

UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES



JESSICA PETTITT

Making sense of
the "T" in LGBT

Out of more than 1,000 institutions of higher education in the U.S., fewer than 300 have non-discrimination policies that include gender identity and expression. "Transgender students, staff, and faculty are already on your campus or have been," said speaker and consultant Jessica Pettitt. "It is up to you to be proactive and foster a more inclusive environment for all community members to have access to services and support."

College campuses, corporations, and even secondary education institutions are beginning to ask for assistance in making their environments and services inclusive for trans community members. "Education, training, and speakers, are all great ways to foster a supportive environment for trans students, staff, and faculty," Pettitt said.

"I am often asked, 'what can be done quickly and cheaply?'" she said. "There isn't one answer that fits every situation as climate and resources vary greatly."

Some quick suggestions Jessica offered:

- Identify, affiliate with, and publicize the names of counselors, nurses, and doctors who are supportive of trans patients and knowledgeable about trans health concerns. Also, publicize the names of staff and faculty who are knowledgeable and can provide support.
- Conduct a survey and post results on a campus website of all single occupancy bathrooms, showers, changing rooms, etc., and their location across all campus buildings. Track how these bathrooms are labeled and note inconsistencies.
- Research and publicize state and campus procedures for officially changing one's name and gender designation within registrar's office, human resources and clinics, as well as state-issued documents.
- Create a web-based campus resource guide for new and prospective transgender students, staff, and faculty.

Trans inclusion doesn't have to be highly politicized. Simple sensitivity to the unique needs of these individuals can go a long way to creating a more supportive campus community.



SHANE WINDMEYER

Helping college campuses
make the grade

As the founder of Campus Pride, the leading national non-profit organization serving LGBT and ally college students and campus groups, Shane Windmeyer has taken on a variety of impactful projects. One of the most heralded is the LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index (campusclimateindex.org). Windmeyer and his volunteers have compiled "Campus Report Cards" on more than 200 colleges, grading them on the support they provide to LGBT community members.

"Even if you find the most queer-riffic campus out there with rainbow and pink triangles everywhere, believe me, there is room for improvement when it comes to LGBT concerns," Windmeyer said. "But people are using our index to find those campuses invested in creating a friendly environment."

Fortunately, Shane said, most colleges today honestly want to be gay friendly. "A growing number of colleges understand and finally get that every student should be able to live and learn in a safe, welcoming college environment, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression," he said.

For many LGBT students, college has become the safe-haven and a place where supportive friends provide a sense of meaning. Shane said that students frequently share stories of fear surrounding family relationships and loss of resources from parents who won't accept their child's orientation.

"These stories of pain and isolation are still very real," Windmeyer said. "I constantly remind people that there are still college students who are closeted and fearful, who commit suicide. For them, the closet door is bolted shut, and acceptance is not guaranteed."

There is still a lot of work to be done before LGBT students can feel safe on every American campus. Even as media exposure increases, political gains are incrementally made, and more young people come out at earlier ages, the stories of discrimination and harassment continue to surface.