 0                    | 0                  | 1                | 2                   | 12           |
| NZATEAP   | 0   | 0          | 0                    | 0                  | 0                | 0                   | 0            |
| OACUHO    | 5   | 0          | 0                    | 0                  | 0                | 0                   | 5            |
| SEAHO     | 42  | 1          | 8                    | 4                  | 10               | 8                   | 11           |
| SWACUHO   | 10  | 1          | 1                    | 1                  | 5                | 1                   | 1            |
| UMR-ACUHO | 15  | 2          | 0                    | 0                  | 0                | 3                   | 10           |
| WACUHO    | 13  | 0          | 0                    | 0                  | 2                | 1                   | 10           |
| Total     | 179 | 5          | 12                   | 10                 | 23               | 23                  | 106          |

**TABLE 3****Consideration of GIH Implementation by Institutional Size**

| Region         | N   | Not at all | Informal discussions | Formal discussions | Explored options | Trial/pilot program | Full program |
|----------------|-----|------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Under 1,000    | 7   | 2          | 1                    | 4                  | 8                | 4                   | 22           |
| 1,000–4,999    | 41  | 3          | 3                    | 2                  | 3                | 5                   | 24           |
| 5,000–9,999    | 42  | 0          | 4                    | 3                  | 9                | 5                   | 32           |
| 10,000–19,999  | 40  | 1          | 4                    | 1                  | 3                | 8                   | 25           |
| 20,000 & above | 53  | 0          | 2                    | 0                  | 1                | 1                   | 3            |
| Total          | 183 | 6          | 14                   | 10                 | 24               | 23                  | 106          |



*The role of student voices in this process seemed to be closely related to securing institutional commitment and support, suggesting that it is important for student affairs educators to view students as partners in the process.*

**Names/terms used.** Most participants ( $n = 99$ ) in this study indicated that gender-inclusive housing was the term currently utilized on their campus. Ten participants used the term gender-neutral housing, and 11 used the term all-gender housing; in addition, 36 indicated they did not have this type of housing, and 20 indicated that some other term was utilized.

**Year of implementation.** Most GIH programs have been implemented since 2013, as 100 of the 134 responses from 184 participants indicated. Thirty institutions started their programs between 2006 and 2012, and four reported having programs implemented before 2000. No participants indicated implementing GIH between 2000 and 2005.

**Percentage of students living in gender-inclusive housing.** Of the 178 responses from 184 participants, 133 reported that less than 5% of on-campus residents (excluding those living in married student/family housing) lived in some type of GIH facility. Nineteen participants reported that between 5% and 10% of on-campus residents lived in a GIH facility; the remaining participants ( $n = 26$ ) reported that anywhere from 11 to 100% of on-campus residents were living in gender-inclusive housing.

**Initiation of GIH discussion.** Participants (177 responses from 184 participants) indicated that central housing or residence life office staff ( $n = 77$ ) and individual students ( $n = 24$ ) were the primary populations initiating discussions of gender-inclusive housing on their campus. Others initiating GIH discussions included student group(s) ( $n = 17$ ), live-in/live-on staff ( $n = 11$ ), student affairs/campus life staff or administration ( $n = 13$ ), and multicultural affairs/LGBTQ+ center staff ( $n = 6$ ). Seventeen participants indicated they did not know who had initiated GIH discussions on their campus. Twelve participants selected “Other” and indicated collaborations that occurred between various groups such as LGBTQ+ center staff, housing and residence life (HRL) staff, students, external stakeholders, and institution presidents.

## Obstacles

With respect to the obstacles that institutions encountered when considering GIH, 184 participants provided 323 responses (participants could select multiple responses). Parent/family member concerns ( $n = 51$ ), public relations concerns ( $n = 46$ ), and lack of suitable facilities ( $n = 38$ ) were among the most commonly identified obstacles. Others reported obstacles related to lack of upper-level administrative support ( $n = 32$ ), lack of support from the Board of Governors or Trustees or Regents ( $n = 26$ ), lack of student interest ( $n = 21$ ), and legal concerns ( $n = 20$ ). Only 11 institutions reported experiencing a contradiction with their institutional mission statement as an obstacle for GIH consideration. A high number of institutions ( $n = 47$ ) reported encountering no obstacles at all.



