Spotlighting
Institutional
Gender Normativity

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“Gender is like a lens through which we’ve not yet learned to see. Or more accurately, like glasses worn from childhood, it’s like a lens through which we’ve always seen and can’t remember how the world looked before. And this lens is strictly bifocal. It strangely shows us only black and white in a technicolour world.”

“In order to hear the voices of trans people, as justice demands, one has to acknowledge the limits of sex and gender and move into a new world in which any identity can be imagined, performed, and named.”

1 Howell, Nestle, Wilchins, GenderQueer: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary, 13
2 Stryker and Whittle, The Transgender Studies Reader, xv
What is gender normativity?
I am using ‘gender normativity’ to mean the strict enforcement of the cisgender male/female binary. A gender-normative space, practice or policy, then, is one that assumes each person’s gender identity based on their perceived sex assignment. Gender normativity leaves no room for people who don’t conform to this binary, whether that’s people who see gender as more fluid or people who don’t identify with a gender at all. While gender normativity is omnipresent in U.S. society, it is also largely invisible, making it difficult to interrupt. For trans* and gender non-conforming people, however, gender normativity can be a daily oppression, and therefore something that we can’t afford to ignore. By viewing gender as a system of power instead of a biological fact, we unburden ourselves and others from the constricting norms that regulate our lives. As it stands, the dominant system of gender in the U.S. is a gender-normative one. Therefore, it’s important to understand that Tufts is not remarkable for its gender normativity, but altogether unremarkable.

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Where do I fit?
By failing to reflect the reality of gender fluidity, gender normativity hurts some more than others, but it doesn’t benefit anyone. Gender normativity, through its policing of behavior, thoughts and actions, also impacts cisgender people. Through this project, I sought to understand how gender normativity operates on a college campus, how it especially impacts trans* and gender non-conforming students, but also how my own cisgender identity plays into the issues at hand. I have a stake in my education here, as well as my social development, and to accept the dominant gender system as the status quo would be an act of apathy.
Why this booklet?

This booklet is loosely broken into two parts, both of which examine gender normativity at Tufts using the experiences of trans* and gender non-conforming students. In the first part of the booklet, I provide a collective narrative comprised of responses from my interviewees about their personal experiences at Tufts. The interview questions were intentionally open-ended so that I could hear about the experiences and ideas that are most important to actual students. The collective narrative portion borrows from counter storytelling, which emerges out of Critical Race Theory. A counter story is “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society.)” 1 The idea behind counter storytelling is that it is itself a form of resistance, contrasting the master narrative, i.e., “one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference.” 2 We can add “cisgender” to that list of privileged identities, as the literature and curricula of higher education are indeed entrenched with master narratives that promote cisgender identities by denying or ignoring gender variance.

I employ counter storytelling as my methodology in an attempt to counteract some part of the trans* exclusion at Tufts. I don’t think that a counter narrative is the only form that could address this subject, but I do think that it serves a purposeful function in critiquing the production of dominant norms and knowledge. As social theorist Patricia Hill Collins puts it, “Defining and valuing one’s consciousness of one’s own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified ‘other’ is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination.” 3

The second part of this booklet is a multipurpose toolkit. First and foremost, it’s a resource for trans* and gender non-conforming students to more easily navigate the gender-normative systems and spaces at Tufts. I rely so heavily on my interviews with current trans* and gender non-conforming students because I firmly believe that we are all experts on our own lives and that there is something inherently powerful in telling our own stories. Furthermore, drawing on counter storytelling, I think that current trans* and gender non-conforming students themselves have invaluable advice for future students who may find themselves in the same situations or environments. By setting up the booklet in this way, I’m arguing that trans* and gender non-conforming students themselves are necessary contributions to a toolkit of this sort. I don’t have the experiences of a trans* student, and I’m under no delusion that I know what’s best for their wellbeing here.

The toolkit is also a call to action for faculty, staff and administrators at Tufts. The insight from my interviewees regarding policy changes should not be taken lightly. Some of the problems that trans* and gender non-conforming students regularly encounter have a quick fix. As the Tufts community, we are all responsible for the success and happiness of all students. By accepting gender normativity as the status quo, we are doing a grand disservice to trans* and gender non-conforming students. The recommendations provided in this booklet are offered in an attempt to generate an environment of gender inclusivity at Tufts.

Finally, this toolkit is a wake-up call to cisgender students at this school. It’s time for all students to enter the conversation and understand how we are all gendered and, thus, all implicated in the struggle. I urge cisgender students to read the following interviews with the knowledge that you have the power and resources in front of you to make the changes necessary to better Tufts. Let us all think about the ways in which we are controlled by the dominant system of gender, but also the ways in which we are in control.

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1 Solórzano and Yosso, “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Educational Research,” 32
3 Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” S18
Limitations, Weaknesses & Impossibilities

Each senior majoring in American Studies must complete a thesis or Senior Special Project that explores a topic within the student’s interdisciplinary cluster. My cluster within American Studies is “Institutions and Power in the U.S.,” and the bulk of my courses at Tufts have dealt with the intersections of gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, class-based identity, and how these social locations inform power dynamics among groups of people. This booklet, along with an accompanying paper, serves as my SSP.

Ultimately, because of the nature and time constraints of my project, there is so much that I could not explore. The need to keep my interviewees anonymous (see page 14) means that I cannot provide any sort of analysis or commentary on how certain social identities were or were not represented within my sample. Furthermore, because the trans* population at Tufts is already quite small in comparison to cis-identifying students, my sample size was also quite small. The interview responses are powerful and especially relevant at Tufts, but they should not be considered representative of all trans* and gender non-conforming students.

Finally, I undertook this project with the knowledge that I would have four months to complete it. While I think that this booklet has the potential to be a helpful tool for Tufts students, faculty, staff and administrators, I don’t think that it should stand alone in that goal. I was inspired and continue to be inspired by the work of the LGBT Center, the Women’s Center, the Office of Equal Opportunity and countless students, professors and faculty/staff/admin members who devote their time and energy to these issues of gender inclusivity. I did what I could do in a semester, but it’s not perfect, and it is by no means complete. Throughout this booklet, I point readers to the tremendous work that others have put out in the world, both on- and off-campus. And to further promote the collaborative intent of this project, I’ve included quotes from various scholars, poets and activists whose words capture what I have found to be right and true.

“Countering dominant and hegemonic narratives is the flip-side of being complicit.”

“Creating awareness of these systems is the foundation for social and psychological emancipation.”

1 Michael Bamberg, “Considering counter narratives,” 351
2 Brent Bilodeau, Genderism: Transgender Students, Binary Systems and Higher Education, 9
“Language is a tool. As such, we believe that speech is performative—it does things. Words invite or exclude, recognize or erase, empower or intimidate, examine or assume.”

“But, it is not simply the absence of terminology that has been problematic; existing language also fails to capture the complexities of gender.”

“Offering more inclusive language would not only be supportive of trans-identified people, but also help educate the campus community about gender diversity.”

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When we talk about power, we cannot ignore language. When we talk about anything, we cannot ignore language. After all, language is how we talk about things. The words that we use, and the connotations of those words, speak volumes about us as a people, what we think of one another and how we organize ourselves. While language may vary across culture and change over time, it is constant in its ability to maintain power dynamics among groups of people. If we acknowledge that gender is indeed a power structure, then we must be mindful of the language that we use when we talk about gender. With the help of my interviewees and countless trans/gender studies theorists, I’ve put together a list of terms and definitions that have helped me talk about what I want to talk about. This list is not exhaustive, and the definitions are, to an extent, open to interpretation and opposition. My hope is that readers may consider this list with a critical eye, and use it as a foundation to be built upon.

### Terms & Definitions

**Trans**
Used to describe a person whose self-defined gender identity differs from the person’s assigned sex (see below); as contrasted with ‘cisgender.’

**Gender non-conforming/gender variant**
Used to describe a person whose gender expression and/or gender identity falls outside the societal norm, which dominant U.S. society defines as a masculine cisgender man or a feminine cisgender woman.

**Agender**
Used to describe a person who does not have a sense of a gender identity, or self-identifies as genderless.

**Androgynous**
Used to describe a person who presents as neither distinctly male nor female. In most cases, a physical descriptor.

**Bigender**
Used to describe a person who self-identifies with both the male and female genders in some way(s).

**Biological sex/natal sex/sex**
Most commonly used to describe the sex (male, female, intersex) that one is assigned at birth based on one’s genitalia. A gender-normative society expects one’s sex to inform one’s gender identity/expression.

**Cisgender**
A person whose self-ascribed gender identity corresponds to the sex that the person was assigned at birth; as contrasted with ‘transgender.’

**Crossdresser or drag king/queen**
A person who wears clothing that is typically worn by members of another gender, usually for performance purposes. Crossdressers or drag kings/queens do not necessarily identify as transgender.

**FtM (Female to Male)/trans man**
A person who was assigned a female sex at birth but who later self-identifies as a man. One may identify as a trans man whether or not one goes through any sort of surgical transition.

**Gender**
See every other definition :-)  

**Gender binary**
The deeply ingrained and strictly enforced model that maintains that all people may be categorized as either male or female, rejecting the existence of any sort of gender spectrum.

**Gender expression**
How one presents oneself, usually in order to communicate one’s gender identity to others. Gender expression may encompass dress, hairstyle, behavior, etc. ‘Masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are terms commonly used to describe someone’s gender expression. Gender expression is not indicative of one’s sexuality/sexual orientation, though the two are often conflated.

**Gender fluidity**
The idea that a person’s gender identity or expression is not fixed, but instead may change and shift over time, even from day to day.

**Gender identity**
How one perceives oneself on a personal or psychological level. When one’s self-ascribed gender identity matches which the individual

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1 Vaccaro, August & Kennedy, Safe Spaces: Making Schools and Communities Welcoming to LGBT Youth, 95
2 Brett Beemyn, “Serving the Needs of Transgender College Students,” 35
3 Brett Beemyn, “Serving the Needs of Transgender College Students,” 45
was assigned at birth, the individual is considered ‘cisgender.’ When one’s self-ascribed gender identity differs from that which the individual was assigned at birth, the individual is considered ‘transgender.’

Gender role
The socially defined expectations of how a person should behave, act, or look based on the sex that the person was assigned as birth. In the U.S., men are expected to be masculine while women are expected to be feminine.

Genderfuck
As a verb, to genderfuck means to bend the norms of one gender or another, like men wearing clothes traditionally associated with women; genderbending. As a noun, a genderfuck person does not conform to gender roles, but rather ‘fucks’ with gender.

Genderqueer
Similar to trans*, used to describe a person whose gender identity is neither distinctly male nor female, but rather somewhere along a spectrum or outside of the spectrum entirely. Genderqueer individuals may describe themselves using gender-neutral pronouns, such as ‘zie’ and ‘hir.’

Intersex
Used to describe a person whose genitalia and/or physiology differs from that of a “standard” male or female body. Intersex individuals are often assigned either a male or female sex at birth despite any ambiguity.

MtF (Male to Female)/trans woman
A person who was assigned a male sex at birth but who later self-identifies as a woman. One may identify as a trans woman whether or not one goes through any form of surgical transition.

Passing
When a transgender person is seen by others as the gender with which he/she self-identifies. Some consider passing as the measure of a successful transition, while others have no desire to “pass” in this sense.

Post-op, pre-op, non-op
Considered irrelevant and offensive to many transgender people, these terms are used to describe a transgender person’s status in regards to a surgical transition. Most transgender people do not define themselves using these terms.

Queer
An umbrella term that may encompass lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, among others. However, many transgender people do not consider themselves queer, as queer is typically used to describe sexuality and not gender. While “queer” can be used pejoratively, many self-identifying queer people have taken steps to reclaim the word and find empowerment and community in it.

