

## Ensure transgenders feel at home, UGC to universities

TNN | Feb 15, 2015, 03.52 AM IST



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CHENNAI: The University Grants Commission has asked universities to take all steps to ensure that transgenders among students do not feel out of place on campus.

In a letter to all vice-chancellors, UGC secretary Jaspal Sandhu has said they should ensure human rights of transgender students are safeguarded and their mainstreaming is fast-tracked within the university and society.

In July last year, UGC notified transgenders as the third gender to enable them to be eligible for all scholarship schemes and fellowship programmes in higher educational institutions.

"The transgender community is a distinct cultural identity and unique on the socio-cultural map of the country. It is to be admitted that much remains to be done in order to ameliorate the discrimination and deprivation suffered by the community in Indian society," the letter said.

The UGC expects colleges to create transgender-friendly infrastructure on campuses. "This will go a long way in acclimatizing transgender students without facing any fear, stigma or shame," it said.

Academics should take up ethnographic research on the life and culture of transgenders to dispel myths about them, it said adding that UGC would award major research projects to academics who can individually or in collaboration with community members and experts take up such research.

"Such research will lead not only to a better understanding of the transgender subculture but also dispel several myths pertaining to the community embedded in popular discourse," Sandhu said.

Selvi, a transgender activist working in a temporary position as a physiotherapist in GH, said the first thing was to set up positive role models.

"The government should provide jobs to all transgenders registered with the employment exchange and make the jobs of temporary workers permanent. This will help develop positive examples within the community and encourage other younger transgenders to attend college and aim for a better future. The health minister and secretary have promised me a permanent job, and this is a step in the right direction," Selvi said.

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