Institutions ( $n = 31$ ) also had the option to select “Other” with respect to obstacles encountered. Responses to this category included political concerns, the capacity of housing facilities and infrastructure for inclusive restrooms, housing assignment software limitations, fear that campus culture is not ready for GIH, logistics of where to implement, and language concerns with respect to making sure that GIH policy and procedures were understood by all.

### Type of Facilities

The question about the types of housing facilities being utilized by GIH programs yielded 296 responses from 184 participants (multiple responses were allowed). GIH was defined as “housing in which a unit (room, suite, apartment) is not occupied by individuals of the same biological (legal) sex” (Taub et al., 2016, p. 86). Most facilities being utilized for GIH were located in apartment-style housing (separate bedrooms, shared kitchen and living area, possibly shared bathrooms;  $n = 111$ ). Other facility types used included suites (shared bathroom and possibly a living area but no kitchen;  $n = 90$ ) and traditional double-loaded corridor housing (communal bathroom or other facilities such as a lounge or kitchen;  $n = 69$ ). The “Other” category ( $n = 26$ ) yielded responses pertaining to pods/pod-style (individual use restrooms), small houses, hotel-style (private bedroom and private bathroom), studio-style apartments, and town-homes (shared kitchen and bathrooms but individual rooms).

## RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

To answer Research Questions 2C and 3, respondents were presented with two open-ended questions: one concerning their GIH policies and the other concerning lessons they had learned from their experience with the implementation of GIH.

### Policies

Participants were asked to provide their GIH policies, if they had them. Of the 184 institutions that responded, 111 provided their policies or links to their policies. The coding and related analysis yielded several themes: eligibility and restriction, the role of parents/family, administrative processes, bathrooms, and using the policy to educate (see Table 4, page 19). Because survey responses were anonymous, the policies cannot be attributed to any specific institution.

**Eligibility and restriction.** Twenty-seven institutions addressed eligibility and restrictions in their submitted policies. Policies detailing eligibility often stated that gender-inclusive housing was available to all students regardless of class year. A smaller number of policies detailing GIH eligibility included restrictions, such as GIH not being open to first-year students and, in rare cases, open only to juniors and seniors. However, in some cases when GIH was not open to first-year students, respondents indicated that housing and residence life staff worked with these students on a case-by-case basis. Of particular note were policies that restricted consideration for gender-inclusive housing to students “based on gender identity and exploration only.” Almost all the policies concerning eligibility indicated that this kind of housing was not designed for romantic relationships.

**TABLE 4**

**Coding of GIH Policies**

| Theme/code                  | Subtheme/subcode             | Number of policies with each code<br>(Total policies submitted, N = 111)* |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Eligibility/restrictions    |                              | 27                                                                        |
|                             | All students/no restrictions | 15                                                                        |
|                             | Restricted                   | 6                                                                         |
|                             | Case-by-case                 | 15                                                                        |
|                             | Romantic relationships       | 26                                                                        |
| Role of parents/family      |                              | 12                                                                        |
| Administrative processes    |                              | 21                                                                        |
|                             | Opt-in/opt-out               | 7                                                                         |
|                             | Secondary agreements         | 10                                                                        |
|                             | Roommate departures          | 16                                                                        |
| Bathrooms                   |                              | 15                                                                        |
| Using the policy to educate |                              | 29                                                                        |
|                             | Education                    | 25                                                                        |
|                             | History                      | 14                                                                        |

\*Not all the policies we received were coded.

***Role of parents/family.*** Some institutions (n = 12) included information about family/parent roles in their GIH policy. For example, it was noted in most cases that it might be beneficial to have conversations with parents and family members so that all were aware of the student’s choice of housing.

***Administrative processes.*** GIH-specific processes found in policies were coded as administrative processes (n = 21). These included opt-in/opt-out, the use of secondary agreements, and details concerning roommate departure. Most institutions that specified the process to offer gender-inclusive housing indicated that students needed to “opt-in” to this option. However, one institution in particular stood out with its “opt-out” approach, in which students must intentionally decide not to choose this housing.

