



## Students & Sensitive Issues: Disclosing Sexual Orientation and Transgenderism

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- ◆ Tufts University
  - ◆ Private
  - ◆ Non-sectarian
  - ◆ RUVH Carnegie Classification
  - ◆ About 5,000 undergraduates + 5,000 graduate students
  - ◆ Located just outside Boston, MA

# Background

- ◆ Senior Survey
  - ◆ Web-based survey administered annually to entire senior class during the 4 weeks prior to commencement
  - ◆ Many individuals on campus have a part in the development of the survey & items
  - ◆ Student ID used as unique identifier
  - ◆ Given contact information for whom to contact in case of questions or technical difficulties
  - ◆ Historically, respondents have reacted to the race/ethnicity item negatively

## Background

- ◆ LGBT Center Director asked that sexual orientation and transgender items be added to our Class of 2006 Senior Survey
- ◆ We agreed, but were concerned
- ◆ Searched literature for how students tend to react to these types of requests, but not much available initially
- ◆ Administered a survey to IR and LGBT professionals to learn about their experiences collecting this info
- ◆ Compared 2006 Senior Survey results to two anonymous surveys at Tufts from the past two years that collected transgender info

## Existing Literature

- ◆ Estimating the size of the LGBT population is complicated & accuracy is questionable
  - ◆ Kinsey reports (1948 & 1953) – 10% of general population
    - ◆ Sampled from prisons & reform schools – biased
    - ◆ Estimates based on behavior not self-identification
  - ◆ Others – anywhere from 2-10% of general population
    - ◆ Samples also biased
  - ◆ Higher Education Campus Climate Surveys – from 3.5% - 8%

## Existing Literature

- ◆ University of Minnesota 2002
  - ◆ 41.5% of Campus Climate Survey respondents indicated they did not disclose their sexual orientation on campus
- ◆ LGBT individuals constantly have dilemma of whether to disclose

## Existing Literature

- ◆ Dangers of disclosing are real & include:
  - ◆ Violence, harassment, discrimination, infringement on human/civil rights
  - ◆ Not being accepted to/dismissed from college, grad school, residency programs
  - ◆ Inability to serve in U.S. Military
  - ◆ Exclusion from involvement with Boy Scouts
  - ◆ Losing job
  - ◆ Until recently, being anything other than heterosexual was considered a mental disorder

## Existing Literature

- ◆ In recent years, stigma of homosexuality and transgenderism seems to have lessened
  - ◆ TV shows, movies, & media have shown that gay people are not necessarily “twisted & deviant”
  - ◆ Between 1993 & 2001 the percentage of LGBT respondents to Campus Climate Surveys who experienced discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation decreased dramatically



## Existing Literature

- ◆ Massachusetts has been progressive & at forefront of movement towards acceptance
  - ◆ Governor William Weld (1991-97) created:
    - ◆ Commission on Gay & Lesbian Youth to combat high frequency of suicide among homosexual youth
    - ◆ Making Schools Safe for Gay & Lesbian Youth manifesto – a set of recommendations implemented in every school district state-wide
  - ◆ Massachusetts is the first and only state to allow same-sex marriage

