

What should I know about pronouns?

A TRAINING FOR
FACULTY AND
STAFF



OFFICE OF
EQUITY & INCLUSION

Introduction:

Why this training? Why now?



We're committed to LGBTQIA+ communities

The diversity of UMBC's community and our commitment to inclusive excellence are among our greatest strengths. We are committed to continuing to improve and simplify pathways for alerting the University of chosen names and pronouns that reflect this commitment to inclusive and affirming language.

While we recognize that achieving inclusion is an ongoing process, we will continue to strive to make our campus a safe and welcoming environment for everyone, including transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people and other members of the LGBTQIA+ communities.

Variety in pronoun use is increasingly common

1 in 4 LGBTQ youth use pronouns or pronoun combinations that fall outside of the binary construction of gender. Although 75% of youth use either he/him or she/her exclusively, 25% of LGBTQ youth use they/them exclusively, a combination of he/him, she/her, or they/them, or neopronouns such as ze/zir or fae/faer. [1]

Gen Z is by far the most likely to say that when a form or online profile asks about a person's gender it should include options other than "man" and "woman." About six in ten Gen Zers (59%) say forms or online profiles should include additional gender options. [2]

Fifty-six percent of 13-to-20-year-olds said that they knew someone who went by non-binary pronouns such as "they," "them," or "ze," compared to 43 percent of people aged 28 to 34 years old. [3]

Lives depend on it

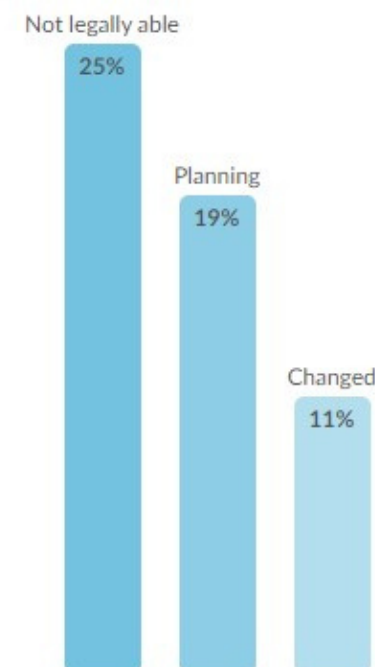
For each context in which trans youth (ages 15-21) can go by their chosen name, there was a 29 percent decrease in suicidal thoughts and a 56 percent decrease in suicidal behavior [4]

13% of youth (ages 13-24) who reported high levels of support from family, friends, **or a special person** reported attempting suicide in the past year compared to 22% of those with lower levels of support (emphasis added) [5]

Transgender and nonbinary youth (ages 13-24) who report having their pronouns respected by all or most of the people in their lives attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected. [6]

Affirming transgender and nonbinary youth by respecting their pronouns and allowing them to change legal documents is associated with lower rates of attempting suicide. [7]

Transgender & nonbinary youth who attempted suicide in the past year, comparison across ability to change legal documents:



Youth who attempted suicide in the past year, receiving low or moderate support or high support from the following individuals:



Why now?

In the summer of 2020, UMBC launched a brand-new, streamlined process for students to update their names and pronouns. Students can now log onto myUMBC and with one single process, update their name, pronouns, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ identity.

This new process allows students to update their information whenever they choose without needing to present legal documentation to the University.

Starting with the 2021-22 application cycle, this information is provided by students on the Common Application when they apply to UMBC.

Information provided by this process will be made available to faculty and staff and will be reflected across University systems, like myUMBC and PeopleSoft. Pronouns are not yet reflected in Blackboard, but we are optimistic that this will be remedied with Blackboard's Fall 2021 updates.

For more information see: <https://oei.umbc.edu/faculty-and-staff-self-identifier-resources/>

Training Goals



LEARN ABOUT PRONOUN POLICIES

Understand which policies apply to pronoun usage at UMBC



LEARN ABOUT PRONOUNS

Understand what pronouns are used, why they are important and how to correctly use non-binary and neo pronouns



AVOID PRONOUN PITFALLS

Learn to avoid the most common mistakes people make when getting used to asking for and implementing pronouns



GET COMFORTABLE WITH MESSING UP

Gain confidence to try and fail at getting new pronouns right, and learn what to do when you get them wrong

Gender: What to Know

- The concept of gender is evolving, and therefore so are gender identities
- No matter one's gender identity, gender can be very important to a sense of self
- You cannot visually tell what someone's gender is -- don't assume!
- This means that you also cannot visually tell if someone is transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, gender-variant, etc.

