



# **Guidance to Support Employees Transitioning in the Workplace**

**by the Department of Human Resources, LGBTQ+ Director, and  
Equal Opportunity Office**

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# Acknowledgements

This Guidance draws on resources provided by the Human Rights Campaign and on the City of Seattle’s *Guidance on Gender Identity in the Workplace*. Western recognizes and appreciates these sources of information. Appreciation is also expressed to the Western faculty and staff who reviewed and provided input during the creation of this document.

## Introduction

Western is committed to fostering a workplace culture that is welcoming to and inclusive of employees of diverse backgrounds, identities and experiences. This includes transgender employees. *Guidance to Support Employees Transitioning in the Workplace* articulates Western's expectations for supporting employees who undertake a gender transition while employed by the university. It is intended to serve as a resource for transitioning faculty and staff, as well as their supervisors, coworkers, and relevant leadership. By following the relevant policies and guidance set out in this document, supervisors and leadership can help ensure a safe, welcoming, productive and discrimination-free work environment for all Western faculty and staff.

Creating a respectful work environment where employees can transition furthers Western's fundamental commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion. The *Guidance* also furthers Western's Policies on Ensuring Equal Opportunity and Prohibiting Discrimination and Retaliation (POL-U1600.02) and Preventing and Responding to Sex Discrimination, Including Sexual Misconduct (POL-U1600.04), which prohibit discrimination and harassment based on gender identity or expression.

While this *Guidance* addresses many topics that may arise in relation to a workplace gender transition, every transgender individual who undertakes a gender transition is unique. The needs of each transitioning faculty or staff member should be supported on an individualized basis, and always in close communication with the transitioning employee.

Employees with questions about this *Guidance* are encouraged to contact the Assistant Vice President for Human Resources or the LGBTQ+ Director. Employees with concerns about discrimination or harassment based on protected characteristics, including gender identity, should contact the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance. To learn or read more, you are encouraged to review the Resources section at the end of this document.

## Key Definitions and Concepts

**Gender Identity** is a person's internal, deeply-felt sense of being a woman, a man, or some other gender. One's gender identity may be different from the gender identity traditionally associated with the person's assigned sex at birth. Every individual – including transgender people – knows best what their gender identity is. And everyone has the right to self-identify their gender.

**Gender Expression** describes the many outward manifestations of one's gender identity, such as style of dress, vocal tone, and mannerisms. Gender expression may be socially or culturally relative.

**Transgender**, broadly speaking, is an umbrella term describing a person whose gender identity is different from the gender identity typically associated with that person's assigned sex at birth. A person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and lives as a woman is a transgender woman. A person who was assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man is a transgender man. Some transgender individuals identify simply as women or men, and not as transgender. And some transgender people identify as non-binary, genderqueer, androgynous or another gender outside of the gender binary. "Trans" is a shorthand term for "transgender."

**Cisgender** is a term describing people whose gender identity is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. A person who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman is a cisgender woman. A person who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man is a cisgender man.

**Transition** refers to the process by which a transgender person may bring their gender expression, legal and non-legal gender designations on documents and records, and/or physical characteristics into conformity with their gender identity.

Not all transgender people transition, and not all people who transition go through a transition process that includes medical steps such as hormone therapy or surgeries. Transitioning is a very personal process, and there are many ways to transition. Every employee who transitions is entitled to respect, regardless of the particulars of how they transition.

***Sexual Orientation*** refers to one's sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to people of the same and/or another gender. A person's sexual orientation is distinct from their gender identity. Just like cisgender people, transgender people may identify their sexual orientation as straight/heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or some other sexual orientation.

# Supporting Transitioning Employees and Affirming Equal Opportunity in the Workplace

Transgender faculty and staff, like all Western employees, have the right to express their gender identities openly at Western. Departments are responsible for maintaining respectful and discrimination-free work environments.

