

**University of Minnesota
Transgender Commission**

**Report and Recommendations for
Institutional Change 2006-2007**

*Submitted to the Vice President and Vice Provost for Equity and Diversity
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Executive Summary

Transgender and gender non-conforming people at the University of Minnesota face daily discrimination and institutional barriers to access essential services such as restrooms, health care and housing—even the fundamental right to self-determine the expression of their own name and gender.

According to the February 2006 Report of the Systemwide Academic Task Force on Diversity: “In order for the University system to achieve its goal of becoming one of the top three public research universities in the world, the University must re-align institutional priorities and accountability measures with diversity as the priority for the University system, and not just a priority... this vision should guide every unit and every person across the system [to] understand that diversity is their responsibility.”

The University of Minnesota Transgender Commission, as the culmination of its first year of work, has developed the following recommendations for institutional change.

Recommendations and Goals

1. Community-Building and Voices at the Table

The Transgender Commission must be committed to working across identities and systems of oppression. We must critically engage with how systems of gender intersect with systems of race, class, ability, age, culture, and the profound ways in which power and privilege play out across these matrices of identity and experience.

The Transgender Commission must see interrupting the vast institutional racism that plays out within transgender and queer communities as essential to our work, and acknowledge the barriers to access within our very Commission. For all the relationships we have built over the last year, the Transgender Commission is still a very white organization. We strive to build a Transgender Commission that does not seek to add new members of color as tokens, but as leaders in a powerfully diverse community that authentically shares power and sets the organizational agenda together.

We must be conscious of how we are setting our agenda, whose voices are being heard at the table, and how accessible the table feels.

2. Health Care Access

Obtain full transgender inclusive health benefits and insurance coverage for all students and employees at the University of Minnesota systemwide, including mental health care, hormone therapy, transition surgeries and related care.

These trans health services are medically necessary; exclusion of this coverage is discriminatory and may literally mean the difference between life and death.

3. Facilities and Restroom Access

Adopt the Transgender Commission's recommended *Policy on Restrooms and Restroom Use*, first on the Twin Cities campus and eventually systemwide. Secure financial and staff resources for the modification of existing, single-occupancy public restroom facilities to become gender-neutral, including installation of new signage and door locks.

There is a critical and urgent need for safe and accessible gender-neutral restrooms at the University of Minnesota. For people whose gender expression differs from their perceived gender, or for people who are not always perceived as female or male, entering restrooms labeled Women or Men can result in discrimination, harassment, violence or arrest.

4. Policy and Procedural Changes

- **Nondiscrimination Policy:** Amend the University of Minnesota's equal opportunity statement to explicitly include gender identity and expression. Ninety (90) universities and colleges across the country have added gender identity and expression to their statements, and the University of Minnesota—once considered a national leader in equal opportunity policy—has lagged notably behind. This exclusion could mean a lack of guaranteed protections for our trans and gender non-conforming communities, and it negatively affects recruitment and retention.
- **Database, Name and Gender Markers:** Change database functionality, policies and procedures to be gender-friendly with regard to name and gender self-determination, including all the ways these identifications intersect with life at the University of Minnesota (UCards, class rosters, health records, diplomas, online class discussion forums, school-printed materials, etc).
- **Department and Program Gender Policies:** Work with departments and programs across the University of Minnesota to help them change their internal policies to be gender-friendly and nondiscriminatory.

Trans students regularly face humiliation and may be put at risk to violence and harassment when their preferred name is not used to identify them in the classroom.

5. Education, Training and Curricula

- Update the GLBTA Programs Office Ally Training curriculum with regard to transgender and gender non-conforming identities and issues, to be implemented in Fall 2007.
- Offer new (Trans)Gender trainings starting in Fall 2007.
- Offer and facilitate short-term gender dialogues (including a needs assessment piece) beginning in Fall 2007, and long-term gender dialogue circles beginning in Fall 2008.
- Develop appropriate gender diversity materials, curricula and workshops for use in: faculty orientation and development; undergraduate cultural diversity requirements; clinical professional programs; and courses within the GLBT Studies Minor.

Following the internal gender dialogue circles at our Transgender Commission meetings, allies have begun to understand how systems of gender affect them, too. The power of sharing our gendered experiences helps create a stronger community from which we can change systems of oppression.

6. Communications Plan and Resource Distribution

- Redesign our website to increase accessibility, resources, community-building and action planning.
- Create a comprehensive and accessible brochure promoting the initiatives and services of the Transgender Commission.
- Gather, document and publish accessible information, such as a comprehensive listing of gender-neutral restrooms on each University of Minnesota campus, upcoming trainings and events, a quick guide to transgender resources on campus, health care information, a quick guide to transgender inclusion for offices and programs, tips for allies, etc.
- Coordinate outreach to administrators, campus communities and media.

7. Programming

- Launch a programming initiative to host social events in order to create access points, build community and develop support networks.
- Bring in speakers, scholars and artists to help educate, celebrate and organize around issues of gender diversity and interlocking systems of oppression.

8. Systemwide Work

- Travel to all the University of Minnesota campuses and host trainings, outreach events and programs.
- Invite people on coordinate campuses to join the Transgender Commission and/or organize similar partner groups on their campuses.
- Partner with the GLBT Systemwide Commission to assess the needs of trans communities across the University of Minnesota by developing questions and outreach for a systemwide Campus Climate Assessment.

Staff and faculty from coordinate campuses have approached the Transgender Commission asking how they can join or become involved.

Introduction

In 2005-2006, the University of Minnesota underwent an intensive strategic positioning process, known as *Transforming the U*, intended to lay the groundwork for the University to become one of the top three research institutions in the world. As a key part of this effort, a Systemwide Academic Taskforce on Diversity was established and charged with recommending how the University of Minnesota could become a national leader in articulating, respecting, embracing, and supporting diversity among faculty, staff, and students.

