

Designing for Real Inclusion at UTD

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Problem Statement



*"Is this inclusion
really real, or
just for show?"*
– Interviewee 1

- Actions seem to be performative
- Campus systems often lack thoughtful implementation of inclusive practices and inadequately support nonbinary and gender-diverse students
- 28% of nonbinary students do not feel a sense of belonging at UT Dallas from Basic Needs and Experience Survey

Audience Definition

Primary Audience: Nonbinary and Gender-Diverse Gen Z Students

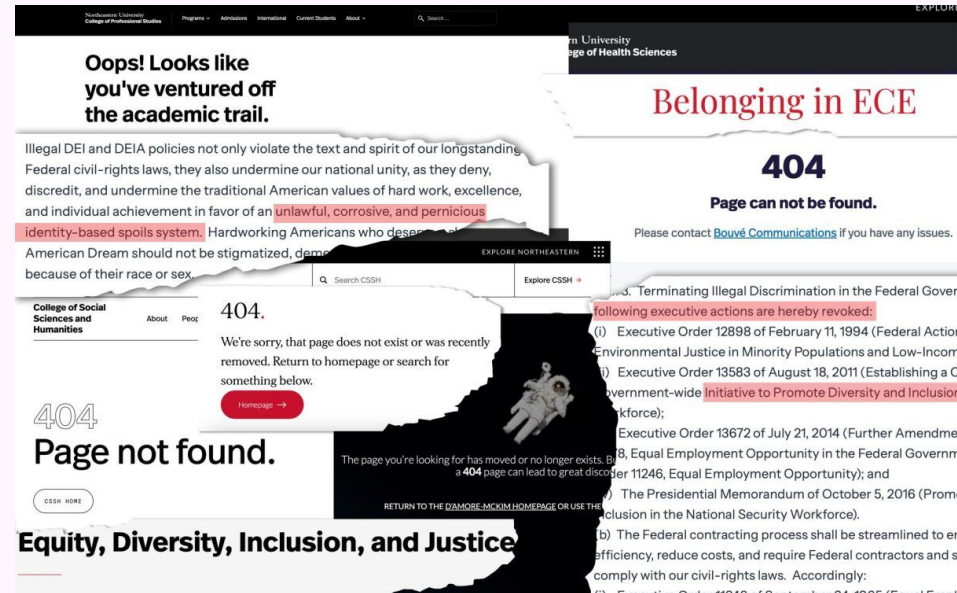
- **Age:** 18–25, primarily undergraduates
- **Gender:** Nonbinary, trans, and gender-diverse identities primarily, but can extend over all genders
- **Location:** Public universities across the U.S., especially UTD
- **Challenges:** Misgendering, hidden or inaccessible support, social exclusion
- **Aspirations:** Visibility, real support from institutions
- **Communication Style:** Digital-first, prefers social media like Discord or email with push notifications

Secondary Audience: Faculty, DEI Staff, and Student Support Services

- **Needs:** Better tools for inclusive communication and student engagement
- **Pain Points:** Lack of feedback from students, outdated event feeds with not that many organizations, gap between policy and usage

Secondary Research & Insights

- DEI centers are being defunded or rebranded, especially in Texas and California (Goldberg, Guevara)
- Faculty and researchers fear backlash and are reducing LGBTQ+ content in teaching and research (Goldberg)
- Institutions and employers are still slow to rollout DEI-friendly policies, especially for those in the nonbinary community (Raphaeli)
- Students still rely on community and word of mouth for resources due to poor promotion or accessibility (multiple sources)



DEI Pages and Resources stripped from university websites

(Jessica Xing, The Huntington News)

Generative Research Summary

■ Interviewees/Friends from UTD, UMN, and ArtCenter shared some of their struggles

- Professors misgender students despite initial pronoun sharing
- Campus events, orgs, or resources (BNRC, LGBTQ+ orgs) are discovered much later or are hard to find and unadvertised
- Legal name still appears in many systems and can trigger dysphoria
- Title IX trainings are skipped over or treated as a checkbox task as professors don't seem very versed
- Some services exist but are located in hard-to-access areas

"Without my friend at BNRC, I wouldn't even know it existed." – Interviewee 2

"My prof asked for pronouns, then just guessed next week." – Interviewee 1

"Professors just stop using pronouns altogether—like they'd rather say nothing than get it right." – Interviewee 3

Final Problem Statement

Nonbinary and gender-diverse students face systemic exclusion, not through outright denial but through institutional neglect; basically, institutions have symbolic gestures without structural follow-through. Despite some existing DEI policies and infrastructure, students continue to experience misgendering, invisible resources, and a lack of support overall from an institution. They mostly rely on each other for support. So our project calls for a solution that embeds genuine support into everyday university life.