Sexuality/sexual orientation
A person’s romantic or sexual attraction to others. Some terms commonly used to describe sexuality/sexual orientation are: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual and pansexual.

Stealth
Most commonly used in reference to FtMs and MtFs who ‘pass’ as their desired gender identities. People who live in stealth usually identify as man or woman, not as transgender.

Transition
The complex process that a transgender person undergoes in order to live more completely or comfortably as the gender with which the individual self-identifies. The process of transitioning is different for every person, and may encompass any number of psychological, social or physical changes.

Transphobia
The intolerance and subsequent discrimination of people who transgress normative gender roles. Transphobia can affect both those who identify as transgender and those who are perceived by others as transgender, based on their gender expression, sexuality, etc.

Transsexual
A narrower term within the trans* umbrella used to describe a person who does not identify with the sex that was assigned to that person at birth, and who may take surgical steps to physically transition in order to align their appearance with their self-ascribed gender identity.

We are all affected by these words, but they are particularly personal to the people whose lives they describe. I cannot speak for any trans* or gender non-conforming students at Tufts, nor do I wish to. On the contrary, I think that the power to identify and define ourselves is one kind of power that we should all hold dear and exercise freely. The terms that I’ve listed are public, and therefore profoundly political, but they are also undeniably intimate; they don’t mean the same thing to any two people. It is essential that we expand our language, but we must do so in cooperation with one another, lest we simply oppress with a new vocabulary.
My Interviewees

Out of my six student interviewees:
- Three are A&S undergraduate students
- Three are graduate students in three different programs

Anonymity:
For the purposes of anonymity, I cannot provide any other identifying information about my interviewees. While race, class, age, ability, etc., all inform my interviewees’ experiences—and, thus, influenced their responses—I cannot speak to those aspects of their identities. All trans* and gender non-conforming students do not experience institutional gender normativity at Tufts in the same way, nor do cisgender students. It is immensely important to consider how students of different social locations approach these identities and issues, but this specific project can’t do that. I urge any readers who are interested in doing so to delve deeper and explore the intersections of other identities with trans* and gender non-conforming identities.

“I guess if your sense of self matches closely with the cultural grid of what you should mean, and you find those meanings pleasing, then the ‘truth’ doesn’t come too expensive. For the rest of us, though, it can cost a great deal.”

Faculty/staff/administrative interviewees:
In addition to the six students, I interviewed three key faculty/staff/administrative members at Tufts whose work directly involves, or should involve, supporting trans* and gender non-conforming students:
- Steph Gauchel, Director of the Women’s Center & Interim Director of the LGBT Center
- Jill Zellmer, Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity
- Shannon Weber, Professor in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Sociology

“In whatever terms make sense to you, could you describe your gender expression, gender identity and/or sex?”

1) “I identify pretty strongly as male, not genderqueer. I seem to fit pretty well into the binary in a lot of ways, but there are a lot of ways that I don’t see myself as an uber-masculine guy either.”

2) “I don’t know. I’ve been changing a lot recently. For a while, especially in high school, I was just going to straight-up transition, like male-to-female, but I decided not to. So sometimes it feels like I would use ‘woman’...it depends. As far as technical terms, you could use genderqueer. It has a certain connotation that I don’t quite agree with, so there are other things that I think could work more toward what I want to transition to. Like, I think ‘femme’ is a pretty neutral one that I think works pretty well. For expression right now, generally more butch, just because of uncertainty, and because there’s less flexibility when you’re assigned-male to do variance in gender performance. You have to choose between going normal butch or going full-out. There’s not an inner-ground. If there was, I’d be more in the inner-ground. I would rather be more femme, but you have to ‘make do’ to a certain extent. So I guess there’s ‘desired gender expression,’ and then ‘actual gender expression.’ Like, right now the most femme thing I have is this pink sweater. I wish I had more. As for sex: assigned-male.”

3) “I identify as agender.”

4) “I don’t usually use it except in medical contexts, but I say ‘female-bodied.’ I guess that would be my sex. And then my gender expression is pretty standard metrosexual or masculine. Usually I just go with a gender identity of ‘male’ or ‘man’ or somewhere in there, but in trans-identified places I will say ‘trans’ or ‘trans man.’”

5) “I identify as transgender. I feel very strongly about that. At the same time, I try to really keep in mind my female-assigned status, as well. Maybe this just applies to keeping in mind how I interact in the world, and with other people. I don’t know how I feel about taking on a male identity necessarily.”

6) “That’s something that I don’t have a real concrete answer to. I would say that I’ve been attracted to the word ‘genderqueer’ for a long time, and more recently have started to think that that’s a word that I could own, but it feels pretty time-based. Sometimes I’m like, ‘Yeah, girl’ and sometimes I’m like, ‘Yeah, genderqueer.’ It’s really day-by-day, but I think that that’s really consistent with where my gender expression has been for a long time. Even through high school, I’ve been with dresses and ties and, for myself, I think of gender as something to play with and to really have fun with. Like, how can I fuck around with this? I try things on and test them in the world and see what reactions I get. Within queer contexts, I sometimes feel more genderqueer, but not always. And [my gender identity or expression] can also change in relation to the gender of the person I’m talking to.”

***IMPORTANT***
From here on out, I will not identify interview quotes using these numbers. Instead, the responses are arranged in no particular order, so as to protect the identities of my participants, and to show how trans* and gender non-conforming students as a group, as those without cis privilege, experience Tufts.
“How have these identities changed since you’ve arrived at Tufts, if at all?”

“Well, I think that my expression has definitely changed. My identity, not so much. Considering myself much more transgender has been something on my mind, in those terms specifically, for probably seven years now, as soon as I found out about it pretty much. I didn’t allow myself to explore that necessarily until three years ago, but not in its fullness until about six months ago.”

“This is something that I came to realize while I was at Tufts, over the summer, between years of my program. I’m not sure if it was really related to being in this environment or anything. It’s something that I had been thinking about for a while, in other terms. I guess I read some excellent books over the summer that started getting me thinking about these sorts of issues, in different vocabulary than I had before. I guess I had always previously identified as a male who didn’t have anything masculine about him, and who didn’t particularly feel male, or didn’t particularly feel gendered at all. I guess I just started thinking more critically about what that meant, and whether identifying as male actually made any sense.”

“Right before I came to Tufts is when I started transitioning. I completed my coursework, got into my fieldwork, and had a lot of problems with it, partially because of being trans. So I took time off, and I think that in all of that time I’ve been working on solidifying my identity, becoming more clear about who I am, and just learning how to interact with people as a man.”

“I’m from a very conservative small town, so I got ‘outed’ as gay or whatever, and I was mainly dealing with that. But at Tufts, you have the flexibility to exist like that. So, this year I’ve just been existing as supposedly a gay male, because I didn’t have the ability to do that before. And I think that there’s a lot of continuity between identifying as a queer cisgender person—and being assigned male—and being a trans assigned male. I’ve been looking more at that space, and being more comfortable with that. So, let’s say, even if I decided, ‘Okay, I want to transition to womanhood,’ I would still probably use the word ‘gay’ to describe my identity. I’ve been thinking more about that, whereas before, in high school, I was stuck in the mindset of completely separating sexuality and gender identity.”

“The identity has stayed pretty consistent. When I first came to Tufts four and a half years ago, I was more openly and strongly and assertively identified as trans. I guess that is a major change…I shouldn’t have said they stayed the same. And that did not seem in contest with my identity as a man, and I still don’t think that it is, but I have moved away from a trans identification.”
On Pronouns

What are PGPs and why do they matter?
Preferred gender pronouns (PGPs) are the pronouns by which people refer to themselves and wish for others to use in reference to them. There are gender-neutral pronouns like zie and hir, but most people use either the ‘he series’ (he, him, his) or the ‘she series’ (she, her, hers). While most people read someone as female or male and use the pronoun series that seems to fit, it’s clear that that doesn’t always work. My interviewees all spoke about the problems that they’ve experienced in getting others to recognize their preferred pronouns, or the hesitations they’ve had in voicing their preferences in the first place. Failure to acknowledge or use someone’s preferred gender pronouns is a form of ignorance and erasure. I hope that the responses below may help to debunk the myth that we can know someone’s PGPs simply by looking at them.

“What, if any, are your preferred gender pronouns?”
- “Male.”
- “‘She’ series or ‘they’ series are good.”
- I prefer ‘he’ and ‘they.’”
- “Masculine. ‘He,’ ‘him,’ ‘his.’”
- “I’m good with any, I suppose. I guess ‘they’ works pretty well if you have to go with one.”
- “You can use male pronouns—makes things easier, I think.”

“Would it be helpful for all professors to ask for PGPs at the beginning of class?”
I think that a model that celebrates people who ask up-front for everyone’s gender pronoun has migrated away from its intended good, and has gone to a weird place. The goal is to create a space—an open, safe, non-judgmental, completely non-charged space—that is just a space for someone to self-nominate as ‘he,’ ‘she,’ ‘zie,’ any pronoun. When it gets asked in social and academic situations, there are ways of inflecting that question that make people feel like they’re on the spot. The thing that people have to keep in mind is that the thing about asking that question as someone who’s comfortable with their pronouns is that it’s like asking, ‘What color is your hair?’ But if you’re asking someone who’s really insecure about their hair, and you’re asking it as though you’re doing them a favor, you’re actually just calling attention to it again. I’m actually not sure that the question really works because the question only works for people who are comfortable with their pronouns, and it only negatively affects the people who are very uncomfortable with their pronouns. I think that for the amount of harm

It does to the people who are most in need of that support and space, it doesn’t work out. I would turn more to a model of allyship that’s more of a one-on-one sort of thing, or ways of creating space that are not related to preferred gender pronouns, like, ‘Say one important thing that you think people should know about you.’”

“Yeah, I think that could be really, really helpful. One thing that I often forget about with preferred gender pronouns, but want to be conscious of, is sometimes people specifically don’t want to say them because they’re uncomfortable in that space. So you could frame that as, ‘Hey, we’re going to go around and do it, but if you want to skip then that’s fine,’ but maybe that highlights them – how do you do that?”

“I’m thinking about something I saw about Facebook recently, and how you can now customize your own gender. The person in charge of the project at Facebook said, ‘This will mean nothing to almost 100% of our users, but to the few people to whom it does matter, it will mean all the whole world.’ That’s how I’m thinking about the process of asking pronouns. Part of me agrees that it’d set a good tone, but part of me wonders if it’s a good use of time, given that, again, it doesn’t matter to 99% of people. But the professor could establish the tone by saying, ‘Let me know if there are particularly pronouns that you’d prefer me to use, or preferred names, anything of the sort.’ Most people probably wouldn’t take the professor up on that, but it establishes the room as an atmosphere where that’s okay and legitimized.”

“It wouldn’t be productive if the professors or other people in the classroom didn’t respect from then on out what that meant. My other concern would be instances where I’m the only trans person in the room. I feel like that would just put the magnifying glass more on me as different, when every single person is going and saying whatever their expected pronouns would be. I was in a situation once where we did that, and it was a very big group, probably fifty people, and I was near the end and would have been literally the only person to say something different. That just felt extremely uncomfortable and isolating. It was supposed to foster inclusivity, but it made me feel like I was further away from everyone else.”

“Personally, if my computer science professor were to do that, I’d be like, ‘Wow, he’s totally cool.’ I don’t know if it would make me feel more or less safe, but they’d be really cool to me, I guess. But, if you’re teaching a huge class or something like that, you’d then have to educate your students about pronouns. So, I think that the best thing that wouldn’t be functionally difficult to do is, if in one-on-one conversations, like in office hours, if professors asked then. I’d say that’d be even more important and wouldn’t be as realistically difficult to do.”
On Names
What’s in a name?
Just like recognizing someone’s preferred gender pronouns, using someone’s preferred name can be an important step in affirming their identity. On a college campus, this can be especially appreciated. For any number of reasons, a student’s name on the roster may be different from what that student goes by, and this discrepancy can be a source of real pain and discomfort for trans* students. Asking students for their preferred names is an easy way to make a classroom more welcoming and supportive.

