

TRANS IN THE CLASSROOM

INSTRUCTOR EMAIL SERIES

In Spring 2020, SBCC conducted a Trans Student Experience survey and follow-up interviews. This is an eight part email series, based on student feedback, covering ways to improve classroom experiences for people of all genders.

PART I: NAMES

Trans and nonbinary students appreciate when instructors:

- Make every effort to refer to trans students by their chosen name,
- Give students an option to provide a different name than what is listed on a class roster,
- Support students who change their preferred name during the course of a semester, and
- Are knowledgeable about [SBCC Name Change Information](#).

PART II: PRONOUNS - The Basics

Trans and nonbinary students appreciate when instructors:

- Give students an opportunity to provide pronouns (but don't necessarily require it),
- Make every effort to refer to people using their chosen pronouns,
- Don't assume anyone's pronouns based on name, appearance, etc., and
- Simply correct and move on if the wrong pronouns are used by mistake.

For a slightly more in-depth discussion of pronouns, see the UCSB Resource Center for Gender and Sexual Diversity's [Pronouns 101 page](#).

PART III: PRONOUNS - How to Set Pronouns in Canvas

Step 1: Click "Account" on the left side of your screen

Step 2: Click "Settings"

Step 3: Click "Edit Settings" on the right side of your screen

Step 4: Select your pronouns on the drop-down list next to "Pronouns"

Step 5: Click "Update Settings"

Also see [this brief tutorial video](#) that covers the same steps.

Note: Selecting pronouns is not currently supported in the Canvas mobile app, so you will have to use a web browser.

Your pronouns will now be displayed wherever your name appears on Canvas. The process for selecting pronouns is the same for instructors and students. Please feel free to share this information with your students, as many students are not aware of this feature offered in Canvas.

PART IV: ASSUMPTIONS

Trans and nonbinary students appreciate when instructors:

- Don't assume a person's gender based on their **name**
 - People of any gender can have any name
- Don't assume a person's gender base on their **appearance**
 - The way someone presents themselves doesn't necessarily indicate their gender identity
- Don't assume a person's **pronouns**
 - Pronouns can be related to someone's gender identity or presentation, but that isn't the case for all people
 - Use they/them pronouns or no pronouns if you don't know someone's pronouns

These guidelines apply not only to the students in your class, but all people. For example, if you are discussing a piece of visual media in class, say "the person in the dress" instead of "the woman" to refer to a person whose gender or pronouns are not explicitly stated. Simple changes such as these can help to disrupt common assumptions regarding gender and create more space for people of all genders.

PART V: LISTENING TO TRANS STUDENTS

When a trans student expresses a concern,

- Acknowledge their experience of the situation, even if you don't see it that way;
- Remember if you are not trans, you do not get to decide what is or is not harmful for trans people;
- Don't minimize or downplay your student's concern,
- Let the student decide how much or how little they want to say on the matter;
- Ask the student what outcome they would like to see, and help to the extent that you can.

If the concern is about something you did or said,

- Acknowledge the mental and emotional effort it took your student to bring this issue to your attention (it's not easy);
- Try to put your feelings aside so you can attempt to really understand how your action(s) impacted your student;
- Think of this as an opportunity for growth and transformation - If you've read this far into this email, chances are you care about your trans students and want to create classrooms they can feel comfortable in. Center that in your mind during a difficult conversation with a trans student;
- Reflect on how your actions impacted not only the student speaking with you, but also other trans students who did not come forward and students who are not trans;
- Give the student a chance to envision a solution, and support them to the extent that you can.

The significance of a reaction of an instructor to a trans student communicating a concern cannot be overstated. A positive, growth-focused interaction with an instructor can create feelings of trust and safety, and often lead to more engagement in class on behalf of the student, while the opposite experience creates equally opposite outcomes.

PART VI: LANGUAGE

Trans students appreciate when instructors:

- Use a gender-neutral terms when addressing a **group of people**
 - Ex. "Folks" or "everyone" instead of "ladies and gentlemen"
- Use gender-neutral terms when referring to **individuals**
 - Ex. "The person in the red shirt" instead of "the woman"
 - Ex. "They said" instead of "he/she said"
 - Ex. "Their homework" instead of "his/her homework"
- Use gender-inclusive terminology when referring to **specific types of people**
 - Ex. "People who can get pregnant" instead of "women" when discussing abortion
 - The most appropriate term for a specific group of people will depend on the topic of discussion and the relevant group characteristic
- Learn and avoid common **transphobic stereotypes**
 - Ex. Avoid making a joke about a "man in a dress"
- Use language that goes **beyond the binary construct of gender**
 - Ex. "Different gender" instead of "opposite gender"
 - Ex. "All genders" instead of "both genders"

For a more in depth discussion of important considerations regarding un-gendering our language, see the [APA's Bias-Free Language Guide on Gender](#).

PART VII: REPRESENTATION

Here are some important considerations to keep in mind when seeking to represent trans people in your course materials:

- Don't treat the opinion of one person as the sole voice for trans people
- Include the work of trans people beyond trans-specific topics
- Seek to represent the diversity that exists among trans people and their experiences
- Include trans people and their work throughout your course, not just in one specific section

For a more in depth discussion of the above points, see [Stacy Jane Grover's post "Creating Trans-Inclusive Curricula."](#)