

OSAY

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Introduction

As the only LGBTQ+ community foundation serving the Upper Midwest, PFund is always interested in better understanding the size and characteristics of the queer populations we serve via our grants and programming. We regularly scan the literature to help keep ourselves up to date about the latest research being conducted, especially regarding queer people and higher education.

We have frequently drawn upon research conducted by notable organizations such as Campus Pride, the Williams Institute at UCLA, the Point Foundation, and others. However, one thing we as a foundation have been limited by is the dearth of research relating specifically to educational attainment among queer people within PFund's service region.

In order to address this gap in research, PFund developed and deployed the SLAY (Study of LGBTQ+ Academic Yield), drawing on research professionals to help shape an online survey designed to better understand the levels of educational attainment among queer populations in our region. We were also interested in better understanding barriers that prevent queer people from pursuing higher education.

This report is meant as a snapshot of the key findings collected via the SLAY survey. Major findings include:

- The mean amount of student debt (both public and private) reported by queer SLAY respondents was \$39,123.
- The most-commonly given reasons for LGBTQ people not being able to attain the level of education they desire are cost, time commitment, and being unsure of what to study.
- Queer students of color report a higher sense of belonging on campus than their White queer peers.
- Cisgender queer people report a higher level of career readiness than gender-expansive survey respondents.
- Transgender and gender-expansive respondents reported a lower student debt load on average when compared to cisgender queer survey respondents.

PFund envisions the 2023 SLAY Survey as the first in a series of research instruments that can help us better understand the unique educational needs of queer communities across the Upper Midwest. To learn more about the research and reporting conducted by PFund Foundation, please visit www.pfundfoundation.org/research.

2023 SLAY Team



Hermela Shiferaw, Aaron Zimmerman, Natalie Bax, and Kai Zhang at Carleton College in April 2023. Photo credit: Kate Mohn

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Special thanks to Dr. Andy Poppick for serving as faculty liaison for the Statistical Consulting Class at Carleton College.

Methodology

The SLAY survey has been a team effort years in the making. PFund Foundation first began thinking about conducting research into educational attainment in queer populations in 2021. Our grants team had noticed that while organizations such as the Point Foundation, Campus Pride, and Williams Institute conduct vital research on experiences queer people have while pursuing higher education, there was a lack of research related to queer people specifically in the Upper Midwest. Specifically, we were interested in collecting information from people currently living in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and the First Nations therein.

PFund's Research Steering Committee worked from early 2022 through early 2023 to identify the key questions the foundation was interested exploring regarding queer educational attainment within the region and to develop a rigorous survey instrument capable of exploring in-depth the experiences queer people in the Upper Midwest have as they pursue post-secondary degrees or certificates.

The survey was built using Survey Monkey and launched in January 2023. PFund's marketing team created an integrated digital promotional campaign that ran from January to March and garnered more than 49,700 impressions across all social media and web channels. PFund's program staff also promoted the survey in-person at various outreach events for the six weeks the survey was open. As an incentive to take the survey, PFund offered five \$100 gift cards to be awarded to respondents at random.

The survey received a total of 555 responses. PFund staff reviewed all individual responses and removed any that either appeared to be junk responses from bots or individuals seeking to submit multiple responses and game the system. Any responses from individuals outside of PFund's services area or who did not affirmatively identify as LGBTQ+ were also removed from the survey sample for data analysis purposes. The result was 389 survey respondents who identified as queer (for the purposes of this study, we have defined "queer" as cisgender people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, sexually fluid, pansexual; intersex people; and transgender, nonbinary, or gender-expansive individuals of any orientation) and resided within PFund's regional service area.

