

Tips for Creating a Trans-inclusive Classroom Environment

INFORM STUDENTS about WMU's [Preferred Name Policy](#). Explain that they can enter a preferred name in GoWMU to replace their legal name on most WMU documents.

COLLECT INFORMATION from all students about names and pronouns they use. If students fill out cards with major, etc., have them all add preferred name and pronouns. Model how to share your name and pronouns with your own introduction: "My name is Toby Jones, please call me Professor Jones, and my pronouns are she/her/hers."

USE LAST NAMES if necessary to take attendance verbally before you know students' preferred names and pronouns. Avoid titles such as "Mr.," "Mrs.," and "Ms."

ADOPT INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE, avoiding binaries such as "men and women" and "ladies and gentlemen."

CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS. Gender identity and pronouns are not always obvious. When in doubt, ask.

CORRECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS when someone is misgendered (called by incorrect pronouns). Be kind about misunderstandings. What seems like a learning opportunity for some students may be disturbing for trans students. Minimize hurtful and derogatory speech in your classroom.

BE RESPECTFUL AND NONJUDGMENTAL if students share information with you about their trans identities. Focus on providing educational support. Resist sharing opinions and advice that don't pertain to their education.

ADDRESS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT of trans (or any other) students when it arises. Refer ongoing behavior to the [Office of Student Conduct](#) and gender-related harassment to the [Office of Institutional Equity](#).

RECOGNIZE TRANS DIVERSITY. Not all trans students openly share their experience or embrace the label "trans." Some deliberately reject the categories male and female. Transitioning, fluid or questioning people may identify differently over time and in different contexts. Transitions may occur during or between semesters. Some trans students will disclose to a professor but may not disclose to their peers. When in doubt about a student's public identity, ask privately.

DON'T ASSUME transgender people are mentally unstable due to gender identity or expression. Do make [Student Concern](#) referrals if you observe signs of emotional or psychological distress.

TAKE STEPS to make online learning inclusive. Discussion on ELearning automatically displays preferred name, but Chat does not. Contact WMU's [Online Education](#) for guidance.

This document seeks to familiarize WMU faculty and staff with ways to provide inclusive education to trans and gender nonconforming students. The suggestions reflect the White House guidance ([Dear Colleague Letter](#), May 13, 2016) and [university non-discrimination policy](#) as well as input from LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff.

You can make a difference

Small efforts go a long way toward conveying to the entire WMU community that trans and gender nonconforming students are welcome here. Simple steps to be more inclusive in your language and classroom procedures will improve the campus climate for all.

Terminology

Trans is a *gender identity* based on self-definition, not biological or physical markers. A variety of identities fit under the designation of trans, and you may want to [read up on transgender terminology](#) to be conversant with current terms, such as transgender, transmasculine, transfeminine, cisgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, and gender creative. Note, for example, that many in the trans community avoid past-to-present distinctions (such as male to female, or MTF), references to surgery (pre-op transsexual), and terms with bio or biological in them (“biological sex” or “bio woman”).

Pronouns

Although there are some alternative pronouns in use by trans people and their allies, most adopt she/her/hers or he/him/his. Some people use gender neutral pronouns, such as they/them/theirs. Using plural pronouns to reference an individual takes some practice! Keep in mind that it shows respect when you make an effort to acknowledge someone’s pronouns, even when you make mistakes or feel uncomfortable doing so.

Basic principles for the classroom (based on Title IX federal guidance)

- treat students consistent with their current gender identity, even if their education records or identification documents indicate a different sex
- use pronouns and names consistent with a transgender student’s gender identity
- take reasonable steps to protect students’ privacy related to their transgender status, including their legal name or sex assigned at birth

Resources

[Office of LGBT Student Services](#)

- offers support, education, and advocacy on LGBT issues
- provides 3-hour Safe on Campus training for WMU faculty, staff, and students as well as shorter trainings for departments and groups available on request
- organizes LGBT student panels to speak to classes, organizations, and other groups

[Office of Institutional Equity](#)

- investigates violations of Title IX pertaining to transgender discrimination, harassment and violence as well as other gender-related incidents
- offers the option of [online reporting](#), which may be anonymous

[Office of the Registrar](#)

- oversees WMU’s Preferred Name Policy

[Office of Student Affairs](#)

- provides students with professional support in response to [Student Concern](#) referrals
- guides faculty and staff in recognizing signs of student distress

[Office of Student Conduct](#)

- addresses violations of the Student Code of Conduct

WMU faculty, students, and the Office of LGBT Student Services collaborated to create this tip sheet in summer 2016. Questions/concerns? Contact lbgt-director@wmich.edu.