POLICY INTENT

To outline AUSU's commitment to acknowledgement of and advocacy for the removal of overt discrimination and systemic barriers faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ students at Athabasca University (AU), as well as affirming and supporting learners of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations.

DEFINITIONS

2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym for the umbrella term that encompasses Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, as well as all other ways individuals and communities self-identify.[1] It is important to recognize that all terms encompassed within this acronym hold different meanings for each individual who self-identifies with them.

Two-Spirit as a term was introduced by Elder Myra Laramee at the 3rd annual Native American and Canadian Aboriginal LGBT peoples gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1990. In particular, Two-Spirit is an "umbrella term that points to the important roles that Two Spirit people held prior to colonization"[2] and "is a direct acknowledgement of the disruption of Two Spirit teachings that took place when first-contact between Indigenous peoples and settlers was made and the ongoing impact of colonization."[3] It is important to note that although "an umbrella term, specific teachings, roles, meanings, and language must come from the community." The term Two-Spirit encompasses a tradition of the First Peoples of Turtle Island and is to be used only by Indigenous peoples. This means that the identity is specific to the Indigenous community, with all individuals and communities defining what it means to be Two-Spirit.[4] We have adopted the practice of placing 2S, referring to Two Spirit, at the beginning of the acronym, to recognize that Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples were the first sexual and gender minorities on Turtle Island.

Transgender is an "umbrella term referring to people whose gender identities differ from the sex they were assigned at birth."[5] It can refer to "transcending beyond, existing between, or crossing over the gender spectrum. It includes but is not limited to people who identify as transgender [, . . .] non-binary[,] or gender non-conforming (gender variant or genderqueer)."[6]

Queer is an umbrella term many members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community self-identify with. While we recognize the derogatory history this term holds for many individuals, we use it to recognize the reclamation of the term by many members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Gender Identity is an individual's internal and individual experience of gender along the gender spectrum or outside of the gender binary, which may be the same as or different from their assigned sex at birth. These include, but are not limited to, genderqueer, non-binary, agender, man, woman, cisgender and transgender identities. An individual's gender identity is different from their sexual orientation.

Gender Expression refers to how an individual presents their gender.[7] Gender can be expressed through behaviour, outward appearance, as well as names and pronouns. In addition, "[g]ender expression and gender identity are not always, and do not have to be, congruent or matched."[8]

Sexual Orientation is used to describe emotional, sexual, or romantic attraction to other people.[9]

Asexuality refers to individuals who experience little or no sexual attraction. It is important to note that asexuality is an umbrella term and exists on a spectrum.[10]

Deadnaming refers to using the name transgender or non-binary students were assigned at birth instead of their name.[11]

Use of Pronouns and Titles - Pronouns are used to refer to someone and are self-determined and not "preferred."[12] Examples of pronouns include zie/zir, they/them, she/her, he/him, as well as the inclusion of individuals who do not use pronouns and simply use their name. Examples of titles include Mrs., Ms., Mr., Mx, or no title.[13]

Ciscentrism refers to a "system of attitudes, bias[,] and discrimination in favour of cisgender identities that marginalizes and renders invisible trans people and treats their needs and identities as less important than those of cisgender people."[14]

Discrimination refers to "not individually assessing the unique merits, capacities[,] and circumstances of a person; instead, making stereotypical assumptions based on a person's presumed traits, [and] having the impact of excluding persons, denying benefits or imposing burdens."[15]

Systemic Barriers refers to "policies, practices, or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded."[16]

POLICY RESEARCH

Despite the recent increased commitment to inclusivity and equitable access, post-secondary institutions remain unwelcoming and unsafe places for many students, including those of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. In many ways, this system continues to reflect "[t]he [primacy of a ciscentric] gender binary [, which] places people into gender roles and identities."[17]

In addition, many 2SLGBTQIA+ communities face additional and intersecting forms of oppression within and outside of the post-secondary sphere, including racism, sexism, ableism, and poverty,[18] including higher rates of occupational, and sexual and gender-based violence.[19] For racialized and disabled 2SLGBTQIA+ learners, factors, such as medical inequities[20] and inequitable policing, remain a reality.[21]

A recent Canadian health policy has underscored various challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ students, including those pertaining to mental health and wellbeing. During the policy's 12-month period, 2SLGBTQIA+ post-secondary students presented poorer outcomes across all mental health indicators, in contrast to cisgender and heterosexual students. These outcomes included higher rates of mental health diagnoses and higher rates of attempted suicide. Within this community, trans students reported higher rates of mental health challenges in contrast to cisgender students.[22] In particular, statistics in a recent

survey by the University of British Columbia revealed that many Canadian trans youth often face rejection, discrimination, and violence at work—within their communities, within their families, and within health care settings, as well as within their learning environments.[23]

According to a 2019 Statistics Canada survey, approximately 47% of students at Canadian post-secondary institutions have "witnessed or experienced discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity[,] or sexual orientation."[24] Of these students, transgender learners are considerably more likely to experience discrimination. In particular, "22% of transgender students stated that they had been insulted, mistreated, ignored or excluded because of their gender in a postsecondary setting—a considerably higher proportion than among their cisgender counterparts (6%)."[25] Of those who had discrimination based on gender identity, along with gender and sexual orientation, few obtained support about these issues at their educational institution.[26]

A 2021 survey by the University of Alberta Students' Union revealed that 85% of respondents who identify as non-binary or other gender identities and 100% of transgender students had a 50/50 chance of leaving, or had plans to probably or definitely leave Alberta.[27]

