

# UT freshman loses military scholarship because he is transgender

By Emily Hernandez

Map Pesqueira said he came to UT to pursue his dream of becoming a filmmaker and serving in the army. He was awarded a national three-year Reserve Officers' Training Corps scholarship to help fund his studies.

However, Pesqueira is a transgender man, and under President Donald Trump's new policy banning transgender people from serving in the military, effective last Friday, Pesqueira is not allowed to serve in the military. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Defense voided his scholarship, Pesqueira said. He may not be able to continue his education at UT because he cannot afford it.

According to the U.K.'s National Health Service, gender dysphoria is a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity. Trump's ban prohibits people diagnosed with gender dysphoria who refuse to identify as their birth gender or who have already begun transitioning medically from serving in the military.

"Since I've already had top surgery, hormone replacement therapy, gender marker and (a) name change, I can't go in under this policy," Pesqueira said. "I'd automatically be discriminated. I really do see (Trump's policy) as a waste of resources, money, time and personnel. It's made figuring out my future education so much harder."

Lieutenant colonel Matthew O'Neill, UT's army ROTC department chair and Pesqueira's military science professor, tried to salvage Pesqueira's scholarship by attempting to get Pesqueira "grandfathered" under the Pentagon's 2016 policy, which lifted the ban on transgender people serving openly in the military, Pesqueira said. O'Neill declined to comment for the story, saying *The Daily Texan* must refer questions to the Defense Department, which did not respond to a request for comment.

According to the Defense Department website, anyone serving or under contract to enter the military who was diagnosed with gender dysphoria before April 12, 2019 is grandfathered under the 2016 policy.

"Unfortunately, this policy is so new, waivers (and) exceptions haven't been determined," Pesqueira said. "(O'Neill) wasn't able to salvage it, but the fact that he tried — it's more than I can ask for."

Despite having his scholarship voided, Pesqueira said he still wants to pursue a military career after he graduates and hopes to attend graduate school so that he could become an older lieutenant if the policy is reversed.

Jazmine Hernandez, a chemical engineering freshman in the ROTC program, said she has been friends with Pesqueira since last semester and has watched him improve as a cadet while training together.

"I know both his degree and the military is his passion," Hernandez said. "Knowing ... he's on the edge of losing those two things hurts me as his friend."

Pesqueira created a GoFundMe page the night he lost his scholarship with a goal of \$20,000 to pay for his sophomore year education. It has raised \$845 as of this writing. Pesqueira, who is from San Antonio, said he plans to meet with a local news anchor and U.S. Reps. Joaquin Castro, D-San Antonio, and Lloyd Doggett, D-Austin, to evaluate his educational and legal options.

“Due to privacy concerns, the University does not comment on specific student cases,” University spokesperson J.B. Bird said in an email. “Since every student’s situation is unique, we offer many avenues for students who undergo sudden changes that affect their access to a UT education. These include Student Emergency Services and the Graduation Help Desk, which both work closely with the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid.”

Pesqueira said he wants people to know how this policy is affecting people, and said it cannot be ignored by the general public.

“My life has definitely taken a negative turn because of this,” Pesqueira said. “I’m trying to put it back on a clear track, but that may or may not happen. As much as it is a headline, ... almost every aspect of (people’s) lives can be affected by this (policy).”