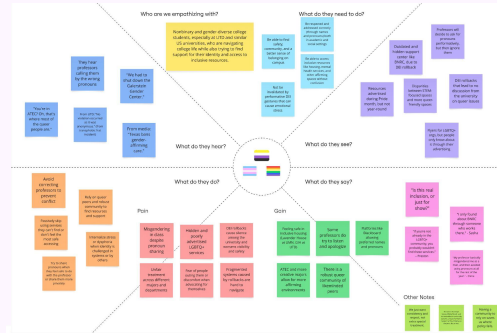
Formative Research Perspectives

■ What I Learned

- Students could feel isolated navigating university systems; unsure how to find support
- Misgendering incidents causes emotional stress and institutions rarely take action
- Existing support services like BNRC or the Gender Center are discovered only through word of mouth

■ How It Shaped My Design

- I was able to find critical intervention points like resource search, event discovery, name change, report form etc.
- Created recommendations that basically account for those pain points



Gender diverse UTD students who struggle to navigate academic life alongside their identity						
Gender diverse UTD students struggle to access LGBTQ+ resources and experience performance inclusion in academic spaces, as they need a curriculum allowing guidance in their support and their research						
Journey Step	Step 1 - Finds information on their own	Step 2 - Finds resources on their own	Step 3 - Downloads the campus inclusion app	Step 4 - Looks for inclusion resources and digital resources	Step 5 - Finds LGBTQ+ resources on the campus inclusion app	Step 6 - Submits feedback on their experience
Action	Gets information on their own	Continues to go to a friend about their experience with professor	Installs and explores platform offering resources recommended to download	Searches for health and mental services on campus	Registers on campus LGBTQ+ resources	Reports misgendering in their research proposal form
Feeling	Frustration, stress	Isolated	Strategic, cautious	Primarily, skeptical, hopeful	Curious	Relieved
Thought	"Why would you call me a trans person if you don't even know I'm trans?"	"It's been a while since this has happened, but I'm not sure if I should even bother trying to correct them."	"Let's see if this app is really helpful."	"I'm sure this is the best way to get the most out of my UTD experience."	"I didn't know how to use the app, but I'm glad I found it."	"The best part is how easy it was to use."
Interaction with designed object (app)	Reads suggestions about the resource app	Continues to go to a friend about their experience with professor	Installs and explores platform offering resources recommended to download	Searches for health and mental services on campus	Registers on campus LGBTQ+ resources	Reports misgendering in their research proposal form

Bio

Jordan is a non-binary student in their junior year at UTD, majoring in Cognitive Science at SDS. As someone who is super passionate about design and equity, they're involved in Pride at UTD and AMP Magazine where they were able to find their home in a supportive user community. One of their main reasons for coming to UTD was their reputation as a more progressive campus in Texas, but they're now a little frustrated with the way UTD has handled their inclusive policies versus what they've experienced.

They've sometimes struggled with being misgendered in class even after sharing their pronouns with professors and have found their camp LGBTQ+ resources to be overly identified or barely accessible unless you're already connected with someone. Jordan disappointedly wrote this letter for UTD and to campus public, as they advocated for more change and more genuine inclusion.

Personality

Thoughtful, Gamer, Driven, Curious, Outspoken

Referents & Influence

LGBTQ+ Peer Community, AMP Magazine, Discord & Online Forums

Scenario

Jordan came to UTD pretty excited to be part of an inclusive and progressive university. In their first year, they joined Pride @ UTD and quickly found a stick-in friends and community to build on. But they've felt like they've been waiting for things to happen, and this sense of waiting didn't necessarily extend into their academic environment. Professors would misgender them, and finding other inclusive events or resources was a big challenge, unless someone told them directly. Inclusive efforts were also often performative, but not provided all the time.

Jordan really wishes there were some type of centralized platform that could make these resources much easier to find, updated, and generally be transparent with them, so that they and others wouldn't have to rely on just the community and others to find them. Real inclusion for Jordan also meant not just policies and posters, but about feeling supported every day.

