

Gender Neutral Bathrooms

An Interactive Qualifying Project
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Abstract

Current bathrooms are commonly divided by gender; this creates a number of issues that can be solved by increasing the availability of bathrooms that are not specific to one gender. At this time, the WPI campus offers very little access to gender neutral facilities. A survey was taken of the climate the WPI community regarding gender neutral bathrooms, in order to determine what changes need to be made to better accommodate everyone on our campus. Additionally, a physical survey of the locations and characteristics of bathrooms on the WPI campus was carried out. Based on this information, a recommendation of immediate bathroom changes that would improve access to gender neutral bathrooms was made to the Dean of Students and the Assistant Vice President of the Facilities Department at WPI. In addition to these immediate changes, information gathered over the course of this project will be valuable in guiding future initiatives in planning and implementing bathroom changes that will benefit all of the WPI community.

Introduction

Biological sex is used to delineate the variations within a species of specific physical characteristics such as anatomy and physiology, genotype, and hormone composition. Sex is commonly viewed as a male/female dichotomy, however there exists in most species a broader variation of characteristics than these two categories can fully describe. It is widely known that sex is linked to chromosomal arrangement, and that XX is the typical chromosomal arrangement of females which XY is the typical chromosomal arrangement of males. However, there are males who possess XX configurations, as well as females who possess XY configurations. Other chromosomal arrangements occur, such as XXX, XXY, XYY, and XO, and each configuration can have a diverse range of sexual characteristics across individuals [1].

Gender is an inherent part of a person's identity having to do with one's view of oneself. Culturally, genders are associated with appearances, interests, skills, occupations, and various other factors. These associations vary by time and place, and heavily impact a person's experience as part of a society [1]. A person's view of their gender is affected by cultural conceptualizations of genders as well as their own personal conceptualizations of genders, so ultimately gender is an experience unique to each person.

Gender is assigned at birth based on biological sex, which is typically identified based on the appearance of the genitals. If the child is determined to be a male, that child is generally raised as a boy. Likewise, female children are generally raised as girls. Culturally, sex and gender are very strongly linked, so much so that people often use the words sex and gender interchangeably when speaking colloquially. However, sex

and gender are two distinct words which reference two discrete characteristics of an individual; in reality sex and gender have no definitive correlation. Some people will feel comfortable with the gender assigned to them at birth, others will not. People who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth are considered to be cisgender. People who identify as a gender different from the gender assigned to them at birth may be considered transgender [2].

Current popular gender theory conceptualizes gender as a binary system. The two binary genders are man and woman. This view of gender assumes men are inherently masculine while women are inherently feminine [1], when actually people are much more diverse and complex than this. No person fits perfectly into one side of this binary; indeed not all people identify with a binary gender at all. There are a variety of nonbinary genders (genders besides man or woman) such as agender, genderqueer, and genderfluid, and people who identify with nonbinary genders may or may not consider themselves transgender [3].

Because sex and gender are so strongly linked in common thinking, the gender binary contains expectations about what people of certain genders should look like based on the sex typically associated with that gender. Often transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people do not meet these expectations of presentation, either because they lack the resources necessary to conform to binary ideas of appearance, or because they do not feel comfortable adhering to these ideas and so choose not to. People who do not “pass” as their gender (in other words, people whose appearance does not match a binary ideal) can face harassment and assault.

Commonly, public restrooms are separated by the binary genders, especially bathrooms that service more than one person at a time (multi-stall bathrooms). This causes difficulties for a variety of people, including parents with children of a different gender, disabled people with assistants of a different gender, and transgender and nonbinary people who may be faced with confrontation or violence if they are perceived to be in the “wrong” bathroom [2, 4].

When bathrooms are divided by gender (gender-specific bathrooms), it creates preconceived ideas of what the people inside a certain bathroom should look like based on binary ideas of what people of a certain gender should look like. People may therefore become confused when they encounter a person who does not conform to these ideas, and this can cause them to react inappropriately and even violently [4]. Transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people may be forced to choose between the bathroom they feel they belong in and the bathroom that is more safe for them, and many people do not feel comfortable using either restroom.

Gender neutral bathrooms create a space with no presumptions about the people using them [4, 5]. This makes them safer for people whose presentation does not perfectly conform with their gender [2], and does not force people to choose between the men’s and women’s bathrooms in the case that neither can fully meet their needs. Gender neutral bathrooms are also more accessible to groups such as parents with a child of a different gender or disabled people assisted by someone of a different gender because they do not force parties to separate by gender [4]. The development of gender neutral bathrooms presents an opportunity to solve numerous problems associated with

public restrooms, thus creating bathrooms that are safer and more accessible for everyone.

The focus of gender neutrality is to provide the same opportunities and experiences to people regardless of gender and gender expression. This includes access to jobs, housing, education, bathrooms, and safety. Gender neutrality also involves deconstructing the association of men with masculinity and women with femininity. True gender neutrality holds no expectations about a person based on their gender and makes no assumptions about a person's gender based on their appearance. Being gender neutral therefore not only creates more safety and acceptance for transgender and gender-nonconforming people, but also encourages all people to explore themselves and their identities beyond the definitions set by the binary. The creation of gender neutral spaces such as gender neutral bathrooms helps to foster gender neutrality in society by making the idea more common in daily life and by demonstrating the multitude of benefits that gender neutrality can have, even for those who feel comfortable within the gender binary.

The purpose of the gender neutral bathroom IQP is to improve on-campus access to gender neutral bathrooms by studying the campus structure and community climate to create recommendations as to how WPI can best alleviate issues associated with gender-specific bathrooms. It was determined that on-campus access to gender neutral bathrooms could be immediately improved by converting existing gender-specific single-stall bathrooms into gender-neutral single-stall bathrooms. Because single-stall bathrooms only service one person at a time, separating the bathrooms by gender does not contribute to the privacy or safety of the bathrooms. Therefore, making

these bathrooms gender neutral does not require any structural changes other than changing the sign [4, 5]. Single stall bathroom conversions can expand accessibility of public gender neutral spaces on campus, and will foster understanding and acceptance of gender neutrality in our community.

Although implementation of single-stall gender neutral bathrooms are a relatively quick and simple way to improve accessibility to gender neutral spaces, they cannot completely alleviate the issues that accompany gender-specific bathrooms. An assessment of the WPI community was created and conducted to evaluate the community's perspective on gender neutral bathrooms and characterize the problems with the current bathroom system specific to WPI. The information gathered with the assessment was used along with data gathered on bathroom locations on campus to identify how the WPI campus can best address the problems with its current bathroom system. Single stall bathrooms were converted to gender neutral bathrooms, using gender-inclusive signage that contains no gendered depictions. The results of the campus survey were compiled and discussed, describing the campus's attitude and providing suggestions for addressing the campus community's concerns regarding single and multi stall gender neutral bathrooms. This information can be used by future project teams to continue improving on-campus access to gender neutral bathroom in a way that best meets WPI's needs.

Background

Currently, most public bathrooms are separated by gender into men's facilities and women's facilities. Gender-specific restrooms tend not to differ from each other at all in safety or privacy features; often the only structural difference between men's and

women's facilities is the presence of urinals. Bathrooms that service single users at a time are less likely to be gender-specific than bathrooms servicing multiple users at a time (virtually all multi-stall bathrooms are gender-specific), however public availability of gender neutral facilities is still very limited.

