

SUNY Fredonia

Revolution Resolution

Trans-action project

Ronan Cichelli, Graham Caulfield, Dean Bavisotto
WGST 377

Dr. Jeffry Iovannone

December 16, 2014

There is a major issue within the realm of Transgender Studies that immediately impacts our campus community here at SUNY Fredonia. It has been recognized and mentioned many times over that having one's preferred name on campus FREDcards, email accounts, Angel, and class rosters is inherently necessary for transgender students, yet extremely difficult in the same respects. Although this may not only pose problems exclusively for trans individuals, they are the ones most often affected by it. To our understanding, it is not possible to change your name on these forms identification and contact unless you have legally changed it within the New York state system– which is a lengthy, expensive, and time consuming process.

Every time a student hands their FREDcard to someone in order to sign into a dorm building or pay for their food at the Williams Center, their birth name is exposed; and this could likely out them as a trans individual and put their mental and physical safety at risk. The reason for this is simply because the name on their card may not reflect the gender to which this person identifies or presents with, based off of the social construction of gendered names and what makes a name fitting for a specific gender identity. Even while simply trying to share this paper with group members via email, research had to be done in order to learn some of the members' birth names. This can make it unnecessarily difficult to get ahold of classmates when trying to work on group projects; beyond simply an inconvenience, if a transgender individual is in a group for another class where email correspondence is necessary, it could be a danger to that student's safety to reveal their email address to the group because the birth name of that person will appear.

Furthermore, it is not only hope for fixing this arbitrary name policy to help provide students with documentation that is consistent with a title they are comfortable identifying with, but also helping these students feel safe, respected, and validated while working hard for their

degree. SUNY Fredonia is an institution that prides itself on providing students with equal opportunities and an outstanding education: I invite our school to exercise this notion and to not delegitimize the identity of their students while simultaneously expecting them to excel in their field of study. When and only when all students are allocated with documentation that reflects and respects their specific identities, SUNY Fredonia can honestly begin to preach its promise of equal opportunity and acceptance.

So as to change a policy at a State University one must research what current policies are in place, and what policies can be revised without legal intervention by the State of New York. Additionally, so as to change a policy of this means one must also provide extensive reason for concern. Sue Rankin and Genny Beemyn's "Colleges and Universities That Allow Students to Change the Name and Gender on Campus Records." is an excellent example of how difficult it is for the trans community to change their identification on a college campus. There are only 114 schools that will let an individual change their name and 47 that will change their gender marker easily out of the 2,870 four-year colleges, and 1,729 two-year colleges in the U.S. according to the National Center for Education Statistics of 2010. That, unfortunately for the gender variant student population, is rather small on a national level.

There are very few places making space for a community that is quickly growing. As a whole, the community is not being recognized for their actual identities, but rather the identity that was assigned to them at birth. This is both a national and local issue and SUNY Fredonia needs to begin to tackle it head on. Identification cards are required in many different situations.

To name a few, proof of ID is needed for traveling, opening bank accounts, purchasing alcohol and some medicines, and as of recent, voting in certain states. In order for a trans person to get a form of identification that reflects who they really are, they must show proof of surgery and/or court order. For those who do not intend on pursuing surgery or do not have the financial resources to get the formal paperwork, this is a serious problem- These obstacles in obtaining correct identification can expose trans people to violence and many other types of discrimination. For example, employment and/or housing equality can be very difficult to achieve. (The National Center for Transgender Equality, 2014). This research is extremely relevant and helpful because it provides us with a starting place. First, to know where the rest of the nation lies on the issue of identification for trans people, and second, allowing us to look at what is trending within this major topic. When we finally bring our issue to the administration of Fredonia, we will be able to say “This is where the country is heading, for we should follow suit.”

Since 2010, the federal government has removed the “proof of surgery” requirement from its stipulations to change gender markers on passports. On a state level, in 2011 California and Vermont improved their laws of changing one’s gender marker on one’s birth certificate. In addition, in 2011 the National Center for Transgender Equality worked with the Association of Motor Vehicles Agencies to educate employees about the most successful practices. However, it also points out that some government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, “outs” individuals through their Social Security Number Verification system, when the matching procedure flags individuals whose gender is not consistent on all documents. This is extremely troublesome because this is the largest matching service used by private employers. Eliminating this system would result in the end of discrimination for many trans people, a seemingly simple fix that has not happened yet.

