

Best Practices for Supporting Trans College Students Today

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Basic Assumptions

- Where institutions themselves are asking about gender, trans students should have the option to self-identify
- Students' gender identities should be respected, regardless of assigned gender or transition plans/status
- Institutional policies and resources should be trans-inclusive, regardless of the number of “out” trans students



Work by Yulonda Rios

***Campus Queer: The
Experiences and
Needs of LGBTQ+
College Students***

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**Johns Hopkins
University Press**

College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- 208 students, ages 17-25, were interviewed from 84 different colleges; 27% identified as people of color
- 111 identified outside of a gender binary, including genderqueer, agender, gender fluid, non-binary trans, demigender, and androgynous students
- 102 also identified outside of a sexual binary
- Average age at which they began using their current gender identity label: 19 years old
- 91 of the 111 use gender-inclusive pronouns for themselves; most (91%) use “they/them/their”

College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- 51% of the non-binary trans students were out to a parent (58% of the participants of color)
- 70% of the cis participants were out or mostly out about their non-binary sexual identity to at least one parent (48% of the participants of color)
- Of the 99 participants who identified outside of both sexual and gender binaries:
 - Half were out or mostly out to at least one parent about both (59% of the students of color)
 - A third were out about their sexual identity but not their gender
 - Only 2 people were out about their gender but not their sexuality

College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- ❑ In cases where there was a difference in parental acceptance for the student's sexual and gender identities, sexual identity was almost always more accepted
- Why the students were not out to a parent(s):
 - ❑ a parent(s) holds anti-LGBTQA+ attitudes
 - ❑ a parent(s) has conservative religious beliefs
 - ❑ a parent(s) comes from a culture that is intolerant toward LGBTQA+ people
 - ❑ believe that a parent(s) would not get or not take their identity seriously
 - ❑ think that a parent(s) would be uncomfortable with their identity

College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- Where all respondents learned about their identities:
 - a website(s)--59%, a friend(s)--24%, met a person/people who identifies that way or who educated them--24%
- Individuals with lesser known non-binary gender identities, like agender and demigender, were much more likely to learn the terms online, typically on Tumblr
- The students who had adopted terminology that, at least as of now, is not widely known even among trans people invariably learned it online

College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- Where respondents received support for their gender and sexual identities:
 - a friend(s): 79%
 - an LGBTQ+ group(s): 39%
 - a website(s): 28%
 - a campus LGBTQ+ center/office: 27%
 - their partner(s): 17%
 - a family member(s): 17%
 - their therapist or a campus counseling center: 4%

Take-Aways on Trans Youth

- ▼ A growing number of trans youth do not have to “come out” because they were never “in”
- ▼ First generation of trans youth in which a significant number can be themselves as they know themselves
- ▼ The parents of Generation Z are more aware and accepting of trans people than any previous generation of parents
- ▼ But many youth still encounter discomfort, confusion, and hostility from their parents when they disclose or confirm that they are trans

Take-Aways on Trans Youth

- ▼ Assigned male youth especially continue to be punished for acting in any way considered feminine
- ▼ Non-binary trans people are less accepted and less respected as their gender, so are less likely to disclose to their parents and others
- ▼ Although there are more role models and greater resources available online, there continues to be high rates of depression and suicide ideation among trans youth

Take-Aways on Trans College Students

- ▼ College as a chance to be on their own for the first time and to be themselves, if they could not do so at home or in high school
- ▼ Or sometimes the opposite: they had been accepted by their high school and family, and find opportunities to be themselves more limited at college
- ▼ Isolation: away from friends and the support they may have had
- ▼ Fear of not being accepted and not seen as their gender, especially if non-binary, by faculty, staff, and other students

Take-Aways on Trans College Students

- ▼ If they want to transition, they want to do so ASAP
- ▼ Concerns about how they will be treated by administrative offices, especially housing, health care services, and other areas where gender comes into play
- ▼ Stress of not knowing how to navigate systems and a sense of processes moving too slowly
- ▼ Possibly cut off from their families when they disclose
- ▼ High rates of depression and suicide ideation
- ▼ The better the climate, the higher the expectation

