

The University of Tennessee-Knoxville has made significant strides in serving the LGBTQ+ community over the last several years, increasing the University's Campus Pride Index from a 2/5 to a 4/5 over the last year.¹ Unfortunately, a recent Princeton Review² ranked UTK as the unfriendliest campus for the LGBTQ+ community.³ We acknowledge that the information from this review predates some of the efforts undertaken by the current administration to improve the climate and student experience for this demographic on our campus. However, we must also consider that the Campus Pride Index has identified areas of opportunities for the University to improve the campus climate that have yet to be addressed. These areas of opportunity include access to safe and affordable housing for students, as well as spaces to foster community among all LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty. Another area of opportunity identified by the Campus Pride Index is access to counseling and health resources. The following resolution outlines some of the issues still faced by the LGBTQ+ community on the UTK campus and strategies we urge the administration to adopt to circumvent negative student experiences and improve the campus experience of all Volunteers.

Resolution to Support Housing and Counseling Services for the LGBTQ+ Community on the UTK Campus

WHEREAS, the latest Campus Pride Index suggests that the University of Tennessee needs to improve access to safe, affordable housing and counseling service to members of the LGBTQ+ community;⁴ and,

WHEREAS, Princeton Review, a resource used by college-bound students across the country has designated, for the fifteenth year in a row, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville as one of the unfriendliest campus for LGBTQ+ students (the 2022 ranking named UTK the unfriendliest, ahead of universities such as Brigham Young University and the University of the Ozarks);⁵ and,

WHEREAS, a 2018 resolution from the UT Student Government Association urged University administrators at the time to address the issue of gender inclusive housing, outlining the difficulties this community faces with the housing options offered at the time, and specifically requesting that UT Housing designate a section of a residence hall as a Living and Learning Community for LGBTQIA+ students;⁶ and,

¹ <https://www.campusprideindex.org/campuses/details/197?campus=university-of-tennessee>

² Princeton Review relies on student surveys rather than statistical data supplied by academic institutions.

³ <https://www.wbir.com/article/news/education/ut-most-lgbtqia-unfriendly-university/51-9e1231c8-bb40-40ae-b9b4-0e22c1d609d5>

⁴ Since the original draft of this resolution, the Executive Director of University Housing, Dr. Anthony White, has informed the FS Diversity and Inclusion Committee that in the Fall 2022, 60 rooms have been set aside for gender inclusive housing, but they were unable to fill all 60, so they have had to condense this number to better serve students. Due to the sensitive nature of the community, the vacancies remain unfilled.

⁵ <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings?rankings=lgbtq-unfriendly>

⁶ <https://sga.utk.edu/sen-23-2018-a-bill-to-establish-a-lgbtqia-living-and-learning-community/>

WHEREAS, as of January 2022, at least 425 colleges and universities throughout the United States offer gender-inclusive housing options, including several SEC peers such as University of Kentucky, Florida State University, Georgia State University, Indiana University, and the University of Texas (several campuses, including main campus in Austin),⁷ and others, several formally establishing Learning and Living Communities for these students;⁸ and,

WHEREAS, access to specialized resources and services offered LGBTQ+ students should be extended for the purposes of the recruitment and retention of an emotionally-healthy and diverse student populace;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the UTK Faculty Senate strongly urges the Chancellor and Provost to work with UT Housing in their effort to further develop affordable and safe housing options for the LGBTQ+ community as they address the larger issue of adequate housing for students on campus; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that specific information regarding current, gender-inclusive housing options (including, but not limited to, the cost and specific living arrangements for existing gender inclusive housing) be made publicly available on the UT Housing website for consideration by prospective students from the LGBTQ+ community;⁹ and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UTK Faculty Senate urges UT Housing to work with the Commission of LGBTQ+ and students from the UT LGBTQ+ community to develop a Living and Learning Community that is gender inclusive and offers safe spaces and resources for all LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and faculty; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UTK Faculty Senate urges representatives from campus leadership to attend community Pride events to demonstrate their support for this demographic; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UTK Faculty Senate urges the campus administration to provide counseling services on the UTK campus in a centralized location that may be accessed by students; and, where the counseling staff is trained and has experience working with diverse populations, particularly those of the LGBTQ+ community.

November 20, 2018 (what the SGA asked for... four years ago)

<https://sga.utk.edu/sen-23-2018-a-bill-to-establish-a-lgbtqia-living-and-learning-community/>

<https://sites.utexas.edu/queerandtransvoices/2022/02/deep-dive-going-to-the-mattresses-for-gender-inclusive-housing/>

⁷ <https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/gender-inclusive-housing/>

⁸ The purpose of the designated community is for members to provide peer support and educate the campus community through programming and social initiatives that increase awareness about gender identity.

⁹ See example from Purdue University's Gender Inclusive Living Community, <https://www.housing.purdue.edu/my-housing/options/special-housing/gender-inclusive.html> .