

Making Class Welcoming for Trans and Gender Non-Binary Students

Faculty and staff 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 Carleton's trans and gender non-binary 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.

Names & Pronouns

Allow students to choose what name 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 include name and pronouns on your student interest sheet or have students introduce themselves with their chosen name and pronouns on the first day of classes. Make sure that you then use their chosen name and pronouns when you call on them or refer to them when speaking to others.

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 lists a prior name.

Roster

It is important to print a photo roster because this will give you access to any chosen name that a student uses at Carleton.

Previous Names

If a student has a 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. This can draw unnecessary attention to their trans identity and be harmful to trans members of our community.

Pronouns

If you aren't sure of a person's pronoun, ask, or refer to them by their name only—do not make an assumption. 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.

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 they/them pronouns." It might also be helpful in remembering people's pronouns by asking that they continue to say their names and pronouns throughout the first week until everyone in the class becomes familiar with the specific pronouns that everyone uses.

Address Mistakes

If you make a mistake about someone's pronoun, correct yourself. Going on as if it did not happen is 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 anyone who heard you. As professors, especially, it is essential that you model respectful behavior and keep in mind that students pay 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. 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. Never ask about a trans person’s body or medical care, their prior 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. It is also important to not ask transgender or gender non-binary people to speak for the entire community when discussing issues of identity in class.

Classroom Guidelines and Community Standards

Set a tone in the classroom of respect and critical inquiry. At the beginning of each term, 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)” in your course syllabus. Doing this sets a tone for challenging assumptions about peoples 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.

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 can be found in housing, health care, employment, criminal justice/policing, education, public benefits, and legal protection.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
Ze	Zim	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Xe	Xem	Xyr	Xyrs	Xemself
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
Sie/zie	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Zie	Zir	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Ey	Em	Eir	Eirs	Eirself
Per	Per	Pers	Pers	Perself
He	Him	His	His	Himself

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:

- Gender & Sexuality Center: go.carleton.edu/gsc
- OutFront MN: www.outfront.org
- Trans Youth Support Network: www.transyouthsupportnetwork.org
- Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals: www.lgbtcampus.org
- Campus Pride: www.campuspride.org
- MN GLBTQA Campus Alliance www.mncampusalliance.org

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

Frequently Used Terminology

Trans people and trans 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.

- **Cisgender/Cissexual:** someone who feels comfortable with the gender identity and/or gender expression expectations assigned to them based on their physical sex
- **Gender Expression:** how one presents oneself and one’s gender to the world. This may or may not coincide with or indicate one’s gender identity
- **Genderqueer/Gender Non-Binary:** an individual whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders
- **Transgender:** a person who identifies as a gender other than that expected based on sex assigned at birth.