“Is your preferred name different from the name assigned to you at birth?”
Yes: 3  No: 3

“Have you experienced difficulty getting Tufts to recognize your preferred name in any way, and how have you dealt with that?”
“I’ve had a lot of trouble getting Tufts to recognize that. Well I guess it depends on who you mean by Tufts. I haven’t gone that far to change it on legal documents. I know that the LGBT Center has one brochure for trans individuals, and I read through that about the name change, but it was going to cost a hundred and fifty dollars and you had to get a court order and all of this other stuff. I can’t swing that. And getting professors to recognize it is very difficult. I think it’s almost easier if they aren’t coming at me with the understanding that I’m transgender, which is interesting. Like, if I sign off with my preferred name at the end of an email, they’ll catch it and toss it back and maybe not think too much about it. I once emailed a professor and I said, ‘Hey, I’m transgender’ and then at the end signed off with my preferred name, but she didn’t respect that at all. I called her out on it immediately because I was just so frustrated, and she apologized but assured me that she had read that I was transgender in the email. The places that I feel like I should be getting support are sometimes the least supportive.”

“Without the deliberate creation of an inclusive atmosphere, however, what happens inside classroom walls reproduces the prejudices that exist outside these walls: straightness and gender conformity are assumed; LGBT identity is deviant.”

HELLO
my name is
not necessarily what it says on Trunk

“Defending our right to be who we are is inextricably tied to your own right to explore and define who you are. Each individual has a stake in trans liberation.”

1 Vaccaro, August & Kennedy, Safe Spaces: Making Schools and Communities Welcoming to LGBT Youth, 84
2 Leslie Feinberg, Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman, 92
Key Spaces/Places

What is a public space?
It would be easy to define public space at Tufts as shared space that is open to all students, but that definition assumes that public space exists in a vacuum. A more accurate, fair description would take into consideration the risks and benefits posed to people of different social locations who enter that space, especially social locations that are written on the body. When social relations are accounted for, it becomes clear that public space by definition may not be public space in effect. What does it mean to be a marginalized person in a public space? More to the point: if whole groups of people routinely feel unwelcome in a space, is it fair to call it public? Race scholar John Calmore writes about public space as something that is racialized and thus inherently inhospitable for Black men in particular. ¹ Calmore argues that structural power dynamics affect spatial breakdowns and that therefore “there is no aspatialized reality or social process.” ² Borrowing from Calmore, I contend that public space at Tufts, as well as outside of Tufts, is also gendered. For this reason, trans* and gender non-conforming students don’t enjoy the same access that cisgender students might. Some public spaces like bathrooms and locker rooms pose major obstacles for trans* and gender non-conforming students by forcing them to choose one of two genders, endangering those who don’t “fit.” Other public spaces like dorm halls and classrooms quietly uphold gender norms by doing nothing to expand discussion outside of the binary, and are therefore just as complicit in enforcing gender normativity. Intentionally or not, these spaces deny a trans* or gender non-conforming student’s identity.

¹ John Calmore, “Reasonable and unreasonable suspects: The cultural construction of the anonymous black man in public space (here be dragons).” In Progressive Black Masculinities, 144
² John Calmore, “Reasonable and unreasonable suspects: The cultural construction of the anonymous black man in public space (here be dragons).” In Progressive Black Masculinities, 151

What is a safe space?
Through my work with SAGE (Students Acting for Gender Equality), a Women’s Center student collective, I’ve learned that “safe space” is a well-meaning term that promotes an impossible idea. If we agree that there are infinite social identities represented within any one group of people, then we must accept that there is no way to guarantee that a space is safe for everyone present. At SAGE, we instead talk about “intentional spaces,” or spaces in which each person makes an active effort to be mindful of language and behavior, and to reject prejudiced or discriminatory tendencies. I think that concentrating on creating intentional spaces instead of safe spaces is a more practical, productive use of our time. While the definitions of safety and comfort are different for everyone, the following places on the Tufts campus have demonstrated support and inclusion when it comes to students of all gender identities and expressions.

“The demarcation of public space is intimately related to the articulation of culturally sanctioned gender identities.”¹

“The demarcation of public space is intimately related to the articulation of culturally sanctioned gender identities.”

²

Authentically safe spaces require commitment to an expanded version of safety. We argue that safe schools provide physical, psychological, and social freedom for all students.”²

¹ Viviane Namaste, “Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space.” In The Transgender Studies Reader, 591
² Vaccaro, August & Kennedy, Safe Spaces: Making Schools and Communities Welcoming to LGBT Youth, 103
Women’s Center

Location:
55 Talbot Ave - the little white house next to the Lower Campus Center

Hours:
Monday through Friday: 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Website:
ase.tufts.edu/womenscenter

Contact:
womenscenter@tufts.edu
617-627-3184

Mission Statement:
“The mission of the Tufts University Women’s Center is to advance the personal growth and intellectual development of all students, and especially women, particularly on issues related to women and gender. We are committed to fostering student leadership and helping students identify and understand societal structures that relate to issues of power, privilege, and oppression as well as providing resources to graduate students, faculty and staff, alumni, and parents. In this pursuit, the Center offers programming, advising, information, and resources about women, men, and gender that are informed by other aspects of identity such as race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and socioeconomic class.

Beyond attending programs, The Women’s Center Student Collaborative, SAGE (Students Acting for Gender Equality) is a great way for undergraduate students of any gender to get involved. SAGE’s mission is to foster a safe and collaborative community in which we educate ourselves on gender issues while gaining the skills necessary to productively work towards gender justice at Tufts and beyond.

The Center’s director is available to all students regardless of gender for academic and personal advising related to gender, academic majors, and career. The director is also happy to discuss transition to college life and other issues of identity formation and development as they are inflected by multiple intersections of identity.”

SAGE Mission Statement:
“Students Acting for Gender Equality (SAGE), The Women’s Center Student Collaborative’s, mission is to foster a safe and collaborative community in which we educate ourselves on gender issues while gaining the skills necessary to productively work towards gender justice at Tufts and beyond. We see ‘gender justice’ broadly, incorporating both the realization of gender equality as well as achieving freedom of gender identity and expression.

You do not have to identify as a feminist to join, but we do approach this work through a social justice and feminist lens. SAGE explores and acknowledges the full spectrum of gendered experiences that exist across individuals and cultures. Within this, we take seriously the call to consider gender in conjunction with the experience of socio-economic status, race, sexual identity, and all other aspects of identity.”
Kayla Hogan: “What is your position here at Tufts?”

Steph Gauchel: “I am the Director of the Women’s Center and the Interim Director of the LGBT Center.”

KH: “Great. So the purpose of this project is to collect the voices of trans* and gender non-conforming students at Tufts. In what ways, big or small, does your work at Tufts involve supporting these students?”

SG: “So I’ll speak from my role as Women’s Center Director because I’ve been in that position for almost six years. In terms of the Women’s Center, I’d say consideration of trans and gender non-conforming students to me, feels central to the work that I do. The purpose of the Women’s Center, for me, is for any student, or any member of the Tufts community who’s interested, to think about how gender operates in their own lives—on the Tufts campus and in the world. That’s really at the heart of what the Women’s Center is all about. And when I think about gender, I’m thinking about it broadly. I want cisgender men and women, trans and gender non-conforming people, people who don’t identify with a gender, anyone, to use the space.”

KH: “Awesome. So do you feel as though there are adequate resources available to you in regards to providing this support?”

SG: “That’s a good question. I think that our Health Services is really pretty phenomenal, and I think that this is something that they really pay a lot of attention to, and it’s always on their radar. I think similarly about the Office of Equal Opportunity. It’s also about the kinds of issues that we end up addressing as center directors, and they vary from director to director. For me, and I’d say this is true at the LGBT Center too, so much of the work that we do is central to issues of physical and psychological safety and physical and mental wellbeing. I think that the fact that our Health Services and Office of Equal Opportunity have really dedicated staffs that see these as really central issues is really beneficial.”

KH: “Yeah, the OEO seems amazing.”

SG: “Yeah, they really are. I mean, Title IX is open to interpretation, so the fact that we have a director of OEO who thinks so inclusively about what sex and gender mean is incredible.”

KH: “Definitely. And the fact that we have the trans protected category at all.”

SG: “Right, like our non-discrimination policy covers gender identity and expression. I was at Harvard during the process of trying to get gender identity and expression into the non-discrimination policy there. I was part of a task force that was working to implement that, and we used Tufts as a model. So that was pretty neat. And we only ended up getting gender identity at Harvard. They were trying to say that [gender expression] was redundant, but it’s not.”

KH: “Look at us go! Great. So you don’t have to cite a specific example, but have you ever had a trans* or gender non-conforming student approach you with a problem that you couldn’t help them with? How did you deal with that?”

SG: “I think what becomes interesting is when you already have a small population of a particular type of student, and then you add in other needs. In terms of social community, we don’t always have a match for someone. The intersections really complicate it. Let’s say we have a gender non-conforming student of color, and they didn’t necessarily feel that there was one space that met their needs. So even if we had a multicultural center or something like that…if we don’t have enough members of different types of people, there’s just a real struggle with community, and that’s tough.”

KH: “Yeah, definitely. So in your experience, or to your knowledge, do trans* and gender non-conforming students enter your space and/or attend your events?”

SG: “Yes, which I’m really happy about. Yeah, I don’t know what else to say.”

KH: “Cool, I just wanted that on the record. So what steps do you take to make your space or events inclusive of trans and gender non-conforming students?”

SG: “One of the simplest things that I do is make it explicit that our programming, which is usually geared toward students, is open to students of all genders and identities. I want to signal that it’s open to all gender identities, but also other identity configurations. So that’s a real no-brainer to me, in terms of signaling openness. Also just how I think through programming—I really try to be intentional overall about what I’m hitting with the different types of programs that I’m offering, but also with each individual program. Am I being aware of gender and its intersections? What is the language that we’re using? We have a statement of respect for the Women’s Center, and I feel like there’s a constant call to be conscious and intentional about the language that we’re using. At SAGE [Students Acting for Gender Equality], when we do any sort of introductions, we include preferred gender pronouns, and we also try to periodically identify why we’re doing that, and have someone define what we mean by it.”

KH: “Awesome. PGPs actually became a huge topic in these interviews, and everyone had different opinions about it. Basically I asked students whether they would want professors to ask for PGPs at the beginning of every class, because I know it happens in some WGSS classes and Women’s Center events. Some people had concrete ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers, but there was a lot of nuance. There has to be education and intention for it to make sense.”

SG: “It’s true. It can become something that we just do and don’t think about.”

KH: “Yeah, it’s just so hard because it seems overall good, but there’s so much gray area.”

SG: “Definitely. I remember one time I went to this social justice training and I really liked the trainer because he asked people what their preferred gender pronouns were when addressing them, and he did it for people who you would assume you were spot-on with what their gender identity was. I thought that that was an interesting practice. We don’t need to only do it for someone who we might not be certain about, when we want to be respectful. It can be a practice for everyone.”

KH: “Yeah! So when the Women’s Center sponsors events, do you have guidelines for what you want to see in events? Or for which ones you sponsor and which ones you don’t?”

SG: “It’s more informal than that. Usually what I try to do is meet with a student. The scenario that most often happens is that a group wants to screen a film here. So if I don’t know the film or I do know the film, I ask the same sorts of questions, I’m trying to get at: what is the film about? Does it need a trigger warning? I try to talk through what I mean by that—could it be about murder, sexual violence, racism? If students are going to do an event in this space, I want to try to engage them in some sort of conversation that makes me feel comfortable that they understand the expectations of the space and that they aren’t doing anything to disrupt the intentional space that we try to create here.”