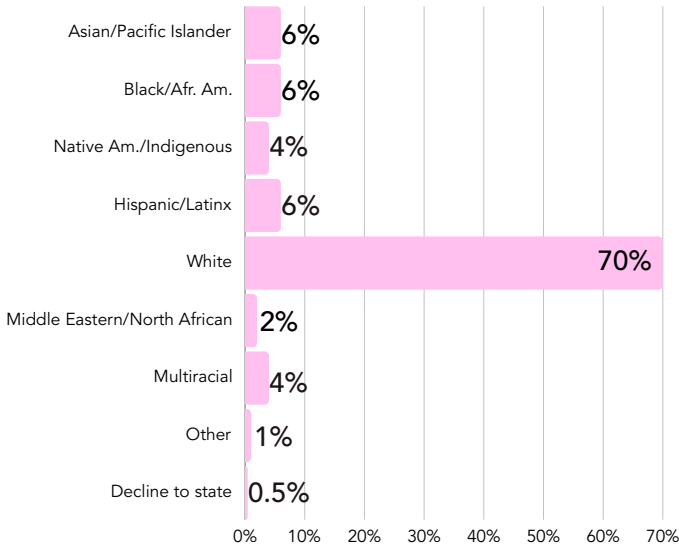
Once cleaned, anonymized survey data was provided to a team of faculty and students at Carleton College, who assisted PFund with conducting the basic statistical analysis included in this report over the spring and summer of 2023. The statistical coding language R was used by Carleton and PFund to run basic statistical tests.

PFund staff also assisted with statistical analysis, and in the summer and fall of 2023, the raw datasets were transformed into the data tables and visualizations found in this report.

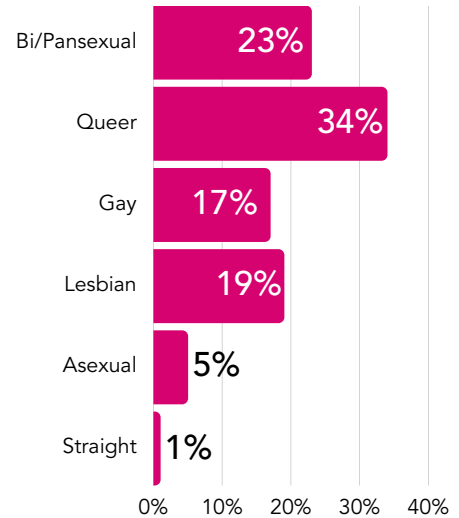
Demographics of SLAY survey respondents

Methodology notes: Some charts may total more than 100% (such as race and ethnicity--respondents were able to check as many options as applied to them while identifying both race and ethnicity).