A common administrative process was the use of required secondary agreements, which served as a way to prevent potential housing issues, ensure that students in GIH are welcoming of others, and communicate an expectation that students would be active

participants in their community. Policies and processes addressing roommate departure were the most common part of the administrative process. In some cases, institutions worked to maintain the gender-inclusive designation of the space, whereas others reverted the room or suite to a designation based on sex assigned at birth (or sometimes gender) for the current residents. Some institutions granted students a limited period of time to fill the vacancy, after which the institution could fill it with someone who had previously agreed to select gender-inclusive housing, thus allowing the space to remain gender-inclusive.

**Bathrooms.** Some institutions featured bathrooms in their policies ( $n = 15$ ), indicating that spaces in gender-inclusive housing were gender-specific, gender-inclusive, a mix of gender-specific and gender-inclusive, or private/single-use. In some cases, housing facilities designated for GIH were based on the presence of private/single-use bathrooms. In most cases, when policies addressed bathrooms, they did so in detail.

**Using the policy to educate.** Many policy statements included sections of definitions or detailed histories of gender-inclusive housing at the institution ( $n = 29$ ). The researchers labeled these as policies designed to provide education to the reader about GIH.

### Lessons Learned

Seventy-nine institutions responded to the question about lessons learned from the implementation of gender-inclusive housing. Four themes emerged: institutional support, campus partners, the student voice, and education and communication.

**Institutional support.** Seven respondents indicated that institutional support for implementing GIH was crucial to its development and success. Some institutions struggled with this, with some referring to the political climate within their state as a challenge.

**Campus partners.** Six respondents reflected on involving campus partners in implementing GIH. A common sentiment was an emphasis on collaborating with campus partners to ensure the success of gender-inclusive initiatives. This took several different forms, such as partnering with campus LGBTQ offices to develop the most inclusive policies possible and to advocate for staff training.

**The student voice.** Five respondents expressed an emphasis on students directly leading the change. For example, one stated, “Having students drive the process is critical.” The role of student voices in this process seemed to be closely related to securing institutional commitment and support, suggesting that it is important for student affairs educators to view students as partners in the process.

**Communication and education.** Seventeen respondents emphasized the importance of clear communication and education. Some indicated the need for clear communication with students due to issues with some students not understanding what gender-inclusive housing is. For example, as one respondent explained,

*You need to make it clear when students are applying for Gender Inclusive Housing what it really means. We have a video students must watch, and two sign-offs and follow up to avoid people signing up and not meaning to sign up.*

Furthermore, several respondents emphasized the importance of communication to the general public and to parents/families as a way to alleviate confusion and ensure support for gender-inclusive housing. One individual stated that it is important to have “a clear and concise statement for open houses and admissions tours” because a “19-year-old tour guide and RA should be prepared to have a conversation with a parent or family who is dismayed” that the campus offers GIH.

Finally, several respondents identified education about gender-inclusive housing for students and staff as an important strategy. Education within living communities (especially for staff) is necessary to ensure a respectful and positive living environment. A statement made by one individual stands out: “Myth busting for our Custodial & Trades Staff was most important” because these staff interact with students frequently in settings outside the classroom.

## DISCUSSION

This study fulfills the recommendation from Taub and colleagues (2016) for follow-up studies to be conducted as a means of gauging the developmental growth trends of gender-inclusive housing. The survey instrument was updated and revised to be more current and contained additional questions that would collect more detailed data. Overall, the findings indicate that GIH continues to be an area of interest and growth within campus housing, with many respondents reporting that their institution has either a full or trial GIH program in place. Compared to previous studies (Taub et al., 2016; Willoughby et al., 2012), it became clear that moving beyond discussions and considerations of GIH in order to focus more on actual implementation represents a much more pronounced movement toward actually offering this housing.

Higher education institutions in the Northeast, the Mid-Atlantic, the Great Lakes region, and the West reported a greater number of full or trial programs, whereas those in the Southeast reported fewer full programs and more discussion in comparison with other regions. In almost every region, if gender-inclusive housing was offered at all, most respondents for each region were at full implementation except for SWACUHO. The Southern states, which include SEAHO and SWACUHO, still have many respondents in the exploration phase.