KH: “Yeah, definitely. This just occurred to me: have you ever thought of expanding the Women’s Center to ‘Women’s and Gender Center’ or something like that? I just know that a lot of people, unfortunately,
assume that’s it’s a cis women-only space.”

SG: “I’ve definitely thought about it. Honestly, I’ve thought about it more in terms of academia because, for me, it’s not that it feels more important…I mean, I would be completely open to a conversation about the name and possibilities of a Gender Center, the Center for Women and Gender, or something else. I think that the barrier based on the name is totally legitimate. But I think there are other times when people are going to continue to use [the name] as a reason why they don’t want to engage with it. There are barriers with all of the centers, but I think so much of [the barriers around the Women’s Center] is attached to feminism: the politics of feminism, the demonization of feminism, but also the legitimate critiques of feminism. There’s a lot wrapped up in this space.”

KH: “Yeah, that makes sense. Okay. So what kinds of events do you think would benefit trans* and gender non-conforming students? Or what kinds have been beneficial in the past?”

SG: “In terms of the Center work, I think there’s a real attempt to try to balance community support pieces with intellectual engagement. I think it’s important that there’s a real effort to make sure that those are sustained. Some students, regardless of identity or what their interests are or what identities are salient for them, want one or the other, one or both. Some people want to come in and have one-on-one support, finding people who are similar in terms of their identities or in terms of their politics, in a space where that feels comfortable and safe. And then other people really want to interrogate these identities and what they mean in their own lives—on our campus and in the world we live in. So, for me, it’s striking that balance in the hopes that neither one creates barriers or dissatisfaction.”

KH: “That’s what a lot of my interviewees have said. They want and appreciate these spaces where they can explore their identities, but also a lot of them participate in T-Time which started as a kind of trans* group but seems to have turned into an intellectual space for talking about anything they want to talk about. It’s a good space, but they’re not necessarily talking about their gender identities for an hour.”

SG: “That’s interesting in terms of the Women’s Center. I don’t mind if a gendered group wants to form or meet here, or an identity-specific group, but just in terms of my philosophy, I don’t ever see myself doing a gender-segregated program or event. For me, the common identities are around the interest in exploring gender and feminism and social justice engagement. For me, it’s more important to provide space for cross-gender, gender-inclusive discussions and opportunities. Gender is so essentialized in our culture that there’s enough [gender segregation] happening everywhere else. Part of my hope is that I’m constantly demonstrating that we can have these conversations together, but I also want to be respectful that, for some people, there are some reasons that they legitimately feel that they want to have a separate discussion group space, or even an organization. But even with that, I think there’s a need to really ask: why? Why is that? And are you being conscious and intentional with that? Are you mindful of other identities? Are you assuming the group is homogenous based on this one shared experience or identity?”

KH: “I see what you mean. So I talked to Jill [Zellmer, Director of the OEO] about this, and she has many kinds of workshop and/or training currently in place for faculty/staff/admin that deals with issues of gender inclusivity? To your knowledge?”

SG: “That’s interesting in terms of the Women’s Center. I don’t mind if a gendered group wants to form or meet here, or an identity-specific group, but just in terms of my philosophy, I don’t ever see myself doing a gender-segregated program or event. For me, the common identities are around the interest in exploring gender and feminism and social justice engagement. For me, it’s more important to provide space for cross-gender, gender-inclusive discussions and opportunities. Gender is so essentialized in our culture that there’s enough [gender segregation] happening everywhere else. Part of my hope is that I’m constantly demonstrating that we can have these conversations together, but I also want to be respectful that, for some people, there are some reasons that they legitimately feel that they want to have a separate discussion group space, or even an organization. But even with that, I think there’s a need to really ask: why? Why is that? And are you being conscious and intentional with that? Are you mindful of other identities? Are you assuming the group is homogenous based on this one shared experience or identity?”

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KH: “I see what you mean. So I talked to Jill [Zellmer, Director of the OEO] about this, but is there any sort of workshop and/or training currently in place for faculty/staff/admin that deals with issues of gender inclusivity? To your knowledge?”

SG: “That’s really interesting. The Women’s Center is interested in trying to bring in more outside resources for First Fridays. There are so many people, and it’s just great.”

KH: “Yeah, and it’s so close. So you talked a little bit about James’ training, but if you were in charge of designing that training, what would it look like? What things would you hit on when you’re trying to educate people about fostering gender inclusivity?”

SG: “It’s funny. I don’t know if this is going to be exactly the answer you want, but my brain automatically goes to the sexual assault prevention piece instead of a workshop specifically on gender identity and expression. For me, my hope is that we can figure out the best way to be really intentional with the sexual and gender-based violence prevention work we’re doing on campus, in terms of education and prevention. Also, to make sure we’re challenging gender essentialism consistently and broadly, not just in terms of cis binary identities. And with that, that’s also thinking about intersectional identity-based differences such as race and citizenship, all these questions that come into play but often get marginalized as ‘culturally relevant’ for specific groups.”

KH: “Definitely. So that’s all I had, but is there anything that we haven’t specifically talked about that you’d want me to see me address in the toolkit?”

SG: “I guess I’m curious if you’re grappling at all with questions of physical space like bathrooms and the gym. Also legal questions like legal documents and internal documents—the policy related to how people identify themselves.”
LGBT Center

Location:
226 College Ave
the yellow house around the corner from SOGO

Hours:
Monday through Friday: 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Website:
ase.tufts.edu/lgbt

Contact:
lgbt@tufts.edu
617-627-3770

Mission Statement:
“The programs and services of The LGBT Center support the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, faculty, staff and alumni of Tufts University. The Center is available to anyone on campus interested in learning more about LGBT-related subjects or issues of sexual and gender identity. The Center is committed to maintaining LGBT visibility on campus and providing campus-wide education on sexual and gender identity and the effects of homophobia and transphobia.”

T-Time Mission Statement:
“T-Time provides a confidential space for individuals who fall outside the traditional cisgender male/female binary. This group will focus on discussing personal experiences with these shared identities. The group will be facilitated by students who share these lived experiences.”

All of my interviewees have participated in T-Time to some extent, or at least subscribe to the T-Time listserv. Although I personally have never attended a T-Time meeting, I gathered from the interview responses that it is a truly productive, positive space for trans* and gender non-conforming students. I urge any readers who identify as trans* or gender non-conforming, or who are questioning their identities, to check out T-Time for themselves. Groups like T-Time are self-sustained by the student members, and it’s because of current students that it exists in the first place.

There can always be uneven power dynamics between cisgender and trans* students, but T-Time is a place for the latter group to fully be themselves, and discuss whatever they want to discuss, free from the worry of those dynamics. Don’t just take it from me though--as you’ll see throughout this booklet, current members of T-Time are its biggest proponents.
Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO)

Location:
196 Boston Avenue, 3rd Floor, Suite 3800

Website:
oeo.tufts.edu

Contact:
oeo@tufts.edu
617-627-3298

Mission Statement:
“The Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) exists to ensure that the University’s commitment and goals toward equal opportunity are integral components of Tufts’ policies.

We further this mission by ensuring that the University maintains compliance with all federal, state, and local laws pertaining to anti-discrimination, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title IX, through complaint resolution, programming and outreach. OEO cooperates with members of the Tufts community to resolve complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual misconduct, and set forth University policies and guidelines that pertain to these areas of conflict. We also ensure that the University maintains compliance with all federal, state, and local laws pertaining to affirmative action.

OEO is guided by the University’s commitment to and desire for a truly integrated, interactive, productive, successful, diverse student, faculty, staff body, and community members.”
Meet Jill

Kayla Hogan: “What is your position here at Tufts?”

Jill Zellmer: “I’m the Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity and I’m also the Title IX Coordinator. Those are my two big roles.”

KH: “Cool. So the purpose of this project is to collect the voices of trans* and gender non-conforming students at Tufts. In what ways, big or small, does your work at Tufts involve supporting these students?”

JZ: “From a student perspective, my goal is to make sure that every student is treated fairly, and with respect, and that includes gender non-conforming students. It also includes students who feel like they’re hidden or not seen, which I think is also relevant. Some students…you see them and you know that they’re gender non-conforming. But then there are other students whose identities or expressions are more hidden, and I want to make sure that everyone is included in that scope, not just the ones we can see. And that goes for all of the protected categories—disabilities, etc. Some are hidden and some are not. My hope is that students feel comfortable and safe here, and treated fairly here, no matter who they are.”

KH: “Awesome. So I know that students can come to you whenever they have a concern or question, but you also do outreach things? Could you speak to that?”

JZ: “Sure. We do lots of trainings. We do some trainings that are more targeted to departments that we know may be having some issues, or need some more awareness or understanding. But the ones that are more fun, frankly, are the ones that are not so targeted, the ones trying to get people in who may not have had thoughts about the conversation of being gender non-conforming or being different in any sense. We just printed condoms this year that said, ‘Got consent?’ on them, and they’re all different colors—that’s a fun thing that we can do. And we can get our information out there and our link out there so that if students are in a situation that’s not comfortable or safe then they know where to go. But then there are more face-to-face conversations, like Steph Gauchel at the Women’s Center inviting me to come and talk to a specific group of students who are having a conversation, or Tom Bourdon [former director of the LGBT Center], or Health Services. It’s also not just undergraduate students; we also support students who are graduate students and professional students in Boston and Grafton. And there are some differences. For instance, if the graduate students are mid-career and having a crisis of identity, then that’s a different conversation than a younger undergraduate student who is having a crisis of identity. [The younger undergraduate student] may not be married and the graduate student might be married, and it might be rocking their world in a bigger or different way. Those are all things that we can help and support students on.”

KH: “Great. Do you feel as though there are adequate resources available to you in regards to providing this support?”

JZ: “To me? From the administration? My supervisor is Mary Jeka and she’s also the General Counsel in terms of lawyers and organizing the legal part of Tufts. And, I have to say, she is one of the better administrators that I have encountered who understands the issues, and GLBTQI students, or any other label that people want to call themselves. So, if I go to her and say, ‘Look, we need to do this because we’re doing it for our traditional—whatever that looks like—students but we’re not doing this for another whole category of students who might be students or color or students of different socioeconomic status or gender non-conforming students,’ usually I’ll get what I need. The funds are limited right now at Tufts, not just at Tufts but everywhere, so we have to think very carefully about how we’re going to make the money stretch. But overall, she’s very good. I also have a lot of support in the legal team. Lili Palacios-Baldwin, who’s fairly new to Tufts, is an attorney and she’s very comfortable in this space, as well. I can always go to her and say, ‘I really think we need to do this here at Tufts.’ For example, ‘I really think we need to change our policy and procedures manual to reflect same-sex couples, same-sex domestic violence, same-sex relationships, or other types of relationships of gender non-conforming students who maybe don’t want to have those labels but who are in relationships that are causing potential issues or problems for people—themselves or others.’ There’s good support. I don’t have to explain. I don’t have to take the time to say, ‘Look, in a situation like this...’ It’s not like that. It’s very open and there are enough people around who get it, and they’re in the right places, I think.”

KH: “That’s really good to hear. Have you ever had a trans* or gender non-conforming student approach you with a problem that you couldn’t help them with? How did you deal with that? Have you ever referred people to resources in Boston?”