Motivations

- Look for opportunities to help others in the LGBTQ+ community
- Wants to work on creating a more inclusive and supportive environment
- Actively participates in outreach at the pride club at UTD
- Values when institutions and peers are transparent and accountable

Frustrations

- Professors don't respect or ignore their pronouns sometimes
- Can't update names on official records like their Current Card
- Feels like LGBTQ+ resources are hidden or not accessible
- BNRC and other support spaces feel hidden and disconnected from the rest of campus

Gender diverse UTD students who struggle to navigate academic life alongside their identity						
Gender diverse UTD students struggle to access LGBTQ+ resources and experience performance inclusion in academic spaces, as they need a curriculum allowing guidance in their support and their research						
Journey Step	Step 7 - Updates university records	Step 8 - joins LGBTQ+ resources events	Step 9 - Finds resources on their own	Step 10 - Receives support from the community	Step 11 - Registers new resources in the community	Step 12 - Shares their experience with the community
Action	Follows guide to change name and gender on university systems	Registers in the community event using the app	Searches for resources on their own	Gets support from the community	Registers a new resource in the community	Recommends the app to someone they know
Feeling	Relieved, empowered	Excited	Supported	Informed, welcomed	Contributor	Proud, connected
Thought	"This is a really good step to take in my life."	"This sounds like a really good event to go to."	"The support system in the app is really helpful and easy to use."	"I feel like I'm not alone in this."	"I'm glad to be able to help others in the community."	"This is a great step to take in my life."
Interaction with designed object (app)	Uses the app to change name and gender on university systems	Uses the app to register for the event	Uses the app to find resources	Uses the app to get support	Uses the app to register a new resource	Shares app to word of mouth in the community

Seven Features Overview

Centralized LGBTQ+ Resource Hub

This feature offers a searchable map and list of campus LGBTQ+ resources like the Basic Needs Resource Center, the Student Wellness Center, and mental health services. It would include information like office hours, contact info, and accessibility tips.

Respect & Accountability Feedback System

This feature creates a way to share feedback when your identity (like name or pronouns) isn't respected in academic or campus settings or to report incidents about this. You can submit reports anonymously, and the goal would be to improve communication and foster more affirming environments.

Event Feed with Notifications

This feature lets you get notifications for events from LGBTQ+ organizations or even just regular organizations you're interested in. You'll see a personalized feed of only the events you care about, instead of the cluttered university-wide calendar on the regular UT Dallas app.

Name & Identity Change Guide for Campus Systems

This feature would give you a guide that walks you through how to update your name and pronouns across school platforms like Blackboard/eLearning, ID cards, class rosters, and more. It's designed to make the process simpler and less frustrating to navigate.

Peer Support Chatrooms

This feature would let you join chatrooms and/or connect with others based on shared interests or experiences (e.g., LGBTQ+ in STEM, mental health support, etc.). These spaces are open to verified students and aim to be respectful, safe, and welcoming.

LGBTQ+ Opportunities Feed

This feature allows you to be notified about scholarships, internships, leadership programs, and DEI-aligned jobs curated for LGBTQ+ students. You can also search based on major, location, or identity focus.

Connect with LGBTQ+ Mentors/Support Network

This feature helps you connect with affirming mentors, such as students, alumni, or staff, who understand your experiences. Whether you're looking for advice, emotional support, or career guidance, you'll be matched based on shared identities or interests.

Generative Research Summary

■ Top Features by Value Rating

- LGBTQ+ Opportunities Feed: 8.32
- Name & Identity Change Guide: 8.3
- Centralized Resource Hub: 8.05

■ Usage Gaps

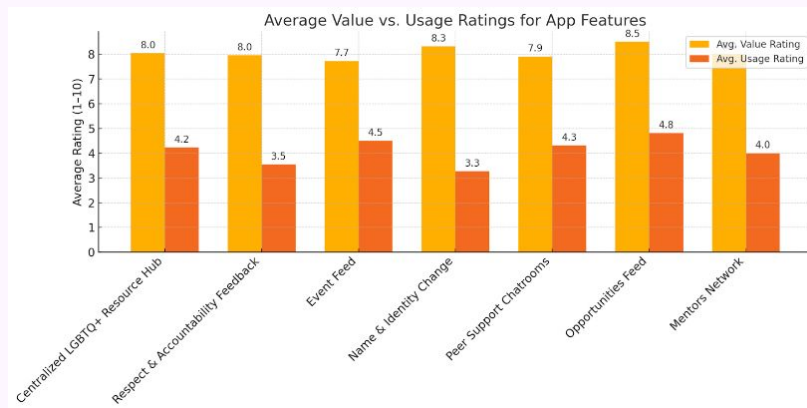
- **Comparatively High Value, Lowest Usage:** Name Change Guide (Value: 8.3, Use: 3.27)
- **Comparatively Low Values, but somewhat High Usage:** Event Feed and Mentors Network have low perceived value, but higher usage than others