How Colleges Fail Non-Binary Trans Students

1. Providing Gender-Inclusive Bathrooms
2. Recognizing that Pronouns Matter
3. Expanding Name and Gender Marker Options on Records
4. Offering Gender-Inclusive Housing
5. Raising Awareness and Education

Gender-Inclusive Bathrooms (GIB)

- ▼ “Gender-inclusive” and not “gender-neutral” (a bathroom open to people of all genders)
- ▼ Mentioned by the most interviewees: few campuses had a significant number of gender-inclusive bathrooms, and these bathrooms were not always well-marked and in convenient locations
- ▼ Some students could give the exact number and location of the GIBs on their campus, as these were the only bathrooms they would use

Addressing Bathrooms

- ▼ Title IX requires that colleges allow trans people to use the facilities that correspond to their gender identity without regard to transition status
- ▼ Have a written bathroom policy that protects trans students from discrimination. Sample policy:

“The University of Massachusetts, Amherst strives to create and sustain a campus environment that supports and values all members of our community. One aspect of creating a supportive environment is providing safe, accessible, and convenient bathroom facilities. Students, staff, faculty, and campus guests should use the bathroom facilities that correspond to their sex or gender identity, or utilize bathrooms that are designated gender-neutral or gender-inclusive.”

Addressing Bathrooms

- ▼ Have single-occupancy men's and women's restrooms converted into gender-inclusive ones by installing locks and changing signs
- ▼ Have a policy requiring at least one gender-inclusive restroom in all newly constructed or significantly renovated buildings, including residence halls
- ▼ Have gender-inclusive restrooms in at least half of the administrative and academic buildings on campus (standard of the Campus Pride Index)

Pronouns Matter

- ▼ Pronoun examples: he/him; she/her; they/them; ze/hir (not “male” or “female” pronouns)
- ▼ They are the pronouns that I use, not my “preferred” pronouns
- ▼ Only a few colleges currently have a process to indicate pronouns on records
- ▼ Almost all of the non-binary gender interviewees said that pronouns were not asked by faculty in any of their classes, including in Women and Gender Studies
- ▼ Many did not feel comfortable approaching a professor with their pronouns

Addressing Pronouns

- ▼ Require all faculty to attend a non-binary trans training session
- ▼ Encourage faculty to have a name and pronoun policy and to have it on their syllabi

“Names and Pronouns: Everyone has the right to be addressed and referred to by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity, including the use of gender-inclusive pronouns. Class rosters have a student’s legal first name, unless they have entered a preferred/chosen first name on SPIRE. Pronouns are not included on rosters, so students will be asked to indicate the pronouns that they use for themselves whenever they are asked to share their names. A student’s chosen name and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom.”

Addressing Pronouns

- ▼ Faculty who teach a large-sized class (where students would not introduce themselves) should avoid referring to students by assumed gender or pronouns
- ▼ Meetings of committees and student groups should also have people indicate their pronouns along with their names
- ▼ Have pronouns on name tags and in email signatures
- ▼ Set an example to others by introducing yourself with the pronouns you use

Name and Gender Marker on Records

- ▼ Few students could use their chosen first name (not “preferred” name) on campus records
- ▼ Even fewer students could indicate their gender identity on campus records (which is especially important for housing, locker rooms, and bathrooms)
- ▼ Even where students could change the gender marker, it was only from one binary choice to the other

Addressing Name and Gender Marker Change

- ▼ Enable students to have a name other than their legal first name on institutional documents (ID cards, class rosters, directory listings, unofficial transcripts, diplomas, etc.) and to make this change themselves online. This should be the only the name that appears
- ▼ Have more than “M/F” as choices on forms and records, including admissions applications

Addressing Name and Gender Marker Change

Suggested wording for admissions and other forms:

Gender identity (optional; choose all that apply):

- agender
- androgyne
- demigender
- genderqueer or gender fluid
- man
- questioning or unsure
- trans man
- trans woman
- woman
- additional gender category/identity: please specify _____
- prefer not to disclose

Addressing Name and Gender Marker Change

Have an explanation of the question:

This information is used for _____.