JZ: “Oh, yes! There are a couple of groups that I like: the Massachusetts Trans Political Coalition, and also BARCC, the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, is really good with these issues. I’ve heard from trans students coming back that they were understood and treated well. So it’s not just me referring and thinking it’s good, it’s actually hearing it from the students themselves. There are a number of places. I really like the Fenway Community Health Center. My partner was hooked in there when he was transitioning, so I know from personal experience in that regard that that’s a really good, supportive place. Sometimes I also like to refer people for medical issues off campus because I think there are a lot of students here and not enough doctors. It’s great that we have doctors on campus, but sometimes if you’re looking at hormones and things like that you’d want someone who can do all of it, instead of going to three different places to get support medically. Davis Square Family Practice actually has a trans doctor, who I see myself personally and who my partner sees, and I sometimes will refer students there who are looking to get on hormones, or who are interested in having that calibrated better. It’s not on campus but it’s close enough that it feels like a community. I should say that Margaret Higham [Medical Director of Tufts Student Health Services] is really open and awesome. She has a trans sticker on her door. It’s not like I’m deferring people away from her, but she’s only one person.”

KH: “So you talked a little bit about the training that OEO does, but I assume that that’s volunteer-based? Or are you just allowed to give training to any group that you feel needs training.”

JZ: “Yes, actually, that’s a really good question. If there is an issue that comes up to OEO in a department where someone is treated not well, or there’s a perception that things are not going well, or there’s a hostile environment of some sort, I have the authority to call and say, ‘We’re going to come and do training.’ And my training is different from, say, Tom Bourdon’s training, which is more focused on GLBTQI. I have to look at all the protected categories, but many people who are in positions like mine on other campuses don’t focus on—because they don’t have the personal and professional knowledge—gender non-conforming students. They don’t even know the language or the lingo, and they get stuck in the alphabet soup, all the
labels. I’m not a big fan of labels, but we need them in some sense. And so people need to know that when I talk, and when I speak about sexual misconduct or sexual assault or sexual harassment, and how that’s not appropriate at Tufts, and that I want people to report it, that I’m including all people in that. Those scenarios don’t just involve a woman accusing a man of sexual misconduct; it can look all different ways.”

KH: “Is there any sort of workshop or general training in place, that you know of, for entering staff/faculty/admin that deals with gender inclusivity?”

IZ: “Great question. I wouldn’t say specifically this issue; I would say that the VAWA [Violence Against Women Act], which is actually being rolled out this month federally, is mandating universities to have orientations for faculty and staff. OEO already does our staff trainings. I will do them or I will have someone in my office do them. We also go to the new hire orientations. One of us is always there for those, in HR, and we always have a conversation about what is not appropriate at Tufts, what is not acceptable, our policies and procedures. We’re pushing it into their heads from day one that they need to report these things and that they need to make sure that their students are safe, and that policy violations are not happening. So, from that perspective, yes. But it includes race, ethnicity, gender, and disability—all twelve protected categories in Massachusetts. My office has jurisdiction over all of those, not just gender expression, gender identity, gender and sex. For faculty, it’s harder, but that’s coming. In fact, just trained every faculty and staff member in Grafton over the fall. And we are rolling out, actually this month, faculty training in the dental school, and we’re hoping to get the engineering school in before the end of the semester. And then we have a plan for next year, which includes everybody else for faculty. They push and scream and don’t show up because they don’t think they need it, but they don’t realize that they could be sued personally if they don’t report this stuff. So when I tell them that they perk up and listen. Sometimes it’s not their fault, it’s their schedules. And some of them are part-time, so do they get paid to come to training on a day they’re not supposed to work? But it’s coming, and it’s coming because of the federal mandate.”

KH: “So this training addresses a lot of things, but if we had a training specifically on these issues—gender discrimination, things like that—what would you want it to look like? What are the key pieces that you feel like you maybe don’t have time now to cover, or you can’t cover in-depth?”

IZ: “I think that there’s a different pattern of behavior sometimes with sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and sexual assault in particular, between same-sex couples or same-sex acquaintances, or gender non-conforming students who are trying to meet each other. There is a different set of issues and circumstances sometimes that I think we don’t often get to talk about. Not because we don’t want to, but because there isn’t enough time, given all of the other categories we need to cover and focus on. The other thing that’s coming to my mind is that I look, and I am, very gendered. You can see me, and you can hear my voice. I look female, I am female. I’ve had a child, I’m curvier. When people see me, they think a certain thing and they have a certain perception of me, but they don’t realize what my personal or professional views are. What I’m getting at is: I would really love to have a training where I had a co-trainer, or even a few co-trainers, who are not gender-conforming like I am, because I think that that models the inclusiveness that I want to convey. That being said, I also think that just having colleagues who are not like me, or who don’t look like me, or think like me, is important. So, not just somebody who’s White either. Those are things I think about when I conduct trainings, and I try to convey the inclusivity, but I think it’s different when people can see the inclusivity.”

KH: “Definitely, just having a presence there.”

IZ: “Yeah, it’s modeling. It’s just a better way to train. People learn better when there’s difference, and they can relate to something else non-conforming student. So you don’t see yourself reflected, just try not to assume, because I want you to try, to not assume anything about you. My goal is to just be open and hope that the obstacles of perception don’t get in the way, on either side.”

KH: “Definitely. I’m just curious: how many people work in the OEO?”

IZ: “I typically have two students who are graduate students, and then our admin. And then I have a Title VII Investigator, a Title IX Investigator, an ADA Specialist, and then myself. So it’s small, and we have a lot of cases. We have, I think, seven religions represented. But that’s not something that you see; it’s invisible, mostly.”

KH: “Right. So I don’t have much else, but is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you’d want to see me address in the toolkit? Or, is there a blur you’d want to send from the OEO to any trans* or gender non-conforming students who might read this?”

IZ: “I would say: we get it. We are not students anymore. Some of us are further away from that age than others, but that doesn’t mean we haven’t experienced it ourselves or haven’t seen it in somebody really close to us. There are more people on this campus than I think people realize who have transgender children. Just because you think you see something or you don’t see yourself reflected, just try not to assume, because we’re going to try to not assume anything about you. My goal is to just be open and hope that the obstacles of perception don’t get in the way, on either side.”

KH: “Yeah, definitely. Well, that’s all I have. Do you have any final thoughts?”

IZ: “One of the things that I’ve noticed here at Tufts is the thoughtfulness of students around, for example, gender non-conforming residential life policies and processes and housing. I know lots of universities have started looking at that because students are pushing. From my partner’s perspective, he was bootied out of his women’s college when he started to transition and that was, financially and socially, really difficult. I don’t see that happening here, and I would hope it wasn’t, and if it was I’d want to know about it so that I could address it somehow. The other thing I’ve noticed is a conversation nationally around fraternities and sororities, which I think is fascinating, when there is a trans student who wants to be a member. We’ve had that conversation here at Tufts, and we’ve had processes and policies relative to that to protect students from being discriminated against in that space. I think it’s going to get interesting because most of our fraternities and sororities have national chapters that are not in Massachusetts, and they sometimes are in states where the policies and laws don’t support [trans* and gender non-conforming people]. So I’m really interested in what’s going to happen with that. If we have to be standing out front, we’re going to. On our campus, it’s very clear. In Massachusetts, we’re lucky that we have the transgender protected category on the state statute list now, and there are a number of really good protections that we get to do. And, as I’ve said, came to Tufts because it already had gender identity and expression protection embedded in the policies and procedures, so I didn’t have to fight that fight. I could come in and support and maintain, instead of start from the ground. So I think this conversation is going to be interesting because so many of fraternities and sororities have specific requirements that say you have to be male, or you have to be female. So let’s talk about that. Does that really make sense? Is that exclusive?”
“In gender-segregated spaces at Tufts (bathrooms, locker rooms, sports teams, sororities/fraternities, gender-specific classes), how have you, successfully or unsuccessfully, explained your gender identity to other people? Do you have any tips for others who may find themselves in these spaces?”

“I feel like that doesn’t apply to me so much. At Tufts especially, I’ve just given up in a sense. I know now that people here, given the age range, will probably not read me as male no matter what I do. If anything, they’ll just assume that I’m a queer female. So I don’t bother with that. I’ve just stuck with the normative assumptions, just to bypass a lot of unnecessary stress that I guess could go through but I think that would be too much for me, mentally, to deal with all the time.”

“Housing was probably the weirdest one for me. I applied as genderqueer, but then I forgot about it until April. I just figured I was going to have to pick a dude roommate, so I picked a dude roommate. Then we tried to do the housing stuff and it was like ‘Error!’ because I was this one thing and he was male. So the system read it as we couldn’t room together. I tried to do everything over email, but then I just called them and it was totally fine. The person even asked about my pronouns and everything, so that went really well. My advice: it will probably be better than you think it is if you just straight-up talk to them. Don’t stress about it too much, or try to do it from a distance, because they won’t get it done. I wish I would’ve kept it as genderqueer because maybe I could’ve gotten a single. Tufts gives the option of applying as genderqueer, but then they just didn’t follow it up. So if they just had a quick fact sheet that was like ‘This is what’ll happen,’ then I probably would’ve picked to have a single and then I probably would’ve had more flexibility in what clothes I could wear and buy, especially if I’m just by myself in my room. That would’ve been nice. In regards to bathrooms, I’m in South, so it would have been nice if trans freshmen knew that South was an option, because they have gender-neutral bathrooms. There are a lot of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus, if you know where they are.”

“I think I tend to put myself in spaces that make a lot of room for either not explaining—like, ‘I’m just going to exist’ and you don’t need to explain yourself—or spaces for if you want to explain yourself, like the LGBT Center, the Women’s Center, just surrounding myself with people who will do that. In terms of tips, I don’t know. If you can, find people who are curious. Like my roommate has been so, so good. I’ll mention something off-handedly and she’ll come back to it and be like, ‘Hey, can you explain that more?’ It’s actually been really helpful for me to have someone asking those questions because then I get to work through it and be like, ‘I don’t know what I meant when I said that.’ In terms of super gender-conforming spaces, I have no need to go. I’m not going to actively never go, but I will never be like, ‘Hey, you know what I want to do tonight? Frat party, let’s go!’”

“Why do I ask? Gender-segregated spaces can cause real problems for trans* and gender non-conforming students. For many of these students, gendered spaces are asking them to make a choice that they feel like they either can’t make or shouldn’t have to make.

Many colleges have already switched over to gender-neutral bathrooms. At Tufts, there has been a push to provide gender-neutral bathrooms and gender-neutral housing, and progress has been made to an extent, but bathrooms are only the first step.

Taking steps to create a gender-neutral college campus can be vital to the happiness and safety of all students, not just trans* and gender non-conforming students. For non-conforming students, a gender-neutral environment can save them unnecessary pain, discomfort and anxiety. Furthermore, gender neutrality can allow all students to not only accept and experience the fluid nature of gender, but also to explore other aspects of their identities that gendered divisions ignore.

WHERE ARE THE GENDER-NEUTRAL BATHROOMS?
“Are there any specific spaces or places on campus where you’ve felt particularly welcome or supported? (The centers, specific events, etc.) How so?”

“Health Services. I felt really welcome there. They do a great job reaching out to trans students and letting us know that it’s okay. For the most part, I’ve felt supported there, although there are some people who use incorrect pronouns, and that’s frustrating. The LGBT Center is super awesome. I started talking to Tom [Bourdon, former director] and other people there. I’m a grad student and I’m here for a semester, so I’m not super involved in lots of things, but definitely Mental Health Services. The person I’m seeing right now is totally awesome. She was like, ‘I don’t know that much about trans stuff, but I’m trying to educate myself as much as I can.’ She was like, ‘If you ever feel like I’m doing something wrong, feel free to confront me or see someone else.’ I feel like I can say stuff to her.”