■ Identity-Specific Trends

- LGBTQ+ students consistently showed higher intent to use features
- Straight students appreciated the ideas but rarely saw themselves engaging directly

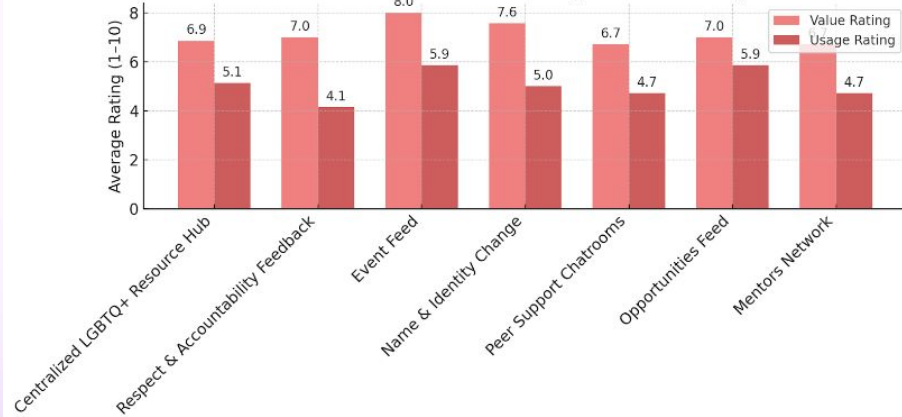
■ Open Response/Qualitative Takeaways

- Someone recommended avoiding labelling like “LGBTQ+ Mentors,” and suggested “Support Network” instead
- App shouldn't feel segregated; it's better if it's a general support tool with LGBTQ+ resources built-in
- To add on, some students found the app's idea isolating: “It's kinda weird like ‘oh if you're gay or trans you should download this app’”

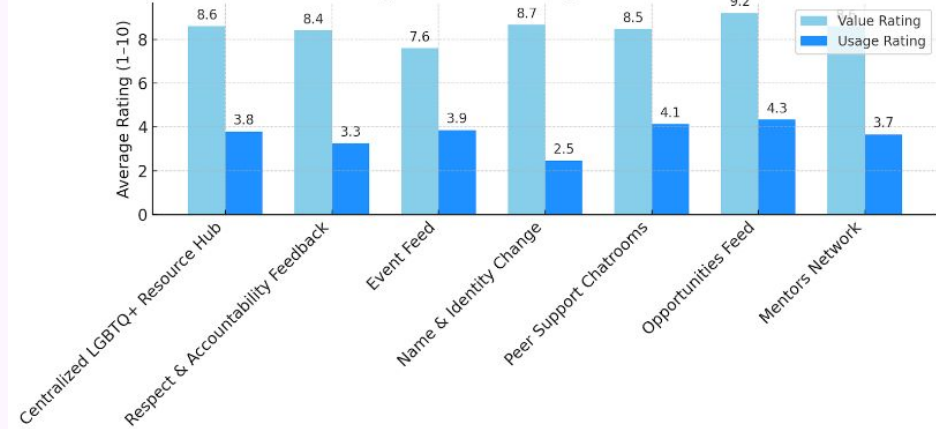


LGBTQ+ vs Straight Value and Features Charts

Non-Straight Students - Avg. Feature Ratings



Straight Students - Avg. Feature Ratings

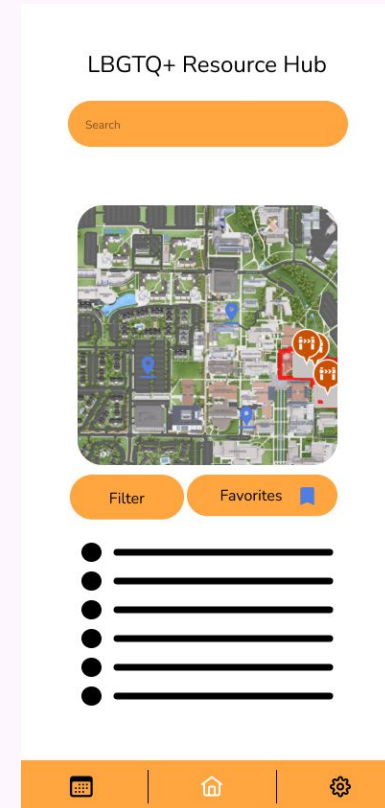


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Recommendations!

