

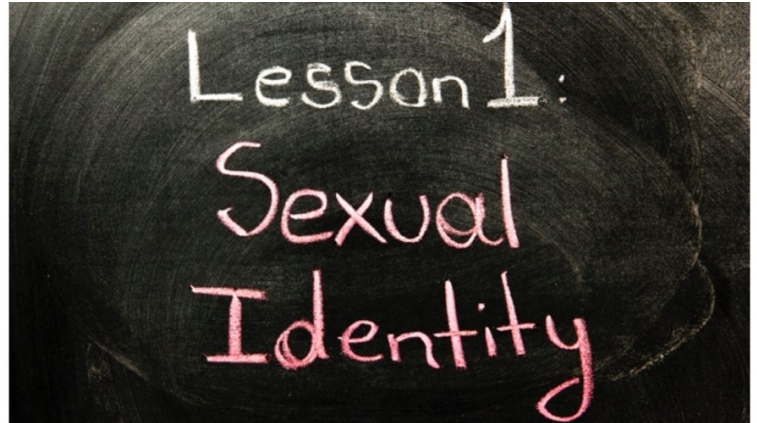


Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 23, 2016

## University of Arizona to Launch Nation's First Transgender Studies Program

The University of Arizona will be the first university in the United States to launch a transgender studies master's program, which is expected to begin in the fall of 2017. The focus for the program will be all things related to transgenderism, including sex, gender, and cultural and political issues.

But the question remains: For what exactly will such a program prepare graduating students? What possible careers will have a demand for transgender studies majors?



According to the *Daily Caller*, the announced program is the “end result of the public school’s Transgender Studies Initiative, which was introduced in 2013.” That initiative sought to prioritize transgender issues even before they became the center of significant national debate.

Three professors have already been hired for the new program, though they will be working in the women’s studies, anthropology, and religious studies departments until the new program is officially launched. Susan Stryker, who is responsible for the program, told *Inside Higher Ed* that the school plans to hire a fourth professor, preferably one who is not white.

“The three people who had been hired were all white, and we were really trying to prioritize hiring faculty of color,” Stryker candidly said.

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One of the hired professors is Eric Plemons, who currently teaches a course called Sex, Gender, Science Medicine. He is working to create a course that will focus on sex reassignment surgery, the *Daily Caller* writes.

“The fact that there was going to be an institutionalized space for doing research on trans issues was exciting to me,” Plemons told *Inside Higher Ed*. “Because there hadn’t been an institutionalized space previously, it struck me that this was an opportunity to shape something.”

As for details about the program, there are few, admits Stryker, as the program is ultimately in the early inception period.

“There are all kinds of bureaucratic details to be worked out,” Stryker said. “It’s just the slowness of getting the paperwork all lined up, getting the job descriptions sorted out, developing the curriculum and finding a director of graduate studies. Hopefully we can get the paperwork done over the summer and be admitting as soon as 2017.”

The University of Arizona is apparently seeking to be at the forefront of what appears to be a national movement towards more transgender-friendly education. In addition to the new program, the school will be hosting a conference this fall called “Trans\*studies: An International Transdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Embodiment and Sexuality,” for which 200 people have already registered. And



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its Transgender Studies Initiative has hosted a transgender journal, “*TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*.”

But the implementation of a transgender studies program at the University of Arizona is just the latest example of higher education institutions placing politics above pragmatism at the expense of students.

In a similar example of this, Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit, Michigan has elected to drop its university-wide requirement in mathematics and is strongly considering adding a three-credit-hours requirement in “diversity” to the school’s general education curriculum. WSU defended its decision by stating that the high schools already maintain a mathematics requirement for their curriculum and that a diversity requirement will provide students an opportunity to “explore diversity at the domestic level and consider the ways in which it intersects with real world challenges at the local, national and/or global level.”

But as observed by Ashley Thorne, the executive director of the National Association of Scholars, an organization that supports academic freedom, general education requirements “ensure that students learn the subjects it deems most important.” Allowing politics to dictate these requirements simply reveals that the decision-makers “do not have their priorities straight.” She added,

The purpose of college is to prepare students for careers, but there is no indication that a transgender studies program or diversity course requirement will prepare students in any way except to provide them with talking points during heated debates.

Earlier this year, *Business Insider* observed that graduates with liberal arts degrees are already at a significant competitive disadvantage:

A new study ... called “The Multi-Generational Job Search,” found that only 2% of employers are actively recruiting liberal arts degree holders. Compare that to the 27% that are recruiting engineering and computer information systems majors and 18% that are recruiting business majors.

One has to wonder how well graduates with degrees in transgender studies would be received by potential employers.

That same *Business Insider* study showed that 73 percent of hiring managers felt that colleges are only “somewhat preparing” students for the working world. One wonders if the addition of a transgender studies program would do anything to dispel this perception.

In an interview with the *Huffington Post*, Stryker defended the value of the program and provided these reasons for why he thinks it is needed:

For trans people at college, it’s an opportunity to see themselves reflected back in the curriculum. For others, a chance to learn about an increasingly visible minority. For people who want to work with trans populations or on trans issues, it’s a chance to develop greater depth and breadth of knowledge, and to prepare meaningfully for a future job.

But at the level of basic research, it’s simply interesting that trans phenomena are increasingly visible — what’s up with that? Understanding why there’s so much trans visibility these days, and why it’s such a hot topic, allows us to address longer term shifts in our cultural, political, economic and social understanding of gender as part of the human experience.

But with just an estimated 0.3 percent of the population identifying as transgender, one has to wonder if an entire graduate program focused on transgenderism is a worthwhile financial endeavor for the



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university and whether it's fair to recruit students for a program that will wholly limit their job opportunities after college.

Evidently, that is of less importance to the University of Arizona than being a trailblazer in the LGBT movement. Stryker told *Insider Higher Ed*, "However successful or unsuccessful the Arizona Transgender Studies Initiative turns out to be, what we've done has helped change the perception of transgender studies throughout the academy."

While the program is not expected to be launched until 2017, Stryker told the *Huffington Post* that an undergraduate minor track in Sexuality, Trans, and Queer Studies in the Gender and Women's Studies Department will begin this fall.



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