“The LGBT Center as a whole is better than just the world, of course. For me, what I’m more interested in is a critical mindset to engage stuff, and not just the standard liberal type of interpretation of things. That’s really the key for me to talk and exist, especially as someone who doesn’t quite fit into the ‘trans 101’ terminology and existence. If someone has the mindset that they can grow more, then I feel more comfortable with that because then we can have a dialogue, versus if they’ve just been given the standard ‘trans 101,’ if they’re cis. Like a lot of cis people go into the LGBT Center with that mindset, and they just check that box of being educated, and then it’s much harder to exist with them. I’d rather be with an ignorant, critical cis person than an educated, liberal cis person, if that makes sense. Beside that, we have T-Time, and T-Time is really, really nice. We just have a lot of good discussions. There’s emotional support, but it’s also a very intellectual type of thing. Like, we talk about a lot of issues, which is nice. I don’t think I’ve been to trans-specific events on campus. I went to TDOR [Transgender Day of Remembrance] in Boston, and I’m involved in PFLAG [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] in Boston. I’m not very involved in activism at Tufts. I’m more in off-campus stuff, just because it feels more important. I suppose if there was an event that I’d want to go to at Tufts, it’d be less social and more just interesting intellectually.”

“I guess I don’t interact too much with stuff that’s going on on-campus, in that regard. I just live my life as it comes, I guess. Online is mostly the place where I’ve been talking about this and exploring this. I haven’t actually interacted with the Tufts community too much. I mean, I know of support groups and I’m signed up for the mailing list, and I really appreciate that they exist. I seek out forums sometimes, and sometimes it translates into actual activity. But yeah, I do a lot of research. I really appreciate knowing that there are other people out there struggling with the same sort of weird non-gender binary vocabulary and identity issues and all these things.”

“Yes, definitely the Women’s Center and the LGBT Center. I think of the Women’s Center as more supporting or comforting for my feminist identity, regardless of gender. As a feminist, I feel very, very comfortable there. Gender-wise, I feel like I fit in fine there, but I don’t know. The LGBT Center feels more supportive for the ‘messing around with gender’ part of my identity. And I would say that T-Time specifically, and Bi-Pan Group, are both great spaces. My favorite part about them is that you don’t have to have answers and no one ever asks you, ‘How would you identify?’ You can just be like, ‘It’s fucking confusing and great and scary sometimes!’ and we all agree on that.”

“T-Time is probably the only place that I’ve found that was a game-changer for me last semester that really helped a lot.”

“I feel especially supported at Health Services. They have text on the wall, and stickers that are trans healthcare-specific. They’ve been very purposeful with the language they use, especially with genital exams. That has been really helpful, because even when they use words that might be uncomfortable, they use them in a sort of impersonal, uncharged sort of way that I think is really well done.”

Why do I ask?

It’s important to note that Tufts is not entirely void of safe or intentional spaces for trans* and gender non-conforming students. Every one of my interviews pointed to positive experiences they’ve had at Tufts, wonderful people they’ve met, and comfortable spaces they’ve been in.

When dealing with issues of gender exclusion, it’s easy to focus on the negativity, but that’s not necessarily what I’m aiming to do here. I think it’s just as important to stress the successes at Tufts, specifically what trans* and gender non-conforming students themselves see as strong points on this campus.

Although gender normativity governs many spaces at Tufts, my interviewees have all found spaces that feel right to them, whether that’s at Tufts or beyond. My hope is for any trans* and gender non-conforming students reading this to consider the aforementioned spaces, but also to find or create new spaces that are open to productive conversations, activities and events.
“On the other hand, are there any routine challenges you face in relation to your gender identity or expression when you’re in a public space at Tufts?”

“I don’t think challenges, but there’s a constant question of how I’m being read. For the most part I assume that I’m very much being read as assigned-female. Once in a while, I don’t know. I don’t think of myself as being perceived as feminine for the most part, so I don’t feel like I’m very often targeted for street harassment. So when I am, it’s confusing. At the drag ball, someone came up to me and asked, ‘Are you a boy or a girl?’ and I said, ‘That’s a great question!’ and walked away. It made me almost more uncomfortable than instances in public because I didn’t expect it there.”

“I think the main thing is just at Health Services. Just some incorrect use of pronouns, even though I’m pretty sure it says to use male pronouns. I know it’s because they haven’t changed it [on my records]. So I understand that that’s confusing, but at least [the nurse] could’ve asked, you know?”

“It’s more of just really internal stuff, I suppose, like trying to figure out everything. Tufts has been as helpful in figuring stuff out, like T-Time. I suppose it’s just weird then...I don’t know how I feel about cis queer people, like at the LGBT Center. I think there are still a decent amount of people who I feel like ‘get it’ to an extent, and I’d almost rather they didn’t or at least were accepting of the fact that they might not. Because I don’t get everything! They can’t get everything. And I think that there is an implicit othering in how events and stuff are handled. There are like ‘regular events’ and then ‘special trans events,’ and it’s made us into a special event when really it’s part of the whole thing. But I really do want to talk to cis queer people about how we’re connected in very serious ways. It’s not just ‘LGB’ and ‘T.’ I don’t think it’s a literal spectrum, but it flows a lot.”

“Less so now, because I pass more now, but in the past the active allyship at Tufts can sometimes take the form in social situations as a questioning that becomes uncomfortable to me. So what’s lacking a little bit at Tufts I think is a lack of an understanding of what it means to be stealth. So people bringing it up, wanting to talk about it, and wanting to talk about it in, usually, a very supportive way. But the fact of talking about it is usually unqueried, possibly because we have so many LGB people. And also people who will know me from before or know this about me will bring it up at parties, anecdotally, and the point of the story usually is not that I’m trans, but it’s involved in the story. People feel really good about having known me through this whole process, and so they’ll bring that up, especially if we’re drinking, and they’ll be like ‘I’ve seen you become the person you are now. I feel so touched to be a part of your life!’ And it’s like, ‘Well, I’m touched to have you in my life too, but I didn’t invite you into my life. This is just my life.’ So I think just bringing it up and drawing attention to it.”

“I’m not sure if this happens just to me, or if it could be anybody, but I feel like I get called ‘lady’ in situations that don’t require a gendered thing attached to whatever’s being said. Like in the dining halls or in the campus center, I get a lot more ladys and ma’ams now than I did freshman or sophomore year. Even referring to my piercings as ‘pretty.’ And I don’t think piercings, especially mine, are gendered in any way. I feel like most of that maybe comes from people being uncomfortable with the ambiguity. In their minds, if they can’t see something slotted in one category or the other, they do it themselves. That’s been the case both on- and off-campus.”

check us out!
“What kinds of self-care steps do you take when you find yourself in an unsupportive or non-inclusive environment at Tufts, whether that’s in the classroom or not?”

“The conversations at T-Time help, definitely. Even if I don’t bring [issues of gender] up, which I usually don’t, it’s just so nice to be in an environment unlike any other place I’ve been on campus. I’m just there, and I’m acknowledged. But also, being transgender is not my entire self to [the other members of T-Time], so it’s just very humanizing and necessary. I have one friend who I also go to. She doesn’t go to school at Tufts, which is nice. I’ll call her up, and she understands. She was the first person who I was able to originally come out to, and I feel very supported by her.”

“Something that has become important to me is assessing in a given situation whether it’s something I need to engage for myself or not. The problem being that I have to take minute to figure it out because, often, something will happen and you won’t realize until later that it was a really crappy thing that somebody said to you. Microaggressions, you know? And so, in the moment what I’ve tried to develop is a kind of self-forgiveness for just leaving. Like, if I start to feel that feeling that there’s something off, instead of trying to engage it I instead try to give myself permission just to leave and not engage it at all, because I know that I won’t be able to process it until later. And often when you process it later you end up self-castigating. So, in that moment, the quick thought process I have to have is: ‘I’m starting to feel uncomfortable. I’m not going to stick around to see in what way specifically I’m feeling uncomfortable. I’m just going to get out and then find people who I’d rather be around.’ So, not waiting around to see if I can get up the nerve to then say something or to see if I can figure out how to say something in the situation. I’ve given myself permission to just leave it if it’s not something that I can engage right away.”

“I listen to a lot of trans music actually. Not like a genre, but just music by trans artists. It depends on the specific situation, like if I’m trying to think, there’s one artist I like called ‘Antony and the Johnsons’ that is more reflective. But I also listen to a lot of queer hip-hop if it’s more of an aggressive thing. So I guess that’s a thing I do that works for me personally.”

“I guess just speaking up when I can, about my pronouns. It feels ridiculous that I still have to do that several years post-transition. Also it helps me to have a support network of people who are trans, not even at Tufts though. We can talk about our experiences in life. Like, ‘This person called me she today, what the fuck?!’ Like my girlfriend is like, ‘I’m dating you and I can’t possibly fathom how anyone sees you and says she.’ So that helps. And for me, having a therapist to talk about some of the stuff that comes up in daily life. Like, ‘Gosh, it’s really frustrating to not be treated like human like everyone else.’”

“I guess I’m lucky enough to have not been in any particularly phobic circles, but occasionally you’ll hear phobic remarks. I’m not sure I do too much of anything, to be honest. I feel like I should be prepared to deal with it when it comes, but I guess flying under the radar is an advantage, and makes you feel a little dishonest at times.”

“Colleges and universities that seek to be supportive of transgender students must consider how they are often physically and socially structured in ways that enforce a binary gender system.”

1 Brett Beemyn, “Making Campuses More Inclusive of Transgender Students,” 78
“Have you taken any courses in which you’ve felt particularly welcome or supported or where your identities have been expressly acknowledged? Would you attribute it to the specific professor, the readings, or something else entirely?”

“I would say there is one professor in [my program], and he’s actually the reason I came back because he took the initiative to include transgender awareness in one his lectures. I think it’s really important that professors do bring these issues into their classes, especially in something like healthcare. In the healthcare profession, we’re all going to work with a variety of people, and we have to know about various issues. So I think it was really great that he did that, especially risking a lot of stuff professionally.”

“Whose stories are privileged in educational contexts and whose stories are distorted and silenced?”

“I’m taking __________ right now, so yes, absolutely, one hundred percent. All of the above. I also took an Ex-College class called __________. I was very surprised by how well the professor talked about trans and gender non-conforming stuff, so pleasantly surprised. So that was really nice. And a few students in the class, who I believe were straight, cis people, were very interested in the issues and fairly well informed. I didn’t expect that so it was a really pleasant surprise.”

“I don’t think I’ve had any identity-minded courses at Tufts.”

“I took one American Studies class last semester and I’m taking one this semester. [The professor last semester] is good. I think she has a lot of blind spots in her analysis, but who doesn’t? But since we were in the critical mindset, I wouldn’t have had any issues talking about stuff to peers. And I’m in __________ this semester, and [the professor] gives much more attention to gender and sexuality and how that is White supremacy in a lot of ways, in what it does. I think, in that sense, [the professor] brings stuff into the conversation to analyze instead of ‘I guess I was trained to do this so…’ Like, I think he brings it up to discuss and think about, which I think is the best thing you can do. Though, I wouldn’t tell all professors that because if they’re like, ‘Let’s debate whether trans people exist or not,’ that’s not what I’m talking about. There are some things that you obviously can’t question, but then there are things that are broad to think about. I think that that’s the best thing that professors can do if it’s relevant to their material—to show how complex it is.”

“Yes, actually. It was a class that was specifically on gender and humanitarian policies...[my group] ended up doing research [on non-binary gender identities]...So we were able to create that space within the class structure. The professor was very inclusive, and it was a totally supportive environment for that.”

“No. I tried to dabble in one class, but I didn’t feel like it was good for me.”

Why do I ask?
At an institution of higher education, it should go without saying that course matter is important. What professors teach, and what students learn from that teaching, is, in part, the responsibility of the school. Although Tufts is a cutting-edge institution for research and scholarship, it is also an institution within the confines of a gender-normative society.