Numerous issues are associated with gender-specific bathrooms. Such bathrooms tend to create unnecessary wait time. Gender-specific bathrooms tend to develop longer lines at one bathroom while the other bathroom has a shorter queue or is even unoccupied entirely; this is especially true of single-stall bathrooms because of the limited user capacity. Restricting users to specific spaces means that available space cannot always be utilized, so often gender-specific bathrooms do not operate at maximum efficiency.

In restricting user access by gender, gender-specific bathrooms force parties to split up by gender. This may force parents and children to separate, and can separate disabled people from their assistants, which causes bathrooms to be less safe for these users [4]. In fact, gender-specific bathrooms for these groups become unsafe whether or not the party chooses to split by gender. If the party does split by gender, it deprives someone of the help they may need to safely use the facilities. If the party does not split by gender, harassment and assault can occur because some members may be perceived as being in the "wrong" bathroom. In either case, gender-specific bathrooms are unable to meet these user's needs and provide them with a safe and comfortable facility.

Harassment and assault in the bathroom is the most harmful product of restricting access by gender [2, 3, 4]. Prevalent gender ideas in society cause us to expect people of certain genders to have certain appearances. The separation of

bathrooms by gender in the context of the gender binary therefore makes implications about the appearances of the bathroom's users. If a bathroom's user looks dissimilar to this expected appearance, they may be perceived as being in the "wrong" bathroom, even if their gender matches the gender the bathroom is specified for. This leads to harassment and assault [2, 4], which are extremely damaging both physically and emotionally. In addition to this, gender specific bathrooms cause further damage by making no accommodations for people who are neither men nor women, and for trans people who have not yet disclosed their true gender [3]. These people are forced to choose between the bathroom they are more emotionally comfortable using and the bathroom they are more physically safe using, and neither choice can fully meet their needs.

Safe access to public bathrooms is a necessity, not a luxury or privilege. When people are not able to safely use public restrooms, they cannot fully participate in public aspects of life like employment and socialization [4]. In some areas, policies have been set in place to protect bathroom users by stating that all people have the right to use the bathroom that corresponds to their gender [2, 3]. Although this does legally protect a person's choice of bathroom, it does little to actually prevent harassment and assault, and so does not effectively improve safe bathroom access. Additionally, it does nothing to accommodate non-binary people and people who are not in a social situation to use their bathroom of choice. The legal protection provided by such policies or laws is valuable for addressing harassment or assault incidents after they occur, but the problems associated with gender specific bathrooms are not resolved.

Because the majority of problems with current bathrooms stem from the user restrictions attached to them, these problems can be addressed by simply removing these restrictions and allowing anyone to use any available space [2, 4, 5]. This immediately reduces wait time to a minimum, because all available space is able to be utilized by anyone. Because of this, many public single-stall bathrooms are already gender neutral in places such as small restaurants where bathroom efficiency must be maximized. Single-stall restrooms provide the same degree of privacy whether or not they are restricted by gender, and many people share private single-stall bathrooms with members of another gender, so single-stall public restrooms that service more than one gender are often readily accepted. No changes need to be made to the bathroom to allow it to service more than one gender except for replacing the sign outside the door. For these reasons, converting gender-specific bathrooms to gender neutral bathrooms is a readily-achievable first step in improving bathroom accessibility.

Making multi-stall bathrooms gender neutral can resolve problems associated with gender-specific bathrooms, however the nature of the multi-stall bathroom complicates this conversion. Multi-stall bathrooms have considerably less privacy than a single stall bathroom, which can cause discomfort even in gender-specific bathrooms. Additionally, ignorance and misconceptions about gender neutral bathrooms, especially multi-stall, cause people to be apprehensive about implementing and using such bathrooms. All of these concerns must be addressed creating gender neutral bathrooms, otherwise the bathroom could create an entirely new set of problems even as it solves others.

Many current single-stall bathrooms service more than one gender, but often these bathrooms are not perfectly gender neutral. Ideally, gender neutral bathrooms not only service users of all genders but also contain no references on the signage or elsewhere to the genders of the users. Many current single-stall bathrooms that service more than one gender have signs with a depiction of both a man and a woman, usually using the symbols for man and woman that are also commonly used on gender-specific bathrooms. Any reference to gender automatically carries the expectations of gender as dictated by the gender binary [4], meaning these bathroom signs still create expectations about the appearance of the bathroom's users. Additionally, while many of these restroom signs do not reference the binary genders in text, they still depict only binary genders and therefore are alienating to non-binary people. Therefore, these and other similar signs are considered unsatisfactory for gender neutral purposes. The gender neutral restroom sign should refer only to the room itself (i.e. the fact that it is a bathroom, whether it is handicap accessible), not its users.

Prior to this project, WPI had very limited on-campus access to gender neutral bathrooms. Single stall bathrooms that service multiple genders already existed in Alden Hall, Boynton Hall, Goddard Labs, the Daniels Hall Offices, and the Recreation Center. However, the majority of these bathrooms are in low-traffic locations such as basements or backstage. In addition, the majority of these bathrooms have signs that are inappropriate for gender neutrality purposes. No official multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms were available. WPI's bathrooms have been a point of discussion for various groups working to improve the campus over the past several years, however due to the lack of a specifically dedicated initiative, little tangible progress was made.

However, the goal of this project is not simply to add gender neutral bathrooms to campus; the goal is to resolve the problems with the campus's current bathrooms in a manner that meets the needs of all members of our community. In order to do this, it is necessary to first identify and fully characterize the problems with our current bathrooms [5]. Although the same types of problems occur with all gender-specific bathrooms, the unique dynamics of a community cause these problems to develop unique dimensions. All nuances of the problem must be addressed in order to fully resolve it and prevent issues from resurfacing in the future. Solving a community-wide problem requires the full support of the community, so the solution must not only address the problem in full, but must also take into account the desires of the community where it is being implemented. Available resources must also be considered, because a solution is only practical and appropriate if it is feasible to implement. Our project therefore seeks to first identify and fully characterize the needs of our community regarding access to gender neutral and gender specific bathrooms before beginning the process of implementing changes to bathrooms.

Methods

Identifying solutions: To determine the most suitable ways to expand access to gender neutral bathrooms on the WPI campus, a survey of the community's attitudes towards these bathrooms was conducted (See Appendix 1). The survey collected information on people's role in our community, their current bathroom experiences, and their impressions and concerns about gender neutral bathrooms. The survey was hosted on Qualtrics and was distributed through email to the email aliases of student organizations

on campus. A summary of the community's feelings and concerns regarding gender neutral or specific bathroom access was compiled along with suggestions of how to address these concerns in the future to continue improving on-campus accessibility to gender neutral bathrooms.

Implementing a short term solution. The survey results indicated that conversion of some single stall gender specific bathrooms on our campus to gender neutral bathrooms would be acceptable to our general community, and would improve bathroom experiences for those who indicated a preference for gender neutral bathrooms. Additionally, this solution is practical to implement in the short term since it requires only replacing the sign; no changes to the structure of the bathroom are necessary. After identifying which bathrooms on campus should be re-signed, the changes will be proposed as a recommended plan of action to the dean of students and assistant vice president of Facilities. To identify what bathrooms should be recommended for this sign change, data on WPI bathrooms was collected including location, type of signage, and number of toilets and urinals in the bathroom. This information was gathered from building plans provided by WPI Facilities and by visiting the bathrooms in person. Bathrooms were considered single stall if they contained one toilet, and no urinals. Single-stall bathrooms marked "Women" were not recommended for conversion if the proximal bathroom marked "Men" was not single-stalled, and vice versa, in order to preserve equal access to gender specific bathrooms. Single-stall bathrooms were considered candidates for new signage if the existing signage contained any text or depictions that referenced the gender of the users, even if the sign referenced more than one gender. Signs will also be placed on single-stall bathrooms

with no pre-existing signage. The selected bathrooms will be re-signed in groups by building, with the permission of the faculty that use that space. These signs will be completely gender neutral, with no reference in either the text or images on the sign to the genders of the bathroom's users. They will contain the text "restroom," as well as a handicap-accessible symbol when applicable. See Appendix 1 for project overview.