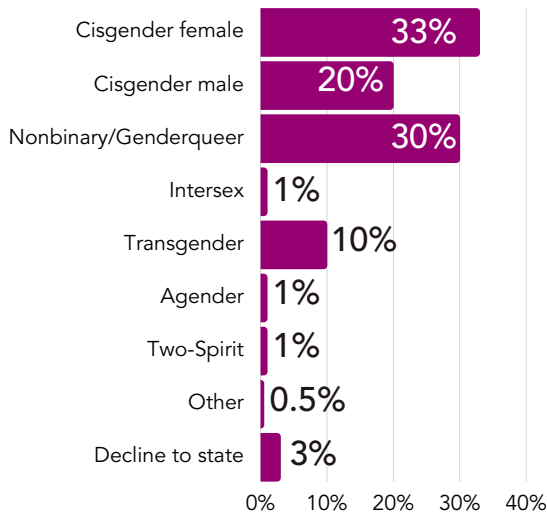
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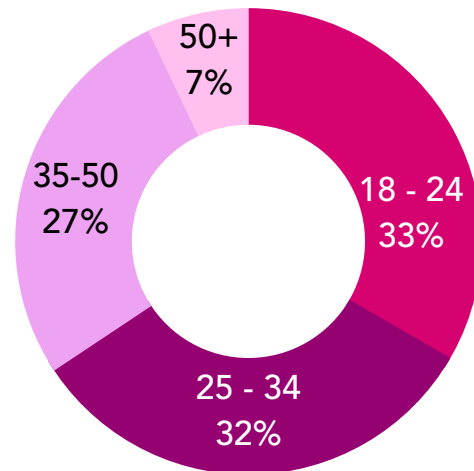
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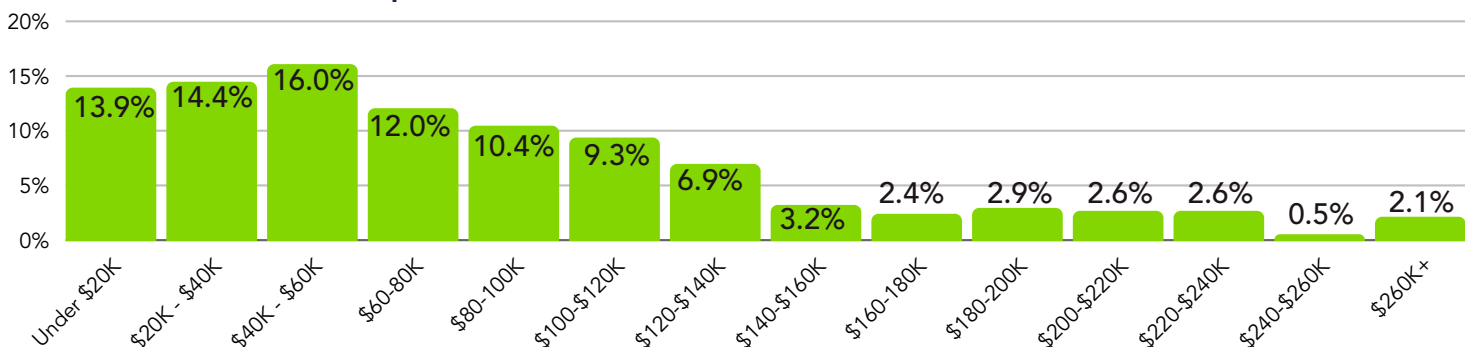
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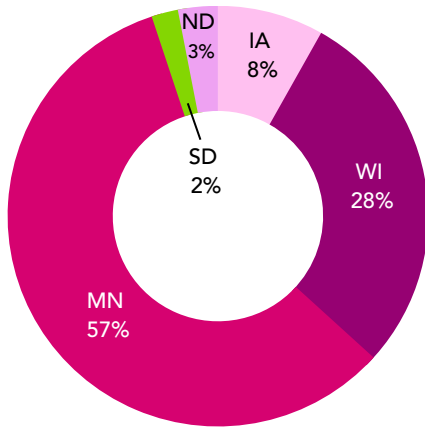
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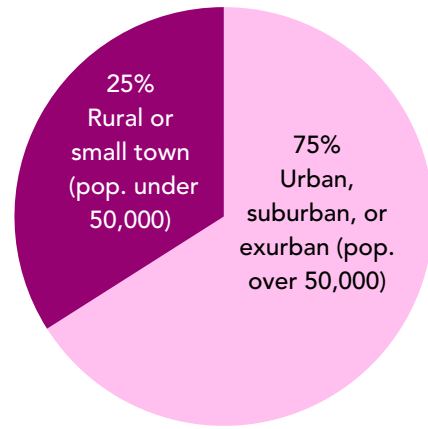
Reported Gross Annual Household Income