How can we reconcile this to make Tufts an inclusive learning experience for trans* and gender non-conforming students? Or for any students who want to explore the multifaceted histories, communities and struggles of various gender identities within an academic structure? More than the need for professors to educate themselves and their students on the subject matter, there is a need for students to recognize the gaps that exist in our coursework when gender normativity goes unquestioned.

As you’ll read in the responses, there are certain courses that have positively affected trans* students, while some trans* students discussed how they take it upon themselves to create an inclusive, aware classroom space.

Meet Shannon

Kayla Hogan: “What is your position here at Tufts?”

Shannon Weber: “I am currently a lecturer here in WGSS [Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies] and also Sociology.”

KH: “Great. Which courses do you teach now and which courses have you taught in the past?”

SW: “Last fall, I taught Intro to Queer Studies, and I’m currently teaching Sexuality and Society, and that one’s in the Sociology department. In the fall, I’m teaching Intro to Queer Studies again, and then I’m not quite sure with Sociology, but probably a different one.”

KH: “Okay, so last year was your first year here, with Intro to Queer Studies?”

SW: “Yes.”

KH: “Okay, great. So, the purpose of this project is to collect the voices of trans* and gender non-conforming students at Tufts. So, in what ways, big or small, does your work at Tufts involve supporting these students?”

SW: “I would say that, as much as I possibly can, I would like for my work to support those populations of students, espe-

KH: “I agree. So do you feel as though there are adequate resources to you at Tufts in regards to providing this support?”

SW: “I don’t really know if I have an answer for that just because there are probably resources that I haven’t really tapped into that are around. Like, I don’t really have any opinions on the Women’s Center or the LGBT Center because I haven’t really made use of those resources in the way that I would like to. So it’s mostly just through my classroom experiences, because I’m also only on campus for a certain amount of time. So it’s kind of hard to say.”

KH: “So in your experiences, or to your knowledge, do trans and gender non-conforming students take your courses?”

SW: “Yes.”

KH: “Great. What steps do you take to make your courses inclusive of trans* and gender non-conforming students, whether that’s readings or something else?”

SW: “I do include readings from trans perspectives, and I want to have more stuff about genderqueer experiences as well. I’ve been annoyed by how there isn’t as much academic work on genderqueer stuff yet, as much as there is in the popular blogosphere or on Tumblr...all these really cutting-edge sources. I’ve been wanting to incorporate more of that into my class. I have included narratives from trans-identified authors, thinking specifically about historically in LGBT social movements, like Sylvia Rivera, and talking about the role of gender non-conforming and possibly trans-identified people and Stonewall, and the way that that’s totally been erased by mainstream gay rights organizations. And then, I also ask people for preferred gender pronouns in class. And I’ve had a somewhat mixed experience with that just because I’ve had a couple of experiences, and this happened at Brandeis, but there was a student who didn’t really know which pronouns to use, and then I was worried about putting that person on the spot, and you know, making it seem like everyone had to have that figured out type of thing. It was an attempt at being inclusive, but then it was also like, well what if you’re not at that stage to even know what to say to that question? But I feel like it seems to be the best approach so far to that. And I tell people, ‘if your pronouns change at some point you can let me know,’ and I take that into account. I also ask people if they have another name that they would prefer to be called because I know that the name people would prefer to be called isn’t necessarily what the roster or registrar has them as.”

KH: “Awesome. So, is there any sort of workshop and/or training currently in place for faculty/staff/admin that deals with these issues of gender inclusivity? That you know of or that you had to go through?”

SW: “Not that I know of, or that I went through, no.”

KH: “Okay. If you could design that training, what would it look like?”

SW: “That would be amazing if I got to design that! I think drawing attention to the fact that just because someone’s name on your roster is a certain name, that isn’t necessarily what they identify as. And that is directly informed by my dissertation work, like hearing specifically trans guys talk about professors calling them by their wrong name or mis-gendering them—all these various microaggressions. So I would think about that and talk about it in a framework of microaggressions, and the way that these seemingly little things build up to delegitimize people’s identities. Also talking about the idea of pronouns being normalized. And then, depending on the course content, I would also talk about that. Like, if you have a class about gender, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t be talking about trans stuff and cisgender stuff and naming it as cisgender.”

KH: “Awesome. Do you think that something like Intro to Queer Studies will ever be or should ever be a foundational course for all students?”

SW: “Wow, that’s an interesting question. I think that having some sort of multicultural requirement would be really useful, and then thinking about Intro to Queer Studies falling under that would be really cool. I think partially why I had a really good experience last semester was because the class seemed to be, in some ways, self-selecting. I had a lot of students who disclosed, at one point or another, that they identified as queer in some way. That made it a really cool space because people were very invested in the material, from a personal and academic perspective. So, there are some interesting conversations that could be had about whether or not having someone mandated to take a class, who didn’t necessarily want to be there or who wasn’t really open to the perspectives, how fruitful that would be for everyone else in the class. Then it’s also important because, a lot of time, the people who aren’t taking the course are the ones who most need to hear what you’re talking about. So it’s this sort of tedious balancing between them. I’d be open to hearing more conversations about making a case for it being required. I wouldn’t just shoot it down.”

KH: “Definitely. So it sounds like you’re an example of a professor who’s taking steps to incorporate these practices into your classes. Do you think there’d be a benefit in talking about preferred gender pronouns at the start of every class? Not just in Women’s Studies?”

SW: “Yeah, totally.”

KH: “Do you think that would foster these discussions in other spaces, or just feel like a requirement to other professors?”

SW: “I think that it depends on how invested the instructors are in it, and how seriously they take it. And how aware they are...
SW: “I wish that there were more examples of really good, informed, scholarly work that talk about genderqueer stuff specifically, because it gives it this ‘academic legitimacy,’ but I always try to incorporate media and current events and things going on in new media. I think that it makes it really dynamic, and it lets students know that what we’re talking about is really relevant in the world, and that people are creating all of these new understandings. So, I think it’s useful. I just wish that there was more stuff that I could also assign, in addition to drawing on that.”

KH: “Definitely. So do you think that Transgender Studies is a subset of Gender Studies, or do you think that that’s something that could be or should be taught separately?”

SW: “Actually, at The University of Arizona, Susan Stryker teaches there now, and they were just trying to create new faculty positions in Transgender Studies specifically, and were hiring a couple of people. It definitely is really flourishing. It is its own thing. I think that it definitely has these various links to gender studies, queer studies and feminist studies. They are all interwoven in various ways, but it’s definitely become more of a distinct interdisciplinary field of study.”

KH: “Awesome. So, in Intro to Queer Studies, I assume you draw mostly from queer theory and feminist theory? So are there any pieces that you teach that address how feminist theory or queer theory can be trans-exclusive?”

SW: “Yeah, actually. Julia Serrano, in her book Whipping Girl, talks about ‘feminist spaces’ and ‘women’s spaces’ being trans-exclusive, and who counts as a ‘real woman.’ She coins the term ‘trans misogyny,’ and talks about all of that, and how people who purport to be feminist aren’t actually advancing those goals. Also Sandy Stone wrote “The Empire Strikes Back: A Post Transsexual Manifesto” against Janice Raymond, who wrote Transsexual Empire, which was super transphobic. Those are some really cool writes. I also assigned stuff from My New Gender Workbook by Kate Bornstein, and also Sylvia Rivera. I like having these historical voices to say, ‘We were here, fighting for all this stuff, and this is why we’re part of this movement. We’ve been fighting for gay rights issues, and people keep throwing us under the bus’ essentially. So, those are all important. Also, Viviane Namaste critiques Judith Butler for around using trans people as studies for talking about performativity without necessarily engaging in the lived materiality of their lives, which I think is really valid. I think that when queer theory becomes too divorced from material lived experiences, it can pose a problem.”

KH: “Definitely. Lots of problems. So I guess in regards to that question and the previous question, do you think that Tufts would do well in offering a trans class? I’m currently in a trans class actually, but it’s through the Ex College and probably won’t be offered next year.”

SW: “Yeah! I would actually love to teach a trans class. I think that would really benefit Tufts. I think that would be really cool. Because also, when I’m trying to include it as part of [Intro to] Queer Studies, there are so many readings and things that I want to talk about further. I’m trying to cover so much different ground, so I cover it but it would be really cool to have an entire class devoted to that.”

KH: “Depth instead of breadth.”

SW: “Right!”

KH: “Great. Do you have any advice for me on how to make this booklet seem relevant to cisgender students who might pick it up?”

SW: “I would’ve cared (as a cisgender undergraduate student). I don’t know how many other people would’ve cared, but I would’ve cared if it was phrased in terms of ‘How to make our campus a more inclusive space’ or ‘How to recognize the dignity of every Tufts student and provide an optimal learning atmosphere and an optimal supportive community’ emphasizing the fact that everyone is responsible for that, as a community, to elevate the standard of campus life. Also administrative things like the roster or the registrar, the email services, Trunk, the way that people’s emails are written and how their names are. There’s also graduation, issues with names on diplomas, and having people’s names read correctly. Also counseling services. Are there people who are in counseling who are actually trained to deal with issues of gender identity and expression? You know what I mean? And then maybe making more effort – I don’t know how much effort is being made currently – to reach out to resources in the Boston metro area that are trying to do things, like MTPC [Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition]. Maybe they could be brought in to help talk to the Tufts community. Or various clinicians or someone, who are trans or genderqueer, or who specialize in that. People who are specifically trained in that could be brought in because Boston has a lot of stuff going on.”

KH: “So it’s clear that you’ve thought about this by virtue of your own research and what you teach. So, how would make the case for offering that transgender class, assuming there will be pushback saying, ‘Cisgender students won’t take it?’”

SW: “That’s really interesting from an administrative perspective. I think it’s super useful because we’re talking about people’s experiences with things like identity and oppression and resistance to dominant structures of power in society. We have multiple classes that do offer those perspectives, and I think it’s really important. I’d say it’s about this idea of authenticity, and people who are part of the community. Even just learning more about how gender is a spectrum is also really useful for everyone. People have been conditioned into these super rigid ways of viewing gender, their own gender and other people’s gender. You see it as a fluid understanding, and you see people as occupying these different positions of gender. I think it’s really freeing for people in general, and also there are positions of power and privilege in that. I think it’s really useful to examine the idea of the margin as the center. You’re able to understand larger issues of power by looking at what’s at the margins. There’s gender policing going on in general, that’s how hegemonic gender reproduces.”
“Briefly, what would inclusivity look like to you?”

“The thing that I like the most and that means the most to me in identifying as agender is that I don’t feel trapped anywhere. I’m not beating against the walls of one box or the other. I’m free to identify myself as I want, without worrying about gender roles or gender identity. I can just be me, completely and absolutely, without having to fit myself into other people’s standards of how I should be behaving or what I should be doing. In society as a whole, inclusivity would mean, to me, not trapping people, not forcing them into boxes, just allowing them to be who they feel like they should be.”

“To me, that would feel like acknowledgement of my existence and all of those facets, and to not feel like I have to fit into some binary or box for Tufts to even begin to consider recognizing me. I think that they’ve made a few advancements, so it seems like they’re trying, but for a very small population of people. It doesn’t seem to be a bottom-up kind of change. I went to a meeting with Monaco and other people for the Diversity Report. In the conversation, it came up that there was no mention of trans people because those weren’t the questions asked on surveys. They just went with it and didn’t try to challenge that at all. They’re just choosing to continue to ignore us. They want to take that Diversity Report and turn it into action, and of course trans people are going to be left out of that as well. So administratively, it would help to have all of that changed.”

“I think that’s a great question actually because we always talk about what’s wrong and what needs fixing, but we don’t talk about where we want to be. But if you don’t have that vision then you’re never going to get there, because you don’t know where you’re going. Baseline, I would like everyone to know the vocabulary and know the concepts so that we don’t have to backpedal when we talk about someone being trans or genderqueer. That would be great. I don’t think that’s inclusivity at all; that’s just education and I don’t think that will get us there. I think that’s much more important than what your practices actually are, because I’ve never seen any type of practice that really includes everyone.”

