Case Studies on Campus Transgender Issues

1) Lucy, a female student at your college who identifies as genderqueer and often dresses in a traditionally masculine manner, is assaulted but not seriously injured by three unidentified men in an anti-transgender hate crime the previous evening. The attack occurs on campus and the perpetrators are thought to be other students. Seeing that you have a “Safe Space” placard on your office door, sie (Lucy’s preferred pronoun to “she”) comes to you first for support. What steps might you take to help hir (Lucy’s preferred pronoun to “her”)? How might Lucy’s needs be different from a non-transgender student who has been assaulted?

2) Charlie, a crossdressing male student who lives in one of the residence halls at your small college, has experienced constant harassment ever since his roommate discovered him in traditionally female clothing and told others. Now it seems that everyone on campus knows that he crossdresses in private. He has heard others in his building make negative comments about “that faggot” and, at one point, anti-gay epithets were scrawled on the dry erase board of his door. His roommate has been so hostile that Charlie does not feel safe in the room. Charlie would like to continue to live on campus, but cannot afford a single room. Assuming the role of an administrator in residence life, how do you serve his needs? If you were to work elsewhere in student affairs, how might you advocate on Charlie’s behalf if he asks for your support?

3) Your university’s health plan has a clause specifically excluding “transsexual surgery or any treatment leading to or in connection with transsexual surgery.” The campus health center is using this clause to deny hormones to transsexual students, some of whom are protesting the policy as an act of anti-transgender discrimination. Assuming the role of the Dean of Students, how do you address their complaint? If you were to work elsewhere in student affairs, how would you make a case to the administration on behalf of the students?

4) Linus, a male-presenting transsexual student, wants to change the female name and gender status on his records. However, he is told by the school’s registrar’s office that they won’t alter his records unless he receives a court-ordered name change and brings in a letter from his doctor indicating that he has completed gender confirmation surgery. Linus states that he cannot afford these procedures and hasn’t decided for sure that he even wants surgery. He comes to you as the director of the campus LGBT center. How do you intervene in this situation?

5) A female staff member in Student Affairs is upset that a transsexual woman who also works in the department is using the women’s restrooms in their building. She complains to you as head of the department about being made uncomfortable by “that man in the bathroom.” How do you address this conflict?

6) Sally, a female transsexual student, approaches you as department chair. She complains that a faculty member in the department continues to call her by her male given name and to refer to her as “he,” even though she has asked the professor several times to use her correct name and gender. How do you address Sally’s complaint?

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Case Studies on Campus Transgender Issues: Suggestions

1) Lucy, a female student at your college who identifies as genderqueer and often dresses in a traditionally masculine manner, is assaulted but not seriously injured by three unidentified men in an anti-transgender hate crime the previous evening. The attack occurs on campus and the perpetrators are thought to be other students. Seeing that you have a “Safe Space” placard on your office door, sie (Lucy’s preferred pronoun to “she”) comes to you first for support. What steps might you take to help hir (Lucy’s preferred pronoun to “her”)? How might Lucy’s needs be different from a non-transgender student who has been assaulted?

- Listen to the student and honor hir needs
- If sie wants to report the attack to the police or needs medical care, offer to accompany hir
- Provide hir with emotional support and help hir navigate the system
- Recognize that other aspects of hir identity will have an impact on how sie perceives and reacts to the attack and the extent of hir safety net
- If sie doesn't have a strong safety net, help hir to develop one
- Recognize that sie will not necessarily be supported by other women and LGB individuals, or organizations and services for women and LGB people
- Maintain hir anonymity (on campuses with few out transgender people, this is especially challenging and important)
- Immediately communicate with transgender students and trans-inclusive student groups to help ensure the safety of other gender-variant students
- Communicate appropriate information about the attack to the rest of the campus community to help prevent further victimization, enlighten people about anti-transgender violence, and hopefully catch the perpetrators
- Look for ways to improve campus safety based on the particulars of the incident
- Recognize that there might be greater trans support services and resources available off-campus
- Campuses should have systems and safety teams in place to address hate crimes before incidents occur, so that the response can be swift, coordinated, and best serve the needs of the survivor

