

WGS 4960  
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Final Project

### Petition For A More Inclusive Transgender Policy

After the recruitment season of last fall, Vanderbilt Womxn's Ultimate was excited to welcome its newest players. One of them identifies as non-binary and was assigned male at birth (AMAB). They are a caring, humorous, and hard-working person, and we were fortunate to have them as our teammate. However, we quickly learned that, according to the current USAU Transgender Inclusion Policy, they were not eligible to play on our team in the regular season. Specifically, the policy stipulates that to participate on a women's team at the competitive level, transgender female, non-binary, and intersex players have to undergo testosterone suppression therapy for 12 months. We argue that this policy is transphobic and contrary to the Spirit of Ultimate, and we call for a revision of the policy where these barriers are removed.

The requirement of testosterone suppression therapy is problematic in several ways. First, it is based on the assumption that individuals who were assigned male at birth have a competitive advantage due to their relative high levels of testosterone compared to cis-women. It is true that some research studies suggested that testosterone can increase muscle mass and aerobic capability, and organizations like the International Association of Athletics Federations and the International Olympic Committee have made policies based on such claims. However, many researchers, including Dr. Katrina Karkazis, have challenged this belief and suggested that the effect of testosterone varies by individuals and there is no broad correlation between testosterone and athletic performance. Therefore, there is no scientific consensus behind the rationale for testosterone suppression. Second, even if testosterone does render an advantage, the current USAU policy is specifically targeting AMAB individuals who wish to participate in the women's division. The testosterone levels of those assigned female at birth were not brought into

question (not to say that they should), and therefore the policy brings a bias against transgender/non-binary players. Ultimately, the argument of having competitive advantage is flawed. In sports, everyone carries advantages and disadvantages. Within the women's division, some people are taller, and some people have higher muscle strength. The variances and diversity among the players should be celebrated, not policed.

Ultimate is a special sport, and we need to have an inclusive policy because of what Ultimate stands for. Although we are excited that Ultimate is making great strides in gaining recognition, this progress should not be at the cost of losing its core value—the Spirit of the Game (SOTG). Since its invention in the late 1960s, Ultimate distinguished itself from other sports because of its reliance on sportsmanship. The rules were designed such that each individual player is responsible for adhering to the rules and playing fairly and safely. A common concern for having a truly inclusive transgender policy is that cis-gendered men could lie and “cheat.” However, SOTG is a guarantee that players act responsibly and behave fairly and respectfully. Ultimate is also about building an inclusive community, and the current “Inclusive” Transgender Policy is deterring this goal. For trans folks, whether to receive medical intervention or not should be a personal choice, and not every trans individual would like to receive interventions like hormone therapy. Moreover, with the current healthcare system, not everyone can have the opportunity or afford having gender-affirming therapies. Therefore, the current policy is denying the access to Ultimate from a population of valuable individuals. This is a loss for our community.

A truly inclusive policy that we envision is one where there is no requirement for hormonal therapy or surgery and any individual can participate in the gender division that they identify and feel comfortable with. Such a policy would not be anything new—other national

Ultimate organizations, for example, Ultimate Canada and UK Ultimate have adopted such policies in 2017. More specifically, both of these policies offer protection for trans players in all national-level competitions, and only in international games will the guidelines of the World Flying Disc Federation take precedence. We advocate that USAU adopt a similar policy to create an inclusive and truly fair environment for everyone.

Some Notes:

I have established connection with a trans-right activist in the Ultimate community, and I plan on sharing this preliminary document with her and ask for guidance on the best way to move forward, especially the idea of a petition. I also plan on playing Ultimate in grad school, so I will try my best to carry through with this project.