In February 2006, the Report of the Systemwide Academic Task Force on Diversity was published. The principal vision of this report is: “In order for the University system to achieve its goal of becoming one of the top three public research universities in the world, the University must re-align institutional priorities and accountability measures with diversity as the priority for the University system, and not just a priority... this vision should guide every unit and every person across the system [to] understand that diversity is their responsibility.” The Report recommends an approach to diversity that is attuned to the continual examination of meaningful access and equity for all University members, particularly those from marginalized communities.

The University of Minnesota Transgender Commission, founded in March 2006, fundamentally exists to help move the University into alignment with its expressed diversity goals: specifically, 1) to value and celebrate gender diversity; 2) to create access to the entire University for people of all genders; and 3) to eliminate the discrimination faced by transgender and gender non-conforming students, staff, faculty, alumni and community members.

I attended the University of Minnesota during the mid-nineteen seventies. As a young, confused and frightened transgender student—the term transgender actually had not been coined yet—I did not feel able to share my feelings of discomfort with anyone about how the world perceived my gender. I could find very little information about people who felt as I did and I assumed I was alone with my internal struggle. I worked hard to suppress my feelings and lived in fear of being discovered. The guilt and shame I carried for having “deviant” thoughts affected every aspect of my life and I believe my potential as a human being was stifled by my poor self-esteem and self-hatred. It is still a daily struggle to accept who I am, live with my fears and feel safe in a homophobic and transphobic world. I continue to live in constant fear of being ‘outed’ and losing my job, friends and family. I hope that the University of Minnesota will become a model for other educational institutions, leading the way to help create an environment of understanding, inclusion and compassion for transgender people.

-- Transgender Commission Co-Chair Karin Anderson, University of Minnesota Alum

Groundwork

The Transgender Commission strives to honor and advocate for the experiences of trans members¹ of the University community, and to make visible the systems of gender by which we

¹ Gender is a fundamental and complex part of our identities; as such, people choose many words to describe themselves and/or their communities, including but not limited to: transgender, transsexual, intersex, Two Spirit, genderqueer, gender variant, gender non-conforming, FTM (female-to-male), MTF (male-to-female), drag queen/king, cross dresser, bi-gender, differently-gendered, transboi, gender-blended, gender outlaw, gender non-normative, woman, and man. For the purposes of this report and our mission statement, we have chosen to use the word *trans* to refer to anyone who transgresses or is not validated by our cultural gender norms.

are *all* profoundly affected and socialized—including gender-conforming people, also referred to as non-trans people or “allies” to trans communities.

Although University of Minnesota initiatives currently exist to foster equity between women and men—essential and irreplaceable work being done by the Office for University Women, among other programs—the Transgender Commission may be the only University of Minnesota organization which strives to eliminate discrimination and create equity for people of *all* gender identities and expressions, including people who identify as or are perceived as falling outside our cultural female/male binary gender norms.

Each member of the larger University of Minnesota community expresses their gender² in their own unique way, trans and non-trans people alike—the interwoven tapestry of which we refer to as *gender diversity*—and we hope to build an environment that seeks to learn from, affirm and celebrate them all. The Transgender Commission works toward a University climate where all gender identities and expressions are visible and validated.

Mission of the Transgender Commission

“In order to more fully realize the mission of the University of Minnesota, the Transgender Commission works toward an inclusive environment and to improve the lives and experiences of trans students, staff, faculty, alumni and communities through education, advocacy and institutional change.”

Access

In a system where gender is naturalized and invisible, and the rich and fluid mosaic of gender diversity is targeted and silenced, simple tasks can pose significant challenges for trans people at the University of Minnesota—using a restroom, being identified by a professor, receiving an accurate UCard, locating housing, obtaining necessary healthcare, or being required to adhere to an office dress code, among many other examples. Everyday tasks and fundamental needs such as these, which gender-conforming people often take for granted and are rarely forced to critically consider, may result in institutional barriers, humiliation and even violence for members of trans communities. In order for the University of Minnesota to move into alignment with its goals of diversity and access—in order to provide *basic human rights*—resources must be provided and decisive action must be taken to eliminate gender discrimination and to educate the University communities about gender diversity and equality.

Stories

In Spring 2007, the Transgender Commission released a *Call for Stories* to University of Minnesota students, staff, faculty and alumni, as well as allies, visitors and community members, with the goal of gathering personal testimonies of gender-based campus experiences, positive or negative, which might help University decision-makers to understand why crafting gender-friendly policies and practices is essential to creating an affirming, accessible and equitable environment for everyone. Direct quotes from a few of the initial batch of stories we received—

² We define *gender* as “a system of meanings and symbols, and the rules, privileges and punishments for their use.” All the ways in which people express their bodies and communicate with the world can be gendered and encoded with meaning, including vocal inflection, body hair, clothing, laughter, sexuality, and the very space one takes up in a room.

which illuminate powerful, painful and joyful experiences on University of Minnesota campuses—have been included in this report.

History

(Some information provided by Beth Zemsky, founding director of the GLBTA Programs Office)

There have always been transgender people at the University of Minnesota; what has changed is trans visibility and how the University deals with the presence of trans people and communities. When the *Breaking the Silence Report on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns* was initiated in 1992, the focus groups strongly recommended trans-inclusion. When the GLBT Programs Office opened in December 1993, it became the first campus office in the nation to include Transgender in its title. The GLBT Programs Office convened additional campus focus groups, which resulted in the first major trans program series in 1995, called *Differently Gendered Lives*, for which renowned transgender author and activist Leslie Feinberg was the keynote speaker (the picture in her influential *Transgender Warriors* book was taken at the University of Minnesota during this series). Leslie Feinberg and other trans authors and activists made return visits in 1998 and 2002.

Additional programming included a panel discussion around “transgender patriarchy” and the de-medicalization of trans bodies, and a 1997 workshop collaboration with Intermedia Arts called *Intersextions*. As a regular part of its services, the GLBT Programs Office supported and assisted Twin Cities, Duluth and Morris employees and students who were transitioning,³ and trained resident advisors and law enforcement personnel. There was a Saint Paul campus emergency response to the negative reaction a staffperson gave to a trans person using a restroom; the GLBT Programs Office worked with police following the public incident.

