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### **“Serving the Needs of Transgender College Students”**

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The examples are many:

- a college student gets called “fag” and “queer” because he looks effeminate
- a campus climate assessment survey asks respondents to rate the environment in the classroom for people of “both genders”
- a diversity training session acknowledges the different genders of participants by asking the women and then the men to stand
- a college admission form asks applicants to check a box marked “M” or “F”
- a transgender student avoids using certain restrooms on campus because of hostile comments about his gender
- a student is afraid that he will not be hired in his profession after graduation if faculty members discover that he has transitioned from female to male
- a transsexual graduate student wonders how she can change her student records to reflect her gender identity and how she will be received by the students she will be teaching.

These incidents occurred in the past year at The Ohio State University, where I work as the coordinator of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Services. But they could have taken place at any college or university, and, I suspect, few schools have not experienced such acts of intolerance and ignorance around issues of gender identity and the inclusion of transgender students.

There is no accurate measure of the number of transgender college students (just as there are no reliable statistics on the number of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students). Direct observation and anecdotal evidence suggest that youth who do not fit stereotypical notions of “female” and “male” are becoming much more visible on North American campuses and a growing number of students are identifying as gender variant or, as many describe themselves, “gender queer.”

Yet colleges have been slow to recognize, much less provide support to, transgender people. Although many lesbian, gay, and bisexual student organizations and almost all of the existing campus LGB administrative offices have added a “T” to their names in the last decade, this move toward greater inclusiveness has been more symbolic than substantive. Most LGB student leaders and center directors still have little understanding of the experiences of transpeople and continue to engage in trans-exclusive practices. Other administrators and faculty typically are even less educated about transgender issues, and only become cognizant of the needs of transgender students when a crisis arises, such as a conflict over a transitioning woman using the women’s restroom.

But in fairness to unknowing staff and faculty members, there is yet to be any empirical research on the experiences of transgender college students and almost nothing

has been written about transgender issues in higher education (Carter, 2000). With this in mind, I will begin this article by providing a brief history of the discourses and terminologies that have characterized gender variant individuals and the subsequent movement among transpeople to define themselves and describe their experiences. I will then relate these issues to higher education by discussing the narratives by transgender people in Kim Howard and Annie Stevens's *Out and About Campus: Personal Accounts by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered College Students* (2000), the first work on college students to include the stories of transgender youth. I will conclude by offering recommendations for educators seeking to improve the campus climate for transgender people, based on my experiences as an openly trans-identified administrator working in LGBT student services. Because most colleges and universities create a hostile environment for gender variant students, staff, and faculty, there is much that institutions can and must do to become more welcoming to people of all genders.

### **A Note on Language**

Complicating any discussion of transgender issues is the lack of a sufficient vocabulary. Only now are words being developed to describe the diversity of gender identity and expression, especially the experiences of transpeople who do not exclusively identify as female or male (Cromwell, 1999). But, it is not simply the absence of terminology that has been problematic; existing language also fails to capture the complexities of gender. Feminist theorists have popularized the idea that "gender" is socially constructed, in contrast to biological "sex," in order to challenge assumed gender roles (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1953). But as shown by the unnecessary surgeries

performed on intersex infants (that is, on babies whose anatomical characteristics do not fit neatly into “female” or “male”) to make their bodies conform to a rigid gender category, “sex” is likewise socially and, at times, literally constructed (Koyama, 2001).

Intersex genital mutilation also points to how “sex” is commonly reduced to one aspect of gender, the person’s genitalia. This has the effect of reinforcing a kind of biological determinism that ignores other important components of gender and the ways in which people actually experience their gender (Bornstein, 1998). For example, as I will discuss, few transsexual men have genital surgery, but they do not feel that this makes them less of a man (Cromwell, 1999), and a growing number of transsexuals who have surgery continue to see themselves as transsexual, rather than identifying as “female” or “male” (Bornstein, 1994). In order to avoid making “genital gender” the defining aspect of gender, I will only use “sex” as a descriptor for individuals when citing commonly used language.

### **Trans-sexology**

As it is commonly used today, “transgender” is an umbrella term for anyone whose self-identification or expression crosses or transgresses established gender categories, including, but not limited to, transsexuals (individuals who identify with a gender different from their biological gender), cross dressers (the term preferred to “transvestites”), drag kings, and drag queens. While this understanding of gender variance is contemporary, developing in the early 1990s with the growth of a transgender movement in the U.S. and parts of Europe (Wilchins, 1997), people who challenge

societal notions of “male” and female” have existed in many different cultures and time periods (Bullough, 1975; Cromwell, 1999; Docter, 1988; Feinberg, 1996).