Results

Data on bathrooms on WPI campus, including location, sign description, and the number of toilets and urinals present, was collected from academic and office buildings. These buildings were Alden Hall, the Bartlett Center, Boynton Hall, the Campus Center, the Career Development Center Building, the Collegiate Religious Center, Daniels Hall (first floor), Fuller Labs, Goddard Hall, Harrington Auditorium, Higgins House, Kaven Hall, Morgan Hall (first floor), the OASIS House, Olin Hall, the Rec Center, Salisbury Labs, the Student Development and Counseling Center, Stratton Hall, and Washburn Shops and Stoddard Labs. Based on the criteria described previously, it was determined that sign replacements should be made to 27 bathrooms across 12 academic and office buildings at WPI (Figure 1; see also Appendix 3).

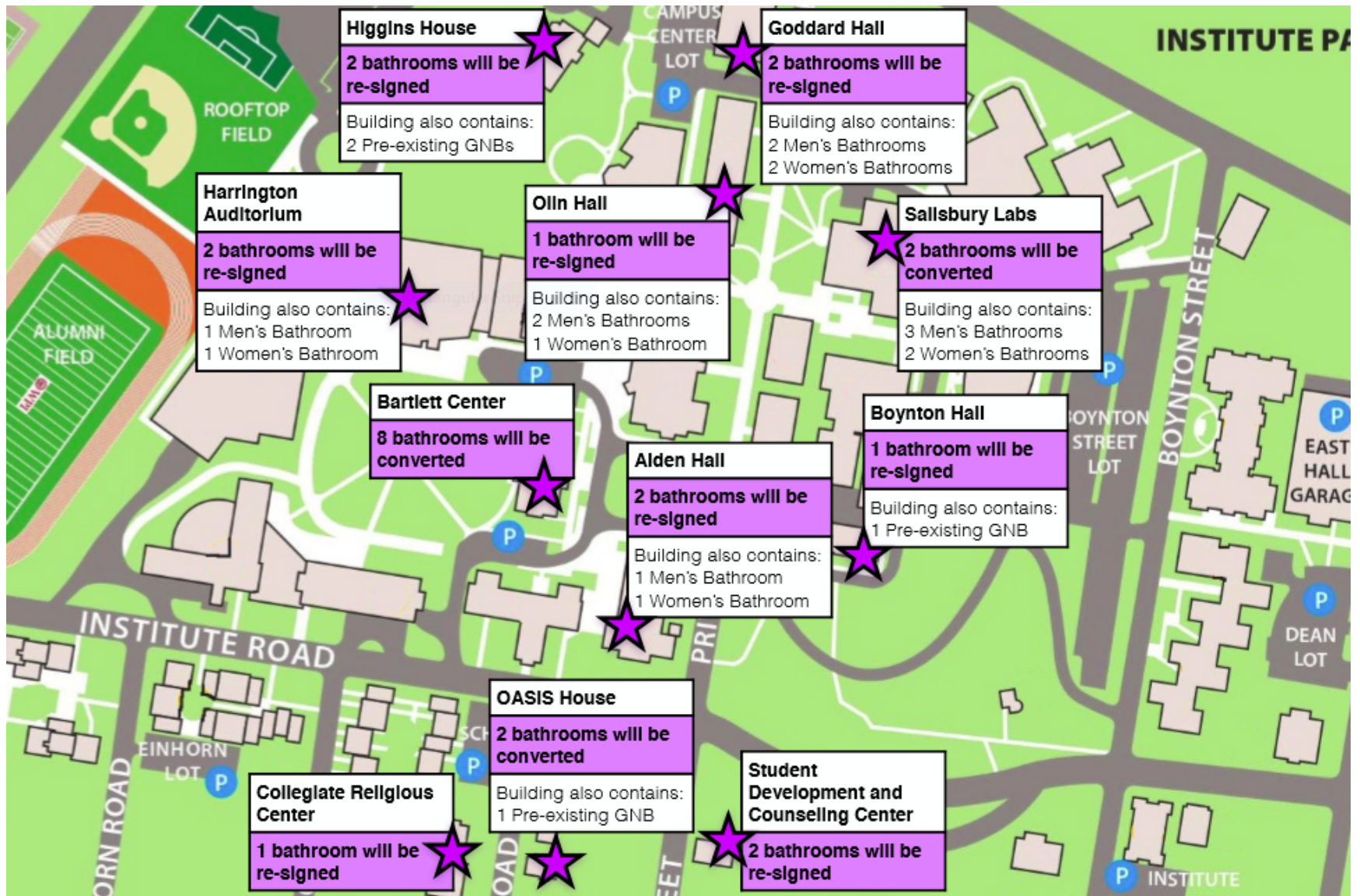


Figure 1: Map of bathrooms on the WPI campus being recommended for changes.

● Student ● Staff ● Faculty ● WPI Alum ● Friend of WPI

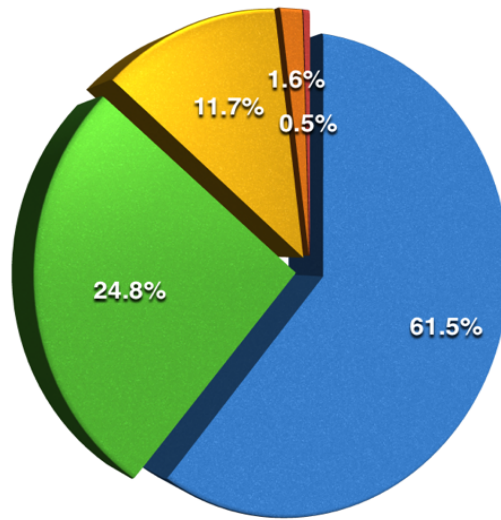


Figure 2: Responses to survey question 1.

The community's attitudes and preferences regarding gender specific and gender neutral bathrooms were assessed through a survey (Appendix 1). 940 responses were collected, and 830 responses were analyzed. 110 incomplete or "bad" data sets were discarded. 514 respondents were students, while 205 were staff, 95 were faculty, 12 were WPI alum, and 2 were a friend of WPI (Figure 2). To understand how bathroom traffic impacts the WPI community, respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1-7 how frequently they experience waiting lines at the bathroom. Many people are not impacted by bathroom congestion: 652 indicated they seldom or never experience lines. However, 176 people reported that they sometimes, often, or almost always experience lines (Figure 3). Respondents were also asked to report on a scale of 1-7 how knowledgeable they felt regarding gender neutral bathrooms. 238 respondents answered 7 or 6, indicating they feel highly knowledgeable, while 331 respondents felt somewhat knowledgeable (answer of 5 or 4), and 257 felt not knowledgeable (answer of 3, 2, or 1) on the topic (Figure 4).

