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Trans Inclusion on College Campuses

As more and more students identify their gender as trans, many colleges and universities are seeking to be more trans inclusive by adopting or revising policies and by creating resources and support services. This entry reviews many of the major changes being undertaken by campuses to become more welcoming to trans students in the areas of institutional policies, facilities, health care, and education. Although significant progress has been made over the past 2 decades, much more work needs to be done at most institutions for trans students to feel fully embraced.

Institutional Policies

To begin to create a more supportive climate for trans students, many colleges and universities have added *gender identity* to their institution's nondiscrimination policy. Since the University of Iowa became the first college to do so in 1996, a majority of schools have followed suit, and educational institutions are now expected to protect trans students from discrimination under Title IX. But as colleges have discovered, it is only a first step. Because campuses traditionally operate from a gender binary, trans students face widespread institutional discrimination, which requires colleges to change other policies and practices so that trans students are not excluded or placed in unsafe or uncomfortable situations.

For example, admissions, housing, and health care forms that ask about sex and provide only *female* and *male* as options marginalize trans students, sending the message that the school does not recognize that they exist or does not care to know. As a result, trans students feel unwelcomed by the institution, and the institution has misleading information about them for housing and health care purposes, which interferes with the ability of the school to meet their needs. A growing number of colleges are addressing this situation by asking about gender identity instead of sex and by using an open-ended question or offering *trans* and other non-cisgender gender identity options instead of just *male* and *female*.

Another policy area in which colleges are seeking to respond to the needs of trans students is their name and gender on records and documents. Many trans students go by a first name different from their legal one and risk being outed and subjected to discrimination whenever their given name is used, such as when their instructors call roll in class, when they apply for a job and have to submit a transcript, when they have to present their campus identification, and every time someone looks them up in the institution's online directory.

To help protect trans students and ensure their privacy, colleges are changing software systems to enable them and other students to use a chosen name on campus records and documents, including course and

grade rosters, advisee lists, directory listings, email addresses, unofficial transcripts, identification cards, and diplomas. Given that many trans students are not in a position to change their first names legally, offering this policy is invaluable.

Enabling trans students to change the gender marker on campus records is similarly an important accommodation so that they can be gendered appropriately in instances where gender comes into play on campuses, such as in being assigned housing, joining fraternities and sororities, and participating on sports teams. This is also a critical service because trans students are often unable to be officially recognized as their true selves in other places.

In some states in the United States, trans people cannot change the gender marker on their birth certificates and driver's licenses or can do so only if they present proof of gender-affirming surgery or a court order. However, most physicians in the United States do not perform such surgeries on individuals under 18 years of age and a growing number of states are seeking to ban the practice, making it impossible for many traditionally aged college students to change their gender marker before entering college, and as most schools do not cover the surgeries under student health insurance, few students will be able to do so during college without parental financial support.

Furthermore, many students who present as a gender different from their assigned gender, especially nonbinary students, have no interest in surgery; they do not feel that they have to change their bodies in prescribed ways to identify and present as their true selves. Other students are not ready to make such a life-changing decision in their late teens or early 20s. Thus, rather than insist that students undertake major, expensive surgeries that they may not want or be ready for, an increasing number of colleges are allowing them to change the gender marker on campus records from F to M or M to F without requiring evidence of medical intervention.

Along with changing the gender marker from one binary option to the other, colleges are beginning to give students the ability to identify as nonbinary by having an "X" on their campus records. This change comes in response to the Common Application, the admissions form used by more than 900 colleges, and a growing number of states legally recognizing nonbinary gender identities. As of 2022, 22 states offer "X" as a gender option on driver's licenses and state IDs and 16 states enable individuals born in the state to have their birth certificates reissued with an "X" for gender.

Campus Facilities

Beyond their nondiscrimination statements, colleges and universities have made the most progress to date on trans inclusion in campus facilities: residence halls, bathrooms, and locker rooms. At one time, residence halls on many campuses were divided by gender, and then floors were restricted to one gender. Both changed because of changing times and student desires. Today, trans students are advocating for individual rooms to be open to people of all genders, because the traditional room assignment process, which is based on a gender binary and a student's assigned gender, is discriminatory and places trans students in unsuitable and potentially dangerous living arrangements.