## Purpose of study

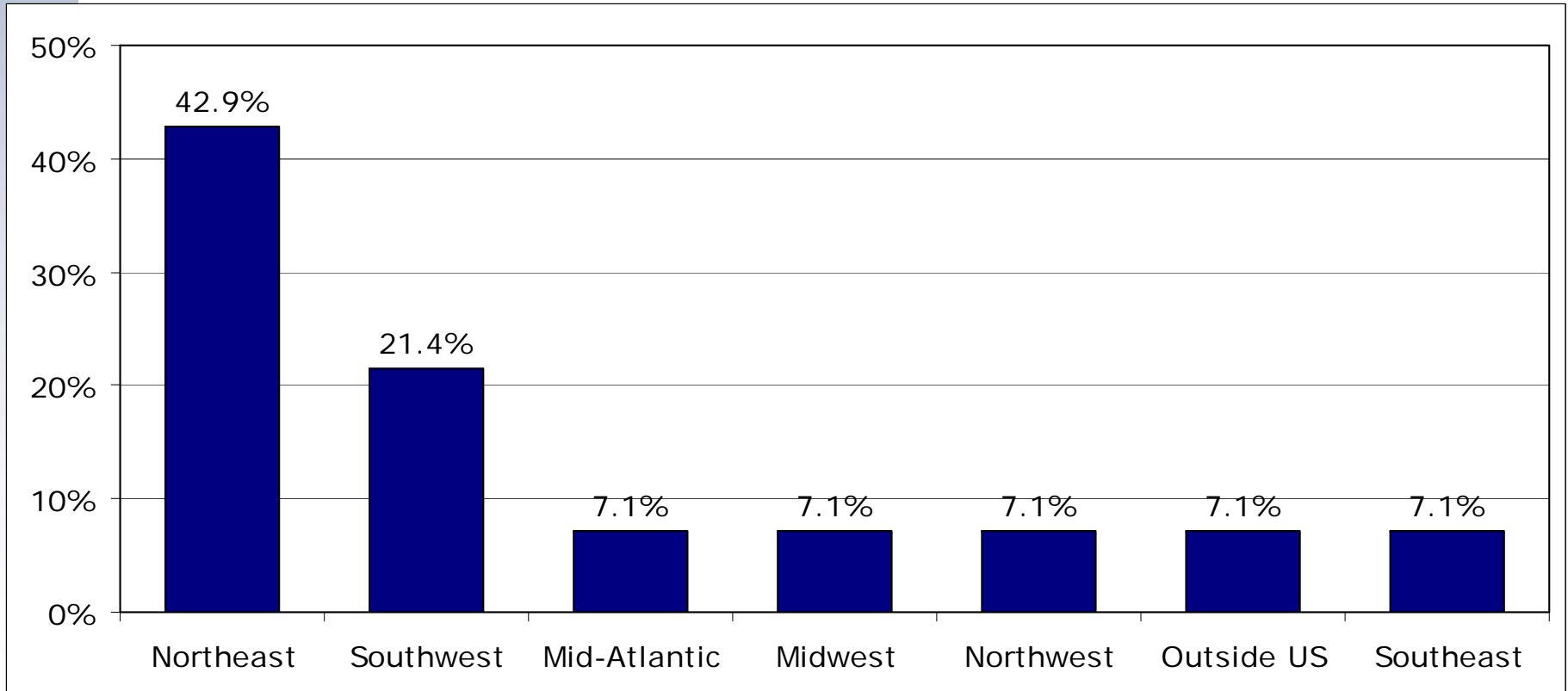
- ◆ Despite developments in mainstream acceptance of the LGBT population, would students be unwilling to respond honestly?
- ◆ Would students react negatively to requests?
- ◆ Do other institutions collect LGBT data, and if so, what have their experiences been?

## Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ Who responded to our survey?
  - ◆ N=175
  - ◆ They represent:
    - ◆ 39 of the 50 states
    - ◆ 6 of the 13 Canadian provinces
    - ◆ Wide variety of institutional types
    - ◆ 86% IR & 14% LGBT
- ◆ Of those who responded to our survey, how many institutions are collecting sexual orientation information?
  - ◆ 8.0% (N=14)

# Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ Where are these institutions located?



## Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

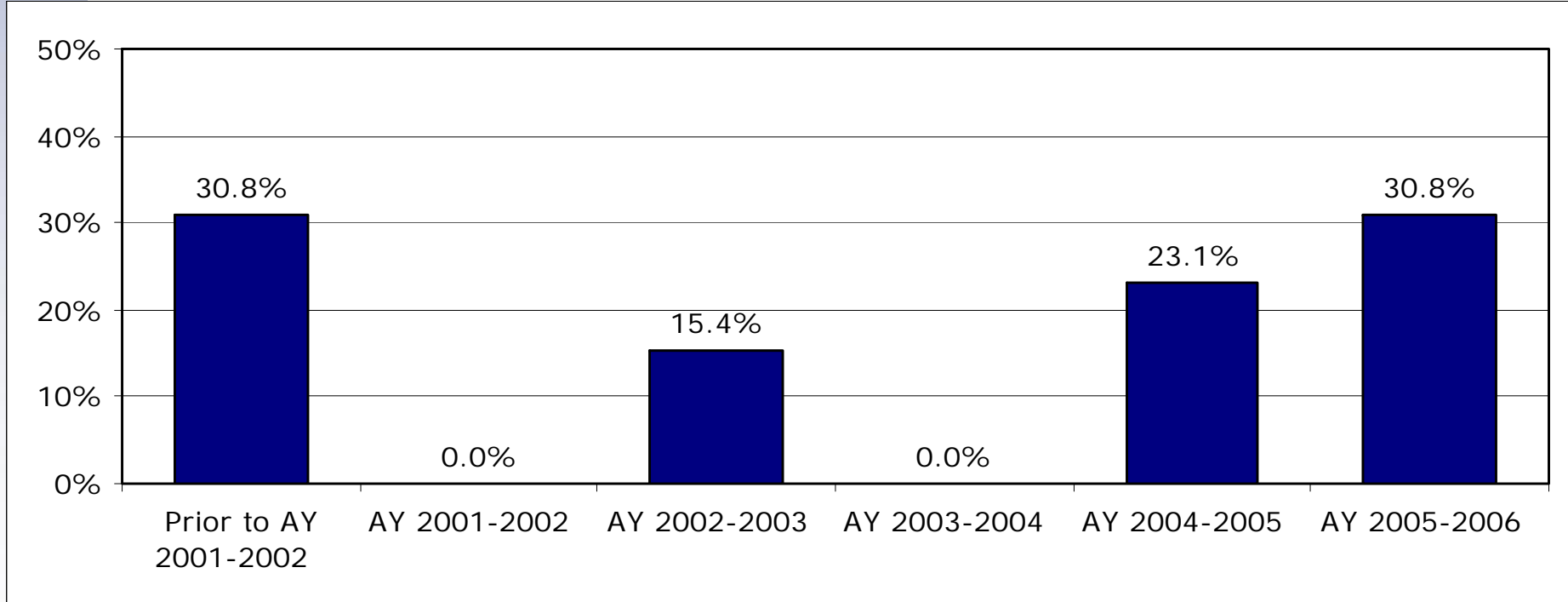
- ◆ Who do they ask to disclose sexual orientation & transgender information?
  - ◆ 100% - Students
  - ◆ 44.4% - Administrators
  - ◆ 44.4% - Staff
  - ◆ 37.5% - Faculty

# Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ How do they collect this information?
  - ◆ Surveys
    - ◆ Admissions
    - ◆ Health-related
    - ◆ Social life/campus climate
    - ◆ Employee
    - ◆ All surveys
  - ◆ Offices/Centers on campus
    - ◆ Health Services
    - ◆ LGBT Center

# Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ When did they start collecting?



