Designing for Real Inclusion at UTD

Rajit Goel
ATCM 3336.003

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**
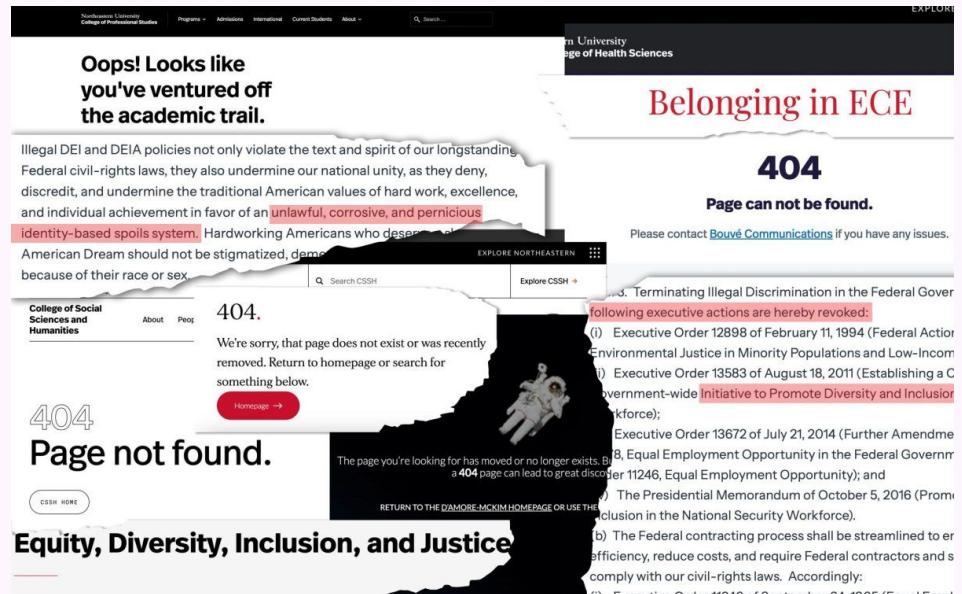
- **Age:** 18–25, primarily undergraduates

- **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- **Pain Points:** Lack of feedback from students, outdated event feeds with not that many organizations, gap between policy and usage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.
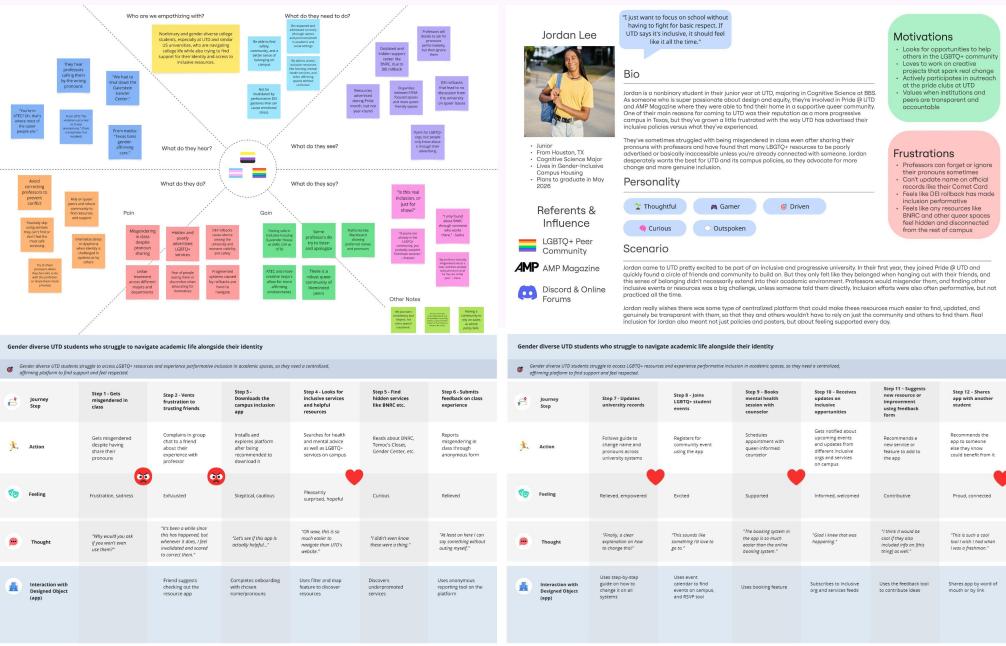
Formative Research Perspectives

