

November 21 2025

## Transgender Awareness Week: Honouring Lives, Demanding Justice

Today, we gather in recognition of Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR), a day rooted in advocacy. Founded in 1999 by transgender advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith, TDOR began as a vigil honouring the life of Rita Hester, a Black transgender woman killed in 1998. What started as a space to mourn her loss has grown into an annual global commitment to remember the transgender lives taken by violence and to confront the systems that allow such harm to persist.

This week also marks Transgender Awareness Week (Nov 13-19), a reminder that commemoration must be paired with responsibility. This week invites us to take accountability: to reflect, challenge transphobia, and to honour and work beyond performative measures to provide support for transgender folks both on and off of our campus community.

True solidarity means ensuring equity, demanding institutional protections, and actively reshaping our community into one where all trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse students are welcomed without exception. We must work intentionally to build a campus where trans students are safe, affirmed, and equipped with the accommodations and resources they need to thrive.

We also would like to ground today's remembrance in the symbolism carried by the transgender pride flag, created in 1999 by Monica Helms, an openly transgender American woman. Including the traditional colours for baby boys and girls, Helms intentionally placed white in the middle to represent those who are intersex, transitioning, neutral, or undefined. The flag was designed in a way that no matter which way it is flown, it is always correct, signifying that there is no wrong way to be transgender.

In the context of Transgender Day of Remembrance, the flag becomes a memorial marker, carried at vigils around the world as a reminder of those whose lives have been taken and as a commitment to uplift, protect, and stand with trans communities who continue to face discrimination.

As we commemorate this day and look at how we can take action for our transgender community on campus, we would like to remind everyone that we will not tolerate any form of transphobia, discrimination, or harassment. Safety and inclusion are not optional; they are collective responsibilities. We call on everyone to share the responsibility to create a community that is safer, more inclusive, and grounded in support, not only in words, but in action. On behalf of the Students' Union, we would like to end with a quote from TDOR's founder, that reminds us of our commitment to stand and advocate for the safety and wellbeing of transgender students:

"Transgender Day of Remembrance seeks to highlight the losses we face due to anti-transgender bigotry and violence. I am no stranger to the need to fight for our rights, and the right to simply exist is first and foremost. With so many seeking to erase transgender people — sometimes in the most brutal ways possible — it is vitally important that those we lose are remembered, and that we continue to fight for justice."

– Gwendolyn Ann Smith

**Sources:**

[glaad.org/tdor](http://glaad.org/tdor)

[oursplatform.org/resource/transrespect-vs-transphobia-worldwide](http://oursplatform.org/resource/transrespect-vs-transphobia-worldwide)

[tgeu-research-project](http://tgeu-research-project)

[pointofpride.org/blog/the-history-of-the-transgender-flag](http://pointofpride.org/blog/the-history-of-the-transgender-flag)