In the U.S., reports of women and men who cross-lived and/or cross dressed have appeared in newspapers, legal records, and medical journals since the 16th century (MacKenzie, 1994). For example, first-hand accounts of white explorers and missionaries demonstrate that “women-men” and “men-women” were widely recognized in traditional Native American cultures (Lang, 1999). The writings of European and U.S. sexologists in the 19th century included many case histories of individuals who saw themselves as belonging to the “opposite” gender and/or who lived as members of the “opposite” gender (MacKenzie, 1994).

But conflating gender with sexual practice, the literature categorized these individuals as “sexual inverts” or “homosexuals.” Indeed, many sexologists considered transgender behavior to be the *sine qua non* of homosexuality (Currah & Minter, 2000). The first researcher to publish widely on homosexuality, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, theorized in the 1860s and ‘70s that what he called “Uranism” resulted from an individual having a gendered soul different from their biological gender. Basing his theory primarily on himself, Ulrichs believed that Uranians constituted a “third sex” who loved others of the “same” gender as a person of the “opposite” gender--a description that would be seen today as more characteristic of transsexuality than homosexuality. The most influential 19th-century sexologist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, likewise failed to recognize a distinction between homosexuality and cross-gender identity. Whereas Ulrichs argued that the inborn nature of “inverted” gender expression required an end to the legal and social persecution of such individuals, Krafft-Ebing classified transgenderism as a sexual

perversion and a sign of “moral insanity” (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Hekma, 1994; MacKenzie, 1994).

Not until Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term “transvestite” in *The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress* was gender expression separated from sexual behavior (Hirschfeld, 1910/1991). Hirschfeld, a pioneer in the study of sexuality and an openly gay man who cross dressed, argued that transvestism was an identity unto itself and that transvestites could be male or female and heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual. Relying on the case histories of sixteen men and one woman, he provided one of the first accurate descriptions of cross dressers:

In the apparel of their own sex they feel confined, bound up, oppressed; they perceive them as something strange, something that does not fit them, does not belong to them; on the other hand, they cannot find enough words to describe the feeling of peace, security and exaltation, happiness and well-being that overcomes them when in the clothing of the other sex. (p. 125)

Hirschfeld, though, failed to distinguish between cross dressing and transsexualism, and in fact, several of the people he studied, who felt a strong desire to be a gender different from their birth gender, would be considered transsexuals today (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Hirschfeld, 1910/1991). The term “transsexual” began to enter the medical literature in the late 1940s and early ‘50s (MacKenzie, 1994; Meyerowitz, 1998), especially through the work of endocrinologist Harry Benjamin

(1953, 1966), who described a continuum of cross-gender behavior ranging from transvestism to transsexualism.

Transsexuality entered public consciousness through the 1952 media sensation over the gender transition of Christine Jorgensen. As the first person from the United States to be open about having had a “sex change” operation, Jorgensen became “the most talked-about girl in the world” when the former World War II soldier returned from surgery in Denmark as what newspaper headlines described as a “blonde beauty” (Serlin, 1995). Although Jorgensen was the first widely recognized transsexual, the earliest known case of transformative surgery was performed in 1882 on Herman Karl (born Sophia Hedwig), a female-bodied man (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). By the 1930s, stories of European “sex changes” appeared regularly in U.S. tabloid newspapers and magazines, demonstrating that a transsexual identity “did not depend on the invention of synthetic hormones or the development of sophisticated plastic surgery techniques” (Meyerowitz, 1998, p. 161).

But the publicity given to Jorgensen and the creation of a commercially feasible process for synthesizing hormones and better methods for sex reassignment surgery in the 1950s (Bullough & Bullough, 1998) led to a deluge of requests for medical intervention from other transsexuals. Jorgensen received hundreds of letters from “men and women who also had experienced the deep frustrations of lives lived in sexual twilight” (Jorgensen, 1967, p. 150); Danish officials were so overwhelmed with visa requests from people seeking surgery that they forbade such operations for foreigners (Meyerowitz, 1998). Doctors in the U.S., though, did not begin to perform sex reassignment surgery until the mid 1960s because of a lack of training in the procedures and a lack of

understanding of transsexuality itself, which was reflected in the belief among many psychiatrists that transsexuals needed mental, rather than physical, intervention (Califia, 1997). But, as psychotherapy was shown to have no impact on an individual's gender identity, it became clear that if "the mind of the transsexual cannot be adjusted to the body, it is logical and justifiable to attempt the opposite, to adjust the body to the mind" (Benjamin, 1966, p. 91).