Transgender Commission: Year One

In early 2006, Anne Phibbs, newly-hired Systemwide Director of GLBTA Programs, recognized the intense need for a coalition which could assess the needs of University of Minnesota trans communities and organize for change around gender values and policies. Anne reached out to staffperson Max Gries and alum Karin Anderson, members of Twin Cities trans communities whom she had worked with in the past, and the three brainstormed ideas and potential allies for what they all agreed was essential and immediate work. Max and Karin became the inaugural Co-Chairs of the brand new Transgender Commission.

In early March 2006, an email was sent out to the list of people the group had identified as potential members. On March 24, 2006, the inaugural meeting of the Transgender Commission brought together 22 trans people and allies: undergraduate and graduate students; staff from Housing and Residential Life, Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, Family Medicine and Community Health, and the Program in Human Sexuality; as well students from other metro campuses—Anne hoped to build connections to the larger Twin Cities communities and model this work for institutions across the state. This initial group brainstormed the needs of our trans communities, priority areas on which to focus, and how to impact change. The energy in the

³ We define *transition* as “the complex process of altering one’s gender, including some, none or all of the following: changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents, counseling, hormone therapy, and some form of chest and/or genital alteration.”

room was infectious and enthusiastic—at this very first meeting, people already began rising to these immense challenges and committing themselves to long-term change work. For Karin, Max and Anne, it was clear that this Commission was necessary and people were excited to finally have a structure to support organization and change.

A painful story also came out of this day, which illustrated the need for this meeting and for a Transgender Commission:

My first moments returning to the University of Minnesota campus in years, for our initial Transgender Commission meeting, included an experience where I was made to feel very uncomfortable. I was wearing conservative women's clothing, and as I exited the elevator on the 2nd floor of Coffman Memorial Union, a group of students outside one of the cultural centers stared at me and loudly yelled—in a volume and tone obviously meant to be overheard and humiliating—'That's a man!' My face flushed in embarrassment as I became the center of attention. I took a couple of deep breaths, steeled myself, and walked to our meeting—to discuss the campus climate for transgender people at the University of Minnesota.

-- Transgender Commission Co-Chair Karin Anderson, University of Minnesota Alum

In May 2006, the Transgender Commission held its first annual all-day retreat at the Humanities Center in Minneapolis, where the group members crafted a mission statement (see page 6), discussed their personal understandings of gender and our positions at the University of Minnesota and in the community, and activated the five Working Groups that would go on to forge multiple institutional relationships and lay the foundation for so much work over the next year.

In July 2006, Ross Neely, new Graduate Assistant for the GLBTA Programs Office and founding Commission member, was added to the Leadership Team of Max, Karin and Anne as Transgender Commission Coordinator. Ross continues to provide administrative support; writes and publishes regular Commission announcements and updates; maintains an 85-member general listserv and separate listservs for each Working Group; manages the Commission budget; co-leads Working Groups; facilitates outreach to trans allies; and has become part of Commission vision and planning.

As news of the Transgender Commission spread throughout the Twin Cities, state and nationally,⁴ Ross began providing information about campus and community trans resources to a variety of email and phone inquiries, including trans youth and newcomers to Minnesota.

In October 2006, the Transgender Commission held a successful Open House at the University of Minnesota Campus Club, which was attended by over 60 people. As a part of the program—which was keynoted by Dr. Rusty Barceló, Vice President and Vice Provost for Equity and Diversity—the Commission presented its goals, structure and working groups to the larger University of Minnesota communities in a public setting for the first time. Membership and interest in the Commission increased following this event.

⁴ The University of Minnesota Transgender Commission has been recognized by such entities as the National Center for Transgender Equality (November 2006 newsletter, under the section “Transgender On Campus,” found at <http://www.nctequality.org/Newsletter/2006/novNews06.asp>) and the Transgender Law and Policy Institute. The national speakers we have brought to campus and the distribution of our materials at conferences has prompted communication from New York, California and elsewhere.

In November 2006, the Transgender Commission was a key partner in a series of transgender health education events delivered by national speaker Samuel Lurie, who also keynoted the Minnesota OUT! Campus Conference held on the University of Minnesota campus.

During the Spring 2007 semester, the Transgender Commission was a busy sponsor or cosponsor of *five* transgender speaker events and subsequent receptions for noted scholars, educators and performers. The Commission also hosted a One-Year Celebration and Spring Social, and met for its second annual retreat at the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. During the retreat, a significant amount of time was reserved for listening to members' feelings about how accessible the Commission felt to them and how valued they felt their voice had been. Important ideas were generated about the creation of new access points to the Commission, and this feedback will impact the 2007-08 meeting format and working group structure.

In April 2007, Max Gries and Ross Neely traveled to Milwaukee on behalf of the Transgender Commission to participate in a national invitation-only strategy session on transgender rights work, facilitated by renowned trans activist Dean Spade.

Currently, the full Transgender Commission meets once per month, rotating the meeting location to different areas of the Twin Cities campuses; the Leadership Team meets monthly at a local coffee shop; and the Working Groups meet as often as necessary or possible. Over the last year, the full commission met 14 times, with attendance ranging from 12-28 people at each meeting.

Working Groups 2006-07

Facilities

- Worked on restroom access and safety
- Developed a restroom assessment
- Crafted a policy recommendation for restrooms and restroom use
- Discussed strategies for change with Facilities Management
- Researched the process and costs of impacting new building construction, renovation of existing buildings, and sign replacement
- Created relationships with Disability Services, Facilities Management and Capital Planning and Project Management.

Living and Learning Community

- Worked to create and launch *Lavender House*, a gender-friendly living and learning community open to all students interested in issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, located in Comstock Hall and set to open in Fall 2007
- Promotional information was written and placed in the Housing and Residential Life guide, the inaugural students applied and were confirmed, and a residence advisor was hired
- Positive feedback for this ongoing initiative has already been received
- This work was possible due to strong Commission relationships with Housing and Residential Life and University Counseling and Consulting Services.