Respondents indicated three common obstacles to offering GIH: parent/family concerns, public relations concerns, and a lack of suitable housing facilities. About the same percentage of institutions reported encountering no obstacles at all; these findings are similar to those of Taub and colleagues (2016). Parent/family concerns and public relations concerns appear to have been common throughout the development of GIH as a housing option. This is consistent with Miyamoto's (2007) observation that campuses that had or were considering GIH were “wary of complaints from

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*As older, traditional residence halls are renovated, housing and residence life professionals should consider principles of universal design, as cited in the ACUHO-I Standards.*

parents and too much publicity about the policy” (p. 47). Nicolazzo and colleagues (2018) speculated that institutions’ concerns about the reactions of external constituents may result in the institution making it difficult to locate information about GIH. In contrast to these concerns, Miyamoto (2007) reported that campuses in their study received “minimal” complaints from parents (p. 46).

Hobson (2014) observed that identifying housing that can be utilized for a GIH program may be “the most difficult and/or limiting [challenge] to moving forward” with GIH (p. 35). In this study, the lack of suitable facilities was identified as one of the three major obstacles to implementing GIH. However, findings indicate that all categories of housing (i.e., traditional, double-loaded corridor; suites; apartments; and other) were being used for GIH. More than two-thirds of institutions reported using suites and apartments, likely due to their having private and semi-private bathrooms (Oliver & Magura, 2011).

The importance of facilities and bathrooms was highlighted in institutions’ GIH policies as well. Policies often contained detailed discussion and description of gender-inclusive bathroom facilities. In some cases, the availability of private or single-use bathrooms dictated which housing was used to implement GIH. It is important to consider that not all students desire a single room with a private bath. Though this housing option can sometimes be the go-to for housing officials to offer transgender students, this may make them feel alienated from their residential community because they are expected to utilize the private bathroom instead of accessing a communal bathroom facility.

On most campuses, less than 25% of campus residents lived in gender-inclusive housing. Research has indicated that a minority of campus residents lived in GIH when it was available (Taub et al., 2016; Willoughby et al., 2012), although the percentage found in the present study is higher than that reported in any previous study. Interestingly, a few respondents in this study reported that 76–100% of their residents lived in gender-inclusive housing. Taken together, these data may indicate the growing popularity of GIH among campus residents. It could also indicate that the GIH option is better publicized and more widely known, though some studies have reported that transgender students indicated that it was difficult to learn about GIH at their institutions (Marine et al., 2019; Nicolazzo et al., 2018).

## LIMITATIONS

One limitation to this study is the low overall response rate, which was 19.87%. Response bias is one possible explanation for this, since institutions offering gender-inclusive housing might have been more likely to respond to the survey. In addition, there were few responses from international institutions, HBCUs, and institutions having fewer than 1,000 students, and no responses from Native American/Tribal Colleges. Therefore, generalization of the findings to these institutional types is particularly limited.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

When institutions are considering gender-inclusive housing, it is likely that housing and residence life staff will need to take the lead, as evidenced by this study. To do so, they must also become better assessors of student needs, especially for specific student populations such as queer-identified and trans-identified students; this housing option is often more utilized by these students as a way of obtaining living arrangements in which they feel safe and comfortable being their authentic selves (Krum et al., 2013; Marine et al., 2019; Taub et al., 2016). Housing and residence life staff, along with other student affairs and campus life administrative units (e.g., LGBTQ+ center staff and diversity, equity, and inclusion personnel), should ensure that student voices are part of the engagement and development process of future housing plans, especially as they relate to gender-inclusive housing (Marine et al., 2019; Nicolazzo et al., 2018).

As college and university HRL professionals plan for the future, gender-inclusive housing needs to be a topic of discussion. When selecting or updating housing software, housing professionals should make sure that software can accommodate the assignment of roommates without regard to their biological sex. When constructing new housing or renovating existing housing, HRL staff should consider the facilities that might be necessary or desirable for a GIH program. As demonstrated in this study, bathroom facilities are a common concern of students, parents, and staff.