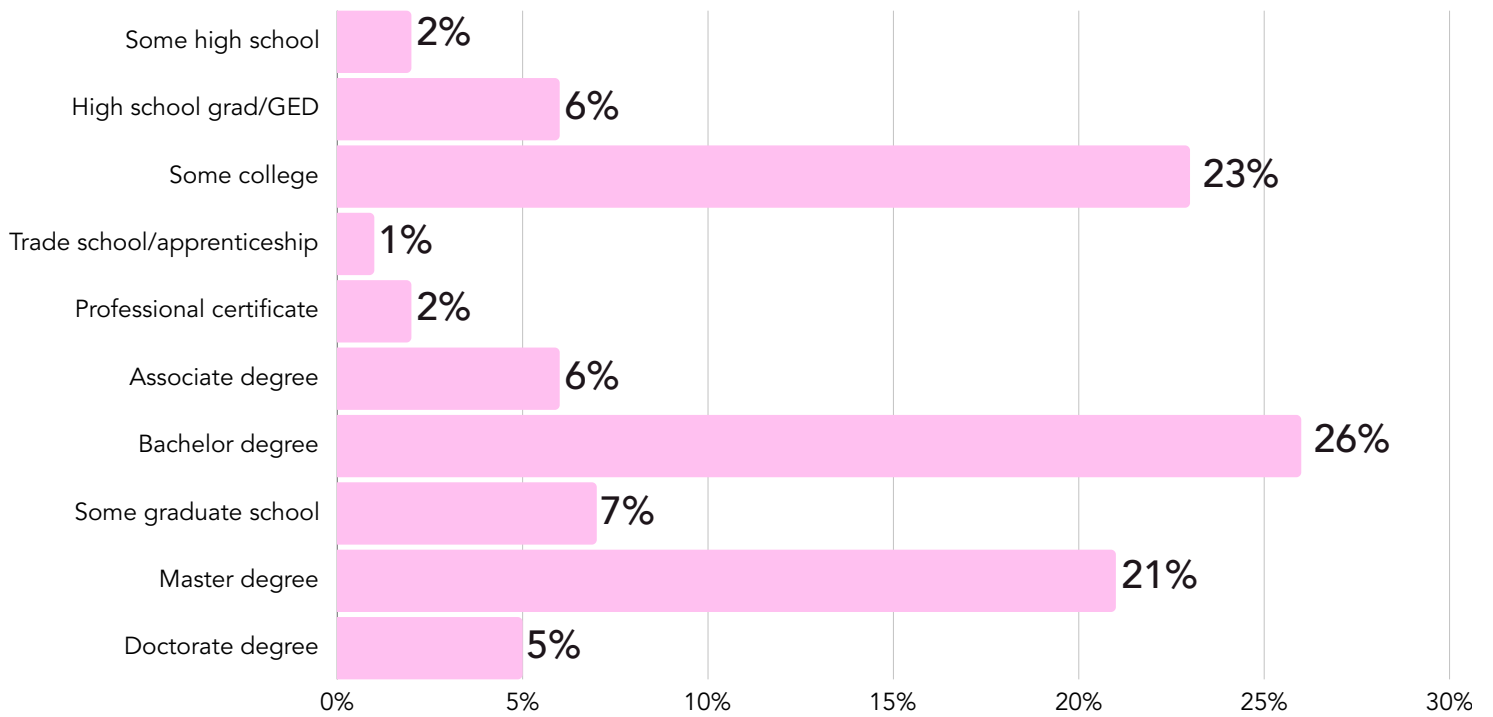
State of Residence



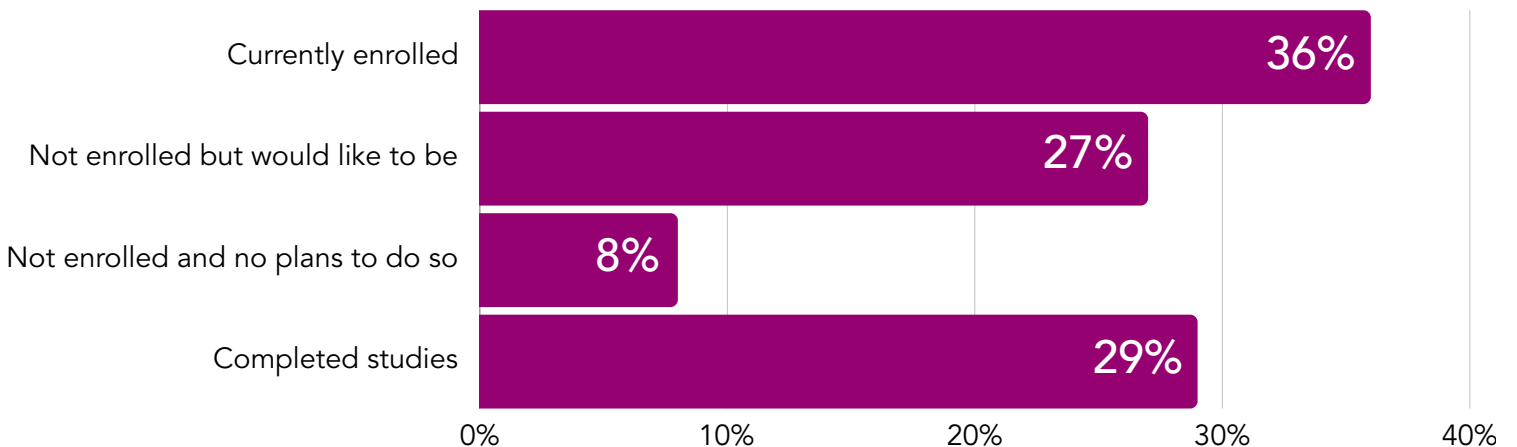
Community Type



Level of Educational Attainment



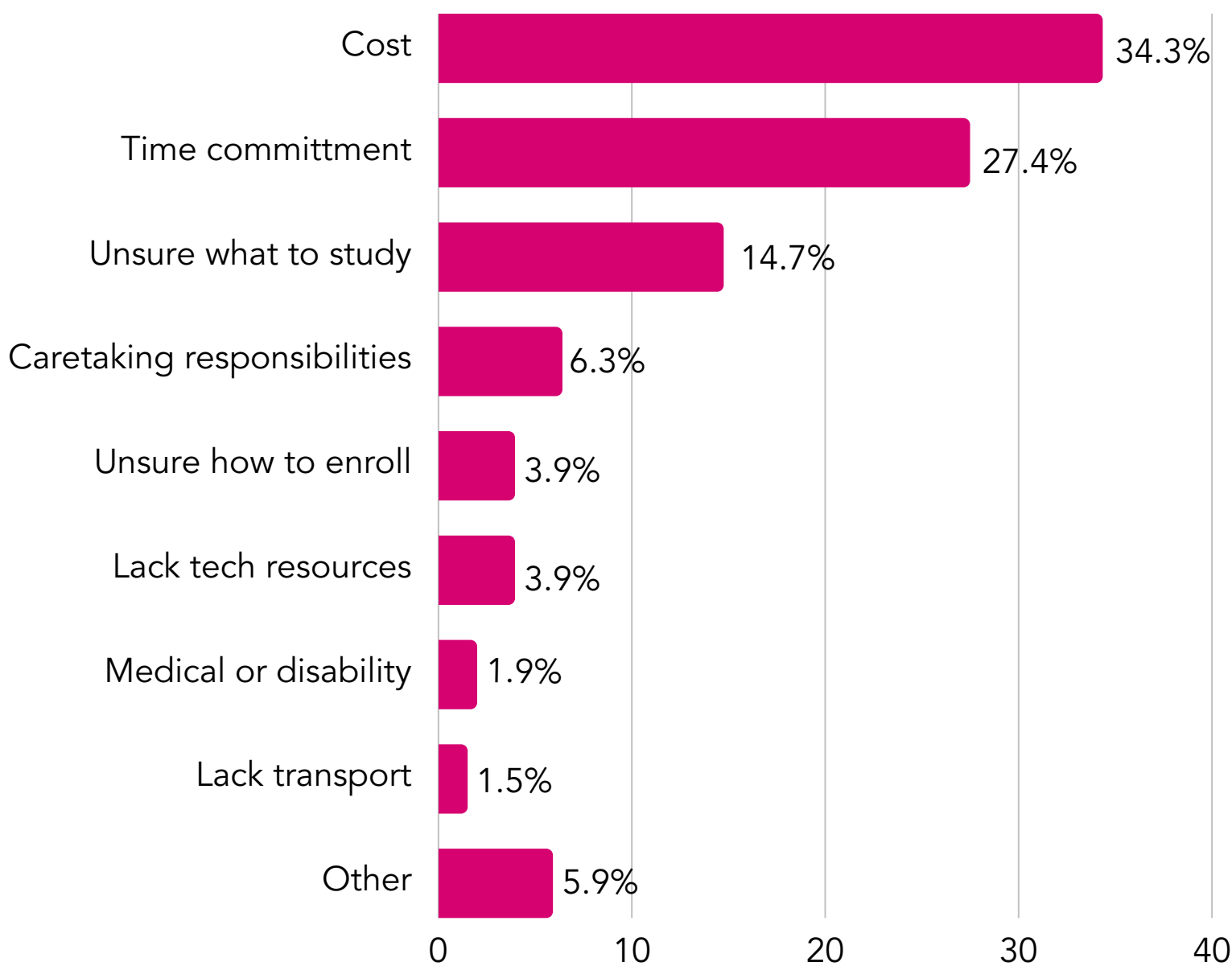
Postsecondary Educational Status



Barriers to accessing postsecondary education for queer people

Question methodology: 204 survey respondents indicated that they would like to be enrolled in post-secondary education but are not currently. This group of respondents was directed to a question providing a list of potential barriers to enrolling in higher education and asked to check all that applied to their situation.

