

Nick Arteaga He/him, They/them

As a proud QTPOC and SLCC Alumni I can say that all the staff was kind and understanding, especially all my professors. However, anytime I had to use restroom during class time not only was I anxious about missing anything important from the lesson and having to walk through a seemingly never-ending row of seats to get to the door, but I usually waited until the absolute last minute to use the public restroom.

If I was lucky, the one or two stalls that are in the men's restroom were not being used. If they were occupied, I had to wait and it was awkward if other folx were in there, wondering why I was not using the urinals. And, because I waited so long to use the restroom in attempt to avoid a stressful situation, I had plenty of close encounters. **It is almost as though I would rather be the guy who peed his pants than be the outed as a trans man or "woman" trying to use the men's restroom. Or worse, both.**

When I first started T I didn't pass very well so even if I got into a clean, available stall with toilet paper to do my business without being paranoid about folx listening, sometimes coming out of the stall to wash my hands around other men, eyeing me up and down, giving me strange looks was terrifying. **I have heard so many horror stories about folx being beat up, assaulted and worse,** for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, so to speak. I also had to make sure that any classmates of mine were not also leaving for the restroom because I did not want them to hear me peeing or see me sitting down to pee. I would also try and keep my shoes out of sight for fear of someone looking at my feet, worried they were looking for clues about the "guy" who sits to pee.

In some instances, if a stall were out of order or being used, I would have to walk even further to the next available men's restroom and hoped no one was paying too much attention. I would make sure to be quick, lower and lift the toilet seat, you know, to not blow my cover, wash my hands and get out of the restroom as fast as possible.

I am thankful to present masculine, even as a non-binary person and that enough time has passed where these concerns are no longer daunting but old habits die hard. I do still find myself looking over my shoulder or worrying that the sound of my pee might give me away. I am at a point now that if someone has a problem with the sound of urine stream, it is most definitely their problem, not mine. I am saddened and angered to think not everyone has that luxury and completely understand the anxiety that stems from using public, binary restrooms.

Ultimately, I always feel the most comfortable in gender neutral bathrooms. It may not mean much to most but having the chance to simply "go" without worry is so amazing! **I realize in retrospect how unhealthy the elevated stress levels of gender nuances like public restrooms added to my schoolwork and life in general.** I think our trans, nonbinary and gender nonconforming students would be more successful in their academic careers if we had gender neutral bathrooms so they can **focus on the things that really matter, without fearing for their lives and overall wellbeing.**

I believe any rules and/or guidelines that validate LGBTQ+ people, mainly trans identities that reiterate the importance of being compassionate to others, and minding our own business in the bathroom will make a massive, positive difference in so many lives!