Transgender issues get airing

Rights: CSULB event aims to build awareness of legal, identity challenges.

By Karen Robes
Staff writer

LONG BEACH — Their challenges are as complex as finding medical coverage for hormone treatments or as elemental as being able to use a restroom without fear.

These and other issues faced by transgenders — a collective term that encompasses transsexuals, crossdressers and gender-queers (those who define their gender as somewhere between a man and a woman) — were brought to the forefront Wednesday at a Gender Identity and Expression session that kicked off Cal State Long Beach’s inaugural Transgender Day of Remembrance program.

“Our community issues get left out oftentimes because of ignorance, or it’s not as visible,” said student organizer Sumi Braun. “In the media, you have increasing representation of gay characters, but there still isn’t a representation of transgender people. You have the stereotype of drag queens and that’s about it.”

The two-day event, hosted by the college’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Resource Center, stems from a transgender conference put on by student services earlier in the semester.

That conference sparked campuswide interest to bring awareness to transgender inclusion. Currently, there is a student movement at CSULB to add gender identity/expression to the school’s nondiscrimination policies, Braun said. The matter is expected to go before the Academic Senate next month, she said.

“It’s a part of a community that has never, ever really been talked about or advocated for,” said Cory Allen, a Women Studies major who works at the LGBT Resource Center.

More than two dozen people attended the two-hour session that included discussions on gender terminology and transgender challenges.

Many present expressed frustration over a society that defines people as either male or female. They spoke about the lack of neutral-gendered restrooms and locker rooms and the lack of medical care and legal rights.

Statistics from the Stonewall Center at the University of Massachusetts show transgender protections are only beginning:

- There were 14 reported anti-transgender murders in the U.S. in 2005.
- Minnesota, California, New Jersey and Washington are the only states with laws banning harassment against public school students for their gender identity or expression.
- Only seven states — California, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Washington — ban gender identity and expression discrimination in areas of housing, employment and public accommodation. (Hawaii covers only housing discrimination.)
- Most private medical plans, the Medicaid statutes of 26 states and federal Medicare exclude coverage for transgender surgeries and treatments.

The inaugural event is a huge step toward acceptance and awareness, said TJ Jaberg, a graduate student and an instructor in public speaking.

“The fact that it’s happening at all is huge,” she said.

Huberg added that many who present acknowledged they were ignorant of the plight of transgenders. She applauded their open-mindedness.

“They were not ashamed to say that. I wasn’t all surprised,” she said. “I was actually really, really pleased that not everyone that was here identified as trans. More people came here to learn and that’s awesome.”

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L.B. tags pro crew for graffiti cleanup

Local: Private group will be more efficient than current program.

“IT’s going to make a significant difference. They’ll be working three times as fast,” Assistant City Manager Christine Shinney said. “You’re not going to see us on the streets.”

The city is partnering with a private graffiti removal firm.

Seven candidates plan to run for council in April.