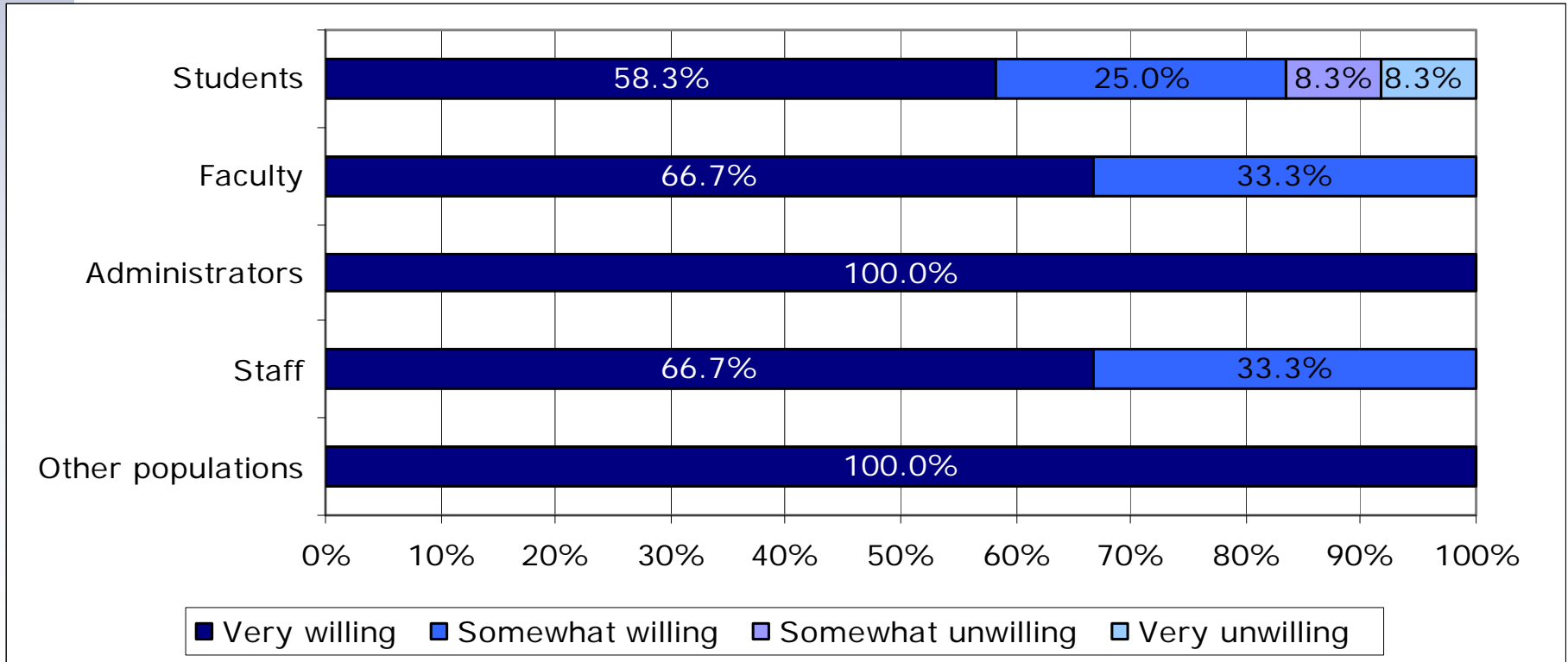
## Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ Why do they collect?
  - ◆ To breakout results by sexual orientation
  - ◆ To identify issues needing to be addressed
  - ◆ To gauge the need for an LGBT Center/Office
  - ◆ To validate those with underrepresented sexual orientations



# Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

## ◆ How willing are people to disclose?

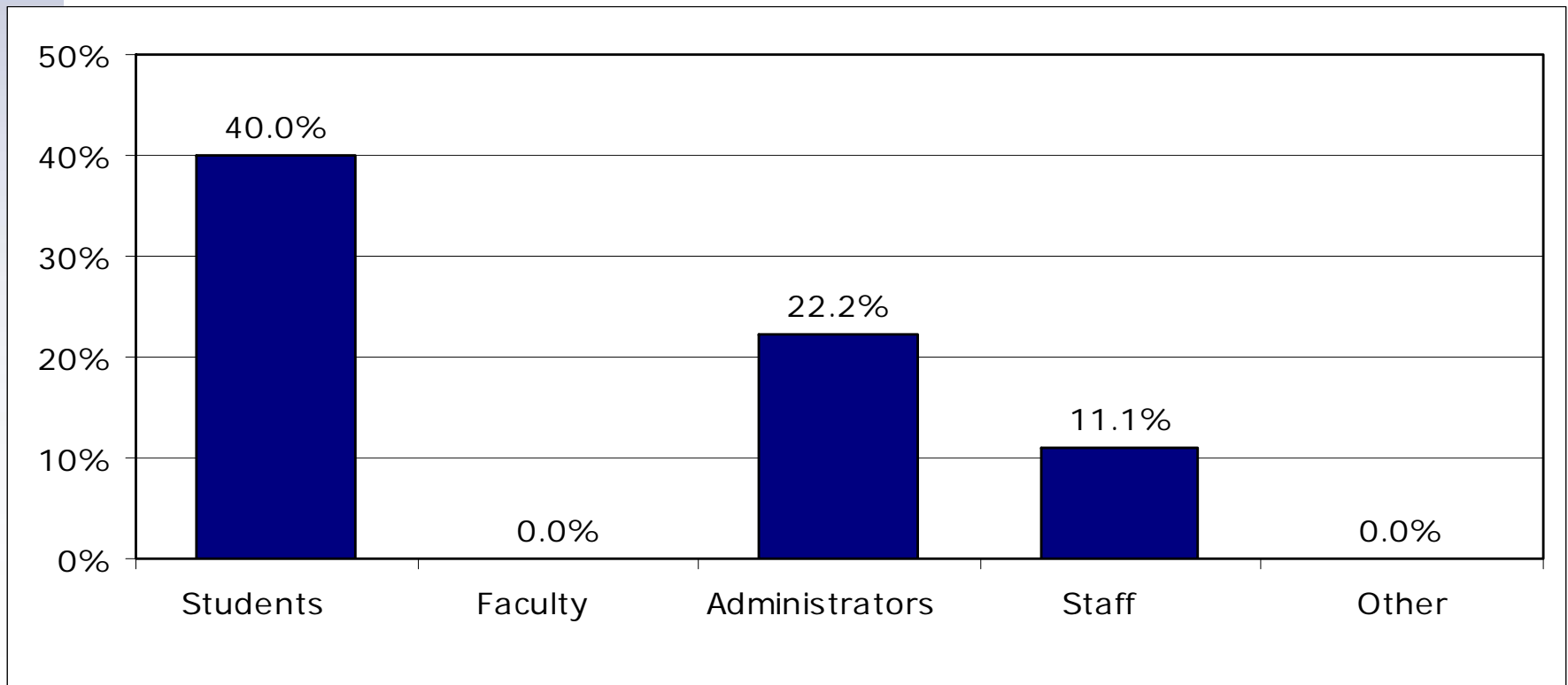


## Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ How do you know if people are willing to disclose?
  - ◆ Low non-response to items requesting the information
  - ◆ Reminded of their right not to respond
  - ◆ Assured of anonymity/confidentiality
  - ◆ Responding to the item is considered being willing
  - ◆ Having a supportive/accepting campus

# Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ When asked to disclose, do people express concern? If so, who?



# Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ What categories/response options do you provide? (N=11)

	N
Heterosexual/straight	10
Bisexual	8
Unsure and/or Questioning	7
Gay/Lesbian	6
Gay	4
Lesbian	3
Other/Other, please specify:	3
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Transsexual, Intersex, Queer (GLBTTIQ)	1
Prefer not to respond	1

## Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ Problems reported when collecting sexual orientation or transgender information:
  - ◆ Uneasiness with the categories used and/or lack of agreement as to their meaning
  - ◆ Being unable to determine if results are representative of the real LGBT population
  - ◆ Negative reactions to the question by respondents and/or those assigned to administer the survey
  - ◆ Gaining access to the data once collected

## Results of Survey to IR & LGBT professionals

- ◆ Thoughts & problems foreseen for those who collect this kind of information?
  - ◆ Concern about students' privacy
  - ◆ Concern students will not answer honestly
  - ◆ Great potential of info being misused, not being secure, or not being kept confidential
  - ◆ Concern about the amount of missing data, which jeopardizes representativeness
  - ◆ What if student changes identity over time?
  - ◆ How to report to IPEDs & others

# Tufts Senior Survey

- ◆ 85% response rate
- ◆ No complaints came in via phone or email
- ◆ Low non-response to sexual orientation and gender/transgender items (about the same as nearby non-sensitive items, much less than race/ethnicity)
- ◆ Less of a negative response to sexual orientation and gender/transgender items than to race/ethnicity

# Tufts Senior Survey

- ◆ “Other, please specify” responses needed to be recoded:
  - ◆ Written responses in “Other, please specify” often are the same/similar to response options that were provided. We read through them and recode them as necessary.
  - ◆ Those providing a written response for “Other, please specify” often do not actually select the button/box for that response. We read through the valid written responses and recode them as necessary.

