

Report of the sub-committee of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

Transgender and gender non-confirming issues

Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

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Transgender and gender non-conforming issues at uOttawa

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On June 15, 2012 The Ontario Human Rights Commission added to the *Ontario Human Rights Code* the protection from discrimination based on gender identity and expression for transgender and gender non-binary people. The University must comply with the code in the following protected social areas: Accommodation (housing), Contracts, Employment, Goods, services and facilities, and Membership in unions, trade or professional associations.

Transgender and gender non-conforming people disproportionately face harassment, discrimination and structural barriers in all aspects of life. Further, their identity is systematically dismissed or invalidated. In an attempt to keep themselves safe, it is common for transgender and non-gender binary people to choose to be “out” with some people but not with others.

Findings from recent research done at both uOttawa and Carleton University paint a similar picture. See attached research report for summary of key findings and recommendations.

Key Findings from the Survey of Trans and Gender Nonconforming Students, 2017

The Research

During the months of January to April, 2017, Leon Laidlaw (PhD student, Carleton University), under the supervision of Dr. Corrie Scott (University of Ottawa) and Dr. Rena Bivens (Carleton University), surveyed transgender and gender nonconforming students at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University (current students and those enrolled in the last 12 months) in relation to their social experiences on campus and access to facilities. In total, 54 individuals responded to the survey. This report uses statistical analysis and direct quotes to represent the experiences of the 32 participants from the University of Ottawa.

The majority of respondents were gender nonconforming (n=20, 58.8%), followed by masculine-identified (n=11, 32.4%) and feminine-identified (n=3, 8.8%). The majority of participants had not transitioned (n=19, 55.9%), but of those who had, it was most common for them to have done so within the last year (n=6, 40%). 1-in-10 (n=3, 9.1%) identified as a member of a racialized minority and a considerable amount identified as a person with a disability (n=15, 44.1%).

Results

Social Experiences on Campus

While it is expected that students feel safe at their university, the majority of respondents (n=21, 67.7%) only felt somewhat comfortable on the University of Ottawa campus; some (n=5, 16.1%) felt outright uncomfortable. As a result, one-quarter (n=8, 25.8%) have avoided spending time on campus because of a fear of harassment, being perceived as trans, or 'outed'. This fear is not without justification, as several participants experienced verbal victimization or harassment at the university (n=4, 14.8%). *"I do often hear – from students and faculty – transphobic jokes (you know the type, the "man in a dress" punchline, etc)."*

Administrative Matters and Identification

Three-quarters of respondents (n=24, 75%) indicated that their university email account displays their legal name to others; the majority (n=13, 54.2%) of which identified this as a serious issue – one that can result in discomfort, harassment, or being 'outed' as trans. All respondents (n=32, 100%) thought that students should be able to use their chosen name on all official university documentation. Yet, results suggest a flaw in the preferred name system used by the university: *"I have tried to remove my middle name from official documentation, but it did not work and my full name still appears on all university documentation."*

A considerable proportion of respondents (n=13, 38.2%) use a preferred name at school, yet only one-third (n=4, 36.4%) of those who do so report that staff and faculty consistently use

their chosen names. Moreover, three-quarters of respondents (n=22, 75.9%) have been misgendered by professors. However, this is not a one-time occurrence; rather, students are often or almost always misgendered (n=17, 77.3%). *“Another experience was a fairly negative one involving a professor who said transphobic remarks in front of an entire class. I attempted to explain why this was wrong and he completely disregarded and then misgendered me.”*

Fitness Centre

Over half of participants (n=16, 55.2%) have avoided using the campus fitness centre out of a fear of harassment, being perceived as trans, or ‘outed’. *“I get glares in the women's room, but I don't feel comfortable in the men's. A girl kept looking over her shoulder at me like I was following her into the women's change room at the gym. I just wanted to get changed but she made it her mission to make it clear to me that my presence made her uncomfortable.”*

Nearly two-thirds (n=18, 62.1%) have avoided using the fitness centre because of a fear of using the traditional men or women’s locker rooms. *“Being forced to choose a locker room has made me avoid using the fitness centres.”* When participants were asked whether they would use a gender-inclusive locker room if it were available, 96.6% (n=28) indicated that they would.

Washrooms

Although access to washrooms constitutes a basic human need, just over half of participants (n=15, 51.7%) have avoided using university washrooms because of a fear of harassment, being perceived as trans, or ‘outed’. *“I avoid any possibility of being ridiculed and go home instead.”* As a result of a lack of gender-neutral washrooms, two-thirds of participants (n=19, 65.5%) have had to travel across campus to find a washroom that they feel safe or comfortable in. *“The gender neutral washrooms are really hard to find - a lot of them are unlabeled. [. . .] It's sucky to have to walk three buildings over to find a washroom that you can use.”*

All who answered (n=29, 100%) indicated that there was a need for more gender-neutral washrooms on campus. But further, their location must be publicly available. *“I know that there are gender neutral bathrooms somewhere on campus but I haven't been able to find any list of them and they certainly aren't easily accessible (i.e. very few available).”*

University Health Services

Alongside the need for general health care, trans individuals may require specialized care in relation to their transition. Yet, of those who used university health services for the purposes of obtaining trans-related care, 80% (n=8) did not think that their doctor was knowledgeable about trans health. *“I saw a University of Ottawa doctor before [. . .] His care was irresponsible - he left my hormones at dangerously high levels (6x the normal upper limit for testosterone).”*

