

# **Guidelines for Gender Neutral Facilities at Western Washington University**

July 29, 2016

## **I. Background**

Western's commitment to building welcoming and inclusive learning and working environments for our students, faculty, staff and visitors includes a commitment to supporting members of our community who are transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming. In our society and community, transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people often experience harassment, psychological harm, and sometimes physical violence when using gender-specific facilities. Gender neutral facilities provide safe places for people to use the restroom, changing or shower room without fear of such harassment, and are important for some people with non-binary gender identities for whom gender specific facilities are not viable options. Such facilities are also useful for people with disabilities who have an attendant of a different gender, and parents and caregivers who wish to accompany their children into the restroom or changing room.

## **II. The Advisory Committee**

Recognizing that Western's commitment to including people of all gender identities requires the provision of safe, accessible and reasonably convenient restroom and locker room facilities, University leadership established an Ad Hoc Gender Neutral Facilities Guidelines Advisory Committee to develop recommended guidelines. The Committee was convened in late January 2016. Between that time and April 2016, and as directed by its charter, the Committee surveyed existing facilities at Western, reviewed related best practices at other colleges and universities, broadly solicited community input, and met regularly to develop these Guidelines. Solicitation of community input included online surveys sent by email to all Western students, faculty and staff, information-gathering sessions held specifically for these constituencies, and meetings with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the Associated Students Board of Directors, and the LGBT Advocacy Council chair.

Several predominant themes arose from the feedback provided by students, faculty and staff. First, community members expressed a need for more accessible gender neutral facilities, located in more buildings across campus and situated in central, high traffic places within buildings. Individuals stressed the importance of having facilities that provide both privacy and safety for all users. Second, community members articulated the importance of broadly educating the campus community about the need for gender neutral facilities and ongoing communication with campus about the guidelines and related progress. Such public education and communication would normalize the presence of these facilities as one aspect of Western's commitment to inclusion, help improve safety for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people, and inform the community about locations of gender neutral facilities. Third, community members

expressed the desire for clarity and transparency regarding accountability for implementation of the guidelines. The Ad Hoc Committee incorporated these fundamental concepts, as well as other ideas shared during the input-gathering process, into the proposed guidelines.

### **III. Interface with building code**

In developing proposed guidelines the Committee was constrained by applicable building code, which mandates specific numbers of restroom toilet fixtures that must be designated as either men's or women's. Despite restroom toilet fixtures located in gender neutral restrooms being accessible to people of all genders, under the building code such fixtures do not count toward the required number of fixtures and thus must be provided in addition to the mandated number of men's and women's toilets. Building code should be revisited and evaluated in coming years, as it may allow more flexibility in restrooms in the future.

### **IV. Statement of principles and goal**

Restroom, changing and shower room facilities at Western should be safe, accessible and reasonably convenient to students, faculty, staff and visitors of all gender identities. Beyond assuring that people have the right to access gender-specific facilities according to their gender identity, these Guidelines seek to improve the number, location and quality of gender neutral facilities in spaces owned or operated by Western Washington University and set out criteria for determining prioritization of additional gender neutral facilities. In addition to provision of gender neutral facilities, educating the campus community about gender identity diversity and harms caused by structural enforcement of binary gender is necessary to effect the goals of safety and accessibility.

### **V. Definitions**

- a. **Gender identity:** A person's internal, deeply-felt sense of their own gender, whether or not that gender identity is different from that traditionally associated with the person's physiology or sex assigned at birth.
- b. **Gender neutral facility:** A restroom, changing or shower room that may be used by people regardless of their gender identity. Such a facility is distinguishable from a restroom, changing or shower room that is designated for people of a particular gender identity. Gender neutral facilities should provide privacy for their users, equivalent space and the same amenities as comparably located gender specific facilities (including but not limited to menstrual products available for purchase and menstrual product disposal bins), and be maintained at the same level of functionality and cleanliness as gender specific facilities.

