**Overview:**

We studied the differences between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students in their feelings of academic success, mental health, and sense of belonging on campus. We further related these three factors to tangible outcomes desirable for universities, such as the confidence students have in finishing their degrees. Our analysis accounts for a multitude of genders and sexual orientations to more fully understand the diverse experiences of the queer student community.

**Stakeholders:** US Colleges and universities

**Data:** Survey data from the Healthy Minds Study for the year 2019-2020: respondents are 90,000 students from 69 colleges and universities in the US

**Approach**

We built a set of dynamic dashboards in Tableau to analyze trends in the data; when relevant, dashboards include a parameter that switches between grouping by sexual orientation or by gender. In this way, we identified questions in the survey which reveal key disparities and highlight student experiences. Of particular interest is the granularity with which our method allowed us to study subgroups of the queer community.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Students who have a stronger sense of group and campus belonging are more likely to choose their school again and finish their degree. Students at schools that prioritize mental health are more likely to finish their degree. LGBTQ+ students report that personal struggles affect their academic performance and outcomes. LGBTQ+ students have different experiences on campus in terms of trauma witnessed, sense of belonging, and sense of community. Experiences vary dramatically within the LGBTQ+ community by both sexual orientation and especially by gender identity.

Our analysis demonstrates differences in shared experiences between different demographic groups in order to quantify the needs of students. Identifying the needs of underrepresented groups is a critical step to help institutions identify resources and initiatives to help improve their academic performance and mental health. Results can inform both policy and practice at colleges and universities. Increasing availability and access to resources of underrepresented groups also benefits these institutions by reducing student risk on campus, improving academic performance, and increasing student retention rates. Documenting student performance and experience can help universities make decisions about resource allocation, such as providing additional mental health resources for students and prioritizing opportunities for underrepresented groups to foster their sense of campus belonging.

**Future work**

Future work will include analysis of additional survey years. The Healthy Minds Study (HMS) has run annually since 2005, with data currently available through the 2021 academic year. Because survey questions vary from year to year, we will first write additional data cleaning and transformation algorithms. In particular, that the 2021-2022 HMS survey allows respondents to select multiple gender identities and sexualities – which more accurately captures the lived experiences of queer people – necessitates more nuanced data cleaning. At the same time, the greater granularity will allow for more precise conclusions. The results of our current project highlight both patterns and variety in the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, and subsequent analyses will better inform targeted and effective institutional policy.