● Almost Always ● Often ● Sometimes ● Seldom ● Never

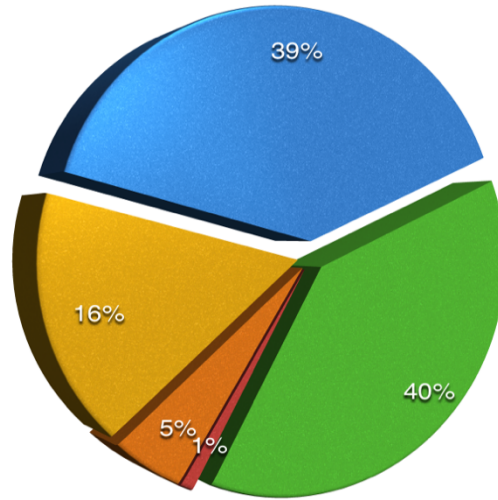


Figure 3: Responses to survey question 2.

● Not Knowledgeable ● Somewhat Knowledgeable ● Highly Knowledgeable

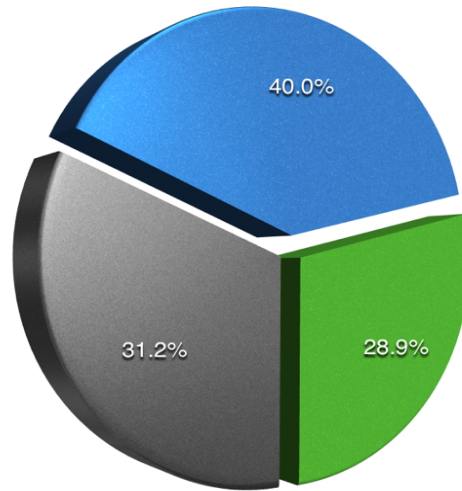


Figure 4: Responses to survey question 8.

Nearly half (380) of those surveyed indicated that they did not have a preference for using gender neutral or gender specific bathrooms. 365 people indicated that they would prefer using only gender specific bathrooms, while 82 would prefer using only gender neutral bathrooms (Figure 5). Respondents indicated whether they were likely or unlikely to use certain bathroom types. These responses show people are most likely to

use gender specific multi-stall bathrooms (754 responses as likely). People are similarly likely to use gender neutral or specific bathrooms that are single-stall (571 and 628 responses of likely, respectively). However, people are less likely to use gender neutral bathrooms that are multi stall; 347 reported likely while 380 reported unlikely. By contrast, only 53 reported unlikely to use gender specific multi-stall bathrooms. For single stall bathrooms, 183 reported unlikely to use gender neutral spaces while 154 reported unlikely to use gender specific spaces (Figure 6).

The question on ranking text options for bathroom signs came back with two front runners. The text “Restroom” had 477 votes as responder’s first or second preference while the text “Bathroom” had 330 votes as first or second choice. The question on ranking image options for bathroom signs also had two front runners. The image of a female and male figure next to each other had 514 votes as responder’s first or second preference while the image of a female and male figure divided by a line had 493 votes as a first or second choice.

● Gender-Specific Only ● Gender Neutral Only ● No Preference

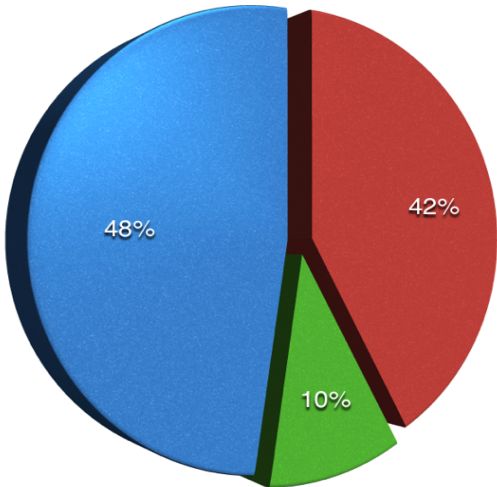


Figure 5: Responses to survey question 7.

A number of questions were asked to gauge the campus’s opinion on gender neutral bathrooms, such as the relevance, importance, and favorability of these bathrooms. Respondents were asked to rate on various scales of 1 to 7 their different feelings about these bathrooms (Table 1). Responses of 1 or 2 were considered negative; 3, 4, and 5 were considered neutral, and 6 and 7 were considered positive. The majority of respondents indicated neutrality towards all statements, with the exception of “Good” and “Favorable,” for which positive responses slightly outnumbered neutral responses, and “Self-Relevant,” for which negative predominated.

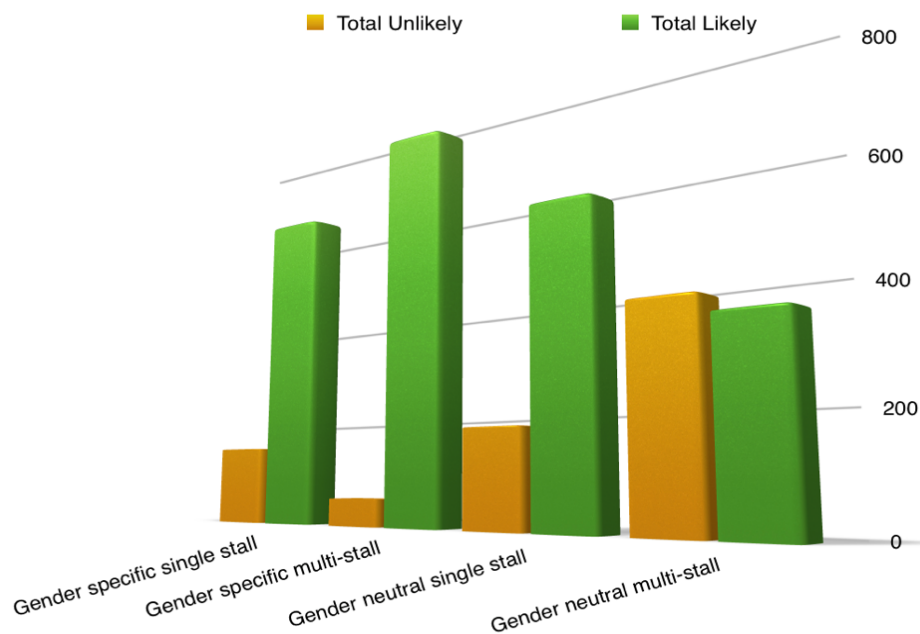


Figure 6: Responses to survey questions 3, 4, 5, 6.

The final survey question was a free-response field asking the participant to describe any concerns they might have about gender neutral bathrooms. These responses brought to light a number of concerns that should be addressed by future

iterations of this project (Figure 7). Responses were also informative about the campus climate towards these bathrooms. Some respondents voiced their support for the project, saying they feel it will promote equality of genders and acceptance for our LGBTQ+ community, as well as improving bathroom access overall. However, other respondents remarked that they do not see the necessity of the project. These respondents felt that single-stall gender neutral bathrooms were already abundant enough on our campus, or that the population of trans and gender nonconforming people is not large enough on our campus to be worth servicing. Many did not understand the purpose and benefits of gender neutral bathrooms, or are opposed to them due to a strong attachment to the ubiquitous gender specific bathroom system. Interestingly, some respondents reporting themselves as staff or faculty were opposed to these bathrooms not because of gender politics but because they do not wish to share bathrooms with students.

Extreme Positive End of Scale	# Positive (response 7, 6)	# Neutral (response 5, 4, 3)	# Negative (response 2, 1)	Extreme Negative End of Scale	>30%
Extremely Important	288	332	206	Not At All Important	<50%
Extremely Self-Relevant	97	263	457	Not At All Self-Relevant	
Extremely Certain	300	429	84	Not At All Certain	
Have Thought About It A Great Deal	166	369	286	Have Not Thought About It	
Will Be Simple	215	387	224	Will Be Complicated	
Will Take Little Effort	173	430	222	Will Take a Lot Of Effort	
Will Be Clear	245	394	185	Will Be Confusing	
Will Take a Short Time	152	500	173	Will Take a Long Time	
Will Require Little Work	157	483	185	Will Require a Lot of Work	
Will Be Fast	132	537	155	Will Be Slow	
Good	347	343	124	Bad	
Favorable	333	318	167	Unfavorable	
Satisfactory	317	371	123	Unsatisfactory	
Positive	352	343	122	Negative	

Table 1: Responses to survey questions 9, 10, 11.

