



"Inclusion of Transgender and Nonbinary Employees in the Workplace: A Critical Conversation" – Webinar Chat

May 14, 2024

1. There have been various opinions about identifying preferred pronouns in email signature lines and on Zoom. What advice would you offer?

It's important to have these options for those who are comfortable sharing pronouns publicly. You don't want to mandate that employees put their pronouns in their email signatures, on Zoom, or on their nametags. However, showing an awareness of gender and pronouns is important to creating inclusion and a sense of belonging. Be careful not to be performative about it (e.g., including your pronouns in your email signature but not paying attention to or honoring the pronouns of your colleagues).

2. Could you describe the difference between agender and genderless?

"Agender" typically refers to someone who identifies as having no gender or as neutral in terms of gender identity. They may feel disconnected from the concept of gender altogether or may not identify with any specific gender category.

"Genderless," on the other hand, can also refer to someone who doesn't identify with any gender, but it can sometimes imply an absence of gender characteristics entirely, rather than just a lack of identification with traditional gender categories. It might suggest a state of being devoid of gender-related attributes or associations.

In essence, both terms describe individuals who don't align with any specific gender identity, but nuances in interpretation can lead to slightly different connotations. It's always best to ask someone how they personally define their identity if you're unsure. It's as easy as asking, "When you have time and if you're willing to share, I'd love to know more about how you define your identity and what it means to you."

3. From an HR perspective where we have to clarify between legal name or pronouns, what terms should we use?

On our campus, we use legal name. Birth name is not appropriate because many people have changed their name legally. We also have an opportunity for people to share their chosen name, which may differ from their legal name and should still be recognized/honored. When you capture a legal name, provide employees with a list of all of the places where this name must be used. This transparency and context will help provide a greater sense of inclusion.

We do have a space for pronouns. We have three options (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs) and an option to write in, if different. The tricky part comes in when the systems don't necessarily "talk" with each other.

Other terms that you may hear from students or staff related to names include:



- Deadname: Some transgender and nonbinary people use this term to refer to the name that they previously used and do not identify with.
- Name in use: This refers to a name that may not be someone's legal name but one that they use instead (similar to chosen name)

4. When updating policy, procedures and forms to ask for chosen first name (vs. preferred first name), what is the best practice terminology?

Where you need to ask for a legal name, you ask for a legal name. Where you can ask for a chosen name, you ask for a chosen name (rather than preferred name or nickname or alternate name). It is also vital to be transparent and explain why this information is captured, especially in hiring and background checks. Assuring potential employees that this information will only be seen by HR and that hiring authorities will not have access to that information will help provide an additional level of personal safety.

It's also important to work with our students, primarily to determine who needs to see their legal name (as opposed to their chosen name) on records. For example, if students are not out to their parents, who may have access to their financial records, you need to figure out a way that when the parents log in, they see the student's legal name reflected. But when the student logs in, the student should see their chosen name reflected.

5. When we hire new staff and faculty, what is the best way to ask for pronouns?

Create a space when filling out paperwork to ask for pronouns. "What are your pronouns?" Provide three options (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs) and then an option to write in if different. Avoid using the term "other" for any pronouns outside of those three options. Our suggestion would be phrase it as, "my pronouns are not listed" and allow an open text box.

6. How do we encourage employees that they do not need to cover/mask?

The institution must do the work in order for employees to feel like they don't need to cover or mask. This all starts before an employee applies to your institution! Things like setting appropriate policies and practices; during interviews, introducing yourselves with your pronouns; honoring others' pronouns; and promoting gender-inclusive facilities will all help create an environment where people will feel comfortable being out. Gender inclusion needs to happen at all levels of the institution. It is the responsibility of HR and campus leadership to support the inclusion of transgender and nonbinary education, policies and practices throughout the institution.

7. What is your opinion on the term "AGAB" for trying to ascertain data for government reporting? Do you feel it is offensive or more explanatory when trying to ascertain this data?

"Assigned gender at birth" (AGAB) can be offensive for two reasons: 1) it continues to confuse sex assigned at birth and gender, which are two very different things (in higher education, we've confused the two forever) and 2) people can change their sex marker. If you're asking for assigned sex at birth, it



could be different than someone's assigned legal sex, which is really what the government is going to want you to report on.

8. Recommendations for inclusion within a remote/work-from-home work culture?

Allow for pronouns to be shared with a person's name on virtual platforms, like WebEx, Zoom, etc. Like in-person meetings, allow people to share pronouns in their introductions if they are comfortable doing so. In addition, be sure to pay attention to pronouns listed in email signatures and respect and use what people have shared.

Acknowledge that some people may find the virtual space safer to be more open with their gender expression than they are in the office. Do not bring unnecessary attention or ask detailed questions if this happens. If there is an expected dress code, be sure the dress code is gender inclusive and allows people to follow the guidelines within their own gender identity.

Encourage allyship and education. If someone misgenders a colleague, even when that person's pronouns are listed publicly, correct them (especially if it happens publicly). There are many ways to do this in a respectful way.

9. I have focused on "For reporting reasons, how should we represent you on forms and statistics?" in recent HR writing. Does this work well?

Context really matters. Provide context by saying, "Due to federal reporting requirements, we must capture legal sex." Then outline the places this information will be shared. The next step is that we have to be clear about asking for sex and gender. They are two different things. The federal government has confused the two, but they are starting to change their forms and reporting requirements.

10. Some individuals I encounter struggle to use accurate pronouns, even though they care to do right and are trying. Do you have a resource for how to help people get it right? Telling them to practice and use gender-inclusive language across the board doesn't seem to be helping enough.

There are two great "practice with pronouns" web-based tools we have found:

- https://www.practicewithpronouns.com/#/?_k=yy4pxu
- <https://www.minus18.org.au/pronouns/>

We don't have an affiliation with either resource, but they are great tools. We also recommend that you practice with a colleague. For example, Jon's pronouns are they/them. If you know you mess up Jon's pronouns a lot, ask a colleague to practice with you before you go to meet with Jon. Say it out loud. "I need their help." "They've been a great resource." "Jon uses they/them pronouns." We learn through practice.



11. We often use titles for more formal correspondence. How can you address a letter or email to someone who you have not met yet? Mr./Ms./Mx./Dr.?

If the person is a Dr., then that is the honorific that should be used. If you are unsure, our first recommendation would be to use their name. A final option would be to use Mx. (pronounced mix) as a gender-inclusive honorific that can be used instead of Mr. or Ms.

12. How to acknowledge important dates without being performative?

There's a difference:

1. An organization flying the Pride flag throughout National Pride month, which is June, while simultaneously upholding anti-transgender and nonbinary policies and practices or only acknowledging the LGBTQIA+ members of your campus community during that one month. This results in the individuals feeling excluded from the campus culture for the other 11 months.
2. An organization that shares name/pronouns on email signatures and staff name tags, shares the locations of gender-inclusive bathrooms with all new employees, talks about policies and practices supporting transgender employees during new hire orientation, swiftly addresses acts of misgendering, and then flies the Pride flag during June.

To not be seen as performative, the work must be intentionally embedded throughout the organization, and acknowledging the commitment to ongoing allyship and education throughout the year is crucial.

If you'd like to know more, please consider inviting Aaric and Jon to your campus. They can be reached at guerr1am@gmail.com and humis1jp@cmich.edu.