Some in the psychiatric community, though, still view transsexuality as a mental illness, albeit one whose prescribed treatment is often hormones and surgery. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association added "transsexualism" to its third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM III), and has listed "gender identity disorders" in subsequent editions, despite opposition from many transsexuals, who resent having to be diagnosed as sick and deviant in order to gain medical assistance. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists succeeded in removing "homosexuality" from the *DSM's* list of mental disorders in 1973. Transgender people, however, have been clinically studied less than lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals and are not as well organized to demand access to medical intervention without stigmatization. Thus, the mental health profession continues to contribute to the stereotyping of transsexuals (Bullough & Bullough, 1998; Cole & Meyer, 1998).

The predominance of the "gender identity disorder" model, along with the extensive media coverage accorded to Jorgensen, has also led to the popular myth that all transsexuals desire sex reassignment surgery, specifically that all transsexuals are biological men who seek to become women (Meyerowitz, 1998). More male-born individuals may have publicly identified as transsexual and sought medical intervention



following the visibility of Jorgensen and other transwomen in the 1950s and '60s, but today about the same number of genetic women and genetic men approach medical providers about altering their genders (Hubbard, 1998). While most transsexual men take hormones and many have chest surgery (radical mastectomies and reconstruction of nipples and areola), few pursue phalloplasty (construction of a penis). Some opt not to have genital surgery because of the tremendous expense (much more costly than vaginoplasty), health reasons, or what are often considered to be less than adequate results. But many transmen and a growing number of transwomen do not pursue "bottom surgery" because they recognize that their genitalia is not what makes them a man or woman. They resist "a system that dictates that one has to be either a man (with a penis) or a woman (with a vagina)" (Cromwell, 1999, p. 117; Rubin, 1998).

Many transgender people today are also challenging the traditional medical model that urges them to assimilate, invent a conventional gendered past for themselves, and not reveal that they are transsexuals or cross dressers to anyone, including their partners, except when necessary. As transsexual activist Kate Bornstein (1994) states:

we're told we'll be cured if we become members of one gender or another.

. . . Transsexuals presenting themselves for therapy in this culture are channeled through a system which labels them as having a disease (transsexuality) for which the therapy is to lie, hide, or otherwise remain silent (p. 62).

Since the mid 1990s, Bornstein and other transpeople have publicly embraced a transgender identity, rather than seeing themselves as either male or female. They have sought to create their communities through support groups, the Internet, conferences, publications, and other social and political networks (Califia, 1997; Cromwell, 1999). In doing so, they are shifting the discourse on transgenderism from a personal disorder to a cultural one: the inability of society to move beyond narrow gender categories.

### **Transgendered in College**

While little has been written about transgender college students, the literature that does exist, along with the handful of published stories by transgender youth themselves, indicates that more and more college students are rejecting the gender assigned to them and openly exploring other gender possibilities (Carter, 2000; Howard & Stevens, 2000; Lees, 1998). College is often the first opportunity many gender variant students have to question their ascribed gender, especially if they are living away from family and childhood friends for the first time (Lees, 1998). The fact that most students establish various aspects of their identities during their college years (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) also helps to create a relatively open environment on many campuses that can make gender exploration easier.

For example, Ian Fried, a cross dressing student who attended a small Ohio college, remembers that even his conservative school was “a pretty open place. In a sense everyone was ‘coming out,’ trying to figure out who they were and what they wanted to become” (Fried, 2000, pp. 254-255). Fried continually had to explain why he

wore dresses and to worry about the reaction of other students, but “in being comfortable with [him]self, [he] found most people incredibly supportive” (p. 253).

Other transgender students, though, have reported greater difficulties. Johnny Rogers was called both “dyke” and “faggot”--once on the same day--while transitioning from female-to-male at Iowa State University. The stress of constantly having to deal with hostility or the fear of hostility, in addition to the usual stresses of being a student, caused him to contract mononucleosis at the end of the school year in which he began to transition. After completing a master’s degree, Rogers was hired as the University’s LGBT Student Services coordinator. But feeling “burned out” from the challenges of transitioning, which included continually having to educate others and a lack of support from both heterosexual and lesbian and gay colleagues, he took a position outside academia the following year (Rogers, 2000 & personal communication).