In response, more than 400 colleges and universities have begun to offer a gender-inclusive housing (GIH) option, in which students can choose to live with other students of any gender on campus. At some institutions, this option is available only in specific buildings, floors, or parts of floors; at other institutions, including Ithaca College and Amherst College, it is available in most or all residence halls so that a trans student does not have to choose between GIH and other residential communities, such as a first-year hall or a living-learning program for students in their major.

The types of housing in which GIH is offered also vary widely. Many colleges provide this option in suite- and apartment-style rooms, which with single-user bathrooms and often single-occupant rooms, lend themselves to being gender inclusive. Other colleges only offer GIH as part of an LGBTQ-themed housing community. This option will not work for all trans students, though, as some do not identify as LGBQ and would not necessarily feel at home in such an environment.

Along with a safe space to live, trans students need a place to “pee in peace,” where they do not have to fear harassment and violence. To address this issue, many colleges have turned some men's and women's bathrooms into gender-inclusive facilities—that is, restrooms available to people of all genders—by changing signage and sometimes by installing door locks. They are also requiring that all newly constructed or significantly renovated buildings have gender-inclusive bathrooms and publicizing the location of these bathrooms through online lists and maps, mobile apps, and signage outside gendered restrooms. A few colleges, such as the University of Arizona and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, have also issued formal policies that enable students to use gendered restrooms in accordance with their gender identity.

Locker rooms that have group showers and changing rooms similarly present a significant safety concern for trans students. But unlike bathrooms, greater changes are needed to make the facilities accessible to trans

people. As campuses are building new recreational centers and athletic facilities, many are including private, individual changing and showering rooms along with the traditional ones for women and men.

Colleges are also creating athletic team locker rooms that have a private option for trans participants, as well as enacting policies that state that trans students can compete in intramural and recreational sports programs in keeping with their gender identity. While the participation of trans students in varsity athletics is limited by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the governing bodies of individual sports, schools can still have policies that respect the rights of trans athletes, such as requiring coaches and other athletes to use the names and pronouns that trans students use for themselves, having nongendered uniforms and dress codes, and enabling trans students to decide for themselves how they want to be housed during travel.

Health Care

Because more and more trans people are recognizing and accepting their gender identities at a young age, colleges today are seeing many more students who come to campus wanting to transition through hormones and/or gender-affirming surgeries. But, to date, only about 150 schools cover these medical needs under student health insurance, even though the campuses that have taken this step have indicated that there is not an additional cost, or it is negligible. Despite the efforts of some conservative states to restrict access to transition-related health care, it is likely that a far greater number of colleges will provide insurance coverage in the next few years, as more and more trans students advocate for this change and as the courts and federal agencies increasingly treat the denial of such benefits as an issue of discrimination.

Beyond insurance coverage, colleges are seeking to provide more trans-inclusive health care by training health center providers to be able to initiate hormone treatment and monitor hormone levels for transitioning students; making sure that the name and gender marker used by students are clearly visible on their medical records so that they are not addressed by the wrong name and wrong pronouns and are not outed in waiting rooms; and having prescriptions and lab orders likewise written under the name that a student uses. Some campuses are also educating all health and counseling center staff about the needs of trans students, often through training sessions offered by a campus LGBTQIA+ or multicultural center.

Education

Although often less visible than policy changes, educating cis students, staff, and faculty about the experi-

ences of trans people and how they can be in allyship is an important way that many colleges and universities are becoming more trans inclusive. The campuses that have been the most successful at increasing knowledge about trans students are the institutions that require all student affairs staff members, public safety officers, and others who work directly with students to attend a trans-focused training session and that have an administrative staff person for whom conducting these trainings is a part of their job description.

Because these institutions are paying a staff member to help foster a trans-inclusive campus climate, they also tend to have more policies in place to support trans students than other schools. Thus, the more that colleges create LGBTQIA+ student service administrative positions and professionally staffed LGBTQIA+ centers, the better the overall campus experience will be for trans students.

See also [Campus Climate](#); [College Undergraduate Students](#); [Nonbinary Genders](#); [Trans Identities](#); [Trans Students](#), [Access to Sex-Segregated Facilities and Programs](#)

Further Readings

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