Key findings: Cost and time-commitment were the most often-cited barriers preventing respondents from enrolling in post-secondary education.



Sense of belonging for currently-enrolled queer students

Question methodology: Currently-enrolled students were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") how much they agreed with the following statement: "I see myself as part of the campus community."

Key findings: Queer BIPOC students report feeling a greater sense of belonging on campus than their queer White peers. BIPOC queer students' mean score when reporting campus belonging is 11% higher than White queer students' mean.

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	125	2.78	0.9344
White respondents	105	2.704	0.9699
BIPOC respondents	27	3.037	0.7061
Urban respondents	88	2.6818	0.9534
Rural respondents	37	2.9729	0.8656
Cisgender respondents	71	2.93	0.8836
Gender-expansive respondents	61	2.672	0.9613

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	-2.0064	0.04982	
Urban vs. rural	-1.665	0.1001	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	1.5922	0.1139	

Career readiness for current queer students

Question methodology: Currently-enrolled students were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") "how well do you feel your education is preparing you for a career?"

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	139	3.41	0.668
White respondents	108	3.435	0.674
BIPOC respondents	22	3.5	0.964
Urban respondents	89	3.449	0.64
Rural respondents	40	3.325	0.73
Cisgender respondents	66	3.227	0.941
Gender-expansive respondents	62	3.371	0.683

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	-0.301	0.766	
Urban vs. rural	0.93	0.3559	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	-0.993	0.3229	

Campus climate for former queer students

Question methodology: Respondents who indicated they had completed their studies were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") how much they agreed with the following statement: "My campus climate was welcoming to LGBTQ+ people."

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	129	2.853	0.876
White respondents	109	2.8716	0.8399
BIPOC respondents	27	2.8148	0.9623
Urban respondents	104	2.8077	0.8822
Rural respondents	22	3	0.8729
Cisgender respondents	88	2.9204	0.8335
Gender-expansive respondents	51	2.7647	2.7647

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	0.28104	0.7803	
Urban vs. rural	-0.93709	0.356	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	0.98847	0.3254	

Academics and career readiness for former students

Question methodology: Respondents who indicated they had completed their studies were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") how much they agreed with the following statement: "My classes/academic activities at college prepared me to succeed in my chosen profession."

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	138	3.1811	0.8036
White respondents	121	3.1818	0.8165
BIPOC respondents	28	2.7857	1.1007
Urban respondents	111	3.1892	0.7922
Rural respondents	27	2.8519	1.0635
Cisgender respondents	90	3.2111	0.7716
Gender-expansive respondents	52	3.0192	0.918

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	0.8804	0.06868	
Urban vs. rural	1.5471	0.1313	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	1.2701	0.2072	

Extracurricular activities and career readiness for former students

Question methodology: Respondents who indicated they had completed their studies were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") how much they agreed with the following statement: "Non-academic activities (i.e. extra curricular activities, clubs, networking) at college prepared me to succeed in my chosen profession."

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	129	2.7597	0.9825
White respondents	109	2.7706	1.0058
BIPOC respondents	28	2.4286	0.9595
Urban respondents	102	2.8235	0.9378
Rural respondents	25	2.8	1.0801
Cisgender respondents	88	2.9659	0.8899
Gender-expansive respondents	50	2.5	1.0926

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	1.6659	0.1029	
Urban vs. rural	0.10007	0.9209	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	2.5695	0.01191	

Educational satisfaction for queer people

Question methodology: Respondents who indicated they had completed their studies were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") "how satisfied are you with your overall experience at your school?"

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	130	3.269	0.724
White respondents	110	3.273	0.753
BIPOC respondents	27	3.111	0.641
Urban respondents	90	3.278	0.719
Rural respondents	40	3.25	0.742
Cisgender respondents	75	3.253	0.79
Gender-expansive respondents	62	3.242	0.74

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	1.133	0.263	
Urban vs. rural	0.199	0.843	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	0.087	0.931	

Student debt loads for queer people

Question methodology: Currently and formerly-enrolled students were asked to select a \$20,000 range (i.e. \$20,000 - \$40,000) that best approximates their total student debt load. To estimate mean debt loads, the mid-point of each range was used. So, for example, a respondent reporting between \$20,000 - \$40,000 would have their debt load estimated at \$30,000.

