Guidance to Support Employees Transitioning in the Workplace
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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 employees, 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 and no document can anticipate every situation. 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. Employees with concerns about discrimination or harassment based on protected characteristics, including gender identity, should contact the Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity/Title IX Coordinator. 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 physiology or 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 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

All employees – including transgender 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 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, 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 afforded the opportunity to transition in the manner and timeframe that is best for that individual. Supervisors, leadership and Human Resources will support transitioning employees and be respectful of employee privacy leading up to the transition and thereafter. Supervisors and Human Resources are responsible for working together to implement transition-related changes requested by an employee, such as updating personnel and administrative 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 will 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 meet together to discuss 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 and/or gender marker 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

Employees may choose to discuss their gender identity or expression openly, or to keep that information private. Supervisors, leadership and Human Resources may not disclose private information without employee consent that reveals an employee’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 with individuals who truly need to know to do their jobs. Information about transition-related medical 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 or in their email signature blocks. This helps to standardize a workplace culture in which gender identity is not assumed, and in which all employees’ gender identities are respected.

**Updating University Records and Systems**

If requested by an employee, Western will update the employee’s Banner record to reflect a change in name and/or gender. Both legal and non-legal name changes should be requested via the Employee Name Change E-sign Form available on the Human Resources website. Some records, such as those relating to payroll and retirement accounts, require a legal name change before an employee’s name can be changed. Most records, however, can be changed to reflect an employee’s chosen name without a legal name change. Questions about which records require a legal name change may be directed to Human Resources.

After consulting with the employee, Human Resources will coordinate implementation of updates to name and/or gender marker 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:

- Email address
- HRIS – Banner HR
- Employee directory listing
- Departmental and other websites
Western Card  yes / no
Canvas  yes / no
E-sign form signature yes / no

Updating employee records may take longer in some systems than others. Human Resources will check in regularly with those making record updates to ensure that changes are ready for the transition date and communicate back with the transitioning employee about this.

**Dress Code**

Western does not have dress codes that restrict employees’ clothing or appearance based on gender. Departments have the right to set out dress codes, and employees have the right to comply with department dress codes in a manner consistent with their gender identity.

**Transition-Related Leave and Benefits**

Supervisors should provide reasonable flexibility to meet an employee’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. Gender neutral restrooms and locker rooms are available for any employee who wishes to use such a single occupancy facility. Information about gender neutral restroom locations is at [www.wwu.edu/eoo/gnf.shtml](http://www.wwu.edu/eoo/gnf.shtml).
Discrimination and Harassment are Prohibited

Western policies (U1600.02 and 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 Equal Opportunity Office. Anyone with a concern about discrimination or harassment based on gender identity or expression may contact the Equal Opportunity Office for assistance or to make a complaint.
Resources for Additional Information

Western Resources

Equal Opportunity Office/Title IX Coordinator: Old Main 345; (360) 650-3307; eoo@wwu.edu

LGBT Advocacy Council: lgbtac@wwu.edu

Resources Beyond Western

National Center for Transgender Equality

“About Transgender People”

“Understanding Transgender People: The Basics”

GLAD

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