A recent "Thriving on Campus" survey from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in Ontario revealed, "that less than half of the institutions have gender inclusive housing and name-change policies." In addition, while 90% of post-secondary institutions have included sexual orientation and gender-identity in their anti-discrimination policies, "less than 50% include these identities in student codes of non-academic conduct."[28] The purpose of the survey was to collect data, as "[l]ittle is known about the experiences and wellbeing of LGBTQ2S+ university students in Canada." This first large-scale study done in Canada was in response to a recent research in the United States, which "suggests that LGBTQ2S+ students often feel unsafe and face discrimination on university campuses."[29]

This type of "discrimination creates barriers to full participation which may hinder the success of students."[30] The creation of an inclusive learning environment "requires all schools to identify and implement evidence-based strategies that ensure the safety, belonging and full participation of all members of the school community."[31] An environment that makes the post-secondary experience more welcoming, accepting, and inclusive, is believed to foster 2SLGBTQIA+ students' well-being and mental health.

Recommendations can range from "offering gender-neutral bathrooms and including gender-inclusive demographic options on institutional records and forms, [which] can encourage trans students' academic development and belonging by reducing daily stressors,'' as well as "using students' pronouns, providing inclusive housing options, enabling students the opportunity to easily change their name and gender on official and unofficial school documents, and sponsoring trans speakers." Other recommendations, including one from Memorial University's "Policy scan of North American universities regarding gender diversity and inclusion," includes allowing students to change their name and gender on official academic records (including after graduation) through communication with the Registrar, without requiring proof of legal change.[32] Additional recommendations include taking all reasonable steps to ensure the maintenance of school records to respect a student's privacy and confidentiality,[33] in an effort to avoid deadnaming and misgendering learners. Studies stress the importance of supporting and affirming 2SLGBQIA+ students, especially those suffering from additional stressors.[34] In particular, a 2018 study revealed that the use of a correct "name in multiple contexts affirms their gender identity and reduces mental health risks" among transgender youth.[35]

Notwithstanding AU's online framework and the fact that not all of these barriers apply to AU learners, 2SLGBTQIA+ students at AU continue to face unique challenges. In particular, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has also underscored many issues faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ students, including increased isolation, as well as deadnaming and misgendering of transgender and non-binary students in virtual classrooms. While not available in all post-secondary institutions, certain schools now allow students to update their documents without a legal name change by filling out two forms, one of which must be signed by a notary or commissioner of oaths. However, often, the onus remains on the students who are deadnamed or misgendered to ensure that documents are updated. In many cases, this may lead to names being updated in some locations, but not others. In particular, in a 2020 interview with *Xtra*, a spokesperson at Athabasca University, which has long focused on an online framework, stated "that a change should update a student's name, but due to the school's 'legacy systems', it doesn't always work."[36] Currently, AU students must submit a Student Change of Information Form from the Registrar, with a requirement of proof of current legal name, including a driver's license, passport, provincial (photo) ID, or healthcare card.[37] This can pose various challenges, including creating additional anxiety for students, increasing the possibility of being outed and being placed in unsafe situations, as well as cost, time, and complexity.[38]

Despite these challenges, change has slowly begun throughout digital worlds in the post-secondary sphere. In June 2020, Thriving on Campus co-hosted a webinar about "Knowledge Mobilization: Fostering LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion in Online Learning," which discussed "pedagogical strategies toward LGBTQ2S+ inclusion in online learning environments."[39] In addition, Halifax's Dalhousie University has implemented the first widely circulated Gender Affirmation Policy, which states that "all members of the University community have a shared responsibility to create a living, learning, and working environment where Two Spirit, transgender, gender non-conforming, and all gender variant people may fully participate based on their gender identity and expression."[40] The University of Manitoba and the University of Alberta are opting for gender-neutral language on forms and documents, including going beyond the gender binary, and including the option to not identify/disclose gender.[41] Outside of Canada, other institutions, such as the University of Minnesota are permitting learners to use names, pronouns, and gender identity different from legal documents without having to provide documentation.[42]

Be it resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to ensure the full and safe participation of 2SLGBTQIA+ learners in the post-secondary learning environment.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to ensure that inclusive and 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming language is used throughout courses, including study guides, reading materials, assignments, and exams.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to strive for gender inclusive washrooms on campuses and AU-controlled spaces.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to collaborate with the Government of Alberta, post-secondary alliances, community organizations, and 2SLGBTQIA+ researchers to develop frameworks and policies to prioritize, address, and support the needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ learners and well supporting policy change, education, and awareness.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to allocate funding to prevent health disparities and promote the wellbeing and inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ students in a post-secondary environment.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to include gender-inclusive terms in their documents and correspondence, including the use of pronouns, or lack thereof, as well as respecting that pronouns, or lack thereof, are simply pronouns, as opposed to "preferred."

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) and the Government of Alberta to include gender options on forms and documents outside of the binary, as well as the option to not identify/disclose gender.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) for the ability to use names, pronouns, and gender identity different from legal documents without having to provide documentation, as well as change email addresses after a name change.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to advocate for easier access to online invigilation, in case of names, pronouns, and gender identity differing from legal documents without having to provide documentation.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to allow students to change their name and gender on official academic records (including after graduation) through communication with the Registrar, without requiring proof of legal change.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to take all reasonable steps to ensure the maintenance of school records to respect a student's privacy and confidentiality, in an effort to avoid deadnaming and misgendering learners.

RELATED REFERENCES, POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FORMS

This Policy References
None

This Policy is Referenced by
None

POLICY RESPONSIBILITY
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POLICY HISTORY
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