

## **Questions and Answers about the Consortium's Transgender-Supportive Recommendations**

### **1) Why does the current question that asks sex need to be changed?**

The question needs to be changed simply because it excludes students who do not identify as male or female. Forced to choose between two options that do not reflect their identities, these students feel marginalized, resentful, and unwelcomed by the institution. Colleges and universities also then have misleading information about students for housing and health care purposes, which adds to students' marginalization and interferes with the ability of institutions to meet their needs.

### **2) Why are you suggesting four options?**

We recommend four options for gender identity because many gender-nonconforming individuals do not identify specifically as transgender. A forthcoming book (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011) that examines the experiences of about 3,500 gender-nonconforming people in the U.S. finds that participants used more than a hundred different labels for their gender identities beyond male, female, and transgender. Providing four options enables institutions to collect information in a manageable way while being more inclusive.

### **3) Will transgender students want to self-disclose this information?**

Although some transgender students are not out or may not want to self-disclose on forms and applications because of a fear that this information would be used to discriminate against them, many more transgender students are open and want to have their gender identity recognized. Transgender students who would prefer not to self-disclose still have this option, but those who do would have the opportunity. For students who are not comfortable disclosing this information immediately, having options will make them feel more comfortable on campus when they feel safe and are ready to identify.

### **4) Would transgender students risk being discriminated against if they disclose their gender identity?**

Currently 392 colleges and universities include gender identity and gender expression in their nondiscrimination policies, and 13 states have similar nondiscrimination laws (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 2011; Transgender Law and Policy Institute 2011). Although these policies do not guarantee that discrimination will not occur, they put systems in place to respond if discrimination does happen. Campuses without such policies should implement them to help protect all students. Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) standards explicitly state that all programs should seek to avoid discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. Including these categories in a campus nondiscrimination policy is the most effective means to ensure compliance with this standard.

### **5) Is making such a major change warranted for what is likely to be a small group of students who would benefit from it?**

Because the opportunity to self identify as transgender is currently not an option for most students, we do not know how many will come out on forms if given the choice. However, even if it is a small number, creating access to more students helps schools become more competitive while increasing institutional diversity and promoting global citizenship among all students.

**6) Would this change interfere with reporting requirements for gender?**

No. According to the National Center for Education Statistics and the Office of Postsecondary Education, this question on college applications is not connected to how institutions are required to report data to the Department of Education (DOE). Colleges are free to ask gender however they want and it will not affect reporting requirements to the DOE.

**7) What have been the experiences of schools that have a transgender-inclusive admissions form?**

The University of Oregon and Tufts University are two schools that ask a more inclusive gender question on their admissions forms (Oregon on its main application and Tufts on its supplemental form). According to Chicora Martin, the director of the LGBT Education and Support Services Program at the University of Oregon, the change “has been wonderfully easy from an administrative side and a great thing for our students.” The University will follow up with students who indicate a transgender identity as needed for housing purposes. Tufts has likewise experienced no problems and works with students who indicate a nonbinary identity on a case-by-case basis. If a student marks an identity other than male or female, their main campus record will not list a gender. Benjamin Baum, the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Tufts, explains that the more inclusive gender question has also appealed to non-transgender students. He states that “every year there are students (generally who select ‘male’ or ‘female’ on the Supplement) who say that their application to Tufts was, in part, driven by the inclusive nature of the University, as evidenced by the fact that we were the only school to which they applied with an application that allowed for an ‘other’ option.”

**8) Why should students be offered a preferred name option on campus records and documents?**

Obtaining a legal name change in most states is an involved process that typically costs more than \$100. A preferred name option enables transgender students who are not ready or able to change their names legally to have a name that reflects their appearance and identity. Otherwise, students may be outed as transgender when an instructor takes attendance, when someone sees their student identification card or looks them up in the college’s online directory, or when a course requires students to use an online forum displaying their username. Graduate student instructors may likewise be outed in course listings and online forums.

**9) How can we offer a preferred name option, as our software does not allow for it?**

Software fixes have been developed for Banner, Peoplesoft, and Datatel Colleague programs to make this change possible. Currently, more than 20 colleges offer a preferred name option using modified software without difficulties. These institutions include the University of Vermont (which uses Banner) and the University of Michigan (which uses Peoplesoft); the registrar’s offices at these schools will provide the software solution free of charge to other institutions.

**10) How will using a preferred name affect diplomas and transcripts for our alumni?**

Colleges and universities have the ability to use a preferred name on campus records and documents, which includes diplomas and unofficial transcripts, as well as class rosters and student identity cards. For some legal records and documents, such as tax forms and official university transcripts, legal names may be required.

**11) Why should students be able to change the gender on campus records and documents without a changed birth certificate or driver's license?**

Having this policy is important because states often require evidence of gender confirmation surgery before changing legal documents, and several states refuse to reissue birth certificates. Moreover, many people transition without undergoing surgery, because they cannot afford to do so, are not satisfied with the aesthetic results, or just do not see the need. There are additional legal and medical reasons why some transgender people wait to change these documents. Requiring a changed birth certificate or driver's license places an undue, unnecessary, and sometimes impossible burden on students to be fully recognized and acknowledged by the institution.

**12) Would allowing students to change their gender on campus records create problems with federal and state records on which their gender has not been changed?**

Not in a significant way. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, the difference in gender marker between campus and federal records may be raised by government officials for students who apply for work-study, but this will not interfere with the students' ability to receive it.

**References**

Beemyn, G., & Rankin S. (2011). *The lives of transgender people*. New York: Columbia University Press.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. (2011). *State nondiscrimination laws in the U.S.* Retrieved May 5, 2011, from [http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/issue\\_maps/non\\_discrimination\\_7\\_09\\_color.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/issue_maps/non_discrimination_7_09_color.pdf)

Transgender Law and Policy Institute. (2011). *Colleges and universities with nondiscrimination policies that include gender identity/expression*. Retrieved May 5, 2011, from <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/college/index.htm#policies>