## Information for Transitioning Employees

Faculty and staff who transition while working at Western can expect support from their supervisor, division leadership and Human Resources. So that this support can be provided, an employee planning to transition is encouraged to share relevant information about their transition plans and needs with the university by contacting their supervisor (who should notify Human Resources) or the Assistant Vice President for Human Resources well in advance of their planned workplace transition date. A transitioning employee may additionally wish to request support from the LGBTQ+ Director or the LGBT Advocacy Council. The supervisor, leadership and Human Resources will work with employees to ensure a successful workplace transition.

When considering and communicating one's needs to their supervisor and/or Human Resources, a transitioning employee is encouraged to consider the following:

- As relevant, how do you want your departmental colleagues, others you work with at the university, and your students, to learn about your transition? Would you like to begin informing people you work most closely with via individual conversations? Is sending an email a helpful element of the communication? Do you want to tell colleagues in an in-person meeting? For in-person conversations or meetings, would you like your supervisor or department chair, Human Resources, a representative of the LGBT Advocacy Council or the LGBTQ+ Director, and/or someone from your own support network to be present?
- When do you plan to start coming to work expressing your affirmed gender?
- When do you want changes to Western's internal systems and documents to take effect (e.g. myWestern, Western Card, Outlook, Canvas, name plate).

## Information for Supervisors, Division Leadership and Human Resources

If a faculty or staff member informs you of their plan to transition, your support is important and expected by the university.

Every employee is unique, and each transitioning employee should be given the opportunity to transition in the way and on the timeline that is best for that individual. Supervisors, leadership and Human Resources will support transitioning employees and be respectful of employee privacy before and after the transition. Supervisors and Human Resources are responsible for working together to implement transition-related changes requested by an employee, such as updating records. If requested by a transitioning employee, the supervisor and Human Resources will set expectations for coworkers as part of facilitating a successful workplace transition.

When an employee shares with a supervisor or other leadership that they plan to transition, the supervisor or other leadership should be mindful of the following:

- Clearly convey to the transgender employee that they can expect your support, that Western will be as supportive as possible, and that transgender people are covered by Western's equal opportunity policies.
- If the employee is not already familiar with this *Guidance*, provide them with a copy and inform them that the Assistant Vice President for Human Resources can serve as a liaison between the employee and the various employees at the university who may need to be involved in some way in facilitating aspects of the workplace transition.
- The fact that a faculty or staff person is transgender is confidential. Absent the employee's request for disclosure of this information by you, this information should be discussed only on a need-to-know basis and with the employee's clear consent.

## Guidance for Transitioning Employees, Supervisors and Human Resources

So that Western can best support the employee through their workplace transition, the transitioning employee, their supervisor, and Human Resources should communicate as needed about topics including the following:

1. The role the employee would like their supervisor and/or Human Resources to play in communicating with colleagues and others on campus about their transition;
2. Establishment of a flexible timeline for the employee's transition at work. This may include items such as anticipated time off for transition-related medical care, when to inform colleagues, and when to update the employee's name in university systems;
3. Whether the employee believes an educational workshop or facilitated conversation would be beneficial for their colleagues and further the maintenance of a respectful work environment. If the employee thinks a workshop or facilitated conversation would be beneficial, discuss timing, content, participants, and who should conduct the training. The transitioning employee should not be required to participate in the training or conversation, but should be invited to do so.

The following information is important for supervisors, leadership and the transitioning employee to be aware of.

### Privacy

Faculty and staff may choose to discuss their gender identity openly, or to keep information private. Supervisors, leadership and Human Resources may not disclose private information without employee consent that reveals one's plan to transition or that an employee is transgender. With employee consent, such private information may be shared by people other than the employee only to the extent necessary for individuals to do their jobs. Information about transition-related health care must be treated as confidential medical information.

### Names and Pronouns

All employees have the right to be addressed and referred to by the name and pronoun they use. Changing one's gender marker with external administrative agencies (e.g. Department of Licensing or Social Security Administration) or obtaining a legal name change may not be



made a prerequisite to using an employee's correct name and pronoun. As part of their responsibility for maintaining a harassment-free work environment, supervisors should be aware that under Washington law, deliberately using the incorrect name or pronoun for an employee may constitute illegal harassment.

