Who is transgender?
Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans or TG) refers to individuals whose gender identity does not conform with what society has commonly associated with the sex they were born as. For example, an individual may be born anatomically female (sex), but identify with and have a masculine gender expression. Not all transgender people fit into the gender binary. Instead, they may express multiple genders or express a unique gender that is neither completely masculine nor completely feminine. Transgender is also used as an umbrella term for a larger group of gender nonconforming people including transsexuals, cross dressers, genderqueers, and others. It is important to acknowledge that not everyone who appears to fit under this definition of transgender identifies as such.

How do gender and sex differ?
While gender and sex are commonly used interchangeably, they are different concepts. Sex is defined by an individual’s anatomy and chromosomes. Sex refers to whether someone is biologically male, female, or intersex. Gender, unlike sex, is not biological, but refers to specific traits (such as femininity and masculinity) that are often thought to correspond with a specific sex. Sex and gender are dependent on culture; they change over time (consider how femininity and masculinity have changed throughout the last 100 years).

Are transgender people “gay”?
The term “transgender” refers to an individual’s gender identity, whereas “gay” refers to their sexual orientation. Some transgender people are gay, but just like any other community, transgender people cover the entire spectrum of sexual orientation—straight, lesbian, gay, queer. There is no uniform sexual identity for transgender people because gender identity or sex do not determine sexual orientation. Transgender is often equated with being “gay” due to a common conflation of gender and sexuality. Transgender communities are also often linked with lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities due to similarities in the oppressions these groups face. Due to this overlap, these communities often work together on social justice activism.

What are some of the obstacles trans people face?
- Trans folks face obstacles on many fronts due to society’s strict enforcement of gender codes. Decisions on which restrooms, fitting rooms or locker rooms to use are often difficult for trans people who may feel forced to choose between “men’s” or “women’s” rooms and often face harassment or violence in both spaces.
- Similar to when someone “comes out” with their sexuality, transgender people often have to “come out” about the gender with which they identify. The coming out process can be traumatic; they may face rejection or lack of understanding from friends and family.
- Medical needs specific to transgender people may not be covered by employment benefits or health insurance.
- Employment discrimination.
- Trans people also face other forms of gender oppression which may include harassment or treatment with suspicion in public spaces (such as hospitals, schools, organized sports, etc.), and violence.
How can I be respectful of transgender people?

- It is important to avoid making assumptions about any person’s gender and/or sex (not just trans people). When talking to someone, if you are unsure, inquire about which pronoun they would prefer used when referring to them (he/his, she/her, some trans people choose gender neutral terms such as ze/hir, zir, or they).
- Invite trans people to talk to a group you are involved in or include trans issues in classes and activism.
- Try to avoid gender binaries—change restrooms in your area from “men’s” and “women’s” to “restroom.” Try to eliminate the M and F boxes on forms and applications that you use or create blank line that can be filled in. Look at other areas of your life that are split on gender lines and try to make them more inclusive.
- Educate yourself further on trans issues.

Where can I find more information?
Search out your local LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer) center and inquire about what they are working on regarding transgender issues in your area, ask them questions, and use their resources.

Resources:

Gender Education and Advocacy
www.gender.org

Gender Outlaw
by Kate Bornstein

Transgender Warriors
By Leslie Feinberg

Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary
Edited by Joan Nestle, Rikie Wilchins, and Clare Howell

GLBTQ Social Sciences
http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/transgender.html