At the University of Texas-Austin, Andrew Gray, an openly gay male cross dresser, likewise had to cope with a lack of transgender acceptance, even from members of the campus lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group. While Gray felt more comfortable cross dressing than passing as non-transgendered, he could not do so every day because of the amount of energy and fortitude required. Chronicling his experiences wearing a dress and high heels to class for the first time, he describes the positive and negative responses he received; some of the harshest reactions were from students he thought were friends. Gray returned home early because he was mentally and physically exhausted (Gray, 2000).

### **Institutional Support for Transgender Students**

The ordeals described by Rogers and Gray demonstrate why many gender variant students still choose to remain closeted if they can (such as by cross dressing only in private or passing as female or male) and only disclose their gender identities when necessary (such as during a gender transition). Transgender students who identify as heterosexual are often even more invisible, as they rarely feel included in lesbian, gay, and bisexual student groups, even those that have added the “T.” But just as lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals shouldn’t be forced to hide their sexual identities, transpeople shouldn’t have to lie, lead double lives, and deny their gender simply to make others comfortable, avoid possible discrimination, and prevent being verbally or physically attacked.

College administrators and faculty members can improve the campus climate for gender variant students and foster an environment in which people of all genders can more readily be themselves by supporting openly transgender students and by learning and providing accurate information about gender diversity. Unfortunately, even well-meaning student affairs professionals and multiculturally-minded instructors often lack basic knowledge about transgender issues, resulting in policies and practices that continue the marginalization of gender variant individuals. There is a common belief, for example, that almost all transgender students are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or are transsexuals planning to undergo sex reassignment surgery. This results in campus programs and services that fail to acknowledge heterosexual transpeople, cross dressers, and individuals who are content to remain outside the categories “male” and “female.” Similarly, policies that segregate students by gender, such as restroom designations, residence hall assignments, and rules on who can join most sports teams and some

student organizations, ignore and stigmatize individuals who transcend binary notions of gender (Carter, 2000).

Carter (2000) offers three primary ways for colleges to address the needs of transgender students: ending institutional gender divisions; providing direct support services; and educating the campus community about transgender issues. I would add a fourth: developing administrative policies and practices that are trans-inclusive and changing ones that discriminate against gender variant individuals. Specifically, I offer the following recommendations to student affairs administrators seeking to improve the campus climate for transgender students.

### **Create a Well-Funded Campus LGBT Center with a Full-Time Professional Director and Support Staff**

Having a center whose mission is to offer programs and services for transgender students, along with lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, is the most important step a college can take to improve the climate for gender variant people. An office would provide a visible, long-term transgender presence on campus and serve as a focal point for education and advocacy related to transgender issues. Students would no longer have to assume the primary burden of educating others and working to end discrimination. Instead, they could focus on developing a transgender and trans-supportive community and, most importantly, devote more time to their schoolwork. With a well-staffed and well-funded LGBT center, “student organizers will burn out less, be more productive in their organizing activities, and greater continuity for the student groups will be established” (Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993, p. 40).

The number of institutions that have established LGBT centers has grown tremendously over the last decade. Prior to 1990, there were only five professionally staffed campus centers, but since then, more than 50 colleges and universities have established LGBT offices with at least a half-time paid director, and others are in the process of doing so (Beemyn, 2002). However, in my experience, many of these centers offer few programs and services for transgender students because staff members lack knowledge about transgender concerns and are unsure of how to provide support. The directors of LGBT centers must, therefore, take it upon themselves to learn about the needs of transpeople, and the search committees for these positions must hire candidates who have experience working on transgender issues.

Institutions that cannot establish an LGBT center because of political or financial circumstances should appoint a presidential commission or standing committee on LGBT issues in consultation with students, staff, and faculty and designate an official administrative liaison to the campus LGBT community.

### **Train the Trainers on Transgender Issues**

Many schools have a Safe Zone, Safe Space, or Allies program to raise awareness and understanding of the experiences of LGBT people and to create visible allies among staff, faculty, and administrators. But, as with LGBT centers, most of these programs include little, if any, trans-specific content, even though transgender issues are invariably much less understood than lesbian or gay concerns. Before trainers begin offering workshops, they need to educate themselves about transgender experiences and make sure that they are presenting both trans-specific and trans-inclusive material. Using

“LGBT” when the circumstances being described are not applicable to transgender people is an insult, not inclusion.