Policies

- Worked toward amending the University of Minnesota nondiscrimination policy to explicitly include gender identity and expression (it is currently subsumed within sexual orientation)
- Researched University of Minnesota trans-related health benefits and alternatives
- Gathered trans health information with the intent of making it easily accessible
- Developed and distributed the first version of a “Quick Guide to Transgender Inclusion” for departments and programs to make their policies and practices more gender-friendly
- Worked toward documenting “pain points” for trans people within the University database and identification systems with regard to name and gender markers, and formed committee of influential system administrators and begun strategizing for system change
- Developed first draft of a “Memo to Administrators” to introduce the Transgender Commission and goals and make inroads for initial meetings to discuss policy changes
- Created relationships with Boynton Health Service, Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, Disability Services, Human Resources Management Systems, Office of the Registrar, and nationally-recognized trans health care educators and advocates.

Education and Training

- Worked toward creating, piloting and delivering (Trans)Gender trainings as a sequel to the GLBTA Programs Office Ally Training and upon request
- Delivered three such trainings, earning an honorarium for one session (which funded the second annual Transgender Commission retreat)
- Launched internal gender discussions at Transgender Commission meetings
- Discussed creating campus-wide gender dialogue circles
- Created relationships with faculty and faculty training coordinators.

Outreach

- Worked toward crafting a communications plan
- Developed and launched Transgender Commission website
- Wrote and published Transgender Commission Information Packet
- Drafted upcoming Transgender Commission comprehensive brochure
- Promoted and held successful Open House to introduce the Commission to the greater campus communities (keynoted by Dr. Barceló)
- Promoted and hosted three social events and six receptions
- Sponsored or cosponsored six trans educators, scholars and performers
- Held a Transgender Commission photo shoot to be used in communications
- Staffed information tables at events
- Created relationships with international gender educators, A/V and design specialists, the Women’s Student Activist Collective, and the Queer Student Cultural Center.

Transgender Commission Members and Key Partners

Grant Anderson
Coordinator of Residential Life
Housing and Residential Life

Karin Anderson
Transgender Commission Co-Chair
University of Minnesota Alum
Transgender Advisory Board,
Program in Human Sexuality

Sara Axtell
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Epidemiology
Community-Campus Health Liaison
Family Social Science

Sarra Beckham-Chasnoff, PhD, LP, LMFT
University Counseling and Consulting Services

Betty Benson, PhD
Associate Director
Disability Services

Walter Bockting, PhD
Coordinator of Transgender Health Services,
Program in Human Sexuality
Associate Professor, Family Med. & Comm. Health
Editor, International Journal of Transgenderism

Matthew Antonio Bosch
Director of Diversity and Multiculturalism
North Hennepin Community College
Former University of Minnesota employee

Brett M. Chin
Pioneer Assistant Residence Director
Housing and Residential Life

Mannix Clark
Associate Director
Housing and Residential Life

Phil Duran
Staff Attorney, OutFront Minnesota
University of Minnesota Alum

julius a. erolin
Equal Opportunity Consultant
Office of Equal Opportunity and
Affirmative Action

Ben R. Falter
Comstock Residence Director
Housing and Residential Life

MJ Gilbert, MSW, LICSW
Field Coordinator
Teaching Specialist
School of Social Work

Max Gries
Transgender Commission Co-Chair
Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition Co-Chair
University of Minnesota Alum
Assistant House Manager, Ted Mann Concert Hall,
School of Music
Transgender Advisory Board,
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Shana Hamilton, PhD
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Anne Hodson
Trans Community Activist

Kristen Jamieson
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Trans Community Activist

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Medical Director, Boynton Health Service
Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics,
Gynecology and Women's Health

Elakshi Kumar
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Jen Mohnkern
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Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies
Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies

Anne Phibbs, PhD
Systemwide Director
GLBTA Programs Office
University of Minnesota Alum

Deborah Rosenstein
Director of Diversity Programming
University of Minnesota Labor Education Service

Nancy Rudstrom
Project Manager II
Capital Planning and Project Management

Barbara Satin
Interim Program Director
Institute for Welcoming Resources
Transgender Elder

Naomi Scheman
Professor of Philosophy and
Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies
Director of Graduate Studies in Feminist Studies

Eric Schnell
Interim Director
Disability Services

Lauren Silverstein
Residence Director, Frontier Hall
Housing and Residential Life

Susan Stubblefield
Assistant Director of Residential Life
Housing and Residential Life

Connie Thompson
Assistant Director, Comstock Hall East
Housing and Residential Life

Hazel “Cedar” Troost
Trans Community Activist
Organizer, Twin Cities Trans March 2007

Claire Walter-Marchetti
Director, Office for University Women

Institutional Relationships

The Transgender Commission has members representing or has built relationships with the following community organizations and University of Minnesota constituencies, offices or programs:

African American AIDS Task Force
Boynton Health Services
Capital Planning and Project Management
Disability Services
District 202
Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
Facilities Management
Family Social Science
Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies
GLBTA Programs Office
Housing and Residential Life
Human Resources Management Systems
Labor Education Service
Metropolitan State University GLBT Services
Minnesota College Personnel Association
Minnesota GLBTA Campus Alliance
Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition

North Hennepin Community College
Office for University Women
Office of the Registrar
OutFront Minnesota
Pride @ Work
Program in Human Sexuality
Queer Student Cultural Center
School of Social Work
Spanish and Portuguese Studies
Tranarchy
Twin Cities Transgender Communities
University Counseling and Consulting Services
University of Minnesota Alumni
University of Minnesota Faculty
University of Minnesota Graduate Students
University of Minnesota Staff
University of Minnesota Undergraduate Students

RECOMMENDATIONS AND GOALS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

1. Community-Building and Voices at the Table

Build a powerfully diverse community that authentically shares power and sets the organizational agenda together.

The Transgender Commission must be committed to working across identities and systems of oppression and to being an active part of larger social justice movements. While our goals center on changing systems of gender, we must critically engage with how these systems intersect with systems of race, class, ability, age, culture, and the profound ways in which power and privilege play out across these matrices of identity and experience.