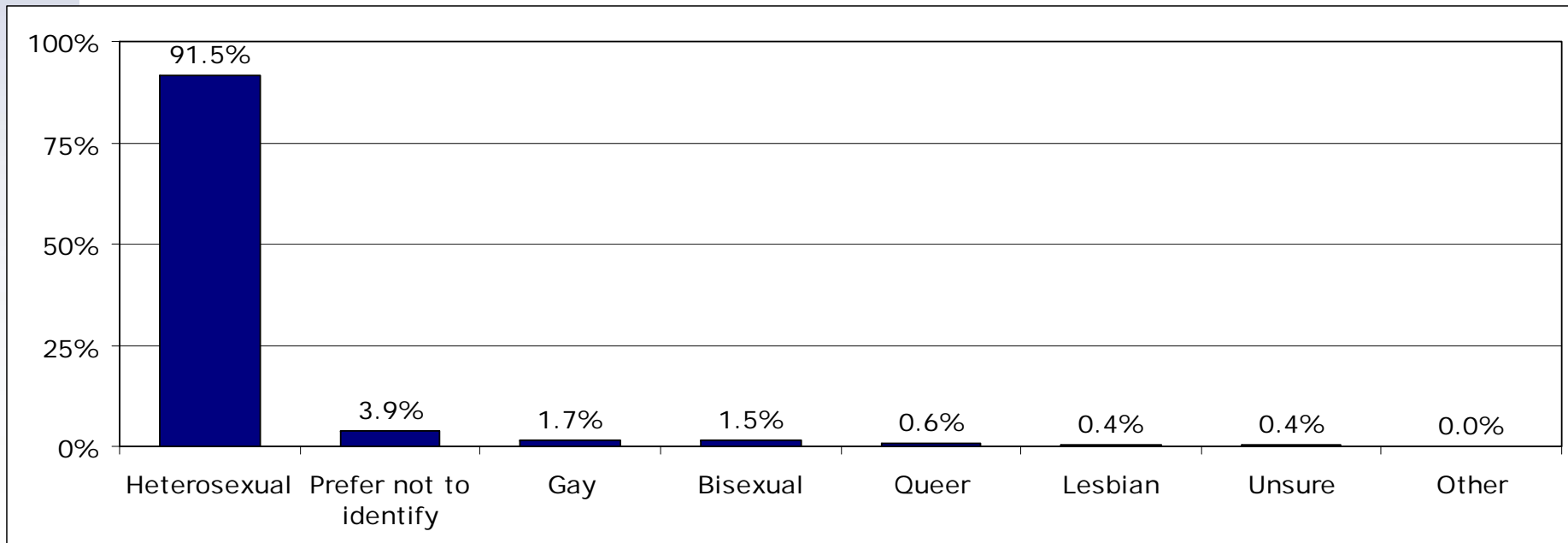


# Tufts Senior Survey

Other text response	How we decided to deal with their response
daniellesexual	This male selected "heterosexual" but then wrote this in. So, we just got rid of this text.
Human	This person selected "other", so we had nothing to go on but to code this person as "prefer not to identify"
I only sleep with animals	This male selected "heterosexual" but then wrote this in. So, we just got rid of this text as we figured this person was probably just saying this to be difficult.
Normal	This person selected "other", so we had nothing to go on but to code this person as "prefer not to identify"
Straight	We are not sure why they didn't select "heterosexual", so we recoded them as "heterosexual"
This is a ridiculous question	This person selected "other", so we had nothing to go on but to code this person as "prefer not to identify"
this is what I can't stand about Tufts- it does not matter!	This person selected "other", so we had nothing to go on but to code this person as "prefer not to identify"
Unsure	We are not sure why they did not select "unsure", so we recoded them as "unsure"

# Tufts Senior Survey

- ◆ The result:
  - ◆ 91.5% Heterosexual
  - ◆ 3.9% Prefer not to identify
  - ◆ 4.6% Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Unsure, Other



# Tufts Senior Survey

- ◆ The 4.6% who self-identified as LGBT or unsure fall well within the ranges of estimates we found for the LGBT population in general and on college campuses
- ◆ No respondents indicated that they were transgender

## Comparison with 2 Anonymous Surveys

- ◆ Senior Survey results were consistent with the two anonymous surveys run on campus in the past 2 years
  - ◆ Alcohol & Drug Survey – Fall 2004
    - ◆ Administered to all undergraduates
    - ◆ 1,921 responses (39.3% response rate)
    - ◆ 0.1% (N=2) were transgender
  - ◆ Latino Center Survey – Spring 2006
    - ◆ Administered to all Hispanic undergraduates
    - ◆ 87 responses (29.0% response rate)
    - ◆ None selected transgender

## Conclusions

- ◆ Collecting went well at Tufts
- ◆ It was very helpful to have the benefit of other institutions' experience beforehand
- ◆ We realize the data will never be truly representative of the LGBT population, but the data we have will inform the improvement of services offered
- ◆ We hope that this presentation will be helpful to others who might be asked to collect this information in the future