

February 26, 2015

Dear Chair Roblan and Vice Chair Knopp, Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you very much for taking the time to deliberate and hear testimony on SB 473. I support the bill for many reasons but, chief among them, is a commitment to making sure our colleges and universities are accessible to all Oregonians and to prospective students and employees from other states and countries. The reporting that this bill requires would enable the HECC and individual institutions to better assess their campus climate and inclusivity toward LGBTQ students, staff and faculty. Moreover, the bill would also help these institutions move into a 21st century understanding of gender and sexual identity by enabling gender-nonconforming, transgender, intersex, and transitioning members of our communities to list a “preferred” name in addition to the name registered through legal government documents so that individuals may be called and identified publicly by the name they prefer and not be subjected to the harms caused by the use of names that do not conform to their identities.

This bill is aimed at creating a more inclusive and accepting atmosphere for LGBTQ students and employees but it will also allow others who, for many personal reasons, may feel disconnected from their legally given names, to have a campus identity and environment in which they can do their best work. For instance, a student who has experienced abuse in a home or school environment may choose to use a different name that enables her or him to construct a positive identity and feel empowered at college. As a communication scholar, I am keenly aware of how powerful naming practices can be in shaping our perceptions and realities!

Finally, the data collection will allow the HECC and the institutions to identify opportunities for educational reform, resource acquisition, and promotion of inclusive campus cultures to external audiences in ways they previously were unable to do. I urge you to support and enact SB 473 in this legislative session. It is time to make a change in how we track, report, and understand sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and this bill is a move in the right direction.

Thank you for your consideration,

Emily Plec
WOU Professor of Communication Studies
Oregon State Board of Higher Education Director