

Rutgers U. passes protections for transgenders

by Christine Dinsmore

New Jersey's Rutgers University enacted an anti-discrimination policy last week that includes protection for transgender people, but some activists say the policy does not go far enough.

After a nearly two-year push from transgender activists, the university senate — a group of administrators, faculty, and students who recommend policy changes — passed a resolution in favor of expanding anti-discrimination protections to transgender persons.

Academic Vice President Joseph Seneca wrote in a memo last week that the university has expanded its anti-discrimination policy to include "people who have changed or are in the process of changing their sex."

Although the language of the school's directive implies protection only of people who are undergoing or have undergone a sex-change procedure, activists hope that it will ultimately protect "gender-variant non-transsexuals," or people who appear to be of a gender other than their biological one.

Rutgers is one of the first colleges to protect transgender people from dis-

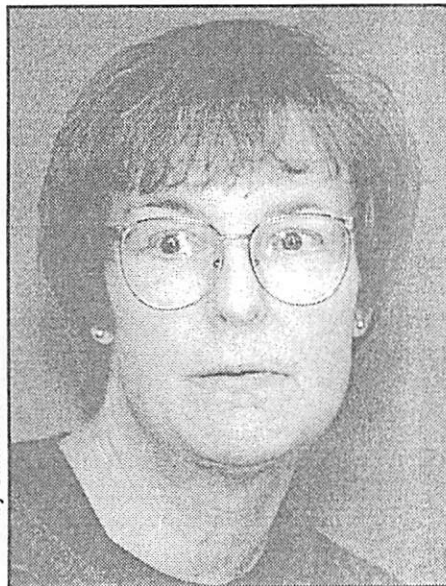
crimination. The University of Iowa has a policy forbidding discrimination based on gender identity.

"Not a lot of colleges have passed these policies yet," said Jessica Xavier, national director of the transgender advocacy group It's Time, America! "But I think we'll see more and more passed as more and more transgendered people start coming out on campus."

Rutgers, founded in 1766 to train ministers for the Dutch Reformed Church, is part of the State University of New Jersey system. It is one of the largest colleges in the United States.

"This had been debated for a while," said Ruth Scott, director of news for Rutgers. "The senate had discussed expanding the university's policy on equal opportunity and affirmative action to provide full protection for transgenders and transsexual students, faculty, and staff."

Ben Singer, a graduate student and transgender activist, said that university officials initially could not agree on the meaning of the term transgender, so they resolved the issue by focusing on sex changes.



by Clint Steib

"Not a lot of colleges have passed these policies yet," said transgender advocate Jessica Xavier.

"The difficulties presented to us over the meaning of 'transgender' represent an apparent attempt on the part of the conservative, and sometimes even reactionary, administration to maintain the

sex/gender status quo," said Singer. "The need to frame the protections in a framework of a medicalization of transsexuality is evidence of the conservative nature of the administration."

Singer said he initially suggested a "more progressive" solution in which the school policy would recognize the "inherent fluidity of gender."

Singer said that this policy now in place at the university — while he admits it is a major step in the protection of transgendered persons — fails to protect "men who look feminine or women who look masculine" from discrimination.

Since the policy change protects only people who have changed their gender or intend to do so, Singer said people may still suffer discrimination for simply challenging gender stereotypes.

He said the university needs to face the fact that its policy is only a partial solution.

"The implication is that one must have access to self-definitional language before they can be protected," said Singer, "a luxury many gender-variant people don't have." ▼

302-6