- c. **Gender specific facility:** A restroom or changing room designated for use only by people of a particular gender.
- d. **Changing room:** A room intended in whole or significant part to provide a place for people to undress and dress. Changing rooms include locker rooms and dressing rooms.
- e. **Restroom:** A room that includes one or more toilets and/or urinals intended for use for personal hygiene. For purposes of these Guidelines, this term does not include restrooms located within residence hall suites, apartments or private residences.
- f. **Shower:** A space containing one or more shower fixtures and intended in whole or significant part to provide a place for people to shower.
- g. **Single occupancy facility:** A restroom, changing or shower room with no more than one toilet or shower fixture.
- h. **Multi-occupancy facility:** A restroom, changing or shower room with multiple toilet, shower or changing-area facilities, providing privacy for users.

## VI. **Applicability**

### a. **Space owned by the University.**

These Guidelines apply to all buildings owned by the University, including existing buildings and buildings to be constructed in the future.

### b. **Space leased by the University.**

The Guidelines are applicable to leases entered into or renewed by the University on or after August 01, 2016 for facilities other than residence hall suites, apartments and private residences, where the lease term is five years or longer and the University is leasing 50% or more of one or more floors of a building.

Where the lease term is less than five years or the University is leasing less than 50% of one or more floors of a building, the University and its agents investigating options for leased space and negotiating a lease should accommodate the presence of safe, accessible and reasonably convenient gender neutral facilities as a desired feature of the leased space. Single occupancy facilities in such leased space shall always be designated gender neutral. Where leased space is constructed or renovated for the University as lessee, the requirements for building renovations below shall be followed.

**VII. Guidelines to inform implementation of gender neutral facilities at Western. (It is understood that costs associated with some of the paragraphs below would require approval through University budget processes for implementation.)**

**a. Convert existing single occupancy facilities.**

The Committee identified two single occupancy facilities that are currently signed as “unisex” and ten single occupancy facilities that, while not signed as gender specific, are nevertheless not signed with the University’s most current gender neutral signage. The University’s current signage includes an image of washing hands to symbolize gender neutral, a wheelchair to symbolize accessibility, and the words “Gender Neutral & Family Restroom.” These ten single occupancy facilities have a symbol for men, women, and wheelchair. In addition, there are nine single occupancy facilities for which no signage currently exists (such as in the Alumni House and the Canada House). Signage on all of these facilities should be changed to make them gender neutral facilities, in line with the current signage, as soon as possible during the 2016-17 academic year. Where any such facilities do not currently include a lock on the door to the facility, a lock should be installed at the time of the signage change. Any additional single occupancy gender specific facilities identified in the future should be converted to gender neutral in the same manner.

**b. New construction and complete building renovations**

These Guidelines apply to projects already in the planning stage or preliminary stages of design, and those that begin planning or design thereafter.

Gender neutral restrooms: In new and renovated buildings, at least one ADA accessible gender neutral restroom shall be provided on the main floor and on every additional floor where restrooms are required or provided. Gender neutral restrooms shall be located in the same areas as gender specific restrooms. Where applicable code requires that a floor contain six or more toilet/urinal fixtures for women or men, two or more gender neutral restrooms shall be provided on that floor.

Gender neutral shower and changing rooms: In new and renovated buildings, ADA accessible gender neutral shower and/or changing rooms shall be provided in every area where gender specific changing rooms and/or showers are provided, recognizing that multiple areas on the same floor might include such rooms. Where a primary intended use of the building would reasonably require use of a shower and/or changing room, such as in a gym or athletic facility, multiple gender neutral shower and/or changing areas shall be provided even if changing rooms and/or showers are provided in only one area of the building.

Gender specific shower and changing rooms in new and renovated buildings shall provide private spaces for users to shower and change.