The Transgender Commission must see anti-racism as part of its work; we must see economic justice as part of our work; we must see working for the rights of people of all abilities as part of our work. We must see interrupting the vast institutional racism that plays out within transgender and queer communities as essential to our work, and acknowledge these barriers to access within our very Commission. For all the relationships we have built over the last year, the Transgender Commission is still a very white organization.

We strive to build a Transgender Commission that does not seek to add new members of color as tokens, but as leaders in a powerfully diverse community that authentically shares power and sets the organizational agenda together. We must also remember to prioritize trans voices in an organization that has many allies, and to find ways to connect with undergraduate students and faculty members, who are currently underrepresented on the Commission.

This is a long-term commitment, and although it does not easily lend itself to specific and measurable goals, we feel it should be listed first, as an overriding priority, and remain in the forefront of every part of our organization and work. As this report demonstrates, we have launched many initiatives and set many goals for the next years; it is easy to become so busy and stretched thin with current programs that we lose sight of how we are setting our agenda, whose voices are being heard, who is at the table, and how accessible the table feels.

The Transgender Commission began to address many of these issues at our second annual retreat, and we plan to build organizational structures that will create new access points and opportunities for new leaders. We will work to build relationships with communities of color, reach out to the trans communities with whom we have not yet connected, share resources and information, host social events, and support the work and events of organizations with whom we hope to build coalitions.

2. Health Care Access

Obtain full transgender inclusive health benefits and insurance coverage for all students and employees at the University of Minnesota systemwide. Mental health, hormone therapy and transition related surgeries are medically necessary services and exclusion of coverage for these services is discriminatory.

Transgender people have health needs that require access to non-discriminatory care. Health care for transgender people may include gender-related counseling, hormone therapy and related laboratory work, one or more transition-related surgeries, and follow-up care.

Unfortunately, most insurance plans discriminate against transgender people by containing exclusion clauses for this medically necessary health care. To the best of our knowledge, exclusions such as this are currently in place in all the University of Minnesota student health care plans offered through Boynton Health Service and the insurance plans available to University employees.

In June 2007, the American Medical Association (AMA) joined dozens of other renowned medical organizations by voting to amend its nondiscrimination policies to include transgender people. The AMA's new policies address a wide range of contexts, including discrimination against patients, medical students and physicians as well as insurance policy. Of particular note, the AMA policies "call for an end to the discriminatory insurance policies that trans people often face—policies that disallow coverage for transition related care, sex specific care and even exclude all care for some trans people."⁵

Such discriminatory exclusions are motivated by bias and misinformation, such as the belief that transgender-related health care is merely cosmetic in nature, or that providing coverage for transgender transition would be too expensive. Making matters worse, these exclusions are regularly used by insurance companies to deny coverage for transgender employees' health care even when the care is not related to gender transition (such as pap smears for transgender men).

Transgender health care needs vary widely from person to person. In addition to general medical care, transition-related care can include psychotherapy, hormones, surgeries (including chest and genital surgeries, facial feminization and Adams apple reduction), electrolysis, hair replacement, voice therapy, travel and related expenses to obtain services when they are not locally available, and gender transition-related medical leave.

However, transgender health coverage is not prohibitively expensive. Rather, the long-term costs of denying transition-related treatment are very high, since lack of access to necessary care can result in depression, suicidality, substance abuse, and other persistent health problems. While access to transition services can be lifesaving for those who need them, very few individuals ever pursue medical gender transition.

⁵ Source: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/467/bot11a07.doc>

Despite initial fears that transgender insurance coverage would result in expensive claim costs, institutions providing such coverage find that only a tiny fraction of insured employees file claims. This is true even where there is good reason to expect an unusually high number of transgender employees.

For example, the City and County of San Francisco have self-insured both hormone therapy and transition-related surgeries since 2001 for 27,000 active employees, their dependents and retirees, for a total of 80,000 insured. *From 2001-2004, the Human Service System collected approximately \$4.3 million from its members specifically to cover the transgender benefit, while paying out approximately \$156,000 on seven claims for surgery. As a result of these statistics and negotiating with the HMOs, the cost charged to members for the benefit was dropped significantly, to \$1.16 per month, and may be dropped altogether in the near future.*⁶ In every case where discriminatory exclusions have been eliminated, initial fears about a flood of expensive claims have proven to be unfounded.

*The main problem I have had has involved insurance. The original provider here was Preferred One which was a nightmare. It didn't cover therapy, wouldn't cover hormones, and don't even think about surgery. The current insurance, which is now the same as the TC campus (Blue Cross) has been better, but still totally inadequate. I brought up the issue that it has a specific transgender exclusion for TS surgery, but was told that it would cost too much to have a better plan. It also technically does not cover hormones for trans people, but *actually* does. In this sense, since they don't know I'm trans, they might think it's for something else, but if they find out they might remove coverage. Instead of naively waiting for insurance to cover my top surgery, I have instead simply chosen to pay out of pocket with money I do not have and live in debilitating debt than hope that years down the road adequate changes are made.*

-- Current University of Minnesota—Morris student

3. Facilities and Restroom Access

a) Adopt the Transgender Commission's recommended *Policy on Restrooms and Restroom Use* (see below), first on the Twin Cities campus and then systemwide.

b) Secure financial and staff resources for the modification of existing single-occupancy public restroom facilities to become gender-neutral, including installation of new signage and installation of door locks and other minor physical modifications as necessary. It is recommended that the modification be completed in phases based on data received from our Restroom Assessment.

There is a critical need for accessible and safe gender-neutral restrooms at the University of Minnesota. For people whose gender identity or gender expression differs from their perceived

⁶ *Source:* Human Rights Commission of San Francisco and the City and County of San Francisco. The source of much of our trans health care context and information is André A. Wilson, Health Access Program Manager for the National Center for Transgender Equality, who visited the University of Minnesota in June 2007 to deliver three presentations and to begin a consulting relationship with the Transgender Commission. If additional trans health information and/or statistics are required, we remain in contact with André and may be able to provide the requested data.

gender, or those who are not always perceived as male or female, entering restrooms labeled *Men* or *Women* can result in discrimination, harassment, violence or arrest.