### **Provide Training on Transgender Issues to Student Affairs Administrators and Other Staff Members Who Regularly Interact with Students**

Training should seek to raise awareness and knowledge about the experiences of transgender people, discuss the skills necessary to be a good ally, and lead to the development of a list of concrete actions that participants agree to take to improve the environment in their workplace for people of all genders. Workshops should be highly interactive and address the situations likely to be faced in participants’ offices. For example, a training involving campus security staff should discuss how they can be sensitive to the needs of transgender students who have been the victims of hate crimes and how they can handle complaints about a “man” in a women’s bathroom. Student health center nurses and doctors should be asked to talk about the specific health care needs of students who are cross dressing or transitioning.

Staff members asked to attend a training session should include, but not be limited to, senior administrators, counseling center staff, police officers and other public safety officials, health workers, student union personnel, residential advisors and hall directors, campus religious leaders, financial aid and registrar’s office workers, and clerical and support staff throughout the campus (Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993).

## **Develop Policies and Procedures for Addressing Transphobic Violence and Harassment**

Hate crimes against individuals perceived as gender variant are rampant in society and often ignored by the media, police, and lawmakers. In the last decade, an average of one person a month has been reported to have been killed because of their gender identity or expression (Remembering Our Dead, 2002). Many more murders of transgender people are not covered in the press or investigated as possible anti-transgender hate crimes by law enforcement agencies.

Harassment and violence against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are also often predicated on gender variance. Rarely do homophobic attackers know someone's sexual identity, but target those who fit the stereotypes of gay men as feminine and lesbians as masculine.

Colleges must implement a "zero tolerance" policy for harassment and violence against gender variant people and clearly and visibly outline the consequences of trans-motivated hate crimes and hate incidents. All students, staff, and faculty should be made aware of where they can turn if they have been victimized and be given the option of anonymous reporting. Even if not required to do so by state law, institutions should keep track of hate crimes on campus against individuals because of their gender identity or expression.

## **Assist with the Creation of a Group for Transgender and Gender Questioning Students**



Many transgender students feel isolated. They know few other trans-identified students, lack role models, and often do not have a sense of belonging anywhere on campus. A support or social group for gender variant students would enable them to feel part of a community and less alienated from college life, which can lead to a greater sense of self-worth and increase the likelihood that they will remain in school.

At the same time, LGBT student organizations should be encouraged to become more trans-inclusive, beyond just having “transgender” in their names and mission statements. To be truly supportive, they should seek to create a welcoming space for heterosexual transgender students, as well as those who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. For example, meetings should be held in a location that is private enough for students to feel comfortable attending cross dressed or changing their clothes when they arrive. Transpeople should not have to disclose their gender identity to the whole campus just to come to a meeting.

Recognizing that transgender students are often hesitant to become involved in LGBT groups because of concerns about transphobia, the leaders of LGBT organizations should make a point of greeting *all* new members before and after meetings, always use trans-inclusive language, and not make assumptions about the gender and sexual identities of participants. LGBT groups should also sponsor programs on transgender topics regularly and include transgender perspectives in other programs.

### **Offer Trans-Specific Programming**

Speakers, performers, and films on transgender topics should be brought to campus regularly as part of general student programming, so that the burden of providing

trans-focused activities does not fall solely on transgender students. Transgender speakers and performers who are popular with campus audiences include Leslie Feinberg, Loren Cameron, Kate Bornstein, Jamison Green, and Riki Anne Wilchins. Among the recent documentaries and feature-length films about transgender experiences that have been well received are *Southern Comfort*, *A Boy Named Sue*, *Ma Vie en Rose (My Life in Pink)*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Iron Ladies*, and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

### **Use Trans-Inclusive Language on School Forms, Printed Materials, and Web Sites**

College forms that ask students to indicate whether they are female or male and brochures and web sites that use “he/she” ignore the complexities of gender and signal to transgender students that they do not belong at the institution. Offering more inclusive language would not only be supportive of trans-identified people, but also help educate the campus community about gender diversity. For example, when “transgender” was added as a possible response to a question asking the students’ gender on a residence life survey at Michigan State University, the issue sparked discussions in the campus newspaper and among residence hall staff and students. According to Michigan State’s director of residence life, the opportunity to self-identify as transgendered and the reaction it generated have been a “positive, thoughtful experience” (Lees, 1998, p. 40).