Key finding: Gender-expansive survey respondents reported lower debt loads than their cisgender peers. Gender-expansive respondents on average reported only accruing 56% of the total debt amounts reported by cisgender respondents.

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	198	\$39,123	\$47,069
White respondents	167	\$39,551	\$48,003
BIPOC respondents	42	\$36,363	\$44,195
Urban respondents	145	\$37,778	\$43,186
Rural respondents	54	\$36,825	\$50,315
Cisgender respondents	110	\$48,641	\$55,599
Gender-expansive respondents	97	\$27,652	\$32,641

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	0.47082	0.6389	
Urban vs. rural	0.13522	0.8927	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	3.9423	0.000103	

Concern about student debt impacts for queer people

Question methodology: Currently enrolled students and respondents who indicated they had completed their studies were asked to rank from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") "how much do you worry about the impact your current student debt will have on your future?"

Category	Total responses	Mean score	Standard deviation
All queer respondents	317	3.10	1.00
White respondents	262	3.07	1.01
BIPOC respondents	72	3.26	0.99
Urban respondents	237	3.08	1.02
Rural respondents	75	3.1	0.98
Cisgender respondents	193	3.03	1.05
Gender-expansive respondents	131	3.24	0.86

Testing between respondent groups	Test statistic	p-value	
White vs. BIPOC	-1.4716	0.1439	
Urban vs. rural	-0.16976	0.8655	
Cis vs. gender-expansive	-1.9209	0.05566	

Conclusion and next steps

Key Takeaways

1. Cost is the top barrier preventing LGBTQ+ people in the Upper Midwest from enrolling in postsecondary education. Lack of guidance (both for choosing an area of study and how to enroll in college) was a barrier cited both in SLAY and in the focus groups of rural queer individuals PFund conducted in November 2023.
2. Sense of belonging and campus climate were the areas where SLAY respondents ranked their satisfaction the lowest. Current students report a less welcoming campus climate than queer people who have completed their degrees. BIPOC queer students reported a significantly higher sense of belonging when compared to their White counterparts.
3. Queer people in the Upper Midwest Reported an estimated average student debt of \$39,123. Likert scale questions asked regarding concerns about debt load (for both current and former students) indicate a high degree concern about debt levels across Midwestern queer people in general.

Implications and Recommendations

- We need more scholarships dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ students in our region. In 2023, PFund was only able to provide scholarships to 20% of queer students who applied. Increasing the amount of scholarships PFund distributes annually will help remove the primary access preventing many talented queer people in the region from pursuing their educational and professional dreams. We also encourage all colleges and universities across the region to create scholarship funds specifically for members of the queer community to help ensure a diverse student body.
- We need more organizations providing queer-specific guidance and resources to help students navigate the high-pressure college admissions process and understand how to enroll in postsecondary education and decide what areas of study are right for them.
- We need our state and local governments to invest in postsecondary education as a public good. Potential initiatives that could be impactful in this area are improved processes for student loan debt forgiveness; increasing funding for state and federal grant programs for low-income students; and free tuition programs at public institutions, such as the ones being piloted through the Minnesota Northstar Promise Scholarship Program and at North Dakota State University and Concordia University.

Future Work for the PFund Research Steering Committee

- Refine SLAY Survey script for future deployments. Review and incorporate findings from the rural focus groups regarding higher education that PFund conducted in November 2023.
- Research potential organizations with a strong research practice with which PFund could partner on future SLAY Surveys.
- Prospect for grantmaking organizations that would potentially financially support future SLAY Surveys.
- Further develop in-progress research best practices policy and methodological style guide to be adopted at the institutional level by PFund.
- Employ SLAY Survey data to help inform questions for future focus groups of queer individuals living in rural communities across the region.
- Determine feasibility and ethical safeguards required to potentially share anonymized future SLAY data sets with researchers interested in building upon PFund's research.