Pronouns: What to Know

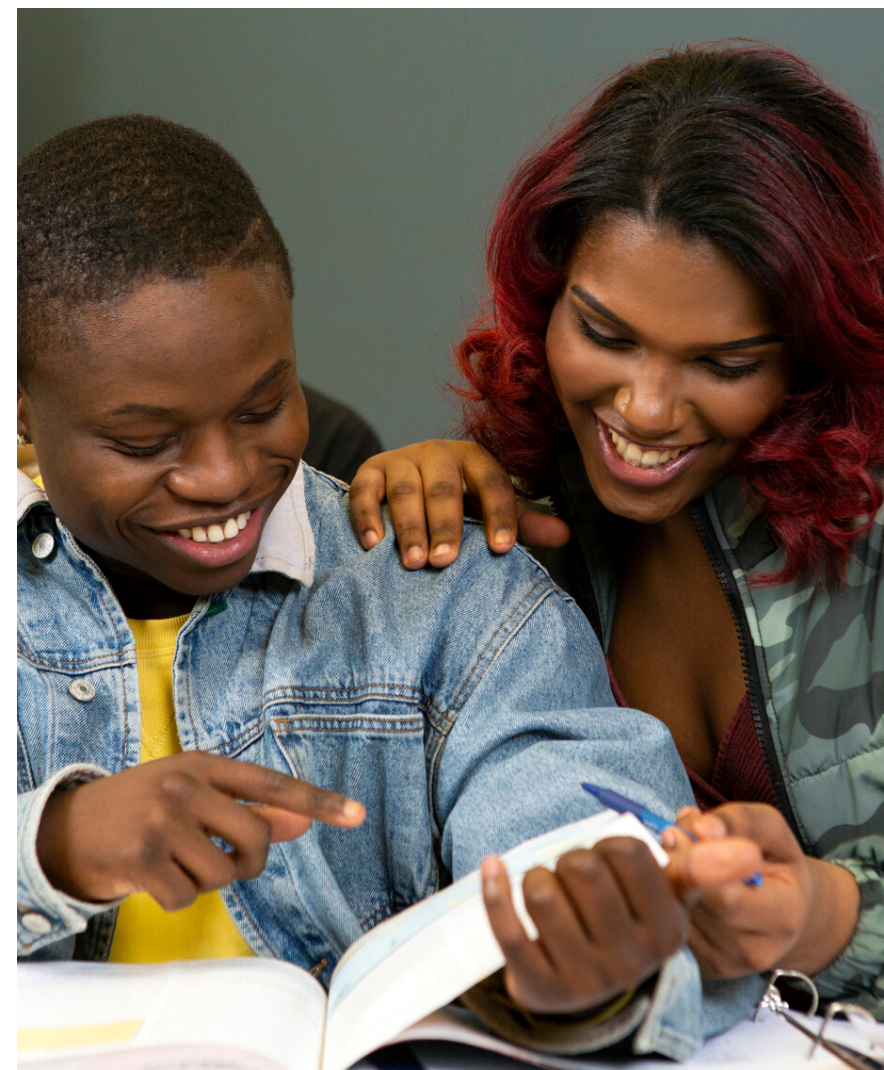
- Pronouns are one of the ways we portray our identities. When someone asks you to use their pronouns, they are asking for you to respect their identity
- When someone refers to another person using the wrong pronouns, especially on purpose, that can lead to that person feeling disrespected and can lead to dysphoria (extreme discomfort or distress), exclusion and alienation
- Some people use pronouns outside of the "she/her" and "he/him" binary
- Someone's name and pronouns may change after you have already been introduced to the person or may change multiple times
- Some people use more than one set of pronouns for themselves

What policies apply gender identity and pronoun usage?

Title IX

Title IX is a civil rights law that protects against discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities

Title IX also protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression



The Fairness for All Marylanders Act prohibits discrimination in employment, labor, housing, and public accommodation based on gender identity and sexual orientation

The USM Policy on Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression

Pronoun tips and tricks

How to do better at
getting new pronouns
right



When you slip up, correct yourself briefly

And keep going! A quick correction is the best way to address the wrong pronoun without drawing too much attention to it.



