

## Review of Potential Student Life Issues Facing Transgender Students

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*ad hoc* study group:

J.J. Boggs, Assistant Director of Campus Activities for Student Organizations  
Center for Campus Activities and Leadership

Mary Hurlie, Associate Director for Alumni Career Services, Career Services

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION; SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF REVIEW AND REPORT**

In July 2009, Dean of Students Gus Jordan appointed a small *ad hoc* study group to conduct a review of the College's practices in addressing the needs of transgender students in the areas of student life. The charge to the *ad hoc* study group was to conduct a cursory review of our student life programs, activities and facilities in order to offer observations and recommendations for further review in some areas, and actions in other areas. The scope of this report, therefore, is limited to major student life areas; and the depth of the review is of a 'first level' examination. The purpose of the report is to provide a preliminary set of observations and recommendations that may point future in-depth reviews in a particular direction.

The review was focused on two areas in particular:

1. Access and accommodation re: facilities and student housing
2. Recordkeeping and documents

Middlebury's Nondiscrimination Statement states the College's policy and commitment to nondiscrimination on the basis of (among other identities) gender identity and expression, and to compliance with state law, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

### Middlebury Nondiscrimination Statement [excerpt from College Handbook]

Middlebury College complies with applicable provisions of state and federal law which prohibit discrimination in employment, or in admission or access to its educational or extracurricular programs, activities, or facilities, on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, marital status, place of birth, service in the armed forces of the United States, or against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability.

## **REVIEW PROCESS AND RESOURCES FOR THIS REPORT**

- Met with residential systems coordinator to understand housing policy and practices, especially re: first year room and roommate assignments
- Reviewed student housing questionnaire and forms
- Reviewed best practices re: transgender student issues, and gender inclusivity of programs, at two other institutions:
  - University of Vermont:  
Interviewed Director of LGBTQA Services at the University of Vermont re: addressing the needs and concerns of transgender students. UVM is regarded as a leader in the area of services for transgender students, especially re: recordkeeping and documents.
  - Wesleyan University:  
Corresponded with Director of Residential Life regarding their approach to gender-exclusive programming, and accommodation of the needs and concerns of transgender students in housing issues.

## **SECTION 2: AREAS REVIEWED AND RESEARCHED**

The following two areas were specifically examined:

- I. Access and accommodation re: facilities and student housing
- II. Recordkeeping and documents

## **I. Access and accommodation re: facilities and housing**

- Concerns re: room and roommate assignments
- Concerns re: residential hall bathroom and shower facilities
- Concerns re: locker room and public bathrooms

This area concerns transgender students in relation to their housing situation: room assignment, roommate assignment; and access/privacy in bathroom and shower facilities. Room and roommate assignments for first year students who are transgender may be complicated by factors such as: whether the student is 'out' as a transgender person; whether the student feels safe with a particular roommate or on a particular hall, or perceives the environment to be unsafe or hostile.

Issues of bathroom and shower facilities may involve concerns about privacy and/or safety. The needs for a transgender student who is not transsexual may be different from those of a transsexual student. And the needs of each individual student, transgender and/or transsexual, will likely be different. The comfort level and societal attitudes of the student's hall mates and other neighbors may also factor into the student's sense of safety. For example, the transgender student may feel comfortable using the gender-designated bathroom that matches their own gender identity, but other students on the hall may not be comfortable. Or the transgender student, for privacy reasons, may feel uncomfortable using that bathroom, even if other students do not 'object'.

In other facilities, issues of privacy and safety for transgender students also arise with respect to locker rooms in the athletic facilities, and in public bathrooms across campus.

## **II. Recordkeeping, Documents and Forms**

- Concerns re: preferred name and pronoun
- Concerns re: self-identification

This area relates to issues for transgender students in how they wish to identify, and how they wish to be addressed, on campus. A transgender student whose legal name is a male (or female) name, may have adopted a new first name and present a gender expression that differs from the legal name. In this case, the student may wish to be addressed by the adopted new name and with the preferred pronoun. Providing for the student's desire to use a preferred name that is not the legal name (when they have not legally changed their name) has implications for many areas of official and unofficial college documents and recordkeeping, such as:

- Class Lists (how professors address students in classroom)
- Grade Reports
- Advisee Lists
- Degree Audit System
- Unofficial Transcripts
- ID card
- Library sign-out process
- Directory Listing

In some cases, transgender students who request that their preferred name be used on a document, may be equally concerned about protecting their privacy and not being 'outed' as transgender. For example, if a student's preferred name is listed on the Class List that is provided to the professor by the Registrars Office - unless the

same name is listed on the Grade Reports, Advisee List, etc – it is likely that the professor will discover the student's transgender identity. Unless the student is 'out' and comfortable with their professors knowing this, the student may fear ridicule or discrimination from the professor or classmates.

