

How to be a Trans* Ally in the Classroom

What does Transgender mean?

- A person whose gender differs from the sex they were assigned at birth, this includes trans men, trans women and people who do not fit into this gender binary
- There is no way to look transgender - trans people can look and dress however they want and it does not make them any less trans
- Transgender is not the same as intersex (intersex refers to a person whose sex characteristics do not align with the male-female binary, **however** intersex people can nevertheless be trans)
- It is important to note that gender is not the same as sexuality - gender is about who you are while sexuality is about who you want to be with, people of all sexualities can be transgender
- It is not new - people that we would today describe as transgender have existed across time and space and often have/had important roles in their cultures
- It is not a mental condition - being transgender is a natural part of the human experience and it is not caused by anything, nor should it be treated as an illness
- Trans people have such a wide range of experience that it is difficult to generalise the trans experience, but the best advice is to take people at their word when they are telling you about how you can help them feel welcomed in your Academic space and ensure that they can achieve their best.

Just ask (about pronouns)

- ask at the beginning of term - introduce yourself with your name and pronouns, and ask students to introduce themselves with their name and pronouns.
- You could do this with a survey so you know how they would like to be addressed, and who they are comfortable using this name and pronouns in front of. For example, a student may feel comfortable with you using the name and pronouns they have indicated in private emails, but not in class around other students, or in front of other students but not in front of teaching staff.
- In a zoom class, you can put your own pronouns in your zoom name, and invite students to do the same if they wish.
- Remember that the name and pronouns a student wants you to use may not match what is in the system - for example if a student is listed with the title Mr on blackboard or on the register, this does not necessarily mean that they use he/him pronouns.

- You can also remind students that they can change their name and title in their blackboard settings if it does not match the name and title that they use.
- To correctly refer to your students, practice using pronouns, especially if they are pronouns that you may be unused to using
- If you make a mistake, say sorry, correct yourself and move on

Appropriate language

- Transphobic words
 - transgender is an adjective, it is inappropriate to say “a transgender” or “transgendered”
 - Transsexual is an outdated term and should not be used
 - tr*nny, transvestite etc. are slurs and should never be used
- Avoid gendered language where possible, for example: instead of saying ‘good afternoon ladies and gentlemen’, you can just say ‘good afternoon everyone’
- Inappropriate questions
 - Trans people do not owe you more intimate details about their life than cis (non-trans people) - before asking a trans person a question about their experience, ask yourself if you would ask a cis person the same question
 - Questions about trans peoples’ bodies or sex lives are inappropriate - you would not ask a cis person about this
 - Never ask a trans person their “real name” - the name they give you is their real name and if you are referring to the name given to them at birth, that is usually a very private matter for trans people

Coming out - don't out your students

- Coming out is when a person tells you their sexual orientation/ gender identity/ a change in name or pronouns
- Outing someone means that you tell someone else about this person's name/pronouns/gender/sexuality etc. without permission
 - There may be a situation where students come out to teaching staff to let them know their name if it is different from their legal name - honour their wishes and use their chosen name and do not out them in front of other teaching staff or students
 - If someone comes out to you, they trust you with personal information - honour that trust and do not out them to other people
 - If you are unsure, clarify with them if they are comfortable with you discussing this/ using this name/pronouns etc in front of others

Final Notes

- Finally, if you make a mistake, just briefly apologise, correct yourself and move on. Profusely over apologising is just awkward for everyone.
- As a general rule, each trans person's sense of their gender is somewhat individualised, with each discrete person having their own sense of how they present, understand, and communicate their gender, and what might be true for one trans person might not be true for another. Until you're more familiar with them, it's always better safe than sorry.

Show your support in the classroom

- Of course, accommodating discrete trans people you're aware of is important, however the best time to start making your curriculum more trans-inclusive is now. Consider where your subject makes cisnormative assumptions; can you work around it, or can you deepen everyone's understanding of the subject matter by highlighting the things it assumes as given?
- Just because something is contrary to this guide doesn't make it necessarily gauche, but it can be a call to look at it and consider how you can dissect this in lectures to help all students, not just those who are trans, more deeply understand the subject matter.

Further resources

- Implementing the above in the classroom will take a small effort on your part, but can go a long way towards making students feel comfortable in class, as well as setting a good example for students to be mindful of these things.
- Please see our linktree for further resources on this subject!
https://linktr.ee/further_resources