**c. Building floor, restroom, shower, or changing room renovations.**

Where an entire building is not being renovated but a floor, restroom, shower or changing room is being renovated, that renovation should include creation of appropriate ADA accessible gender neutral facilities. If the renovation includes restrooms, or if a gender neutral restroom does not already exist in the building, a gender neutral restroom should be created. If the renovation includes shower or changing rooms, or if shower or changing rooms are provided elsewhere in the building but those shower or changing rooms do not include a gender neutral shower or changing room, an appropriate equivalent gender neutral facility should be created. If the renovation includes gender specific shower or changing rooms, it should include creation of private spaces to shower and change. The position responsible for implementing these guidelines should coordinate with the University's Space Administration Office as appropriate.

**d. Working with City of Bellingham.**

Beginning in summer 2016, the University should work with the City of Bellingham, including Building Code authorities and other appropriate City officials, to discuss these guidelines and work in partnership in requesting flexibility in interpretation of Code requirements to allow Western to provide additional gender neutral facilities. Such flexibility is particularly important so that the University can address the need for gender neutral restrooms in high occupancy spaces by (1) converting some existing multi-occupancy gender specific restrooms to multi-occupancy gender neutral restrooms and (2) building needed gender neutral restrooms in new construction and renovations in the most economical way possible. If necessary, the University shall also work with appropriate State authorities to allow provision of additional gender neutral facilities.

The University should request similar flexibility from the appropriate authorities in other jurisdictions where it owns buildings.

**e. Addressing need in existing facilities.**

The University shall work toward the goal of providing gender neutral facilities in existing buildings that are not scheduled for renovation as described in sections (b) or (c) above. The positions and offices responsible for implementing these Guidelines will coordinate with the University's Space Administration Office as appropriate. When determining which buildings to prioritize for creation of gender neutral facilities, the following criteria will indicate higher priority:

- Current absence of gender neutral facilities in that building
- Distance from buildings with existing gender neutral facilities
- High occupancy
- Use in large part for classes
- Use in large part for purposes uniquely served by that building (e.g., exercise/athletics, theater)
- Use in large part for provision of services required by students (e.g., financial aid)

**f. Publicizing locations of gender neutral facilities.**

The Spatial Institute of Huxley College of the Environment shall maintain an accurate map showing the locations of gender neutral facilities, identifying which facilities are ADA accessible, and identifying whether each gender neutral facility is single occupancy or multi-occupancy. This map should be included in the “Maps” page on the University’s website. University offices that interface with new students, new employees and visitors to campus are encouraged to publicize this map.

Gender Neutral facilities should be identified on building directories.

Buildings that do not have gender neutral facilities should identify the locations of the nearest gender neutral facilities on their building directories.

**g. Public education about the importance of gender neutral facilities.**

Ongoing education about gender neutral facilities shall include the following:

- Communication to the campus community from University leadership when the Guidelines are adopted.
- For one year, signs near new gender neutral facilities providing a brief explanation of why these facilities are important.
- Communication to directors located in buildings where gender neutral facilities are created providing suggestions for communicating to employees and students about the new facilities.
- Communication to new students, faculty and staff about the locations of gender neutral facilities and where to find information as additional facilities are created.
- Beginning in academic year 2016-17, communication to new faculty as part of new faculty orientation encouraging faculty to share the locations of nearby gender neutral facilities with their students and to provide ample break time for students to access gender neutral facilities.

Responsibility for coordinating these communications is assigned to those offices responsible for adherence to these Guidelines, which may further delegate responsibility to other offices as appropriate.

**h. Oversight and accountability.**

Under the purview of the Provost and of the Vice President for Business and Financial Affairs, the Equal Opportunity Office and the Office of Facilities Development and Capital Budget share responsibility for ensuring ongoing adherence to these Guidelines. Facilities Development is responsible for implementation of Sections VII. a-f. The Equal Opportunity Office is responsible for implementing Section VII.g. WWU areas negotiating leases are responsible for implementing Section VI.b. An appropriate University website should publicize this information so that members of the community can provide feedback about gender neutral facilities on campus. When appropriate and on a regular basis, the two offices above should communicate with and seek advice from, among others, the Associated Students' Queer Resource Center (QRC) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Advocacy Council (LGBTAC).