- Only (name of offices) will have access to this information
- Your responses will be kept private and secure.
- The information will not be used for a discriminatory purpose.
- You can change this information in the future by _____.

If that is too many choices, then be sure to include:

- Trans woman
- Trans man
- Non-binary (genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, etc.)
- Another identity, please specify _____

Gender-Inclusive Housing (GIH)

- ▼ Most of the campuses did not offer gender-inclusive housing (housing in which students are assigned to rooms without regard to gender) that is open to both incoming and returning students
- ▼ A few campuses that offered GIH had set it up poorly, either because of a laborious assignment process or an inappropriate facility
- ▼ Rarely does a campus offer GIH in all residence halls and in all types of housing (doubles, suites, and apartments)

Addressing Housing

- ▼ Enable students to indicate their gender identity on their housing application
- ▼ Offer gender-inclusive housing that is open to both incoming and returning students
 - ✓ Recognize that GIH is not the same as trans housing
 - ✓ It should be offered in different parts of campus and, if possible, in different types of housing (doubles, suites, apartments)
 - ✓ GIH should include gender-inclusive bathrooms/showers

Addressing Housing

- ▼ Move away from having “single-sex” residence halls or floors
- ▼ Offer gender-inclusive bathrooms and shower rooms beyond GIH
- ▼ Require residence life staff to regularly offer activities and post educational material to raise residents’ awareness of trans experiences

Raising Awareness

- ▼ Require all Student Affairs staff, Public Safety officers, and other front-line personnel to regularly attend a training session about trans topics
- ▼ Incorporate gender identity topics into orientation sessions for new students, staff, and faculty
- ▼ Have an online campus resource guide for new and prospective trans students
- ▼ Regularly sponsor non-binary trans speakers and performers



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Additional Best Policies & Practices

Health Services

- ▼ Enable trans students to self-identify on health care forms
- ▼ Make sure that the campus health and counseling center staff are knowledgeable about the specific needs and experiences of trans students
- ▼ Offer a support group that assists students in the process of acknowledging and disclosing their trans identities

Health Services

- ▼ Develop and make available a list of area therapists experienced in working with trans people
- ▼ Offer a student health insurance policy which covers ongoing counseling, hormones, and gender-affirming surgeries for trans students who need such health care

At least 68 colleges cover hormones and gender-affirming surgeries for students and 20 cover just hormones

Student Activities

- Educate fraternities and sororities and other gender-segregated student organizations about the rights of trans students to participate in keeping with the institution's nondiscrimination policy and Title IX
- ✓ Fraternity and Sorority Transgender Resource Guide: <http://www.lambda10.org/transgender>
- Create a Web-based campus resource guide for new and prospective trans students
- Include trans-focused and trans-inclusive programs as part of general campus programming

Athletics

The NCAA's Policy: All About the "T"

- “A trans male (female to male) student-athlete who has received a medical exception for treatment with testosterone for gender transition may compete on a men’s team but is no longer eligible to compete on a women’s team without changing the team status to a mixed team. A mixed team is eligible only for men’s championships.”
- “A trans female (male to female) student-athlete being treated with testosterone suppression medication for gender transition may continue to compete on a men’s team but may not compete on a women’s team without changing it to a mixed team status until completing one calendar year of documented testosterone-suppression treatment.”

Athletics

- **Develop a policy for trans students to compete in intramurals**

- ✓ **UMass Amherst policy:**

“When an activity makes a gender designation, an individual who has transitioned to a different gender can participate in the division of the individual’s current gender. If an individual is in the process of transitioning to a different gender, participation in a particular gender designated activity will be handled on a case-by-case basis.”

Specific Best Policies & Practices

Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse:

<http://www.campuspride.org/tpc>

LGBT-Friendly Campus Pride Index:

<http://www.campusprideindex.org>

**“Suggested Best Practices for Supporting Trans
Students” (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT
Resource Professionals)**

**[http://www.lgbtcampus.org/policy-practice-
recommendations](http://www.lgbtcampus.org/policy-practice-recommendations)**

Questions?

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