



United Council

of University of Wisconsin Students, Inc.

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“Gender Identity or Expression” Added to Non-Discrimination Policy

University of Wisconsin System Joins Number of Universities to Add Protections

MADISON—The University of Wisconsin (UW) Board of Regents added “gender identity or expression” to the list of protected categories in policy documents regarding non-discrimination at their February 10 - 11 meeting. The 26-campus UW system joins the University of California and University of Minnesota systems among others to offer clear and explicit protections for transgender faculty, staff and students.

“Transgender members of our campus communities deserve equal opportunity and treatment. Our campuses must foster educational experiences and campus climates that are welcoming, inclusive and equitable for all students” stated Lilia Williams, United Council LGBTQ Issues Director. “By adding these protections, we will continue to work with campuses to end the violence, intimidation, harassment, abuse, seclusion and indifference experienced by transgender students, faculty and staff.”

“Gender identity” can be defined as a person’s own sense of identity as a man, woman, or a combination of both or neither while “gender expression” is the external presentation or appearance of a person’s gender. “Transgender” is a term used to describe people whose gender identity does not fit traditional gender roles or whose gender identity and/or expression is not adequately described by the sex assigned to them at birth. (Definitions from United States Student Association’s (USSA) “Transgender Access” sheet, 2004)

A growing number of universities have amended policies to protect and make campuses more accessible for gender-variant individuals. This is one step in educating campus communities on the issues transgender members face on and off-campus and providing an avenue for them to voice issues or concerns. Education is critical for campus members to modify their own behavior, language and instruction to be more inclusive of and sensitive to transgender people. However, a number of institutional and structural barriers remain for gender-variant individuals.

One student who transitioned from male to female while at UW-Eau Claire remarked that one difficulty she faced dealt with something most take for granted: bathrooms. “There is no safe choice when you are between genders and are constantly forced to make a decision. I felt unsafe going into either one, particularly the men’s bathroom” she said. “I was afraid I would get assaulted or in the women’s bathroom being arrested for simply being there. For me and other transgender people it is a matter of safety and comfort. Any protections can ease the oppressions I face daily.”

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The United Council of UW Students, founded in 1960, is one of the nation’s largest, oldest and most effective student advocacy and research organizations, representing approximately 145,000 students on 23 UW campuses. United Council is a non-partisan, non-profit, student-directed organization committed to enhancing the quality of student life and higher education in Wisconsin.