Recommendation #1 Centralized LGBTQ+ Resource Hub/Map

- **Purpose:** One-stop access to health services, BNRC, Temoc's Closet, event calendars, office hours, and identity support tools
- **Features**
 - Searchable real time campus map of LGBTQ+ services with pins for BNRC, Gender Center, and other resources
 - Filter by category (health services, community events, support groups/organizations, bathrooms)
 - Real-time updates on events at different places and office hours
 - Pin or bookmark places for students to save what's relevant to them
- **Why It Matters**
 - It helps reduce reliance on "hidden knowledge"
 - Students can navigate services and to events they care about



Recommendation #2: Feedback System + Identity Change Guide

- **Purpose:** Provide an outlet for students to report misgendering or exclusion incidents, and also navigate administrative identity updates without stress
- **Features**
 - Anonymous feedback tool for misgendering and inclusion incidents
 - Step-by-step identity change guide for Comet Card, eLearning, Galaxy portal and other systems
- **Why It Matters**
 - Students avoid reporting due to outing risks
 - Allows students to change their identity without bureaucracy



Have an Issue?

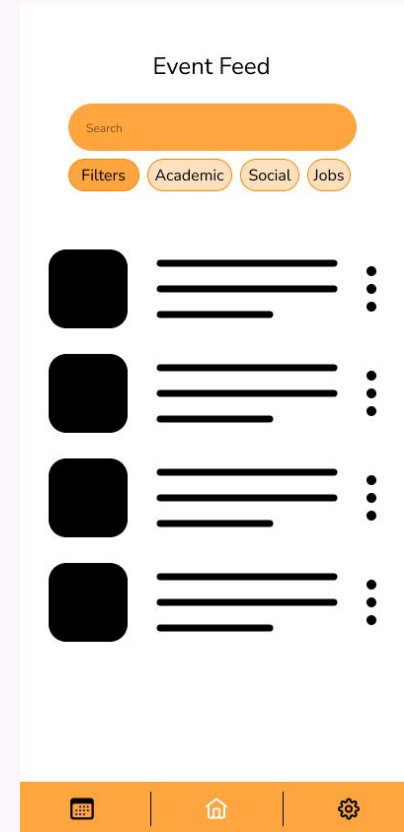
Full Name Email

Subject

Description

Recommendation #3: Event Feed + Opportunities Hub

- **Purpose:** Ensure students never miss events or resources by providing a live, filterable stream of campus happenings and opportunities
- **Features**
 - Feed for LGBTQ+ and other student org events, resource fairs, mental health pop-ups, or opportunities like mentorship/networking opportunities with employers
 - Filter events by type (academic, social, jobs), location, and organization
 - Follow different organizations to get different events
 - Built-in RSVP tool with save/share options for events
 - Integrates with resource map and calendar
- **Why It Matters**
 - Students sometimes mentioned only finding out about events after they happened
 - Allowing students to see a more real time feed of organizations' events would allow them to keep in the loop better especially for important opportunities
 - Search and filter allow for more fine tuning

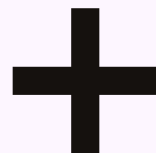


Final Recommendations & Next Steps

- **Recommendation for Building:**
 - An independent, better app than UTDallas
 - Core Features: Resource Map, Feedback + Identity Change Hub, Inclusive Events + Opportunities Feed
- **Next Steps:**
 - **Conduct Usability Testing:** With LGBTQ+ students across majors and identities, but also include regular students
 - **Iterate Based on Feedback:** Update app regularly based on usage and surveys within app
- **Collaboration Plans:**
 - Seek support from UTD CS and or ATEC capstone teams to work on this project potentially
 - Ask different student orgs, especially LGBTQ+ orgs, about interface testing and event input



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Final Remarks

- Nonbinary students want real support, not just symbolic gestures.
- Performative inclusion without real follow through harms students. These systems must be redesigned to reflect student realities and concerns, not just check boxes on policy.
- I believe our recommendations for an app would greatly deliver and improve on these concerns.

Thank you!