

# Steps Toward an Affirming Environment for Transgender Students

**Presented by:**

**Tara Young- Captain**

**Joseph Lehocky**

**Samantha Wagner**

**Nakia Waters**

# Background

According to the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), “55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8% because of their gender expression.” In the GLSEN 2013 National School Climate Survey, students ages 13–21 recounted incidents of being both physically and verbally harassed/assaulted. The rate of absences of this student demographic is linked to this harassment. Students have reported avoiding gender specific spaces such as locker rooms and restrooms due to fear for their safety or fear of discrimination. Forty-two percent of transgender students have been barred from using their affirming name. Transgender students have also been prevented from using the bathrooms of the gender with which they identify. A negative school climate has a great impact on a student’s education. Creating a welcoming environment for transgender students will allow them to focus on their success in academics and beyond.

# Campus Climate

The current campus climate of many universities across the country have been faced with various issues surrounding diversity and underrepresented students. Although Centrist College has reported no significant problems concerning this student demographic, we wish to be proactive in the matter of inclusion of all students. While all elements concerning diversity and inclusion are important, Centrist College will first focus on ensuring that the campus is both inclusive and welcoming to their transgender population.

# Current Programs

- Availability of gender inclusive housing
- “Preferred Name” campaign which allows students to update their official school record with their affirming name and pronouns
- Availability of gender inclusive restrooms
- Optional “Safe Zone” training is available to interested faculty and staff

# What Can We Do Better?

While Centrist College has a good foundation for an inclusive campus, there are some additional steps we can take to improve our inclusionary environment.

The following are goals and objectives we identified as crucial to achieving our vision for an inclusionary campus climate.

# Goals and Objectives

- 1) Expand educational resources available to everyone at Centrist College regarding transgender issues.
- 2) Create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for transgender and non-binary students.
- 3) Educate faculty and staff about creating inclusive spaces for individuals who self-identify as transgender and non-binary students, faculty, and staff.

# Action Plan- Trans 101 workshop

Action: Create a Trans 101 workshop mandatory for all current employees and new hires going forward.

Purpose: Review basic information about what it means to be transgender and non-binary (affirming name and pronouns), the intersectionality of identities (sexual orientation, race, socioeconomics, etc.), and address possible microaggressions they may commit.

Cost: \$- minimal, after the initial training, the Trans 101 workshop could be completed with new hire orientation.

# Action Plan- Continual Staff Training

Action: Include a speaker who addresses transgender issues during bi-annual staff training.

Purpose: To keep the staff educated on the most relevant and current issues affecting transgender individuals.

Cost: \$\$- reasonable, we want to bring in top speakers in the field, in addition to knowledgeable staff members.



# Action Plan- Trans 101 at Student Orientation

**Action:** Have a section of new student orientation designated to talk about transgender identities and resources available on campus.

**Purpose:** To educate those who don't know about transgender identities before they interact with someone who does identify as transgender on campus. Also, to offer resources to those who may be transgender without specifically singling them out.

**Cost:** \$- minimal, this should be in addition to an existing orientation session on LGBTQ+ information and resources for students who self-identify within the community.

# Action Plan- Department Inclusion Review

**Action:** Have all departments on campus review their resources (print and online) to verify they're inclusive for transgender and non-binary individuals, including any resources targeted toward students, in human resources, and etc.

**Purpose:** Confirming that all departments on campus are using transgender inclusive language will help affirm transgender students presence on campus. Student manuals that have a clearly defined code of conduct for both online and real-world interactions between students, faculty, and staff will set standards of behavior and concise consequences if not followed.

**Cost:** \$- minimal, after the initial review of all current materials, anything new that is published should be verified for inclusivity.

# Action Plan- Gender Inclusive Restrooms

**Action:** Create a campus map for existing gender inclusive restrooms and create new inclusive restrooms in expanded locations throughout Centrist College's campus.

