

Students lead gender-neutral restroom effort

Victor Valley College Associated Student Body Council flyer promoting the implementation of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus.
Design by Daniel Mariano. Image courtesy of Victor Valley College.

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VICTORVILLE — A group of Victor Valley College students have launched a movement to create “gender-neutral” bathrooms on campus.

VVC Associated Student Body Council Vice President Jazmin Gailey is spearheading the effort to implement single-stall restrooms with no gender restrictions at the college after she said she recognized that VVC has a “significant LGBTQIA community” — the initials stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersexual and asexual.

“The goal is to change any single-stall restroom that reads male or female to say ‘gender-neutral’ instead,” Gailey said, “and that for any other building here on campus built from here on out to have at least one gender-neutral restroom included.”

This wouldn’t be the first college campus to implement the bathroom change. Colleges nationwide have already implemented similar bathrooms, whether single-stall or full “gender-inclusive” public restrooms, similar to family restrooms. Gailey said that she was partially inspired to pursue the project from seeing these restrooms at California State University San Bernardino.

“I started talking to students and faculty to see if this was a student need,” said Gailey, who had first learned about the idea of gender-neutral bathrooms at a statewide conference for community college students. “I realized that this was a basic necessity for students to have in order to feel secure on their own campus.”

While Gailey said she plans to advance the project through meeting with VVC faculty through the shared governance committees on campus and promoting it throughout the VVC community, it has already been secured as a goal of the ASB Council for the 2016-17 school year.

“I modeled it off of different students' projects that are implementing this already,” Gailey said. “They gave me ideas on how to approach this.”

Gailey conducted a survey in the spring semester among students in order to receive feedback. Although she says it was on a small scale, she was still pleased with the results. She said 94 percent of the voluntarily-taken surveys favored gender-neutral bathrooms.

VVC Board of Trustees President Joseph W. Brady said that he is “one million percent behind surveying students” in order to maximize the opportunity for student voices to be heard, and that if any aspect of the gender-neutral bathroom project comes to the board for approval, that it will “absolutely be open for dialogue.”

Student Robert Mitchell, who also serves on the ASB Council, said that he thinks the project is “a great step for the college in making sure we have an environment where students can feel welcomed regardless of their gender identification.”

VVC Bookstore Operations Manager Maria Rempfer said that while it is something that would “affect a small population,” it is very important to the people who are faced with asking the question: “What bathroom do I go to?”

“At one point, handicapped people couldn’t go in regular restrooms,” Rempfer said. “It’s something important to anybody who feels like there’s a bias against them.”

Theater instructor Ed Heaberlin said that implementing gender-neutral restrooms is “something that is of the time” that would be responding to a current need of some students.

“We’re in a much more open time period than when I was at the college 20 years ago,” Heaberlin said. “Anything that makes students more comfortable in the learning environment is definitely beneficial.”

Gailey said that the biggest concern expressed so far, in her surveying and studies on the issue, is sexual assault occurring within gender-neutral bathrooms. But she said making the restrooms single-stall would mitigate those concerns.

While Gailey shared that her own sexual orientation is heterosexual, she said that she is sensitive to the LGBTQIA community because “it’s a group that hasn’t been advocated on behalf of in the right way.”

“Every student deserves an equal opportunity to succeed,” Gailey said. “Even if just one transgender student at VVC isn’t able to focus on their studies because they don’t have their basic needs met because of something as simple as a restroom, this is extremely important.”

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