

He or She?

November 03, 2010 11:30 AM Michael Celone
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He or she ? do individuals have a right to choose their sexual identification? As Americans went to vote in national elections on Tuesday (Nov. 2), the Tulane Office of Multicultural Affairs hosted a panel discussion on “transphobia” and the issues facing transgender people in American society.



At a discussion about “transphobia,” audience members take a quiz to test their knowledge on forms of gender expression and the challenges transgender people may face, especially discrimination in the workforce. (Photo by Claire Barry)

Transgender is an umbrella term for someone whose self-identification, anatomy, appearance or behavior is not congruent with typical gender norms and societal expectations. Transgender individuals may identify as transsexual, cross-dressers or gender variants, for example.

Even though transgender “is identified with lesbian, gay and bisexual, transgender is not a sexual identity or sexual orientation,” said Tommy Gray, one of two student panelists at the presentation in the Lavin-Bernick Center. Gray, a sophomore, is program coordinator for diversity programming in the Tulane [Office of Multicultural Affairs](#).

The speakers emphasized the importance of respecting everyone's gender expression and asking transgender people directly what pronoun they prefer.

"If someone is trans, asking them [what pronoun they prefer] would be polite because you're saying with that question, I respect you enough to want to know what pronoun to use, instead of assuming what pronoun to use," said Max Wallace, a junior student and panelist.

The speakers also discussed discrimination that a transgender person might face on the university campus. The current non-discrimination policy does not specifically cover transgender students who may face discrimination on campus, according to the panelists.

"In Tulane's nondiscrimination policy we do include sexual orientation but we don't include gender identity or expression," Gray said. "That's definitely something we should work on." Assistance for transgender students is available from the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Educational Resources and Counseling and the Student Health Center.

The end of the discussion focused on ideas for allies who wish to strengthen their relationship with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community.

Today (Nov. 4), the Office of Multicultural Affairs is hosting a development session on ["Coming out as an Ally"](#) to address how staff and faculty members can better support LGBTQ colleagues and students.

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