As one element of cultivating a welcoming environment for transgender employees, leaders may consider inviting all employees in their area to share their personal pronouns during introductions at meetings, in their email signature blocks, on business cards, and/or on name plates used at meetings. This helps foster a working and learning culture in which gender identity is not assumed, and in which everyone's gender identities are respected. It can also send an important message to students about respect for their and other people's gender identities.

## **Updating University Records and Systems**

When requested, Western will update the faculty or staff person's Banner record to reflect a change in name. Both legal and non-legal name changes should be requested via the Employee Name Change E-sign Form available from the Human Resources and LGBTQ+ Western websites. Some records, such as those relating to payroll and retirement accounts, require a legal name change before an employee's name can be changed. However, many internal Western records and systems can be updated to use an employee's chosen name without a legal name change. Questions about which records require a legal name change should be directed to Human Resources.

Human Resources will coordinate implementation of updates to name in Western's systems. In doing so, Human Resources should be clear with those administering the updates that they are not to go live until the date agreed upon with the employee.

Electronic records that may need updating include:

Banner HR

Email address

Employee directory listing

Departmental and other websites

Western Card

Canvas

E-sign form signatures

The time it takes to update records in Western systems varies. Human Resources will monitor the progress of record updates to ensure that changes are made in a timely manner, and will communicate with the transitioning employee about this.

In updating one's name on their Western Card, faculty and staff may request that the Western Card Office take a new photograph of the individual. There is no charge for a new Western Card printed due to a name change.

## **Dress Code**

Western does not have gender-specific dress codes; any departmental dress codes should be gender-neutral. Western may require that employees dress in ways that are appropriate for their work at the university, and all employees have the right to dress consistent with their gender identity.

## **Transition-Related Leave and Benefits**

Supervisors should provide reasonable flexibility to meet a faculty or staff person's need for appointments related to transition.

An employee's transition may include medical care. Leave for medical care related to transition should be treated the same as leave for any other medically necessary care. As with other aspects of transition and leave for any other medical reason, confidentiality regarding transition-related medical leave must be maintained and information should be shared only with employee permission and only to the extent necessary.

Transitioning employees with questions about applicable benefits and availability of paid and unpaid leave should contact Human Resources. Human Resources can help coordinate leave for the employee.

## **Access to Restrooms and Locker Rooms**

All employees have the right to use restrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity. This right is protected by Washington law. Gender neutral restrooms and locker rooms are available for any employee who wishes to use such a facility. Information about gender neutral facility locations is at <https://lgbtq.wvu.edu/locating-gender-neutral-restrooms-on-campus/>.

## **Discrimination and Harassment are Prohibited**

Western policies (POL-U1600.02 and POL-U1600.04) and the Washington Law Against Discrimination explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on gender identity and expression. Supervisors are responsible for promptly addressing discrimination or harassment, including behavior taking the form of jokes, and for reporting known or suspected discrimination or harassment to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance. Anyone with a concern about discrimination or harassment based on gender identity or expression may contact the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance for assistance or to make a complaint.

## Resources for Additional Information

### Western Resources

Chyerl Wolfe-Lee, Assistant Vice President of Human Resources: (360) 650-3630;  
[Chyerl.Wolfe-Lee@wwu.edu](mailto:Chyerl.Wolfe-Lee@wwu.edu).

Litav Langley, LGBTQ+ Director; [LGBTQ+ Western](#): (360) 650-7500; [langlel@wwu.edu](mailto:langlel@wwu.edu).

[LGBT Advocacy Council](#): [lgbtac@wwu.edu](mailto:lgbtac@wwu.edu).

[Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance](#): Old Main 345; (360) 650-3307; [crtc@wwu.edu](mailto:crtc@wwu.edu).

### Resources Beyond Western

National Center for Transgender Equality

[“About Transgender People”](#)

[“Understanding Transgender People: The Basics”](#)

[Everyone Matters: Dignity & Safety for Transgender People \(video\)](#)

Human Rights Campaign

[Trans Toolkit for Employers](#)

Washington Human Rights Commission

[Guide to Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity and the Washington Law Against Discrimination](#)

[Employer Self-Assessment Checklist](#)