To avoid these potentially unsafe situations, transgender and gender non-conforming people often refuse to use public gendered restrooms, and sometimes even change their eating and drinking habits, leading to health risks: urinary infections, dehydration, kidney failure, and other health problems can occur from avoiding bathroom use.

Using bathroom facilities in classroom buildings... was something I constantly had to negotiate and, whenever possible, avoided... having to plan one's bathroom needs around when one will be either home or in the vicinity of a gender-neutral bathroom is restricting and demeaning. The alternative, putting oneself in a situation that is at best stressful and at worst dangerous, is unacceptable, but sometimes it just has to be done. It's a quality of life issue that is very easily resolved, and many, many people would thank the school for doing so.

-- University of Minnesota 2001 alum

A survey aiming to measure the need for gender-neutral (also known as “unisex”) restrooms conducted by the City of San Francisco Human Rights Commission in the summer of 2001 cites many comments from trans respondents. These comments, which acutely demonstrate the severity of the situation, include the following: *“I almost got killed,” “I have been slapped, pushed, and dragged out by security guards,”* and *“I have spent so many hours avoiding public multi-stall bathrooms that I have damaged my bladder and put pressure on my kidneys.”*

The University of Minnesota has repeatedly failed to provide safe and accessible restrooms for trans members of its community. A trans student recounted an experience from 2004: *“A janitor followed me and harassed me while I went to the bathroom.”* In October 2006, the Campus Club denied a request to post temporary gender-neutral restroom signage during the Transgender Commission Open House held in that venue. In November 2006, the Student Unions and Activities (SUA) office denied a similar request to the Minnesota OUT! Campus Conference, which was held on the third floor of Coffman Memorial Union. In February 2006, SUA allowed the Alphabet Soup 2007 conference some gender-neutral restroom signage, ostensibly because no other groups were using the facility.

As for bathroom issues, do I wish there were gender-neutral options in EVERY building? YES! Despite the fact that my co-workers are OK with me being in the men's room, that does not stop me from experiencing 'tranny bladder' when it is busy/crowded.

-- Current University of Minnesota employee

Unfortunately, there is no up-to-date listing of gender-neutral restrooms on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. The Transgender Commission is currently conducting a Restroom Assessment to discover which of the 209 Twin Cities campus buildings currently have labeled, public unisex restrooms. When this assessment is completed, we will post the current data on our website. Some older data shows that approximately 22 buildings (only about 11% of the buildings on campus) have or at some point had labeled unisex restrooms.

Many other colleges and universities have changed their facilities to include more gender-neutral restrooms and created nondiscriminatory restroom use policies. According to the Transgender

Law and Policy Institute website,⁷ among these institutions is the University of California-San Diego, where 88 single-occupancy restrooms have been converted from gendered to gender-neutral since 2003.

The City of Minneapolis has also made some strides in removing barriers to safe restroom use. The Minneapolis City Council voted in September 2003 to repeal the City's "restroom ordinance" which stated it was a crime for any person, at any time, for any reason—even by accident—to be in the restroom designated for the 'opposite sex.'⁸

Gender-neutral restrooms offer increased restroom access and safety for a variety of people in addition to trans persons. These restrooms offer safety and privacy to parents with small children, and to individuals with disabilities with a personal care attendant whose gender differs from their own. Single-stall restrooms also more easily meet the accessibility regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

We have begun exploring additional facilities, such as locker rooms and medical centers; an early assessment of the recreation center has been completed, with more work to follow.

As a student at the U of M, I would avoid restrooms and never participated in athletics or physical education classes.

-- Transgender Commission Co-Chair Karin Anderson, University of Minnesota Alum

Recommended Twin Cities Campus-wide Policy on Restrooms and Restroom Use

The Transgender Commission, with support from Disability Services and the Office for University Women, recommends the University of Minnesota make the following changes regarding restrooms and restroom use:

- All single-occupancy public restrooms shall be open to people of all gender identities and expression; these restrooms shall use standard accessible signage and be identified according to the preferred signage below.
- All new construction or major renovation of University of Minnesota buildings/facilities shall contain at least one accessible, gender-neutral restroom on each level or floor.
- The University of Minnesota shall develop a plan to create gender-neutral public restrooms in all existing buildings.
- The University of Minnesota shall recognize the rights of all people, including transgender and gender non-conforming people, to use the restroom they deem appropriate based on their gender identity or expression without disciplinary action or without negatively affecting employment or student status.

⁷ Source: <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/college>

⁸ Source: <http://www.outfront.org/action/press6.html>

- Preferred signage shown below; wording: *RESTROOM* (also in Braille), two stick figure symbols and disability access symbol (when appropriate).



4. Policy and Procedural Changes

a) Nondiscrimination Policy: Amend the University of Minnesota's nondiscrimination policy to explicitly include gender identity and expression.

The time has come for the University of Minnesota to *explicitly* add gender identity and expression to its nondiscrimination policy / equal opportunity statement. Ninety (90) universities and colleges across the country have added gender identity and expression to their statements, a majority of them in the last five years, and the University of Minnesota—once considered a national leader in equal opportunity policy—has lagged notably behind.

Currently, gender identity is technically subsumed within the University of Minnesota policy’s provision for “sexual orientation,”⁹ but this is not enough—a visible verbal commitment is a necessary symbol, and there is no guarantee of protection when a clause is hidden within another phrase and their relationship is open to interpretation. A single misinterpretation of how gender identity and sexual orientation are related could rob someone of the job protections they need and deserve.

