

UA sets bar for transgender access rights

By Jennifer Tramm | Published 09/25/06 9:00pm

The UA allows transgendered people to use the restrooms with which they best identify, making it one of the most inclusive campuses in the country, a UA official said.

According to a policy issued by the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office in June, the UA "allows individuals to use the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity."

The "Statement on Restroom Access" is based on the UA's policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of gender identity, according to the statement.

"We're actually the only school in the country to make publicly available a bathroom access statement that was endorsed by the (UA) president," said Jessica Pettitt, coordinator of social justice programs for the Social Justice Leadership Center. "I forwarded out the statement to (other universities), and they're now using it as a starting place on their campuses."

The bathroom access statement is a proactive step, not a reactive one, said Jeanne Kleespie, assistant vice president of the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office, which aims to prevent harassment on campus and create a more comfortable educational environment for everyone.

"I think it sends an important message," Kleespie said.

Brian Shimamoto, assistant director of multicultural education and advocacy for Residential Education, said the policy is a good step toward making the campus a comfortable environment for transgender people.

"It's funny how something that can be pretty simple - go in, take care of a biological need and then get out - can be a huge thing to (the transgender) population," he said. "Where do I go? I don't want to scare anybody, and I don't want to be scared."

If a student identifies as transgender, Residence Life places the student in a single room with its own bathroom, if one is available, "so as not to disrupt the life of the transgender student or of the community," Shimamoto said.

Barbara Gafner, an exchange student in English literature, said she's used men's bathrooms before because women's bathrooms are sometimes too busy, so it wouldn't bother her to see a transgender student in a bathroom.

If someone needs to use either restroom, then they should be able to, said Leslie Snow, a communication junior.

"I think that it's really cool," Snow said. "It is different. A little weird, but it doesn't matter."

Guillermo Aldaz, a mechanical engineering freshman, said it might make him somewhat uncomfortable, but he wouldn't leave if he met a transgender person in the restroom.

"It'd be different and unexpected, I guess," Aldaz said.

Aaron Kuhl, a pre-business freshman, said he thinks people should use the bathrooms of the

genders they were born with.

"I don't agree with switching (genders), really," Kuhl said.

Kleespie said that people probably wouldn't know a transgender person from any other person in a bathroom.

"They are already there, and you don't even know it. In reality, how many of us really know? It's not right to even try to figure it out," Kleespie said.

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