Many respondents noted that they were comfortable with single-stall gender neutral bathrooms, but had concerns regarding multi-stall bathrooms. These concerns can be addressed in the future of this initiative in order for WPI’s bathrooms to service all of our community members. The major concern, which is arguably the most important concern to consider going forward in this initiative, is the fear that gender-specific bathrooms will become less accessible, or unevenly accessible by gender. Other frequently-voiced concerns regarded the cleanliness, safety, ease-of-use, and

privacy of these bathrooms. Respondents often considered members of the “opposite” gender to be unclean. Some fear that these bathrooms will increase opportunity for assault, either against women or against trans people. It was mentioned that guests to our campus, or anyone unfamiliar with the subject, may find these bathrooms confusing or off-putting. Many people stated that they would simply feel uncomfortable sharing restroom space with members of another gender. They feel that common multi-stall bathrooms don’t offer enough privacy when carrying out business such as changing clothes, cleaning up, and bodily functions. Women may feel especially uncomfortable because of the gender imbalance on our campus causing men to outnumber them. A specific privacy issue brought up is the need for trash receptacles within the stall, which is an issue with many of WPI’s current gender-specific bathrooms and could be addressed while improvements to other bathrooms are being made. Additionally, although urinals do not offer much privacy and can be visually off-putting to those who do not normally use them, those who do use urinals mentioned that they would prefer to still have urinals available to them. Therefore, the structure of gender-neutral bathrooms may need to provide urinals in a way that still ensures privacy and comfort for all users.

A number of other issues were mentioned somewhat less frequently than the major issues described above, however they are still important to consider in creating gender neutral multi-stall bathrooms. It was pointed out that difficulty accepting these bathrooms on our campus could manifest as inappropriate actions toward the bathrooms or their users. Some worry that traffic would move slower in such bathrooms. Many respondents were interested to know how the costs of bathroom improvements would be handled. There were also a number of mentions of parental concerns, as

people worry that young children should not be in such bathrooms or would not be able to understand them. It was also mentioned that it is possible that a while student might accept gender neutral bathrooms on their campus, their parents may not be comfortable with these bathrooms.

Some respondents provided specific detail about how to make gender neutral bathrooms most accessible to trans and gender nonconforming users. It was suggested that a university policy be installed to protect users of gender neutral bathrooms, as well as to protect trans people who prefer to use gender-specific bathrooms. In an earlier question regarding the depiction on bathroom signs, the most preferred signs contained silhouettes of a (binary-typical) man and woman. However, in the free-response, many people noted that they felt a gender neutral bathroom should have no depictions indicating genders, in order to be inclusive of all users.

Lastly, the content and wording of many of the free responses made it apparent that there is a need for education regarding gender and gender-neutral bathrooms in order for these bathrooms to be accepted and understood. Inappropriate or incorrect language indicated a lack of knowledge about gender subjects, especially regarding transgender and gender nonconforming people. Some respondents seem to feel that gender-neutral bathrooms are specifically for the LGBTQ+ community, and due to internal prejudices would be unwilling to use these bathrooms because they are reluctant to be associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

Addressing The Community's Concerns

A number of common concerns regarding gender neutral bathrooms (GNBs) were raised during our survey of the WPI Community. These concerns will be addressed as the initiative moves forward so that WPI's bathrooms meet everyone's needs.

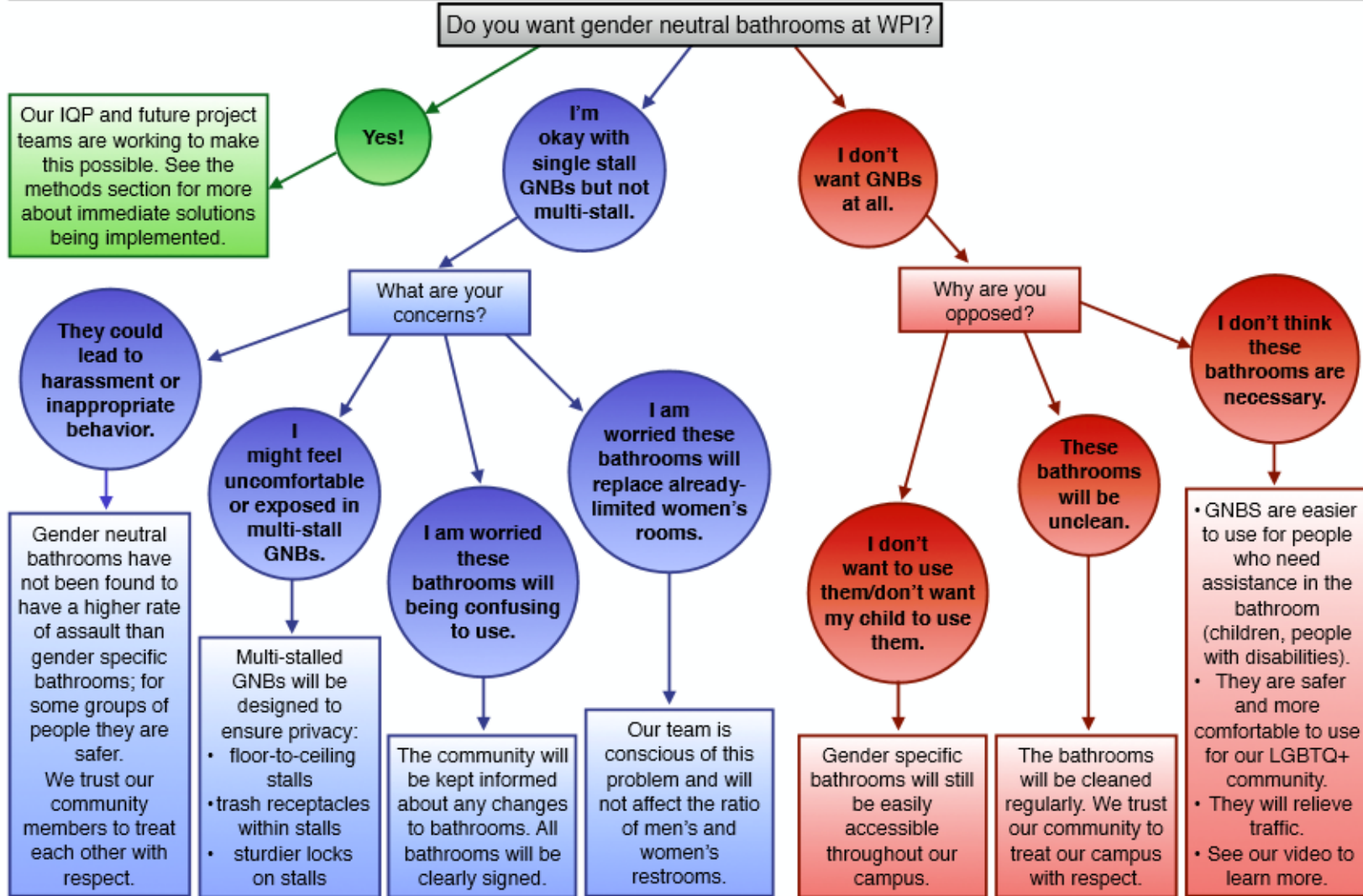


Figure 7: Common concerns with proposed solutions.

