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Some restrooms at UA will be 'gender neutral'

By Dan Sorenson

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Soon, restrooms at the University of Arizona will come in at least three varieties: men's, women's and "gender neutral".

The UA has adopted a "Statement on Restroom Access" to make relieving oneself a bit less stressful for transgender people and other folks who feel uncomfortable with standard gender labeling.

Former UA President Peter Likins signed the statement June 26, just before leaving office.

While not an official policy, the statement, when read to a meeting of the UA's Faculty Senate, was presented as another step in keeping with the university's policy of non-discrimination.

The action moves the UA to the front of the line as the first Pac-10 school to have such a statement, said Jeanne Kleespie, assistant vice president for equal opportunity and affirmative action.

And while it hasn't been decided, the gender-neutral bathrooms probably won't be labeled transgender.

The issue is just privacy and not having to worry, said Jessica Pettitt, coordinator of the UA's Social Justice Programs, who says "some people in the community call me 'Dr. Bathroom.' "

The initiative comes as the campus is a few years into its largest building boom in recent history, with at least four major buildings opening in the last year.

UA spokesman Johnny Cruz said there is no estimate yet on what the effort will cost. With roughly 300 buildings on the campus and thousands of bathrooms, it could take months to develop a plan.

It shouldn't cost too much, Pettitt said. In most cases it will be as easy as designating an existing bathroom as "gender neutral" — what used to be called "unisex."

In other cases, it could mean mandating that new construction include at least one single-use, single-stall bathroom.

"That's supportive to trans (-gender people) but also people who might have a caregiver of a different sex ... or parents with a child of another sex," Pettitt said.

She said the action is needed because bathrooms are the most common scene of violence against transgender people. And it's not just in the men's room, she said.

While she said women typically are more social in their restrooms than men, Pettitt said some women are threatened by what they perceive to be the presence of a man or a person of indeterminate gender in their area.

"In a women's restroom, there's much more community-building that goes on," said Pettitt. "But there's also a lot of sexism, some stereotypes, that if there is a man present, or what looks like a man, they are in danger."

Pettitt said she has been the victim of bathroom hostility, that she has been aggressively confronted.

"I'm a biological woman. I was born a woman," said Pettitt. "But there are times when I go into a bathroom

UA restroom policy online

- The UA's Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action Office's "Statement on Restroom Access at the University of Arizona": fpnew.ccit.arizona.edu/affirm/restroomaccess.htm

and people say something because I look too much like a man. But, I turn around and they say, "Oh, you have boobs, that's OK." "

In the end, said Pettitt, this is not about gender politics. And, no, she said, it's not about having women use men's restrooms or men using women's restrooms.

"It's about not having to gender yourself," said Pettitt. "It's about peeing in peace."

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