GENDER IDENTITY INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM: BEST PRACTICES

Keep the following practices in mind to use in your classrooms to help make them more inclusive of your students. Additionally, check out the Additional Resources and Sources at the end to become more familiar with terminology, topics, events, and practices adapted for this document.

Terms
Please note that this list is not exhaustive. Please check out the resources at the end of this document for more information.

- Trans or Transgender
  ○ A broad identity term used to refer to a person who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. The transgender community encompasses several different identities such as trans men, trans women, two-spirit individuals, nonbinary individuals, and more.

- Cis or Cisgender (/sisˈʃjendər/)
  ○ A broad identity term used to refer to a person who does identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

- Gender Identity
  ○ The gender of a person regardless of sex. Gender identity isn’t something you can see--everyone has an internal sense of their gender identity.

- Gender Expression
  ○ How a person expresses their gender through physical attributes such as clothes, hair styles, etc. It is not the same thing as identity.

- Sexual Orientation
  ○ The attraction (physical, emotional, etc.) of one person to others. It is not the same thing as gender identity or expression.

Do’s

- Include or reference a diversity statement or anti-discrimination statement supported by your institution.
  ○ Georgia State’s Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Policy

- Establish respect as a core concept when it comes to student-student and student-teacher interactions.
  ○ For example, consider having a section in your syllabus under “Classroom Conduct” that defines what these relationships should and should not look like with clear boundaries.

  “We are part of a learning community and must treat one another with respect at all times. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationalities. Disruptive behavior such as disrespecting a member of the class, eating, sleeping, text messaging, web browsing, holding personal conversations, disrespecting another member of our community, or doing work for other classes cannot be tolerated. I reserve the right to ask students to leave the classroom or to drop disruptive students from the course if disruptive behavior persists, in particular if a verbal warning is ineffective at eliminating the behavior or if a single incident is particularly egregious. If asked to leave for violating the course or University policies, you will forfeit any in-class assignments we complete after your
departure. Remember that our community does not end at the classroom door, but extends to our iCollege space and all other out-of-class environments used for our course interactions.”

- Believe students when they tell you who they are.
  - Many students don’t or can’t go by their legal or roster names for a variety of reasons. As such, take the time at the beginning of the semester to let your students tell you who they are. This behavior helps engender respect and can be accomplished rather easily in the first few sessions of class.
    - Try letting your students introduce themselves to the class or complete a survey at the beginning of class. If the name or other details do not match your roster, tell the student to speak with you after class or during your office hours so that you can let them identify whether or not they are on your roster in private.
    - Another strategy is to pass around an empty roster that allows for students to fill in the name they would like to go by, their pronouns, and their GSU email. After the first few days of class, you can have a roster with the names that students go by and have a reference sheet of everyone’s pronouns.
    - You could also ask for this information by emailing your class in advance.
      - Use the pronouns that each student indicates are their pronouns. Those pronouns may change over time. Also, if a student wishes to be referred to as “they,” know that conventions have shifted and it is useable in the singular form.
      - It is not the student’s job to educate you on their identity. If you are unsure how to proceed in your interactions regarding a student’s identity, do some research via the resources below. Don’t confront the student or question their identity.

- Correct behavior in yourself or your students when the behavior is harmful to others.
  - Admitting guilt when committing an error (such as misgendering a student), especially when it is unintentional can be challenging for both instructors and students. Take these opportunities as moments to teach your students how to interact with others when you are wrong.
  - Don’t make a scene. A long or drawn out apology puts the focus on you rather than the mistake and puts unwanted attention on the student. Just apologize, correct, and move on.
  - If a fellow student makes an error, correct them and move on.

- Use gender inclusive phrases rather than exclusive phrases.
  - Try using phrases such as “y’all,” “folks,” and “person” over phrases steeped in the gender binary (i.e. phrases that essentialize members of a group into an either/or situation between male and female such as “guys/gals,” “men/women,” “male/female,” “ladies/gentlemen,” etc.).

- Normalize the introduction of pronouns
  - When we don’t expect someone to tell us their pronouns, we are legitimizing the idea that assumptions on this aspect of identity are normal. Instead, consider how you can help normalize inclusivity through practices such as introducing yourself to your students with your preferred pronouns or using them in your email signature.

Further Suggestions
- Include topics on gender identity and other LGBTQIA+ issues in your course content.
- Invite a trans person to speak to your class.
- Organize a panel of queer and trans people to speak to your class.
Don’t’s
- Don’t leave your boundaries abstract or unspoken when it comes to student interactions or respect.
  - Make sure that you have clear expectations of conduct for your class in your syllabus and that you enforce them in the classroom. Remember: students can’t read your mind, and your syllabus outlines the mutual obligations for you and them.
- Don’t let students find out bad habits or practices on their own.
  - Students and instructors will make mistakes such as misgendering their peers or more egregious errors such as questioning the legitimacy of someone’s identity. Anticipate some of these issues by having clear policies for the course and enforcing them. Pedagogy that is only reactive is potentially harming to some of your most vulnerable students as it is them who will be hurt even if you correct the behavior immediately. Avoid the situation altogether by establishing clear rules ahead of time.
- Don’t ask students if they are a particular sexual orientation or gender identity or disclose that information to others without the student’s consent.
  - They may not want to share that information. And, more importantly, it is none of your or anyone else’s business.
- Don’t ask about surgeries or other medical history.
  - You wouldn’t ask any of your other students about their medical history; don’t risk isolating the student in question.
- Don’t ask for “preferred” pronouns in class.
  - This practice is well-meaning but risks forcibly outing your students in front of their classmates. As mentioned in the “Do’s,” consider offering the example of what pronouns you use when you identify yourself in class and/or put your pronouns in your email signature to show that you value the practice; but, don’t make the performance of identity a requirement. They don’t owe you that performance.
  - Also, the notion that pronouns can be “preferred” implies that they are optional rather than mandatory. Consider how using words such as “preferred” in regards to someone’s identity is problematic and potentially harmful. Instead, if you want to normalize the introduction of pronouns in your class, just refer to them as pronouns and lead with yourself as an example.
- Don’t assume that your student represents everyone from their community or expect them to perform expertise.
  - Your students will have a variety of expertise depending on the various experiences and communities with which they are a part. Be respectful of that experience and allow them the agency to communicate their experiences.

Additional Resources and Sources
- Key terms and definitions from Trans Student Educational Resources
- TransWeek at GSU events
- “Understanding the Transgender Community” by the Human Rights Council
- “Transgender FAQ” by the Human Rights Council
- “Teaching Beyond the Gender Binary in the College Classroom” by Brielle Harbin
- “Creating Inclusive Classrooms for Trans* and Gender Expansive Students” Division of Equity & Inclusion, UC Berkeley
- GSU’s Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity
- Multicultural Center’s Safe Zone trainings