

Faculty, staff, and teaching assistants are all responsible for creating welcoming and inclusive environments in the classroom.

In recent years, cultural, political and legal resistance to the oppression of transgender people has resulted in greater visibility of the issues facing this population and growing recognition of gender identity and expression discrimination. As these issues gain greater attention, and as obstacles to trans people's participation in education and employment are addressed, we will likely continue to have more trans people in our classes.

These tips may be helpful in ensuring that your classroom is a welcoming place for UW's trans and gender non-conforming students, and ensuring that unintentional exclusionary practices are reduced and eliminated, allowing students to perform at their full potential in class. This reaffirms our institution's commitment to not discriminate based on gender identity and expression.

Classroom Guidelines and Community Standards

Set a tone in the classroom of respect and critical inquiry. At the beginning of each semester, when establishing the guidelines for class, include something like: "It is important that this classroom be a respectful environment where everyone can participate comfortably. One part of this is that everyone should be referred to by their chosen name, the correct pronunciation of their name, and their chosen pronoun (like she, ze, he, or they)."

Doing this sets a tone for challenging assumptions about people's bodies, their identities and the ways they present themselves in terms of gender, and also race, ethnicity, class, dis/ability, sexual orientation, and country of origin. This can also encourage critical engagement with the authors and subjects of texts and ideas in our classes.

Roll Call

Avoid calling the roll or otherwise reading the roster aloud until you have given students a chance to state what they prefer to be called, in case the roster represents a prior name.

Names & Pronouns

Allow students to choose what name and pronoun they use. Avoid making assumptions based on what is on the class roster or the student's appearance. A great way to accomplish this is to pass around a seating chart sign-in sheet and ask them to indicate these two items in writing, and then use them when you call on students or refer to them in class.

Modeling Behavior

When facilitating a group discussion, ask people to identify their pronouns when they go around and do introductions. This will allow everyone in the room the chance to self-identify and to get each other's pronouns right the first time. It will also reduce the burden on anyone whose pronoun is often misidentified and may help them access the discussion more easily because they do not have to fear an embarrassing mistake made by another student or the instructor. Model this by saying, "In our introductions, please state your name and pronouns. I'll start: my name is Simon and I use he and him pronouns."

Previous Names

If a student has an previous name and/or pronoun that you are aware of because you knew them before they changed it, or because it is on the roster, do not use it or reveal it to others. Well-meaning comments like "I knew Gina when she was Bill," even if meant to be supportive, reveal what might feel like personal information to the student, and unnecessarily draw attention to their trans identity.

Address Mistakes

If you make a mistake about someone's pronoun, correct yourself. Going on as if it did not happen is actually less respectful than making the correction. This also saves the person who was misidentified from having to correct an incorrect pronoun before it is planted in the minds of classmates or anyone else who heard the mistake. As teachers, especially, it is essential that you model respectful behavior and keep in mind that students pay especially close attention to the ways we interact with our students in the classroom.

Correct Others

Whether in office hours, when speaking with students in groups, or when speaking with faculty and staff, when someone else makes a pronoun mistake, correct them. It is polite to provide a correction, whether or not the person whose pronoun was misused is present. Allowing the mistake to go uncorrected ensures future uncomfortable interactions for the person who is being misidentified. For example, if a colleague uses the incorrect pronoun for a student, simply respond saying "I believe Gina uses she and her pronouns."

Respect Boundaries

Avoid asking personal questions of trans people that you would not ask of others. Because of the sensationalist media coverage of trans people's lives, there is often an assumption that personal questions are appropriate. Never ask about a trans person's body or medical care, their old name, why or how they know they are trans, their sexual orientation or practices, their family's reaction to their gender identity, or any other questions that are irrelevant to your relationship with them unless they invite you to do so or voluntarily share the information.

Pronouns

If you aren't sure of a person's pronoun (and there isn't someone around to let you know), ask, or refer to them by their name only—making a pronoun assumption is the worst option. One way to be respectful is to share your own first. "I use the pronouns he/him/his. I want to make sure I address you correctly. What pronouns do you use?" Another way is to ask, "How would you like to be addressed?" This may be challenging at first, but a person who often experiences being addressed incorrectly may see it as a sign of respect and that you are interested in getting it right.

Taking it Further

If you want to take your awareness of these issues further, here are some additional ideas to consider.

Educate yourself about trans history, trans law, and trans resistance. There are wonderful resources on the internet, in addition to many articles and books.

Local organizations that serve trans and gender-variant communities include:

- UW-Madison LGBT Campus Center
www.lgbt.wisc.edu
- OutReach
www.lgbtoutreach.org (Madison)
- Milwaukee LGBT Community Center
www.mkelgbt.org
- Trans Youth Support Network
www.transyouthsupportnetwork.blogspot.com (Minnesota)
- Transformative Justice Law Project
www.tjlp.org (Chicago)

Other organizations include:

- Transgender Law and Policy Institute
www.transgenderlaw.org
- National Center for Transgender Equality
www.transequality.org
- The Transgender Law Center
www.transgenderlawcenter.org



- The Sylvia Rivera Law Project
www.srlp.org
- The TGI Justice Project
www.tgijp.org

Include trans issues on your syllabus and help your students learn how to talk about issues of gender respectfully and understand their importance. Important trans struggles, as well as those of intersex and other gender-variant communities, can be found in housing, health care, employment, criminal justice/policing, education, public benefits, and legal protection. Also, trans studies is relevant to cultural studies, literature, history, sociology, medicine, law, science, and economics, and has a place in any discipline. Including these issues offers students an introduction to scholarship that is usually left out of academic fields.

Think about how gender norms, or ideas about what women and men should be like, might be being enforced in your classroom or in other parts of your life. What does it mean to stand up against the rules of gender, both in the classroom and in other areas of our lives? How might we be enforcing gender norms on our selves or our loved ones with well-meaning advice or guidance?

Exploring these questions can deepen our commitment to gender self-determination for all people and to creating learning environments that invite gender non-conforming students and teachers to fully participate.

Frequently Used Terminology

Trans people and gender-variant communities often use these terms to talk about self-identity. Because individual people and communities use identity terms in different ways, it is important to gain further understanding of the terms than we have provided here.

Trans – short for transgender or transsexual; is also sometimes used as an umbrella term for those who identify anywhere along the gender-variant spectrum

MTF – male-to-female trans identity marker

FTM – female-to-male trans identity marker

Genderqueer – identity marker for those who consider their gender outside the binary gender system

Gender-variant – umbrella term for all of the above non-normative gender identity markers

Using language that reflects respect for students' self-identity – using their chosen name and pronoun, not assuming the gender identity of students, pronouncing names correctly, etc. – communicates that you are invested in creating and maintaining a classroom welcoming to all students.

*Original text by Dean Spade, Assistant Professor of Law, Seattle University School of Law.
Edited by Avi Cummings, Graduate Student, UW Madison Dept. of History, and Simon Fisher, Graduate Student,
Dept. of History; LGBT Campus Center, UW-Madison.*