But further, over half (n=11, 52.2%) of those who have used university health services felt that staff were not respectful of transgender identity. *“Although I have my preferred name on all of my medical documents they continuously call me by my dead [legal] name. I’ve had extensive health problems and have to correct the doctors every time.”*

Counselling Services

The ability to access counselling is essential for students – especially for trans and gender nonconforming community who experience unique social issues. Indeed, a large proportion of participants (n=13, 44.8%) used university counselling services and much of the need for counselling stemmed from issues surrounding gender identity (n=6, 46.2%). However, the majority (n=7, 63.6%) of those who used these services thought that their counsellor was not knowledgeable about trans issues or the trans community. As a result, trans and gender nonconforming students may be referred elsewhere because their needs cannot be adequately addressed by university counsellors. *“I needed gender-related counselling so I called the University of Ottawa's services. [...] The problem was, she didn't seem particularly knowledgeable about the issues. [...] She provided me with a list of resources in the community. I looked them up and they were over \$250 a month! I couldn't afford to go.”*

University Housing

A considerable proportion of participants (n=12, 41.4%) have lived in University housing. However, a small number decided against living in university housing because of their gender identity (n=2, 12.5%), presumably stemming from a fear of roommate assignment on the basis of assigned sex, as opposed to gender identity. Of those who had lived in university housing, 1-in-5 (n=7, 20.6%) reported discrimination, harassment or humiliation by their roommates or others/peers. *“I felt unsafe around my roommate - heightened anxiety.”*

Recommendations

The University of Ottawa must undergo systemic change in order to adapt to the needs of its transgender and gender nonconforming students. The following is a list of practical recommendations that will alleviate much of the hardships experienced by this body of students:

- 1) Update the preferred name system used by the university to ensure that it is applied uniformly and that students’ chosen names are used on email communications, course lists, employee contracts, and all other documentation.
- 2) Create, in a timely manner, a gender-inclusive locker room (defined as a locker room with open access to people of all genders, equipped with multiple changing and shower stalls, and a washroom) in both the Montpetit Hall and Minto Sports Complex fitness centres.
- 3) Create additional gender-neutral washrooms to ensure that students will not have to travel unreasonable distances to find a washroom that they feel safe and comfortable using.

While it is ideal for there to be a gender-neutral washroom on every floor of every building, at a minimum, there must be one gender-neutral washroom per building.

4) Publicize on the university website the location of all gender-neutral washrooms on campus to ensure that students will be able to locate washrooms and, given the high proportion of participants who identified as a person with a disability, provide information as to whether or not they are accessible washrooms.

5) Introduce mandatory sensitivity training and trans education for medical and counseling staff at the University of Ottawa to ensure that staff can meet the needs of transgender students who experience unique social issues and require specialized care in relation to their transition.

6) The university must update its policies on roommate assignments in residences so that roommates are never assigned on the basis of sex, but on gender identity. Transgender and gender nonconforming students should be able to choose a roommate with the gender that they would feel most safe and comfortable being housed.

Implementing these changes is of utmost importance. Our university has a legal responsibility to provide a safe and non-discriminatory environment for all students. Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* institutions have the duty to accommodate trans individuals through the use of gender-inclusive spaces which provide safety and comfort especially for those who are non-binary or who have recently transitioned (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2014).

Suggested Citation:

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Additional Key recommendations

1. Survey transgender and gender non-conforming employees to bring to light how issues are similar or different from those of students, as revealed in the attached research document.
2. That the University of Ottawa approve a policy guiding the collection of gender and sex data to ensure that “language used on in-take forms, record documents, and surveys is inclusive and free from bias or barriers related to sex and gender identification” (See Queen’s University Policy)
<http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.us/cwww/files/files/policies/administration/CollectingInformationAboutSexandGenderPolicy.pdf>
3. Approve trans and gender non-binary policies or guidelines on matters which we know are most problematic on an institutional level: 1) (un)necessary gender and sex data collection, 2) allow for gender and sex options beyond the binary for respondents when collection of such information is necessary, 3) allow for people to choose their names & pronouns, 4) allow for individual accommodations around pronouns & names until systemic changes are in place, 5) other areas for which trans and gender non-conforming people require accommodations.

Members of the Diversity and Inclusion Trans and gender non-binary sub-committee are comprised of members of: Facilities, Human Rights Office, Labour Relations (HR), Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies, Sports Services, and the student population. A number of Committee members have lived experience as a trans or gender non-conforming person and/or as a member of a trans family.

For more research, consult the following:

Transpulse is a “community-based research (CBR) project that is investigating the impact of social exclusion and discrimination on the health of trans people in Ontario, Canada”. Their document entitled “Transgender People in Ontario, Canada; Statistics from the Trans PULSE Project to Inform Human Rights Policy can be accessed at <http://transpulseproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trans-PULSE-Statistics-Relevant-for-Human-Rights-Policy-June-2015.pdf>.

The “2015 U.S. Trans Survey”, the largest survey ever of trans people with 27, 715 respondents, has published a full report of finding. The report and executive summary are available at <http://www.ustranssurvey.org/report/>.