### **SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **I. Access and accommodation re: facilities and housing**

1. Further research and survey peer institutions and best practices leaders (i.e., University of Vermont; Wesleyan University) re: housing policies, practices and accommodation for transgender students.
2. Form a discussion group (representatives from Dean of Students office, Residential Life, Health Center, Counseling Center Commons staff, others) to learn more about the needs and concerns of transgender students (current and future) with regard to housing, room and roommate assignments (especially first year housing), and bathroom/shower facilities in residential halls. Reach out to the student body to invite transgender students to participate in this discussion – either as part of the discussion group, or anonymously through confidential questionnaire or written survey.
3. Request that Facilities Services department conduct an inventory of all public bathrooms on campus to determine the number of single-sex / gender-designated bathrooms (whether single occupancy or multiple occupancy); and the number of gender-neutral bathrooms (whether single occupancy or multiple occupancy).
4. Initiate a collaboration with other appropriate college offices (i.e., Facilities Services department, Public Safety, Business Services office, ADA office, others) with a goal to:
  - Convert as many gender-designated bathrooms into gender-neutral bathrooms, as possible. It will be relatively easy to convert single-occupancy bathrooms to gender-neutral, and this should be implemented as soon as possible, including the appropriate signage. For current gender-designated bathrooms that are multiple occupancy, this will require a feasibility study to determine: what portion of these should be converted in order to provide reasonable proximity to a gender-neutral bathroom from any point on campus; and which can or cannot be converted from a facilities/structural standpoint.
  - Provide a gender-neutral bathroom/shower/changing room in the vicinity of the locker room facilities in the athletics complex.

#### **II. Recordkeeping, Documents and Forms**

1. Initiate collaboration with the offices of the: Dean of Students, Provost, Registrar, and LIS to discuss how Middlebury will adopt a 'Preferred Name and Pronoun Information' policy similar to that of the University of Vermont. Create a task team to plan for this implementation; the team should include representatives from above listed offices. (At UVM, this task team was chaired by the University Registrar.)
2. Assist Registrars Office and LIS in researching customized programming/coding for the BANNER student information system that would allow transgender students to be listed with their preferred name and pronoun on internal forms

and records such as:

- Class Lists (how professors address students in classroom)
- Grade Reports
- Advisee Lists
- Degree Audit System
- Unofficial Transcripts
- ID card

Contact University of Vermont for best practices information on their process of custom-coding their BANNER system in this way. UVM has offered this program cost-free to other BANNER institutions wishing to add this option for transgender students.

### **III. Additional Recommendations**

1. Awareness training for all Student Life department heads on issues facing transgender students
  - Ask Counseling Center staff and Health Center staff to lead discussion on some of the issues facing transgender students at Middlebury (generically)
  - Invite the Director of LGBTQA Services at the University of Vermont, Ms. Dot Brauer, to conduct a training session for department heads and staff. At UVM, Ms. Brauer developed this training program curriculum ('Trans 101'); trained 14 presenters to conduct the training throughout the university on a voluntary basis; and has conducted 50-60 trainings for faculty, staff, advisors and students over the last five years. Ms. Brauer has offered to come to Middlebury to conduct this training for us in whatever timeframe and format works best for the student life division (as a 2-hour training, or half-day workshop, etc). She would provide this training at no charge.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Some of the recommendations offered in this report can be implemented with relative ease, and some will require further study and deliberation to determine whether they represent a direction the College wishes to pursue. For the more complex and policy-sensitive recommendations (i.e., a 'Preferred Name and Pronoun' policy by the Registrars Office) or those with potentially significant financial resources implications (i.e., the conversion of some public bathroom facilities on campus and in residence halls), further research and deliberation will be necessary, with review by College legal counsel. We hope that the preliminary review we have conducted in these areas, and this resulting report, will provide a direction in which future task groups and groups working on these issues can focus their work.

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Respectfully submitted *March 19, 2010*:

J.J. Boggs, Assistant Director of Campus Activities for Student Organizations  
Center for Campus Activities and Leadership

Mary Hurlie, Associate Director for Alumni Career Services  
Career Services