### **Add “Gender Identity” to the College’s Non-Discrimination Policies**

College non-discrimination policies include “sex” and sometimes “sexual orientation” as protected categories. Neither necessarily applies to transgender people, who face discrimination based on their gender identity and expression, rather than their

biological gender or sexual identity. To alleviate this shortcoming, some colleges, beginning with the University of Iowa in 1996, have added the words “gender identity” to their equal opportunity statements. Other institutions which have written policies prohibiting discrimination against gender variant people include American University, Brown University, DePauw College, Kalamazoo College, Knox College, Lehigh University, Rutgers University (whose policy is applicable only to “individuals who have changed sex or are in the process of changing sex”), the University of Maryland, the University of Puget Sound, and the University of Washington (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2002). Changing a college’s nondiscrimination policy is not going to bring an immediate halt to harassment and violence against transgender people--any more than having “race” as a protected category for nearly 40 years has ended racial oppression. But it does give gender variant students necessary legal recourse and, like the use of trans-inclusive language by college officials, sends a message to the campus community that people of all genders are worthy of respect.

### **Establish a Mechanism to Change the Gender Designation on College Records**

Students who are transitioning from one gender to another should be able to have their new gender reflected on college documents, including identification cards, transcripts, financial aid and employment forms, and enrollment records. Besides being a matter of fairness and respect, an accurate gender designation in college files is critical to avoid outing transgender students and to help protect them from discrimination when they apply for jobs, graduate and professional schools, and at any other time that they would need to show a college document. An institution should never insist that

individuals complete sex reassignment surgery before changing their records, as even transsexual students who desire surgery often cannot afford the procedures and many transmen feel that the surgical outcomes are still inadequate, since techniques have not been developed to produce a “natural” looking, fully functional penis. Moreover, given that some transgender youth may be uncertain about undertaking the long, arduous process of transitioning, “nothing is gained by forcing a student to hasten into surgery simply for the correct bureaucratic designator” (Nakamura, 1998, p. 185).

### **Create and Publicize the Location of Unisex Restrooms and Enable Transpeople to Use the Restroom They Find Appropriate**

One of the main areas where transgender people experience discrimination is in their use of public restrooms. The “bathroom issue” is particularly a problem for transsexual women, but butch lesbians and other masculine-appearing women are also often harassed in women’s restrooms, despite being biological women (Nakamura, 1998). Non-transgender women should be able to feel safe in this most private of public environments. So, too, should transsexual and other gender variant women, who have a right to use the restroom appropriate for their gender. An administrator seeking to mediate a restroom conflict needs to balance the desires of both the transgender student and the complainant; however, a transperson should never be denied access to adequate bathroom facilities simply because of someone’s transphobia.

A recent court ruling in a school case recognizes that prejudice does not supercede the basic right of a transgender person to use a public bathroom. When a Minneapolis high school teacher complained about a female transsexual librarian using

the faculty women's restroom at the school, the administration provided the teacher with access to other bathrooms, including single occupancy facilities. Unsatisfied with the school's accommodation, the teacher sued, seeking to ban the librarian from all of the women's restrooms. Both a federal court and the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the school's policy as a reasonable solution (Gender Advocacy Internet News Digest, 2002).

To avoid potential confrontations and to make campus restrooms more accessible to transgender individuals, colleges should publicize the location of single occupancy bathrooms and designate more unisex facilities. Ohio University's Office of LGBT Programs, for example, launched a "LGBT Restroom Project" in 2001 to identify bathrooms in residence halls and academic and administrative buildings that were not gender specified and to encourage administrators to make other single occupancy restrooms available to people of all genders (Ohio University Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs, 2001).

### **Have Advocates in Units Where Transgender Students Are More Likely to Encounter Obstacles**

Along with restrooms, other single-gender environments, such as residence-hall floors and locker rooms, are also sites of potential conflict between transgender and non-transgender students. Having student affairs administrators who are well-versed on transgender issues in units where gender variant students are likely to encounter prejudice from their peers can help resolve problems quickly and avoid further stigmatizing the transperson in the situation.

## **Conclusion**

Transgender students are attending colleges and universities across North America, whether or not they are visible to faculty, staff, or other students. Implementing these recommendations would begin a process of creating a better campus climate and safer environment for cross dressers, transsexuals, and other gender variant people. They would feel more comfortable being out, be less isolated, and, in general, have a much more positive college experience.

But it all begins with senior administrators and student affairs professionals recognizing the tremendous prejudice and discrimination faced by transgender students and making a serious commitment to changing the situation. College officials need to learn the appropriate language to describe transpeople, educate themselves on transgender history, and seek to understand the lives and needs of gender variant students. Only a concerted, institution-wide effort supported and spearheaded by a school's central administration can transform a campus culture of transphobia.

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