The *Fredonia Student Rights and Responsibilities* has proved to be very telling and interesting in our research; it has provided the current policy at our school and affirms the strict rule on Fredonia IDs that make personal identification without a legal name change impossible at this time. "Making, forging, printing, reproducing, copying, or altering any record, document, writing, or identification used or maintained by the University that results in injury, defrauding, or misrepresentation." is listed under the Personal Identification and Representation section of the Student Rights and Responsibilities (Code of Conduct) header on the official school website. This perpetuates discrimination against trans students because if said student were to simply cross off or tape over their name on their FREDcard, and manually replace it with their preferred name, according the policy, this action is technically deemed forbidden and repercussions may be given.

After the decision to strive to make a change in policy for our cause, it became clear that asking the Student Association Speaker of the Assembly, Jefferson Dedrick, to help was the best course of action. Jefferson is a resourceful, passionate and very helpful leader within the Student Association. We were also aware that he was running for, and ended up acquiring the Presidential position of the Student Association. When we met with Jefferson and laid out our platform, he was extremely supportive and eager to work with us on our cause. He came very prepared to the meeting and brought a lot of background and understanding of the issue to the table. He encouraged us to write a resolution and provided us with different templates that we

could work from. He gave us a timeline, encouraging us to have said resolution completed by November 14, 2014. After that date, we would proceed to present it to the rules committee.

Writing the resolution was a lengthy process, but everything fell into place and we completed it by the date Jefferson laid out for us. At the rules committee, either one of two options were possible: our resolution would not be passed, in which case we would have had the Student Association vote on it once more during the General Assembly meeting; or the rules committee would pass our proposal, and we would only have to inform the General Assembly of what our plan was before taking it to the University Senate.

The resolution is as follows:

Whereas, Fredonia identification cards do not meet the minimum Document Requirements¹ for a form of legal ID listed by the Federal REAL ID Act of 2005 but are treated as legal documents; and,

Whereas, SUNY includes gender, religion, and ethnic background in their Non-Discrimination, Anti-Discrimination, or Equality Policies², however these policies are not applied to identification cards, email addresses, and class rosters; and,

Whereas, the current enforcement of student IDs as legal documents discriminates against students on the basis of gender, ethnic background, and religion³; and,

¹ "REAL ID Act of 2005, Section 202.b." Library of Congress. 43-44. Accessed November 11th, 2014. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-109hr418rfs/pdf/BILLS-109hr418rfs.pdf>

² "Student Handbook and On-Campus Living Guide- 6. Respecting the Community- Student Rights and Responsibilities" *SUNY Fredonia*. 3. Accessed November 11th, 2014. <http://www.fredonia.edu/studentaffairs/2014-2015%20Student%20Handbook.pdf>

Whereas, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants all students the right to request to amend their records⁴, but are denied the ability to change their public identity without legal intervention; and,

Whereas, the model policy described by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) for inclusion and non-discrimination in schools states that school IDs “are not legal documents and should use the student’s preferred name”⁵ yet legality is used as a main argument for why preferred names should not be allowed; and,

Whereas, the Civil Rights Act under Title IX Education Amendments of 1972 grants all students equal opportunity of education and therein the services granted to all other students, including identification and protection from sexual violence⁶ and gender-based discrimination⁷; and,

Whereas, the current policy discriminates against greater than an estimated 23,000 students University-wide and with greater attention brought to trans issues in the media as of late, more people are coming out everyday; and,

Whereas, this is a University-wide issue of ethics and not finances or budget, however further implementation falls on Fredonia and it is their duty to amend this issue of ethics; and,

Whereas, there is an expected increase in college revenue from the reissuance of student IDs in colleges that implement an ID “name change”, “preferred name,” or similar options, and the implementation of this policy will increase the amount of Undergraduate applications for admission into the SUNY-system;⁸ and,

Whereas, a student’s safety is at risk when they present their Fredonia ID that contains their legal name/birth name to a staff/faculty member, because their identity related to gender, religion, or ethnic background is revealed and subject to the personal prejudices of that staff/faculty member; and,

³ “SUNY! Your student ID policy is a Civil Rights violation!” Womb to World. Accessed November 11th, 2014. <http://briezymelodie.me/2014/09/03/cannot-self-identify/>

⁴ “A Transgender Advocate’s Guide to Updating and Amending School Records.” Lambda Legal. Accessed October 9th, 2014.