As older, traditional residence halls are renovated, housing and residence life professionals should consider principles of universal design, as cited in the *ACUHO-I Standards* (ACUHO-I Professional Standards Committee, 2017). For example, when current bathroom facilities cannot be converted to gender-inclusive use, one approach could be to create private/single-use bathrooms similar to family or unisex bathrooms found in large retail stores, restaurants, and other non-residential campus facilities. Such accommodations and designs should not be considered solely for transgender or gender-nonbinary individuals (which is often the argument), but as facilities that incorporate the principles of universal design and thus provide greater flexibility as they can be utilized by a wide variety of individuals: those needing assistance to use the bathroom who may have an aide whose gender/sex differs from theirs or a parent/guardian with a small child of a different gender.

The importance of communication and education about gender-inclusive housing emerged in this study as a critical lesson learned. Housing and residence life professionals should include GIH in education and training for resident advisors (RAs) and occupancy management staff as well as custodial and trades staff; RAs, in particular, can play an important role in supporting LGBTQ+ residents (Mollett et al.,

*Education about gender-inclusive housing should also be provided for those outside residence life who interface with the public and will need to respond to questions from students and their families, including communications and marketing professionals, admissions and campus tour guide staff, and orientation leaders.*

2020). Education about the needs of LGBTQ+ students is critical. Education about gender-inclusive housing should also be provided for those outside residence life who interface with the public and will need to respond to questions from students and their families, including communications and marketing professionals, admissions and campus tour guide staff, and orientation leaders.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researchers plan to continue with follow-up studies to track the growth and changes in gender-inclusive housing on college and university campuses, comparable to the DeCoster (1979) study of coeducational housing. In doing so, they will be able to explore whether the emergence and implementation of GIH is like that of coeducational housing, as suggested by Bleiberg (2004) and Willoughby and colleagues (2012). As GIH matures, questions included on the instrument may be added or modified.

In addition, future research should explore the reasons institutions are increasingly adopting gender-inclusive housing and the impact of GIH on the students living there. Of particular importance is the need to examine whether this housing option is successfully addressing issues of safety, comfort, and sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ students, as this is the often-stated goal of adopting a GIH program. Finally, gender-inclusive housing is not necessarily limited to LGBTQ+ students. Further inquiries could be focused on the reasons that cisgender students choose GIH and the impact that living in this housing has on them.

Similar to previous findings (Taub et al., 2016), the current study found that parent/family and public relations concerns were identified as obstacles to implementing GIH. Future research could explore the nature of these concerns and the frequency with which they are encountered in practice as well as the ways institutions have addressed and overcome these obstacles. Additionally, scholars could explore how parent and family attitudes about gender-inclusive housing change over time.

## CONCLUSION

Calls from the literature for campus housing and residence life professionals to become more responsive to and inclusive of the needs of LGBTQ+ students have been clear (Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). Campuses should also make their GIH policies more widely known and easier to find (Marine et al., 2019; Nicolazzo et al., 2018). Although much remains to be done in areas such as programs, policies (Marine et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020), and visibility (Marine et al., 2019; Nicolazzo et al., 2018), the findings from this study indicate that progress is being made. Continued conversation, assessment, and evaluation, informed by the growing literature on gender-inclusive housing and the needs of LGBTQ+ students, will be necessary as housing professionals continue to work to make campus housing accessible, safe, and inclusive for all students. ■



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. The authors confirm that gender-inclusive housing programs are helpful in communicating a sense of belonging and inclusion to prospective LGBTQ+ students. How do you believe your campus communicates to these students that they are welcomed and supported in your residential communities?
2. If you have gender-inclusive housing on your campus,
  - a. What challenges have you faced in implementation?
  - b. How do you think your current model successfully supports students?
  - c. The researchers observe communication and education as a theme linked to the success of GIH programs. How does this look at your institution? Are there areas where you can improve in order to align with best practice?
3. If you currently do not offer gender-inclusive housing on your campus,
  - a. How might you initiate creating spaces and programs for LGBTQ+ students to feel welcome in their residential communities?
  - b. What barriers would your team need to navigate to move a GIH model forward?
4. What assessment do you have in place on your campus to understand how LGBTQ+ students experience their residential communities?
5. If there is a disconnect or lack of information about LGBTQ+ students' experiences on your campus, how might you cultivate a deeper awareness to better support these students and help them thrive?

*Discussion questions developed by Kayley Carter and Lauren Oliver, Virginia Tech*