**Purpose:** Increase the availability and awareness of gender inclusive restrooms on campus.

**Cost:** \$-\$\$\$\$, cost will depend on the conversion of existing spaces and how many new spaces are created. The creation of a map for the restrooms would be very minimal, and can be accessed online through the school's website or app if applicable.

# Action Plan- Transgender Advisory Committee

**Action:** Create an advisory committee comprised of transgender and ally students and staff. All members of the advisory committee must be volunteers. No one can be approached on an individual basis because of their identity. Recruiting will be done through public announcements.

**Purpose:** The advisory committee will highlight issues affecting the transgender community on campus and provide feedback on current and future policies. This committee will also bridge the gap between students and administration, allowing for student-driven programming and policies.

**Cost:** \$- minimal, there will be no additional monetary compensation given for volunteers of the advisory committee.

# Action Plan- Office of Social Justice and Inclusion

Action: Create an Office of Social Justice and Inclusion.

Purpose: The Office of Social Justice and Inclusion would create safer spaces on campus for students to exist and give guidance to associated student organizations. Office staff will serve on and host the Transgender Advisory Committee, giving input on existing and developing policies to make sure they are inclusionary to students who identify with marginalized populations. The creation of this office will also address issues of race, spirituality, gender, and sexual orientation through continual programming and events.

Cost: \$\$\$\$\$- high, however the cost associated with creating this space would be an investment to the future of the college. To have trained social justice educators on staff would help Centrist College remain inclusionary and attract prospective students and employees for years to come.

# Action Plan- Add Specialized Staff

Action: Hire staff who specialize in LGBTQIA+ education and mental health.

Purpose: In addition to the staff in the Office of Social Justice and Inclusion, hiring staff who specialize in LGBTQIA+ issues are needed, especially to address mental health concerns within this student demographic. This is necessary to ensure a balanced, holistic approach to these students' education.

Cost: \$\$-\$\$\$, cost would depend on the present competency and additional training needed for current staff. If needed, Centrist College would be open to creating an additional position to specifically address LGBTQIA+ needs.

# Metrics of Success

In order to measure the success of these new initiatives, Centrist will utilize the benchmarks set forth in the Campus Pride Index. The Campus Pride index is a measurement tool used to assess policies and resources provided to the LGBTQ+ population attending colleges & universities. The Campus Pride Index rates schools based on the following criteria:

- LGBTQ Policy Inclusion
- LGBTQ Support & Institutional Commitment
- LGBTQ Academic Life
- LGBTQ Student Life
- LGBTQ Housing
- LGBTQ Campus Safety
- LGBTQ Counseling & Health
- LGBTQ Recruitment & Retention Efforts

# Consequences

In order to ensure the success of these programs and initiatives, Centrist College will need to develop a comprehensive policy that details consequences for noncompliance.

Failure on the part of the administration to enforce the new policies will compromise the integrity of the inclusionary program.



# Conclusion

While the action plans suggested vary in cost, the benefits are well worth the investment considering the specific needs of transgender and non-binary individuals.

Creating an inclusive and welcoming space will not only attract transgender students and staff, but will help boost campus enrollment and retention rates.

# Resources

- Campus Pride Index
  - <https://www.campusprideindex.org/menu/aboutus>
- Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
  - [http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report\\_o.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report_o.pdf)
- KENNEDY, M. (2015). Transgender students and bathrooms. *American School & University*, 87(8), 18–20.
- Newhouse, M. R. (2013). Remembering the "T" in LGBT: Recruiting and Supporting Transgender Students. *Journal Of College Admission*, (220), 22–27.
- Rowan Office of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution
  - <http://www.rowan.edu/studentaffairs/sjicr/lgbtq/>
- Seelman, K. L. (2014). Recommendations of transgender students, staff, and faculty in the USA for improving college campuses. *Gender & Education*, 26(6), 618–635.doi:10.1080/09540253.2014.935300