<http://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/transgender/ferpa-faq>

⁵ “Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender NonConforming Students: Model Language, Commentary, and Resource.” GLSEN. 6. Accessed November 11th, 2014.

http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Trans_ModelPolicy_2014.pdf

⁶ “Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence.” US Dept. of Education. 5. Accessed November 11th, 2014.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>

⁷ “Gender-based Violence and Harassment: Your School, Your Rights.” ACLU, Women’s Rights Project. Accessed November 11th, 2014. https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/genderbasedviolence_factsheet_0.pdf

⁸ “The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends (Manuscript).” Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA. 52-53

<http://heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/40TrendsManuscript.pdf>

Whereas, a student's safety is at risk when their campus issued e-mail or ANGEL account is required to use their legal name because their identity related to gender, religion, or ethnic background is revealed to anyone trying to contact them or to those they are trying to contact; and,

Whereas, a student's safety is at risk when their legal name is required on a class roster because their identity related to gender identity and/or expression is revealed and subject to their professor's personal prejudices and the opinions of their classmates; and,

Whereas, a student should not be required to reveal their identity related to gender identity and/or expression to every professor before the start of the semester and be subject to that professor's personal prejudices; and,

Whereas, a student's safety is at risk when they are signing in to a dorm building because they are often questioned about their preferred or legal name, and it is potentially dangerous for a student to reveal why they use another name; and,

Whereas, the current systems, Fredonia ID, e-mail, Angel, class rosters, etc., that force students to reveal their identity related to gender identity and/or expression may endanger transgender students on the Fredonia campus and may make them subject to physical and/or verbal harassment, violence, and discrimination⁹; and,

Whereas, the current systems, Fredonia ID, e-mail, Angel, class rosters, etc., hinder Fredonia from creating a positive campus climate by allowing discrimination based on identities related to gender identity and/or expression rather than encouraging inclusivity and adequately addressing relevant issues for a growing number of transgender students¹⁰; and,

Whereas, the current systems, Fredonia ID, e-mail, Angel, class rosters, etc., prevent students with identities related to gender identity and/or expression from reaching their fullest potential academically and remaining in school through the creation of a negative campus climate¹¹; and,

Whereas, one of the four Baccalaureate Goals that Fredonia calls its students to exemplify includes responsibility, and our campus is failing to protect both our students' identities and safety; therefore be it;

Resolved, that policies be changed so that Fredonia ID cards are not used as or held to the standards of a legal document and as such allow for preferred name provisions, thus alleviating all grievances of gender, religion, ethnic background, and other discrimination

⁹ Beemyn, Genny, and Sue Rankin. "The Climate for Transgender People." In *The Lives of Transgender People*, 94-99. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

¹⁰ Ibid., 84-86

¹¹ Ibid., 87-88

and finally follow Federal, State, and College policies of Non-Discrimination, Anti-Discrimination, and Equality; and,

Resolved, that policies be changed so that Fredonia ID cards do not put students into dangerous situations where their identities are revealed to people whose reactions they cannot predict; and,

Resolved, that policies be changed so that class rosters reflect preferred names and and pronouns and do not put students in unsafe or uncomfortable situations where they are subject to the prejudices of their professors or classmates; and,

Resolved, that policies be changed so that campus issued e-mail addresses and ANGEL accounts reflect students' preferred names and pronouns so as not to put them in danger or expose their identity to those who are getting in contact with them or whom they are trying to get into contact with.