2) Charlie, a crossdressing male student who lives in one of the residence halls at your small college, has experienced constant harassment ever since his roommate discovered him in traditionally female clothing and told others. Now it seems that everyone on campus knows that he crossdresses in private. He has heard others in his building make negative comments about “that faggot” and, at one point, anti-gay epithets were scrawled on the dry erase board of his door. His roommate has been so hostile that Charlie does not feel safe in the room. Charlie would like to continue to live on campus, but cannot afford a single room. Assuming the role of an administrator in residence life, how do you serve his needs? If you were to work elsewhere in student affairs, how might you advocate on Charlie’s behalf if he asks for your support?

- Find him a safe room ASAP
• Support the student in his choice of hall and living arrangements
• Trans housing concerns should be addressed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the needs of the particular student are met
• Create a safety net and buddy system for the student
• Provide trans education to the floor and hall
• Develop a program to conduct trans education workshops across campus
• Have a fund that could be used to support trans student who want but cannot afford a single
• Offer a single room at a double-room price, if there are no safe housing options
• Have a non-discrimination policy that includes gender identity or expression
• Have procedures in place to help transgender students before the need arises

3) Your university’s health plan has a clause specifically excluding “transsexual surgery or any treatment leading to or in connection with transsexual surgery.” The campus health center is using this clause to deny hormones to transsexual students, some of whom are protesting the policy as an act of anti-transgender discrimination. Assuming the role of the Dean of Students, how do you address their complaint? If you were to work elsewhere in student affairs, how would you make a case to the administration on behalf of the students?

• As the dean, you need to advocate for transgender students too
• Help the students find and navigate available support services
• Look into the legal, economic, and political aspects of providing coverage
• Investigate how many transsexual students are affected by the denial of hormones
• See how other campuses handle the issue
• Investigate the extent to which hormones are provided for other health care needs, with the aim of making a case that transsexual students are experiencing discrimination
• If the campus has a non-discrimination policy that includes gender identity or expression, does the health-care policy violate it?

4) Linus, a male-presenting transsexual student, wants to change the female name and gender status on his records. However, he is told by the school’s registrar’s office that they won’t alter his records unless he receives a court-ordered name change and brings in a letter from his doctor indicating that he has completed gender confirmation surgery. Linus states that he cannot afford these procedures and hasn’t decided for sure that he even wants surgery. He comes to you as the director of the campus LGBT center. How do you intervene in this situation?

• Investigate requirements under state law
• Research how many transsexual students are affected by the policy
• Consider how other campuses handle the issue
- Recognize that a student's gender expression and their campus records and identification have to be consistent for their safety and to help protect them from discrimination
- Recognize that a student shouldn’t be pushed into SRS
- Make sure that Student Affairs offices like the registrar and human resources, which are often overlooked by Safe Zone or Ally Program trainings, are included

5) A female staff member in Student Affairs is upset that a transsexual woman who also works in the department is using the women’s restrooms in their building. She complains to you as head of the department about being made uncomfortable by “that man in the bathroom.” How do you address this conflict?

- Encourage a dialogue or mediation between the individuals
- Educate the complainant about trans issues
- Require all Student Affairs staff to attend a trans education workshop
- Create gender-neutral bathrooms, both in the building and campus-wide
- Recognize that everyone should be able to feel comfortable while using the bathroom

6) Sally, a female transsexual student, approaches you as department chair. She complains that a faculty member in the department continues to call her by her male given name and to refer to her as “he,” even though she has asked the professor several times to use her correct name and gender. How do you address Sally’s complaint?

- Make sure the student is comfortable with the actions that are taken
- Help the student find any support she needs
- Look at the policies that protect students in such cases. If no policies exist, work to create them
- If the student is willing, perhaps pursue mediation
- If the option is available and the student is willing, enable her to change sections
- Require the faculty member and other faculty in the department to attend a trans education workshop
- Make education on LGBT issues an ongoing part of faculty development
- Be sure that trans issues are included in Safe Zone or Ally Program trainings