A recent news release by the U.S. Government Accountability Office documents the need for and growing trend of inclusion for gender identity/expression in nondiscrimination policies: “Although discrimination laws specifically cover sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, or bisexual), they do not cover gender identity. People in transition, in particular, encounter challenges on the job and in some cases have lost their jobs. However, a growing number of private and public sector employees are adopting policies and practices to guarantee the rights of transgender individuals in the workplace: 266 corporations, including 134 Fortune 500 firms, have incorporated gender identity in their nondiscrimination policies. In the public sector, 93 city or county governments and [90] colleges and universities cover gender identity in their sex and/or disability discrimination programs. A number of states have enacted legislation to include gender identity in their antidiscrimination or hate crime laws.”¹⁰

⁹ Source: http://www.eoaffact.umn.edu/learn_about/Definitions/sexualorientation.html

¹⁰ Source: GAO Management News, Vol. 34, No. 40, Week of July 9-13, 2007.

Additionally, the lack of a visible commitment to gender identity and expression is costing the University of Minnesota in terms of recruitment and retention. Ben Falter, Residence Director and member of the Transgender Commission, reported that while attending Student Life conferences, he has heard striking stories from staff at other schools: when researching universities to pursue employment, they compared our nondiscrimination policy to the parallel schools they were considering and dropped the University of Minnesota from contention due to the visible absence of gender identity/expression in the policy.

b) Database, Name and Gender Markers: Change database functionality, policies and procedures to be gender-friendly with regard to name and gender self-determination, including all the ways these identifications intersect with life at the University of Minnesota.

When a trans student or employee at the University of Minnesota is unable to easily align their name and gender information in the PeopleSoft database system with their internal gender identity, the myriad results can be an everyday source of challenge and pain.

Every use of the UCard, every school mailing or batch printing of materials, every appearance on class rosters, every (sometimes required) posting on WebCT for online class discussion forums, every encounter with Boynton health records, even the information on one's diploma—can represent a forced outing of trans status or identity to numerous audiences and vast amounts of physical and emotional energy can be spent, often repeatedly, to correct even the simplest information. Additionally, many University of Minnesota online and paper forms require a mandatory choice of “female” or “male” to be processed—a choice that may not be true or adequate for some trans people—and this is also tied to PeopleSoft database functionality and the gender options possible within the system.

The Transgender Commission, with the help of Eric Schnell, Interim Director of Disability Services, has formed a PeopleSoft Committee, comprised of key people who affect the database at the University of Minnesota from Human Resources Management Systems, the Office of the Registrar, Information Technology, the Higher Education Users Group of PeopleSoft (national advisory group to PeopleSoft of all campuses who use the vendor; the current president is a University of Minnesota employee), and more. This committee has begun to ask important questions and make critical connections, but will likely require the weight of the Office for Equity and Diversity to make lasting change.

I changed my first name on OneStop, but it did not appear on class registrations, which required me to disclose my name change to instructors before the first role-call of every class. I would strongly suggest that the software be changed to enable students to choose what name appears on their class registration, transcripts, and diplomas in a comprehensive and flexible way. It's necessary to remove the burden of responsibility from students, who are often intimidated to request special considerations from instructors because those conversations are unregulated by university policy (to my knowledge), and in my experience, instructors often felt entitled to ask over-personal or invasive questions before considering whether to grant my request for appropriate accommodation and considerations.

-- University of Minnesota alum

c) Department and Program Gender Policies: Work with departments and programs across the University of Minnesota to help them change their internal policies to be gender-friendly and nondiscriminatory.

The Transgender Commission seeks an institutionalized position from which to build relationships with department and program administrators in order to provide information and education which encourages them to change their internal policies to be equitable to people of all genders, including mandatory dress codes, office pronoun usage, restroom access, and more. The Transgender Commission has produced a first version of a *Quick Guide to Transgender Inclusion*, and plans to produce more efficient and complete guides in the future.

I am a U of M staff member and FTM. I began working here in 2001 and came out to my department June 2005. The only difficulties I encountered were in determining HOW to come out. This, I have to say, was the most anxiety producing aspect of my transition. On the one hand, I was entirely in charge of the process. On the other hand, I felt unsure and adrift and wished there had been some 'how to come out as trans at the U' guidelines I could have referred to before dropping the bomb. My human resources person was completely clueless about how to handle it. Some people would have liked an (optional) educational opportunity to learn what 'transgender' even means."

-- Current University of Minnesota employee

5. Education, Training and Curricula

a) Update the GLBTA Programs Office Ally Training with regard to transgender and gender non-conforming identities and issues to be implemented in Fall 2007.

We assert that a great deal of sexist and homophobic violence and discrimination is rooted in reaction to gender diversity. We recognize the need to adequately introduce and address trans issues and gender theory as a part of any discussion that confronts homophobia. After reviewing the current Ally Training curriculum, we will make recommendations for improvements regarding trans inclusion.

b) Offer targeted (Trans)Gender trainings starting in Fall 2007.

We recognize the need for in-depth training opportunities for students, staff, faculty and community members that are specifically focused on transgender and gender diverse identities, issues and policies. We are currently designing this training and plan to pilot it with various audiences before promoting it across the University of Minnesota and greater Minnesota.

c) Offer and facilitate short-term gender dialogues (including a needs assessment piece) beginning in Fall 2007.

As a step along the path to semester-long gender dialogue circles (see next goal), we will host short-term discussions designed to foster dialogue about systems of gender and how they impact everyday life on campus. The expectations for these sessions are two-fold: 1) to provide an open space for trans and allied campus community members to begin to question and think critically about their gender identities, expressions and experiences; and 2) to informally assess what is

happening on campus across trans and non-trans communities, in order to use that information to help shape and guide the longer-term gender dialogue circles and services provided to trans people.

d) Offer semester-long gender dialogue circles beginning in Fall 2008.

These semester-long gender dialogue circles will be a way to encourage ongoing discussions and foster learning around the depth and breadth of gender oppression. They will be designed to facilitate dialogue amongst people of all genders, and will explore the ways that gender oppression impedes our ability to be in relationship (however widely defined) with each other. The circles will also intentionally explore the intersections of interlocking systems of oppression, including race, class, ability, sexuality, age and culture. Funding would be required to pay for education materials and a stipend for long-term facilitators.