Resolved, that a copy of this resolution be to sent to Student Association President Antonio Regulier, Dr. Jeff Iovannone, CMA Director Jellema Stewart, Registrar Scott Saunders, Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Bill Boerner, FSA Executive Director Darin Schulz for distribution to the FSA Board of Directors, Chairman Dr. Robert Deemer for distribution to the University Faculty Senate, Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. David Herman, and Fredonia President Dr. Virginia Horvath so that appropriate action may be taken to protect the students of Fredonia.

With much gratitude, we are able to say that our resolution was passed unanimously; this was an incredible step for our cause. At Rules, much of the discussion revolved around how it would benefit campus and if it would cost the campus money. To that we responded, that with a more LGBT+ positive campus climate would increase the retention rate of these students as well as allow them to prosper and focus on their work. With the increase of students staying at and coming to Fredonia, more revenue would be generated by the university.

On December 4th, we went to the General Assembly and presented our resolution, receiving a lot of support from our peers through encouraging and supportive remarks. Our

group felt ready and motivated to take the next step- presenting our resolution to the Faculty Senate on Monday, December 8th.

When we arrived at the University Senate meeting, Jefferson introduced our group by saying that our resolution had passed the Student Association and that we are seeking faculty support. The group spoke on the resolution and how necessary the policy change is to the trans community of Fredonia. We emphasized the fact that the level of “outness” correlates with the likelihood of experiencing violence; and under current policy, transgender students are outed on a daily basis. We spoke about the necessity of coming out to professors immediately so as to not be exposed in front of the class when attendance is being taken, being outed whenever our FREDcard is shown to a resident assistant, or night desk attendant when signing into a building, and or to a FSA employee upon purchasing food. We encouraged them to understand that the possibility of violence is endless under current policy, and that they safety of these students is being sacrificed.

One person on the Senate asked if it is possible in the software (fredmail, angel, moodle) to make these changes, and someone else responded that it is indeed possible, but policy is currently preventing any change that could be made. Another asked about how to respond to someone outside the school requesting information about a trans student, whether a parent, family member or otherwise, and accidentally outing them by referring to the student as their preferred name. Our group discussed the differences between public and private identities, and after the symposium, a few senate members continued to ask more generally questions about our resolution, to which each person who asked eventually agreed with our stance and reasoning.

The resolution passed with 40 votes and 1 abstention. This does not mean the policy is different, but the Senate supports us and gave us their endorsement. If and when we get approval

from the administrators listed at the end of the resolution, we can bring it back to the Faculty Senate and work from their to change the policy. Dr. Bill Boerner is also committed to continuing our effort by speaking to administration about our resolution. The next step in our process will be to set up meetings with the Registrar, Dr. Herman, the FSA Director, and Dr. Horvath to talk about our vision for what exactly we want changed- although our vision was already written in the resolution it will be nice for the individuals mentioned above to hear it directly from the voices of the activists who started it all. They will hopefully then give us the proper information needed as to how to finish this policy change; these meetings will take place next semester, spring of 2015.

Division of Work:

This project was infact an entire group effort. Our plan of action required many meetings, emails, ideas, and formal writing, and the entire group did what they could within their realm of availability. We never formally split the workload, for this project turned into something much more political than we initially thought and so we did as much as we could together. Bobby did much of the public speaking and work on the resolution itself, and attended the meetings. Graham was our most involved researcher and the one who set up most of the meetings, as well as attended and spoke at them. Ronan attended the meetings, emailed professors, and wrote the introduction, and research sections of this paper, and checked the grammar of every written document. Mark attended meetings, brought many ideas to the table and wrote the action plan

and reflection sections of this paper. However, let it be said that our entire group stayed as close together as possible during the entirety of this project, and we all agree that the amount of work equalled out very well in the end.

Citations:

Beemyn, Genny, and Sue Rankin. "Colleges and Universities That Allow Students to Change the Name and Gender on Campus Records." *Campuspride.org*. N.p., 2014. Web.

"A Blueprint for Equality: ID Documents and Privacy." *The National Center for Transgender Equality*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Oct. 2014.

"MAP: Updating Gender and Name on Driver's Licenses Policies by State." *National Center for Transgender Equality*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Oct. 2014.

"Student Rights and Responsibilities." *Fredonia State of New York*. N.p., 2012. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.

United States. Court of the State of New York. *Petition for Name Change*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.