Discussion

Information gathered on the community's attitudes and preferences regarding gender neutral and gender specific bathrooms, as well as on bathroom locations and features, will enable this project team and future project teams to make changes best suited to the needs of the WPI campus. Most survey responses indicated positivity or indifference regarding single-stall gender neutral bathrooms. Nearly half of respondents indicated they had no preference for gender neutral or gender specific bathrooms; creations of gender neutral bathrooms will be executed such that those who indicated a preference for gender specific bathrooms will still have access to such bathrooms throughout campus. Meanwhile this and future projects take steps to improve the campus environment for those who indicated a preference for gender neutral bathrooms by expanding and improving access to such bathrooms at WPI.

Survey questions regarding people's impressions of gender neutral bathrooms revealed a largely positive or neutral attitude in the WPI community. Respondents reported that they were almost as likely to use a single-stall gender neutral bathroom as a single-stall gender specific bathroom. Some survey takers noted confusion regarding the likelihood question, saying they were unsure if the question referred to their likelihood to use the given bathroom types on our campus at the time of the survey, or if it referred to their likelihood to use these bathrooms if all types discussed were equally available. It may be possible that survey takers reported they were slightly more unlikely to use a gender neutral single stall bathroom as gender specific because gender neutral bathrooms were notably less available on our campus than gender specific at the time

of this survey. Even with this possible source of uncertainty, the data is encouraging that single-stall gender neutral bathrooms can be readily accepted on the WPI campus.

Given this campus climate, as well as the relative ease of conversion, the project team felt conversion of single-stall gender neutral bathrooms could be carried out within the scope of the project. The changes being proposed will be presented as a formal recommendation to the Dean of Students and the Assistant Vice President of Facilities. The proposed changes to each bathroom were explained to and approved by the staff and faculty working proximal to the bathroom. The sign affixed to the selected bathrooms will read “Restroom” and contain no gendered depictions; if the bathroom is handicap accessible, the appropriate symbol will be shown, otherwise the sign will have no image. The label “restroom” was most favored by survey respondents, and was preferred by the WPI Facilities department. Responses to the question about sign images indicated that depictions involving a man and a woman were most favored. However, many answers to the final question noted that the responder felt uncomfortable with any gendered depictions on signs for gender neutral bathrooms and they felt it would make such bathrooms less gender neutral. Bathrooms will be recommended for sign change if the sign contains reference to gender in text or image, to ensure that these bathrooms are fully and comfortably accessible to everyone. Many people may have selected the images containing gendered depictions because they lack knowledge on the topic of gender neutrality, or because these images are commonly used on bathroom signs and so are familiar to most people. Other images that could be associated with bathrooms, like the toilet and toilet paper icons, were not

highly favored by the community. Therefore, it was decided that the most acceptable sign design would contain no image, except the accessibility icon where appropriate.

In the campus survey, many responses to the concerns item specifically expressed comfort with using single-stall gender neutral bathrooms, however many of these respondents noted concerns about cleanliness of such bathrooms. Coordination with the WPI Facilities department has been key throughout the progression of this project to ensure that any proposed changes to bathrooms on campus are in line with legal code and WPI standards before moving forward. In addition, although immediate bathrooms conversion plans were developed and coordinated by the project team, actual execution of these conversions will be carried out by WPI Facilities. Further communication with Facilities will be key in addressing the campus's concern for the cleanliness of single-stall gender neutral bathrooms. Facilities has been made aware of this concern and will be especially vigilant of the state of the bathrooms to prevent undesirable conditions.

In many buildings on campus, single stall restrooms were present for women, but the adjacent men's bathroom could not be considered single stall due to the presence of one or two urinals in addition to the single toilet. Such configurations occur in Kaven Hall, Stratton Hall, and Washburn Shops. In the case of these bathroom configurations, it would be possible to convert only the women's room to gender neutral, which would further increase the availability of gender neutral bathrooms. However, this conversion would affect the already-unbalanced ratio of men's and women's bathrooms on campus, and so would not contribute to improving the campus's bathrooms. As the gender neutral bathroom initiative continues, these particular bathrooms should be considered

as opportunities for more intensive conversion, which would involve changes to the structure of the bathroom as well as the designation on the sign. While these conversions would be more costly than simple sign changes, such conversions would allow creation of gender neutral space while preserving access gender specific facilities within building.

When making changes to bathrooms in a building, it must be considered how these changes will affect the users of these buildings. Academic buildings on campus are used by both students and staff. The building's staff can be directly consulted, but it is impossible to consult every student who might use a given building, so gender specific bathrooms must remain available in such buildings even as more gender neutral bathrooms are implemented. The immediate changes being recommended were brought to the faculty and staff who regularly use each building being affected. They then decided whether or not these changes were desired in their workplace. The gender neutral bathroom initiative was met with acceptance and encouragement from each group, further demonstrating that the WPI community is ready for these changes. Some groups expressed a desire to learn more and fully understand the implications of these changes and the project overall, which is also encouraging as it indicates that the community is receptive to education on the topic. In buildings like the Bartlett Center and the OASIS house, the bathrooms are mainly used by the people working in the building rather than by students. In these cases, the staff supported converting all bathrooms in the building to gender neutral. Since the staff approve these changes and student traffic to these bathrooms is low, it is unlikely that these conversions will cause an inconvenience.

Conversion or re-signage of single-stall gender neutral bathrooms was relatively uncomplicated and had little effect on the function of the bathroom. However, creation of multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms on the WPI campus will likely require more complex changes to the structure of the bathrooms, and a number of factors must be accounted for so that the bathrooms on the WPI campus can meet everyone's needs. Although those who prefer gender neutral bathrooms were only 10% of people surveyed, their presence is undeniable and their needs should not be dismissed simply because they are a smaller population. Many people may benefit from gender neutral bathrooms who have not even considered them before, and people may find they are more comfortable and accepting of the idea if they are provided with more information on it and if their concerns are addressed. It is worth noting that those who felt the topic was more self relevant also reported feeling more knowledgeable. Less than a third of people surveyed felt highly knowledgeable about gender neutral bathrooms, and those who felt less knowledgeable commonly felt less positive about these bathrooms. This is significant because it indicates that education on the topic of gender and bathrooms will likely be key in ensuring that bathroom changes can progress smoothly and be accepted by the community.

Due to the large scope of the gender neutral bathroom initiative, a successive IQP team will be established to expand upon the short-term changes by planning steps to make more complex bathroom changes, like creating gender neutral multi-stall bathrooms, both in public spaces and potentially in dormitories. In addition to educating the community, it will be vital to address the community's needs when constructing multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms. People who prefer gender-specific bathrooms can

be assured that such spaces will still be available to them throughout campus. The WPI campus has an imbalance of availability of men's and women's rooms; continuations of the gender neutral bathroom initiative on this campus will have to be conscious of this issue and avoid making changes that would skew this ratio further. Concerns about cleanliness of multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms, as with single stall bathrooms, can be addressed through cooperation with WPI Facilities.