- **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

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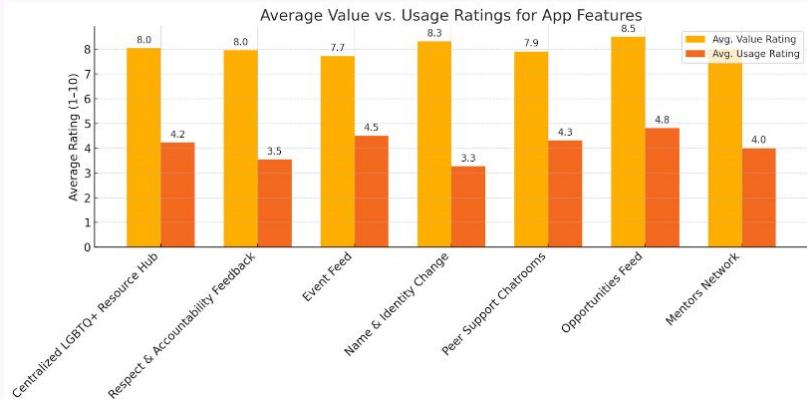
This feature allows you to be notified about scholarships, internships, leadership programs, and DEI-aligned jobs curated for LGBTQ+ students. You can also search based on major, location, or identity focus.

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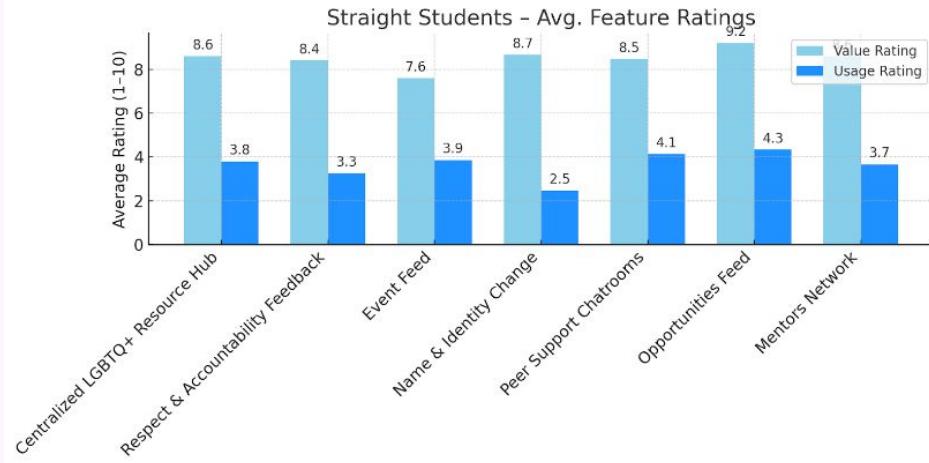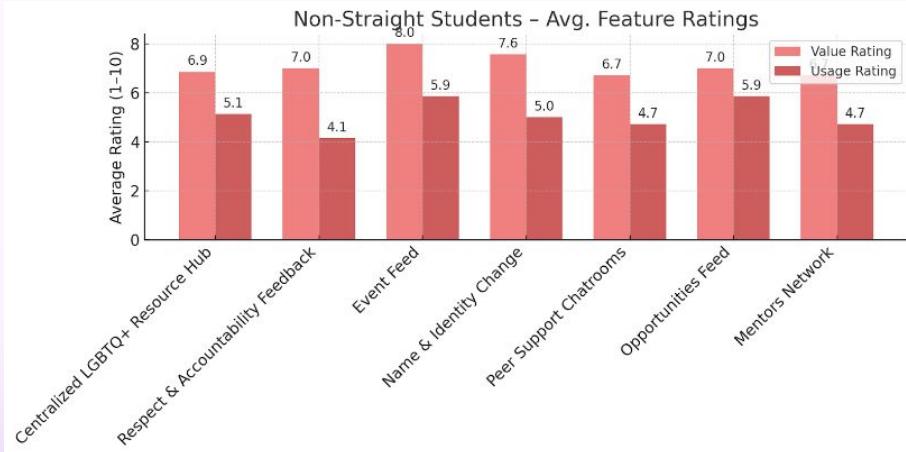
This feature helps you connect with affirming mentors, such as students, alumni, or staff, who understand your experiences. Whether you're looking for advice, emotional support, or career guidance, you'll be matched based on shared identities or interests.

