**Office of Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender Student Services**
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

# Addressing Transgender-Inclusion at Western Michigan University

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## Background and Overview

The efforts described herein have been funded through the generous support of the Diversity Change Initiative Grants: Implementation of Assessment Recommendations. The grant, titled, *Systemic Transformational Change Toward Increased Transgender-Inclusion,* seeks to increase transgender inclusion at Western Michigan University through three primary approaches. Project goals include the *Student Preferred Name Initiative, Gender Identity Academic Integration, and Service Learning.*

### Grant Overview

**October 2014**: Draft policy language submitted to Preferred Name task force for review.

**October-November 2014**: Review draft Preferred Name Policy feedback, students developed service-learning projects in coordination with instructor and Office of LBGT Student Services staff

**October-January 2014**: Developed Academic Integration Workshop presentation based on Gender Identity Training Program and transgender-inclusion best-practices

**December 2014**: Students finalized and implemented service-learning projects

**January 2014**: Conducted Academic Integration Workshop with the Gender and Women Studies Department with pre-post evaluation

**January-February 2015**: Revised Academic Integration Workshop with evaluation feedback

**March 2015**: Coordinated Student Feedback Session on Preferred Name Policy progress

## Preferred Name Policy

**December 2013**: Office of LBGT Student Services' LBGT Student Advisory Council met with university leaders including VP for Student Affairs, VP for Diversity and Inclusion, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Assoc. Provost for Enrollment Management, Assoc. Provost for Assessment and Undergraduate Studies, and Assoc. Provost for Institutional Effectiveness to discuss opportunities to address systemic institutional barriers for transgender students. The advisory council urged leaders to address the lack of opportunity to display a preferred name in various student information systems including class roster, ID card, email address and university housing records.

**February 2014**: Western Student Association passes resolution in support of a student preferred name policy

**March 2014**: Exploratory meeting with institutional partners that would be affected by Preferred Name Policy to determine support.

**July 2014**: Preferred Name Task Force established under the leadership of Assoc. Provost for Enrollment Management and chaired by the University Registrar. Task Force is charged with developing policy language and implementation guidelines.

**October 2014**: Task Force approves draft policy language

**January-March 2015**: Draft policy language is shared and revised

"Besides being a matter of fairness and respect, an accurate gender designation in college files is critical to avoid outing transgender students and to help protect them from discrimination when they apply for jobs, graduate and professional schools, and at any other time that they would need to show a college document." (Beemyn, 46, 2003)

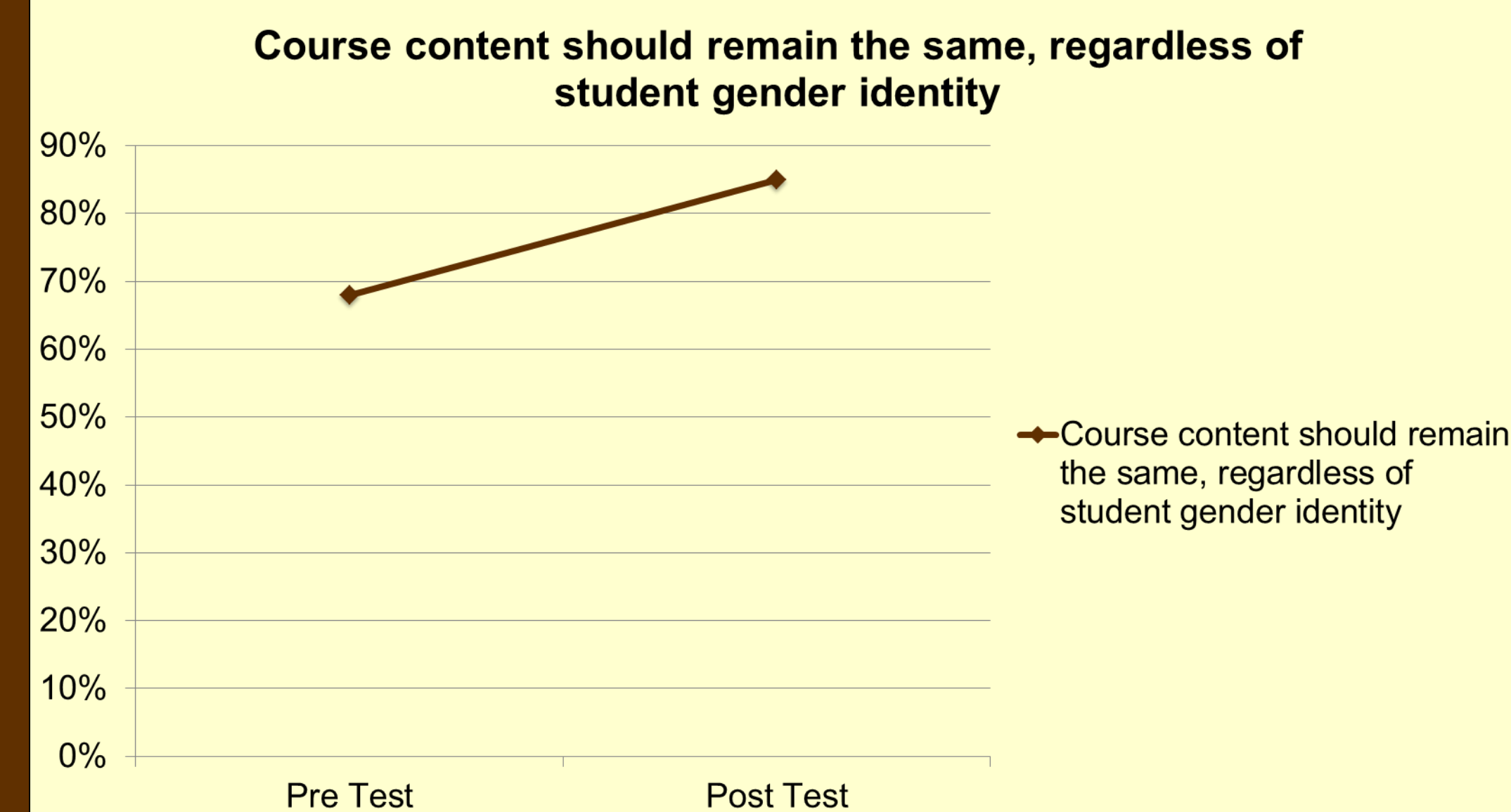## Gender Identity Academic Integration Workshops