Careful design of the physical plan multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms will be essential in addressing people's concerns regarding safety, ease of use, and privacy. Many people expressed concern that multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms might offer opportunity for assault. However, assaults in bathrooms occur very rarely, especially against non-transgender bathroom users [6, 7]. Current multi-stall gender specific bathrooms actually offer very little protection to users, as the sign on the door does not physically impede anyone's entrance. Multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms offer the opportunity to improve the physical safety of bathrooms. These bathrooms are inherently safer for trans and gender-nonconforming people for reasons previously discussed. The physical plan for these bathrooms could include elements like strong locks on stall doors, and sturdy stalls which extend from floor to ceiling. These elements will also help provide privacy. It is recommended that, like the proposed signs for single-stall gender neutral bathrooms, the signs for any future multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms contain no images which imply gender. However, for the sake of clarity text such as "all-gender restroom" may be preferable over simply "restroom" for bathrooms that will have multiple users; the exact text will be identified by the future project team.

Several survey respondents expressed worry that those opposed to gender neutral bathrooms might express this opposition in inappropriate actions against the bathrooms or their users. The survey responses indicate that there is little strong opposition to these creating these bathrooms; although some people noted that they would not personally use such facilities, very few people were completely opposed to their presence on campus. The most important duty of the successive project team will be to prepare our community for any changes that will be made, and ensure that the changes are appropriate for our campus at the time they are being made.

Conclusion

The project team is aware that bathroom changes will be difficult and uncomfortable for some people, and made efforts to be sensitive to these people when recommending changes. However, the project team is also very aware of why these changes are necessary, due to long term involvement with the trans and gender-nonconforming community, whom these changes most greatly benefit. This involvement has allowed the team deep insight into the needs of this community, and to gain understanding of gender variance and the associated social dynamics. Their relations with the LGBTQ+ community was especially valuable in providing them with understanding of the negative impacts of struggles with gender specific bathrooms as well as the positive impacts of creating safe and comfortable gender neutral spaces. For Rebekah Johnson, the greatest challenge with this project was navigating the extensive formal channels necessary for making even minor changes. Participation on this project provided a better understanding of the social dynamics surrounding gender and

bathrooms on this campus, and the needs of people who prefer gender specific bathrooms as well as the needs people who prefer gender neutral bathrooms. For Christian Peguero, the greatest challenge with this project was taking data values and converting them into numbers that can be easily understood by strangers. Participation on this project provided insight into all the steps required to effect change, even on a minor scale. For Jonathan Berry, the greatest challenge on this project was the large amount of time which was spent to find the proper contact for each step of the project. Participation provided an opportunity to learn more about the community's thoughts and opinions regarding gender neutral bathrooms.

It is likely that as gender neutral bathrooms are gradually added to our campus, people initially unsure or opposed may become more comfortable with the concept and many even prefer gender neutral bathrooms over gender specific. Already, creating single stall gender neutral bathrooms is being discussed as part of a number of renovation plans on WPI campus. Renovations are being done to the Gordon C. Library bathrooms, and it has been proposed that during these renovations, new gender neutral bathrooms could be created in addition to the gender specific ones already present. Renovations to other buildings could be similarly planned such that they help further this initiative. Preliminary designs for the new Foisie Innovation Studio and residence hall have been made to include gender neutral bathrooms in both the academic and residential areas of the building. The inclusion of gender neutral facilities in plans for both the library and the Foisie Studio came about independently of the gender neutral bathroom IQP team. This demonstrates that our community is becoming more conscious of the issues surrounding bathroom and gender, and more supportive of

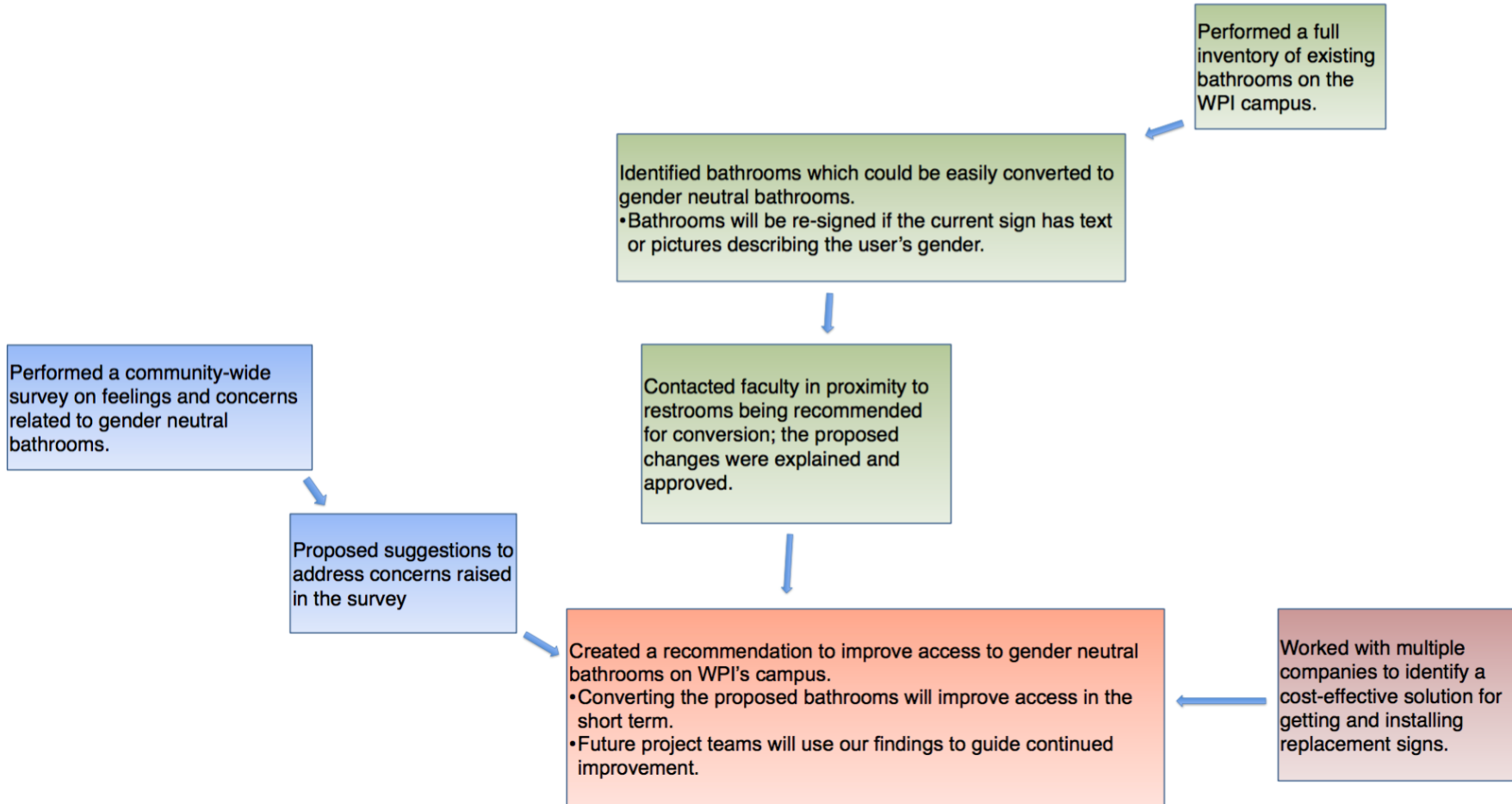
initiatives to resolve these issues. Additionally, WPI community members are making efforts to support those using current gender neutral bathrooms; for example, Residential Services in East Hall has hung a sign announcing that the gender neutral bathrooms inside the office can be used by anyone passing through the building. This acceptance and support is valuable to the continuation of the gender neutral bathroom initiative, and is greatly appreciated by those who prefer gender neutral bathrooms.