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'"

Average Value vs. Usage Ratings for App Features

Legend: Avg. Value Rating, Avg. Usage Rating

Feature	Avg. Value Rating	Avg. Usage Rating
Centralized LGBTQ+ Resource Hub	8.0	4.2
Respect & Accountability Feedback	8.0	3.5
Event Feed	7.7	4.5
Name & Identity Change	8.3	3.3
Peer Support Chatrooms	7.9	4.3
Opportunities Feed	8.5	4.8
Mentors Network	—	4.0
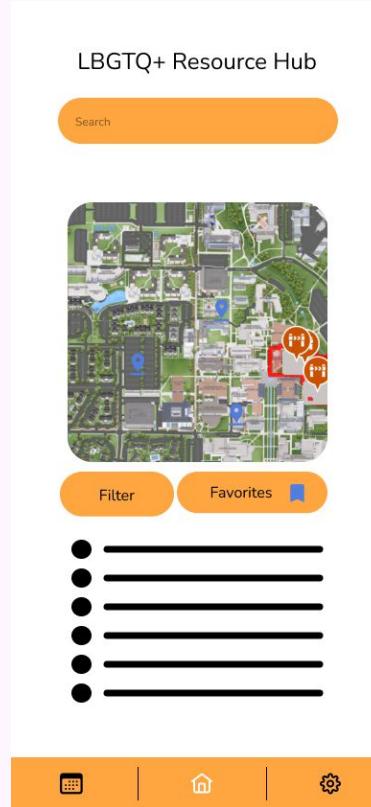
LGBTQ+ vs Straight Value and Features Charts

Non-Straight Students – Avg. Feature Ratings

Average Rating (1–10)

Value Rating / Usage Rating

- Centralized LGBTQ+ Resource Hub: 6.9 / 5.1
- Respect & Accountability Feedback: 7.0 / 4.1
- Event Feed: 8.0 / 5.9
- Name & Identity Change: 7.6 / 5.0
- Peer Support Chatrooms: 6.7 / 4.7
- Opportunities Feed: 7.0 / 5.9
- Mentors Network: 4.7

Straight Students – Avg. Feature Ratings

Average Rating (1–10)

Value Rating / Usage Rating

- Centralized LGBTQ+ Resource Hub: 8.6 / 3.8
- Respect & Accountability Feedback: 8.4 / 3.3
- Event Feed: 7.6 / 3.9
- Name & Identity Change: 8.7 / 2.5
- Peer Support Chatrooms: 8.5 / 4.1
- Opportunities Feed: 9.2 / 4.3
- Mentors Network: 3.7

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

LBGTQ+ Resource Hub

Search

Filter   Favorites

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?
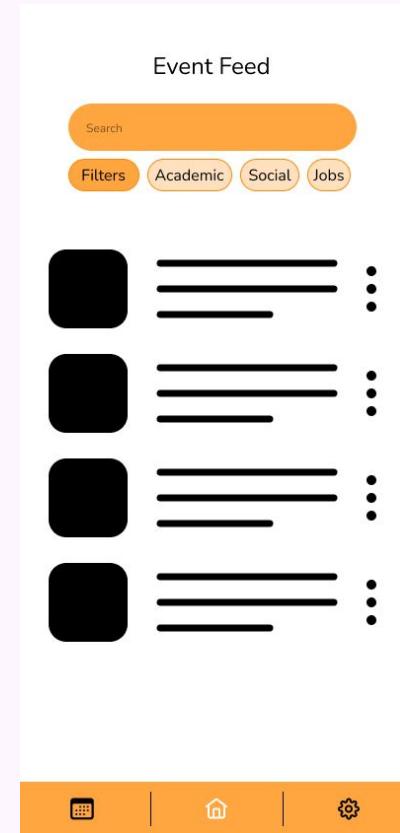
Full Name

Email

Subject

Description

Submit Report
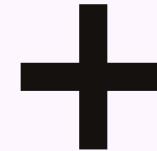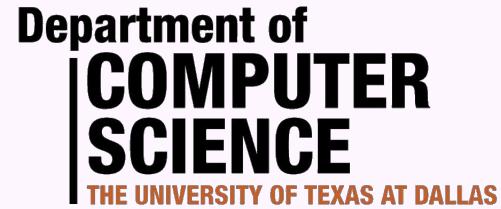
Recommendation #3: Event Feed + Opportunities Hub

- **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 LBGTQ+ orgs, about interface testing and event input

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!