National surveys, including the WMU Campus Climate Study report that transgender and gender-nonconforming students continue to face discrimination and bias on campus and in the classroom that create barriers for academic success; cultural competency workshops are recommended to support student success and retention (Beemyn, 43, 2003; Worthington, 2013). Building on the past success of the Office of LBGT Student Services' Gender Identity Training Program, the Gender Identity Academic Integration Workshop was developed with a focus on national transgender-inclusion best-practices in higher education and current inclusive practices. The workshop was presented to the Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) Department instructors. Participants provided feedback through a pre- and post- evaluation to inform workshop revisions. The workshop seeks to increase classroom climate for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

### Pilot Workshop Outcomes and Outputs
• Based on participant feedback workshop will be revised to include role play to provide participant application of new terminology and knowledge
• Based on participant feedback staff are developing take-aways in the form of handouts for post-workshop reference
• Following the training, instructors reported implementing workshop content in their class incorporating the use of gender identity/expression, sex, sexual orientation educational graphic, Genderbread person, reporting increased awareness of the use of chosen names and pronouns, and increased commitment to include transgender topics in course curriculum

### Academic Integration Workshop Evaluation Findings
• Following the workshop 85% of participants (3 did not respond) felt that course content should not remain the same compared to only 68%. This means that there was 17% increase in the belief that content should be adjusted to reflect gender identity. (2 did not respond**)**

**Course content should remain the same, regardless of student gender identity**



## Gender Identity Academic Integration Workshops

### Academic Integration Workshop Evaluation Findings

"I absolutely will incorporate what I learned from the workshop into my future classes. I will continue to add in reading materials and examples that bring transgender voices and experiences into the classroom. In addition, I will use the idea to a collaborative exercise to make the classroom environment as comfortable as possible."

**100% of participants (n=13) felt that the training is relevant to their classroom instruction (1 not reporting).**

"I think the workshop would be great for faculty and staff who don't have background knowledge of trans* identities."

### Academic Integration Recommendations
• Be proactive and integrate transgender and gender nonconforming issues and concerns into curricula Include class discussions
• Provide reading material inclusive of transgender people
• Respond to and intervene when anti-transgender or anti-gender non-conforming incidents/biases occur
• Respect students' chosen name and/or personal pronouns
  • Set the standard that others in the class do the same
  • When taking initial roll call, utilize last names and ask what each student wishes to be called
• Create an inclusive classroom setting through words, actions, and formal syllabi statement of expectations
• Set classroom ground rules of respecting others, including gender non-conforming and transgender people
• Challenge binary and cis-centric language
• Frame curriculum in anti-oppressive pedagogy

## Service-Learning Projects

Students from a Fall 2014 section of GWS 2010: LGBT Studies were given the option of writing a final paper or developing a Service-Learning Project for their class. Students selected an LGBT population or topic and developed the following group Service-Learning Projects:

**LBGTQ Youth**
• 1 page newsletter with information about LGBTQ youth homelessness, healthy dating tips, and information about LGBTQ youth in foster care to put in the residence halls

**LBGTQ People & Faith**
• Worked with Partners in Pride faith group to organize an event where two Christian religious leaders discussed different readings of the Bible in regards to homosexuality

**Transgender Identities**
• Created a blog to increase transgender visibility at WMU

**World AIDS Day**
• Screened documentary "How to Survive a Plague" to students in a residence hall and hosted a feedback discussion about HIV/AIDS on World AIDS Day 2014

**Non-Monosexualities**
• Created a Tumblr zine featuring original writings to serve as a creative outlet for non-monosexual people to express themselves

## Additional Campus Considerations

Many university campuses have created or are in the process of creating more on-campus living options for those who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. The LBGT Student Advisory Council and Residence Life continue to explore these opportunities at WMU.

In December 2014, the Western Student Association passed a resolution to include gender-inclusive facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms in each university building. This improvement is a recommended best practice for transgender inclusion on campus (Seelman, 629, 2014).

## Next Steps/Future Opportunities

• Finalize and implement Preferred Name Policy
  Next steps include:
  • University President approval of policy
  • Information system modifications
  • University education regarding student implementation use and employee practices
  • Ongoing student feedback forums for future success
• Finalize Academic Integration Workshop and develop capacity to deliver workshops across campus in the future
• Explore additional opportunities to increase transgender-inclusion including increased housing options, additional gender-inclusive facility development, and broader transgender-inclusion campus education.

## References

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