Although bathrooms both gender neutral and gender specific present a number of complex issues, cooperation and communication across the WPI community will allow the community address these issues. Successive project teams will facilitate this conversation as they continue to expand gender neutral bathroom access. We hope that future iterations of this initiative will be able to build upon our work and findings to create a bathroom system at WPI that is accessible and comfortable for all members of our community.

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Appendix 1: Overview of Project Pathway



Appendix 2: Survey used to assess community attitudes

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study conducted by an IQP team from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI). The aim of this survey is to understand opinions about gender neutral bathrooms. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Results of this survey will be kept confidential and will not be attributed to you in any way. Results of this survey will only be released in aggregate and with no personal identifying information.

For questions regarding the research study, please contact our advisor, Prof. Adrienne Hall-Phillips (ahphillips@wpi.edu). For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Human Research Protection Program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (irb@wpi.edu).

If you agree and are ready to participate in this survey, please click Agree and Continue to indicate your consent to participate. By agreeing you are verifying that you are over the age of 18 and are a member of the WPI community.

- i. Agree and Continue
- ii. I do not want to participate

I. Please tell us how you are a part of the WPI community.

- i. Student
- ii. Staff
- iii. Faculty
- iv. WPI alum
- v. Friend of WPI

II. How often do you experience long lines or congestion while attempting to use a bathroom on the WPI campus?

- i. Almost Always
- ii. Often
- iii. Sometimes
- iv. Seldom
- v. Never

III. How likely are you to use a **single stall** bathroom that services **one gender only** at WPI?

- i. Very Unlikely
- ii. Unlikely

- iii. Somewhat Unlikely
- iv. Undecided
- v. Somewhat Likely
- vi. Likely
- vii. Very Likely

IV. How likely are you to use a **multi-stall** bathroom that services **one gender only** at WPI?

- i. Very Unlikely
- ii. Unlikely
- iii. Somewhat Unlikely
- iv. Undecided
- v. Somewhat Likely
- vi. Likely
- vii. Very Likely

V. How likely are you to use a **single stall** bathroom that services **more than one gender** at WPI?

- i. Very Unlikely
- ii. Unlikely
- iii. Somewhat Unlikely
- iv. Undecided
- v. Somewhat Likely
- vi. Likely
- vii. Very Likely

VI. How likely are you to use a **multi-stall** bathroom that services **more than one gender** at WPI?

- i. Very Unlikely
- ii. Unlikely
- iii. Somewhat Unlikely
- iv. Undecided
- v. Somewhat Likely
- vi. Likely
- vii. Very Likely

VII. Given the option, which type of bathroom facility would you prefer to use? (choose only one)

- i. Gender-specific only
- ii. Gender neutral only

- iii. No preference

VIII. On a scale of 1-7: How knowledgeable do you feel about gender neutral bathrooms?

- i. 1 (not at all knowledgeable)
- ii. 2
- iii. 3
- iv. 4
- v. 5
- vi. 6
- vii. 7 (highly knowledgeable)

IX. Please indicate your feelings towards the idea of WPI implementing gender neutral bathrooms on campus. [Survey respondents ranked their feelings 1-7 with 1 being the negative extreme and 7 being the positive extreme.]

- i. not at all important//extremely important
- ii. not at all self-relevant//extremely self-relevant
- iii. not certain at all//extremely certain
- iv. have not thought about it at all//have thought about it a great deal

X. Please indicate your agreement with the statements below with respect to using a gender neutral bathroom on the WPI campus. [Survey respondents ranked their feelings 1-7 with 1 being the negative extreme and 7 being the positive extreme.]

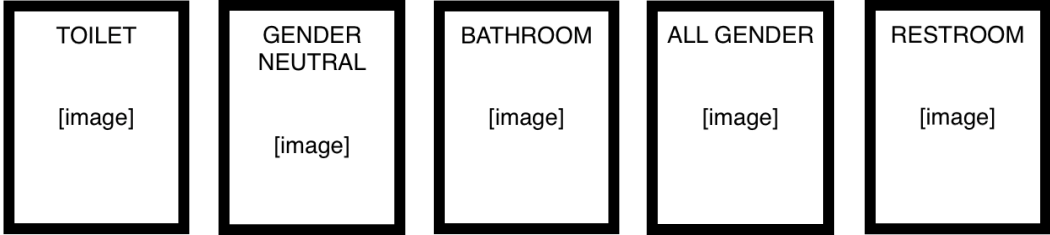
Gender neutral bathrooms on this campus:

- i. will be complicated//will be simple
- ii. will take a lot of effort//will take little effort
- iii. will be confusing//will be clear
- iv. will take a long time//will take a short time
- v. will require a lot of work//will require little work
- vi. will be slow//will be fast

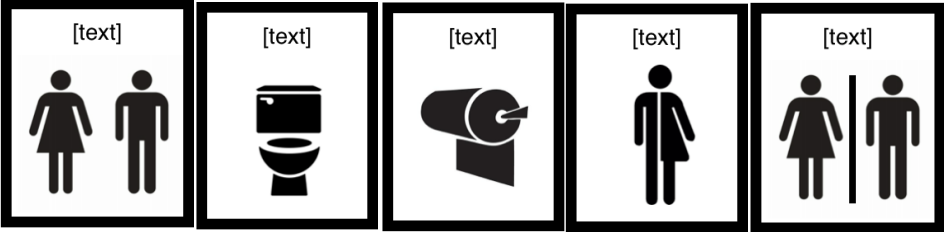
XI. My overall impression of gender neutral bathrooms is: [Survey respondents ranked their feelings 1-7 with 1 being the negative extreme and 7 being the positive extreme.]

- i. bad//good
- ii. unfavorable//favorable
- iii. unsatisfactory//satisfactory
- iv. negative//positive

XII. The following are text options for gender neutral bathroom signs. Please rank in order of preference the wording you feel is most appropriate. You may drag and drop each to place in your order of preference.



XIII. The following are image options for gender neutral bathroom signs. Please rank in order of preference the wording you feel is most appropriate. You may drag and drop each to place in your order of preference.



XIV. Finally, please share with us any specific concerns that come to mind when thinking about gender neutral bathrooms on the WPI Campus.

[Open response field.]

Appendix 3: Bathrooms recommended to be re-signed

Gender Neutral Bathroom IQP: bathrooms to be re-signed

Building	Location	Original Signage
Alden Hall	Stage level, stage right	Restroom
Alden Hall	Stage level, stage left	Restroom
Bartlett Center	1st floor	Women
Bartlett Center	1st floor	Men
Bartlett Center	1st floor	Women
Bartlett Center	1st floor	Men
Bartlett Center	2nd floor	Women
Bartlett Center	2nd floor	Men
Bartlett Center	2nd floor	Women
Bartlett Center	2nd floor	Men
Boynton Hall	Basement	No Text
CDC/Project Center	2nd floor	Women
CDC/Project Center	2nd floor	Men
Goddard Labs	1st floor	Restroom
Goddard Labs	1st floor	Restroom
Harrington Auditorium	Room 205	Men
Harrington Auditorium	Room 206	Women
Higgs House	2nd floor	(no sign)
Higgs House	2nd floor	(no sign)
Higgs House	2nd floor	(no sign)
OASIS	1st floor	Men
OASIS	1st floor	Women
Olin Hall	1st floor	Restroom
Collegiate Religious Ctr	1st floor	Restroom
SDCC	1st floor	(no sign)
SDCC	2nd floor	(no sign)
Salisbury Labs	Basement	Men's Staff
Salisbury Labs	Basement	Women's Staff