“I think one thing that a lot of students at [my undergrad school] were doing that felt very inclusive is any time there was a group setting they would say, ‘Okay let’s go around and do names and pronouns.’ And I haven’t seen that in many other places. So I think that’s one key thing that can start leading to awareness.”

“I love it! It’s like a college essay question. In a specific example context: I think that the LGBT Center has done a cool thing with starting to get a bunch of flags like the bi flag, the pan flag, the trans flag, the ace flag. And, to me, what’s more useful is to just display them around because that, to me, is making space and affirming, as opposed to combing through our student population for students who want to do a panel or something. There’s a subtle difference between maintaining an open space versus demanding that there be particular representation in programming. I feel like we’re moving toward inclusivity in more large ways. For example, we have multiple gender designations on most forms now. And the fact that there is a non-binary option, or a couple, should not be undervalued. It’s impossible to properly codify what that third option is, but it’s there. I think inclusivity would look a lot like how I perceive the Women’s Center is operating. My understanding of the space at the Women’s Center is that it’s definitely not always a strictly women’s space, but there’s also a respect for, say, Women’s Group, which is a women’s-only space. It’s run in a smart way in which it works with its allies and its allies are conscious of what it does. I guess what I’m saying is: inclusivity would neither look like no centers, everyone’s equal, nor would it look like identify-specific spaces all over. We would tend to spaces that are responding to people’s actual needs.”
“Do you have any tips for faculty, staff and administrators in regards to supporting this inclusivity?”

“Don’t make assumptions.”

Number one tip would be to take the gender identity and expression training that the LGBT Center offers. It’s the sequel to the Safe Zone training. And then also to absolutely nail down in your head that trans man means man and trans woman means woman. Also, familiarize yourself with ways of making space without putting the onus on the student to self-nominate, without putting students on the spot. And then, finally, check the stuff you do in class, the things that go totally unqueried, like, ‘Okay, let’s split the class in half, men on that side and women on the other.’ And also just being flexible and knowing that not all your tools are going to translate into all your situations. The tools are one thing, and you can learn them by rote, but tying to them to lived experiences is not going to have any impact really if you don’t reflect on it afterward.”

“I think the Safe Zone training is great, and people need that. The one time that I’ve seen it, though, it was fairly medically-focused. Well, it focused on the vocabulary and the spectrums and all of that, and then the social, legal and medical challenges that trans people might face. On one level, it was fairly binary because it was assuming that people are transitioning. That’s great because we need that, but we also need stuff for non-binary folks. I don’t think the training gets at the ways that people can use language subtly, cis-sexistly, like talking about women’s rights as abortion rights. There are obviously a lot of political conversations happening in classrooms and people need to be aware of the assumptions they’re making.”

“Education. Take the effort to educate yourself on the fact that there is gender diversity and that your students are not as simple and don’t fit into the boxes that you might assume that they do. Taking the effort to make yourself aware of that would be a really important step. Really a teacher should be doing that with any students who they’re trying to teach.”

“Yeah, one thing that’s so simple: the stickers that say ‘Safe Space’ or ‘Transphobia is not okay’—stuff like that. To some extent, it’s like maybe the professor is okay to talk to. Some of it is more just making you comfortable in a space, and some of that comes from people doing their own education and not expecting trans students to educate them. And also just being aware that you might have trans students in your classroom. We’re all coming from different identities, and there is a different potential for oppressions, so just trying to be aware of that.”

“Maybe providing something that said like ‘What you exist as legally’ in terms of the administration, like if you checked that genderqueer box [on the Common App]. And then housing options, like what do you do. If I had been able to get a single in South, that would’ve been nice.”

Safe Zone Training:

“The Safe Zone training is offered to any faculty, staff or campus group that wants to be more aware of LGBTQ identities and issues. The Safe Zone symbol is the sticker that you get if you go through the training, which you can then display in your office or dorm or wherever.”

- James Mulder, graduate assistant at the LGBT Center

“The Safe Zone symbol communicates a message to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people and their allies. The message is that the person displaying this symbol will be understanding, supportive and trustworthy if a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person needs help, advice or just someone with whom s/he can talk. The person displaying this symbol can also give accurate information about sexual orientation and/or gender identity.”

- Tom Bourdon, former director of the LGBT Center
“I’m trying to compile a list of texts and other works that could lend to this self-education for students and faculty/staff/administrators at Tufts, trans* and non-trans* alike. Are there any pieces that have been especially important to you?”

Books
- Just Add Hormones: An Insider’s Guide to the Transsexual Experience – Matt Kailey
- Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits – Loren Cameron
- The Phallus Palace: Female to Male Transsexuals – Dean Kotula
- Transfigurations – Jana Marcus
- From the Inside Out: Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond – edited by Morty Diamond
- Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue – Nick Teich
- Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation – edited by S. Bear Bergman and Kate Bornstein
- Stone Butch Blues: A Novel – Leslie Feinberg
- Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender – Riki Wilchins
- The Transgender Studies Reader – Susan Stryker & Stephen Wittle
- Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of Law – Dean Spade

Films/Documentaries
- The Queen (1968)
- Paris Is Burning (1990)
- Ma Vie en Rose (1997)
- You Don’t Know Dick: Courageous Hearts of Transsexual Men (1997)
- Boys Don’t Cry (1999)
- No Dumb Questions (2001)
- Beautiful Boxer (2004)
- TransGenerations (2005, TV mini-series)
- Two Spirits (2009)
- Red Without Blue (2007)

Online Resources
- jilliancottle.com
- genderqueerid.com
- neutrois.me
- practicalandrogynv.com
- nonbinary.org/wiki/main_page
- tranarchism.com
- asexualagenda.wordpress.com
- FTMtranstastic YouTube channel

White = recommendations from my interviewees
Yellow = recommendations from me

“Any final advice or tips for a trans* or gender non-conforming student who might pick this up?”

“At the gym, there are men’s locker rooms and women’s locker rooms, and there are single-person bathrooms that have showers in them. It’s clear that they’re meant as a space for people who can’t or don’t want to use the locker rooms, for whatever reason, but I just stumbled across them. I would’ve had no idea that they were there. Information like that should be really valuable—safe spaces where you can go, even in completely gendered environments.”

“Any final advice or tips for a trans* or gender non-conforming student who might pick this up?”

“I would say go to T-Time! Also take advantage of the anonymous things that are offered by the LGBT Center. Like, the director in the past has had drop-in hours in the Campus Center, where you can just go and nobody knows you’re there, just to test it out and have somebody who knows what’s going on. It’s totally non-threatening and the director of an LGBT Center is going to get confidentiality, so you just go and you just make a connection. I would also say: I spent time feeling like I was just getting to know people and then, at some point, was going to have to tell them to call me something different or think something different about me. So, if you know how you want to be in this new space, people here, at the grad-level at least, are going to know what you’re talking about, and they’re going to be supportive. So, choose your spaces, go to the LGBT Center maybe, and start off with that. Like, ‘I prefer these pronouns.’ Say it, if you can. Because, if you really know, then you don’t have to worry about correcting people later. Feel out your audience, but largely trust the Tufts community to go with you. And then know that you have support like T-Time, the LGBT Center and the Women’s Center. Or really anywhere that has a Safe Zone sticker, because a lot of faculty members have Safe Zone stickers.”
Policy/Campus-Culture Changes

After transcribing my interviews with students, faculty, staff and administrators, I looked for themes in their responses. While everyone gave distinctively helpful advice and recommendations, I’m providing what I hope is a useful summary of the patterns I found. This summary should be taken as a policy recommendation, a call to action and a conversation-starter. I hope that my condensing of responses does not diminish any individual’s voice, but rather shows how our goals overlap and intersect.

How should faculty/staff/admin handle preferred names and preferred pronouns?

- Professors should ask students to tell them if they go by a name or pronoun that may be different from what the roster says, and then use the right name/pronoun from thereon out.
- Administrative members should reevaluate sites like Trunk and iSIS to make sure there is a place where students can easily indicate their preferred names and pronouns.

What can make a space more welcoming or supportive for trans* and gender non-conforming students?

- People in the space who are unfamiliar with trans* identities or trans* issues should acknowledge that unfamiliarity or lack of experience as the first step toward education.
- Spaces should be open to personal as well as intellectual conversations regarding trans* identities and issues.
- Spaces dedicated to exploring trans* issues should also be supportive of other identities that a trans* student might have (for instance, a particular racial identity).
- A space can promote trans* visibility by displaying trans-specific language and images.

What can make a course more welcoming or supportive for trans* and gender non-conforming students?

- Professors should take the initiative to include trans* topics in their lectures when relevant, including assigning readings by trans* authors or about trans* issues.
- Professors and other students in the class should connect trans* identities/issues and other identities/issues.
- Professors should give students the opportunity—through group projects, papers, etc—to explore trans* topics on their own.

What are some general ways in which faculty/staff/admin can support gender inclusivity?

- Don’t make assumptions.
- Familiarize yourself with trans* language (see pages 10-13).
- Take the Safe Zone Training that the LGBT Center offers.
- Approach your classes/workplaces/offices with the knowledge that your some of your students/employees/assistants may be trans*, whether or not they disclose that to you.
- Be open to changing your policies/practices if they don’t apply to trans* students, or if they ignore/erase trans* identities, histories or stories.

How can trans* and gender non-conforming students be more included in Tufts policies?

- Housing: offer more gender-neutral housing options.
- Records: simplify the process for a name-change on Tufts records.
- Healthcare: more trans inclusion on student health insurance (i.e., including facial feminization surgery for trans women).
- Financial Aid: make available an informational guide for trans* students who may face complications in getting access to loan money (i.e., trans men who transition after the age for registering for the draft may need to contact Social Security and obtain a letter in order to qualify for financial aid).
- Forms: any form that asks for gender should either have more options (i.e., an “Other” option) or should be a write-in.

What about broader campus-culture changes?

“I wish that, on the campus as a whole, there was some acknowledgement of transgender identities.”

“We need to push allies to really be allies, and to educate themselves.”

“I think we need to have conversations about femininity in general, existing as a thing not necessarily linked to womanhood, without anyone presupposing that theirs is the most important femininity.”

“I want people to have an understanding that this is an identity like any other identity, and so you’re allowed to say, ‘Could you say a little more about what you mean by that? I haven’t known anyone who identifies that way.’”
Tufts Resources

LGBT Center
--> ase.tufts.edu/lgbt/

T-Time
--> http://ase.tufts.edu/lgbt/organizations/T-time.asp

Women’s Center
--> http://ase.tufts.edu/women-scenter/

SAGE
--> http://ase.tufts.edu/women-scenter/SAGE/index.asp

Office of Equal Opportunity
--> http://oeo.tufts.edu/

Health Service
--> ase.tufts.edu/healthservice/servicesLGBT.htm

Counseling and Mental Health Service
--> http://ase.tufts.edu/counseling/

Ears for Peers
--> http://ase.tufts.edu/earsfor-peers/

LGBT & Going Abroad?
--> http://uss.tufts.edu/study-abroad/Resources/LGBTQdocument.pdf

References


Boston Resources

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC)
--> masstpc.org

Fenway Health
--> fenwayhealth.org

Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth (BAGLY)
--> bagly.org

Boston Area Trans Support (BATS)
--> groups.yahoo.com/neop/groups/boston-area-trans-support/info

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays of Greater Boston (PFLAG)
--> pflag.org

Transgender Care and Education Needs Diversity (TransCEND)
--> aac.org/about/our-work/ transcend.html

References


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In Solidarity,
Kayla