My experience is as a gender non-conforming medical student (my difficulties mostly relate to 'professional' dress code, bathroom usage, co-workers) and as a medical student who experienced the feeble attempt by the medical school to educate us around transgender (and gay, lesbian, bisexual) health care issues.

-- University of Minnesota Medical School alum

e) Develop appropriate gender diversity materials, curricula and workshops for use in:

- Undergraduate cultural diversity requirements
- Faculty orientation and development, including new chair workshops, early career faculty development program workshops, and the directors of graduate study
- Staff training, including teaching/research assistants and residence advisors, the Teaching and Learning Center, and material to incorporate into current diversity workshops
- Clinical professional program training (medicine, dentistry, marriage and family therapy)
- Course development within the GLBT Minor and Gender, Women and Sexuality curricula.

We believe the following story connects the critical need to work concurrently on education and training, curricula change, a communication plan and resource distribution, highlighting the potentially life-saving affect this work could have on individuals at the University of Minnesota:

Transgender / transsexual people often have such a deep drive to become gender congruent, that we would rather die than continue living the lies. It could be so simple for the University of Minnesota to change this—through a series of well-done brochures, presentations to faculty and students that are advertised very very broadly and have posters which offer some education, hope and support. A campaign started by the University of Minnesota could be a model that other schools copy. It could be some of what draws the best transgender researchers to your institution. AND IT WILL SAVE LIVES. I cannot actually think of any other accommodation that will save lives. It will also improve earning capacity for transgender students. I dropped out. Had I felt more supported, I may be a college professor of Sustainable Development and Agriculture now. But instead, I left, and basically hid out in jobs where I could be left alone for how I dressed. And now, I am a single parent of three kids, and struggling with physical health and mental health issues that could have been prevented, by transitioning at a more appropriate age, back in 1988. As it stands, I am 40, and in the end of the first year of transitioning, fully, female to male.

-- Former University of Minnesota student

6. Communications Plan and Resource Distribution

a) Redesign and update our website to increase accessibility, resources, community-building and action planning.

We recognize the vital importance of an accessible website as a tool for outreach and communication with all our audiences. We strive to build an website which is genuinely useful, easy to navigate, updated regularly, and appealing to current and prospective students, staff, faculty, alumni and community members.

Features on our updated website would include:

- Complete information about the Transgender Commission and how to get involved
- Images and photos of Commission events and members
- A downloadable document of our 2006-2007 Report and Recommendations for Institutional Change
- A list of gender-neutral restrooms on campus and a restroom access guide for trans people
- News about our latest policy initiatives
- A guide to the trainings we offer and a schedule of upcoming trainings and educational events
- A *Quick Guide to Navigating the U* for trans students and employees, including transition information
- A *Quick Guide to Gender-Friendly Policies and Practices* for departments and programs
- A programming calendar, listing events that may be of interest for trans and ally communities
- A list of trans-friendly services and businesses around the Twin Cities
- Tips on how to be an effective ally to trans people
- Health related information, including insurance information and an overview of transgender coverage at the University of Minnesota, self-advocacy tips such as how to find a doctor and how to navigate the health system, as well as information about hormones and transition-related surgeries.

b) Create a comprehensive and accessible brochure promoting the initiatives and services of the Transgender Commission.

We have created the layout and draft text for a comprehensive, one-stop-shop brochure about the Transgender Commission, and we plan to print and distribute this glossy, full-color brochure in Fall 2007. This communication piece will spread awareness of the Transgender Commission, market our trainings, show images of people and places at the University of Minnesota, offer information about how to get involved with our efforts, and will attempt to address issues of gender diversity and systems of gender oppression while shedding light on trans lives and experiences. We will develop a careful plan of distribution for this brochure, as we recognize the importance of who receives this information and where it is displayed.

c) Gather, document and publish accessible information

Resources are desperately needed for trans people and allies, and we plan to make available all the resources listed above on the website as well as in print, and to gather and distribute information about additional local and national trans resources. When possible, we plan to directly contact these resources to get the most accurate information and build partnerships between organizations.

d) Outreach to Administrators

We have begun crafting a document explaining our mission, need and strategic rationale to administrators and decision-makers in programs and departments around the University of Minnesota, to begin discussions about why and how to make their policies more gender-friendly. Getting on the agenda and raising awareness of the need to provide equity and safety to trans people is critical so administrators can begin advocating for system change. By working in conjunction with the Office for Equity and Diversity, we hope to reach administrators at all levels of the institution.

e) Outreach to Campus Communities

Recognizing the importance of becoming a familiar and welcoming organization, we plan to hold a number of open meetings this year, which will provide opportunities to catch new members up on the initiatives the Transgender Commission is already involved with, as well as giving new members the chance to voice their concerns, hopes and needs for the organization. We will increase our visibility by hosting and advertising more “access” events such as open meetings, social events and programs. This will include holding another Open House event in Fall 2007.

f) Outreach to Media

As the Transgender Commission becomes more visible, we expect to attract some media attention. We will actively seek out positive, constructive and engaging media coverage with the assistance of the Office for Equity and Diversity and University Relations. This will include utilizing our internal University News Service and systemwide news publications such as the *Brief* for faculty and staff, the *Minnesota Daily* and other publications that reach students, in addition to other Twin Cities area news coverage, especially in GLBTA community newspapers and journals.

7. Programming

- a) Launch a programming initiative to host social events in order to create access points, build community and develop support networks.**
- b) Bring in speakers, scholars and artists to help educate, celebrate and organize around issues of gender diversity and interlocking systems of oppression.**

8. Systemwide Work

- a) Travel to all the University of Minnesota campuses and host trainings, outreach events and programs.**
- b) Invite people on coordinate campuses to join the Transgender Commission and/or organize similar partner groups on their campuses.**
- c) Partner with the GLBT Systemwide Commission to assess the needs of trans communities across the University of Minnesota by developing questions and outreach for a systemwide Campus Climate Assessment.**