



What can you expect from your college experience as a trans-spectrum/queer person?

The truth is, it depends. It depends on your college, your major, your roommate, your RA, your friends, your parents, and it depends on you. Surprisingly, RIT has an unusually high number of trans-spectrum (including nonbinary) students compared to other universities.

Why? Well, we'd like to think it's because we have been working so hard at making RIT a trans-inclusive, safe and welcoming place. But honestly, we have no idea. We just celebrate the reality that we have no less than seven queer student clubs and organizations, an LGBTQIA+ resource center and staff, gender-inclusive housing, an easy name change process, loads of cultural competency trainings for our employees and students, a trans health team, trans-inclusive athletics, club sports, and intramural policies, a queer and intersectional lending library, queer spaces, and queer coursework for students to access as needed. All of that is terrific, but we're never satisfied. Each year we continue to learn and improve our services and skills.

So why do I say your experience depends on you? The literature on student success is crammed with support for the idea that the more students engage in things outside the classroom (within reason), the better they do at staying in school and on track for graduation. I sneaked in "within reason" because I have seen students get overinvolved and overwhelmed by their co-curricular commitments.

This is especially true for the students who have trouble asking for help or working in partnership with a team that exists to share the load.

So, what is engagement? Engagement simply means getting involved on campus in things outside the classroom. Whether it's a job, clubs, events, becoming an RA, or visiting resources spaces (the Q Center, the MOSAIC Center, OUTspoken's office, the Deaf/Hard of hearing ASL space in the Wallace Center, the Writing Center, or any number of other spaces, these experiences help shape your perspective on campus life and how you can use out-of-classroom experiences to build your social network, skills, and self-confidence.

The other reason it depends on you is that you bring your own combination of assets, needs, and curiosity. One of the things to focus on in your first year is finding and using the resources around you. Some people, for example, think that counseling is for other people. Instead, think of counseling as "me time" that you use to increase your self-awareness and sort out your priorities, identity questions, relationship issues, mental health issues, and feelings of depression or isolation.

The first year is hard. You might look around and think everyone but you is doing fine. That's not true. Everyone struggles at some point. The trick is to face the struggle without putting off acting on it. When you are trying, people will help you—if you ask, especially if you don't wait until it's late in the semester.



At RIT, we pride ourselves on the resources we make available to students, and our entrepreneurial way of handling student needs, questions, and concerns. If something is needed and doesn't exist, we try to find a way to build it. If a process (like name changes) doesn't work for some people, we change it. Sometimes it takes a while, but we are persistent. Sometimes we have to admit that, at least in the short term, there is no perfect fix.

The important thing is that sometimes we need a student to tell us that things aren't working for them so we can work together to find a solution. Sometimes you, as a student, need to think critically and ask questions in order to inform a change process or find resources that already exist. Learning to advocate for yourself is an important part of "adulthood" and something we want you to learn to do effectively while you are here.

As a student, you have more power than you realize but you have to actually use it or you lose it. Now, that doesn't mean you go around abusing that power but it means you can get the resources you need if you are persistent and learn to navigate the systems in place. And we are here to show you how.

What questions do you have? Send them to qcenter@rit.edu and we'll try to help.

Dr. Christopher Hinesley

Assistant Director for Campus Life – The Q Center
Co-director, Women's and Gender Studies
chhgs@rit.edu