01

When someone corrects you, say "thank you"

And move on quickly.

"When I was talking to her earlier --"

"You mean them"

"Yes, thank you. When I was talking to them earlier..."

02



Interrupt with a correction



Every time! Getting in the habit of interrupting people with a quick correction is good practice, lifts some of the burden from trans people, and it makes it easier to catch yourself. Also, it builds our resilience for getting corrected.

Get them wrong

IT'S OK TO MESS UP!

What's not okay is trying continuing to choose to ignore corrections and not taking initiative to try to get it right next time.

Try practicing with a friend or colleague. A good rule is to practice getting it right three (3) times for every time you get it wrong.

04

Avoid apologizing profusely

This burdens the person with your feelings about their name and pronouns and relies on them to alleviate your guilt.

05

Instead try:

APOLOGIZING ONCE, GENUINELY

And working to get it right in the future. One apology can be okay, profusely apologizing is not!

TALK TO A FRIEND

If you are struggling to remember someone's name or pronoun, that's ok! Just don't make it that person's issue. Find a friend to talk to about it.

SAY THANK YOU

Instead of saying "sorry" say "thank you for sharing your authentic self with me!"

Pronoun Tips and Tricks

- When in doubt - avoid using a pronoun!
 - You can refer to a person by their name instead of using a pronoun
 - Follow this up by asking them what pronouns they use when you can
- You can refer to a person as “that person,” or “that student”
 - Ex: “That person has a really cool backpack on today”
- You can refer to a person using a physical description or a location
 - “The student in the red shirt”
 - “The person with the short hair”
 - “The student in the front row”
 - “The person with the green hat”
 - “My colleague in the pink dress”
 - “The person by the back door”

Pronoun Pitfalls to Avoid

Referring to pronouns such as “they/them/theirs” or “ze/hir/hirs” as “gender-neutral pronouns.”

While some trans people identify as gender-neutral, many see themselves as gendered, but as gender nonconforming. Better language is “non-binary pronouns.”

Describing the name or pronouns someone uses as “preferred.”

The name and pronouns that a person uses are their name and pronouns and the only name and pronouns that should be used for them. However, it's best that this word is avoided when discussing pronouns. Preferences tend to indicate that one is choosing something, whereas identity is not a choice. "What are your pronouns?" is the appropriate question to ask others, and, "My pronouns are..." is the safest way to share your own.

Saying “male pronouns” and “female pronouns.”

Pronouns are not necessarily tied to someone's gender identity
Some trans people use “he/him/his” or “she/her/her,” but do not identify as male or female, respectively.

What to do next

01



PRACTICE ONLINE

Try using any of the following resources:

[UMBC Pronoun Practice Worksheet](#)
[Game: Minus 18 Pronouns](#)
[Practice With Pronouns](#)

02



CHECK OUT THE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE STYLEGUIDE

Practice using gender-inclusive alternatives to binary assumptions, and replace words with masculine markers (or feminine) with non-gender specific language

03



ASK ABOUT PRONOUNS

The easiest way to know how to refer to someone is to ask how they refer to themselves, including what pronouns they use

Resources

FOR MORE ABOUT SEX AND GENDER

- [My Gender Journey](#)
- [Language of Gender](#)
- [Sex? Sexual Orientation? Gender Identity? Gender Expression?](#)
- [The Gender Spectrum](#)
- [Understanding Gender](#)

FOR MORE ON THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSION

- [The 2017 National School Climate Survey](#)
- [Importance of acknowledging LGBTQ+ Identities](#)

FOR MORE ON PRONOUN USE

- [HCI Gender Guidelines](#)

Sources

FROM SLIDE 3: PRONOUN USE

[1] [Research Brief: Pronouns Usage Among LGBTQ Youth](#)

[2] [What We Know About Gen Z So Far](#)

[3] [Teens These Days Are Queer](#)

FROM SLIDE 4: LIVES DEPEND ON IT

[4] [Chosen Names Are Vital to Transgender Youth, Per Study](#)

[5], [6] [National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2020](#)

[7] [The Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021](#)

[Graphs from Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2020 \(left\) and 2021 \(right\)](#)

PRONOUN TIPS ADAPTED FROM

[tai.draws: "How to do better at getting new pronons right"](#)

Contact Us



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