UMass Boston Pronoun Policies and Practices for Staff

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Pronouns: She/Ella
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In partnership with: Registrar’s Office, Student Affairs, UITS

NOTE: This presentation borrows from the UMass Amherst materials.
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Gender Identity and Expression: The Basics

The University of Massachusetts Boston is committed to validating and valuing the gender identity and expression of members of the campus community.

**Gender identity** refers to an individual’s internal sense of gender, regardless of the sex assigned to them at birth or the sex designation on their legal documents. *(Linguistic and descriptive)*

**Gender expression** is defined as the way in which a person expresses their gender identity, typically through appearance, dress and behavior. *(Performative)*
Why Pronouns are important?

- Respecting gender identity and expression affirms an individual’s existence.
- Misgendering retraumatizes and leads to the person feeling disrespected, invalidated and marginalized.
- What seems like a minor mistake happens over and over.
- As an institution that is committed to the inclusion of historically underrepresented groups and ensuring a respectful, safe, and inclusive campus for all members of the community, UMass is working to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to indicate their pronouns and to have their pronouns be respected.
Inclusive Identity Project

- **Project Sponsors** – Multi-campus representation from Registrar Offices, Student Affairs and Offices of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

- **Goal** – deliver a more inclusive, respectful and welcoming experience for *all Student Identities* that includes development of necessary processes, practices and support systems to maintain that environment.

- **Objectives** –
  - Partner with UITS, Dartmouth and Lowell campuses to review best practices for collecting **Inclusive Identity** data and modify existing or create new Student Self-Service fields in WISER.
  - Perform Campus Readiness activities to support these values and notify campus stakeholders of changes so they can prepare to assist Students where needed.
Pronouns: Definitions

- **Gendered pronouns** specifically reference someone’s gender: he/him/his

- **Non-gendered or non-binary pronouns** are not gender-specific and are often used by people identifying outside the male/female binary
  - Ex: Jadzia identifies as genderqueer; they do not see themselves as either female or male.

- **Any pronouns**: individuals who do not care which pronouns others use for them or want others to use for them or want others to vary their pronoun use for them. It is best to ask which options the person desires.

- **Name only**: Individuals who do not use pronouns and want to be known by their name only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns:</th>
<th>In a sentence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>She wants you to use her pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>He wants you to use his pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ze/hir</td>
<td>Ze wants you to use hir pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they/ them/ theirs</td>
<td>They want you to use their pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>co/cos</td>
<td>Co wants you to use cos pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No pronoun/name (use the person's name instead of a pronoun)</td>
<td>____ (name) wants you to use ____ (name) pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xe/xem/xyr</td>
<td>Xe wants you to use xyr pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hy/hym/hys</td>
<td>Hy wants you to use hys pronouns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Choose not to disclose**
WISER – Class Roster/Reports in Faculty/Advising Centers
How to Use the Pronoun Information

• In interacting with a student, it is unlikely you will have a reason to refer to them in the third person. But if you need to do so, be sure to see if they have pronouns listed and always use those pronouns.

• In interacting with a parent/guardian, **do not** use the pronouns listed, if these pronouns are “ze/zir,” “xe/xem,” or “the opposite” of the sex assigned to them (i.e., someone assigned female who uses “he/him” or someone assigned male who use “she/her”), **until** you hear how the parent/guardian genders their child. To do otherwise might out that student to their parent/guardian. Until you hear how the parent/guardian genders their child, you should use “they/them” as generic pronouns, the student’s name, and phrases like “your child” and “the student.”

• If a parent/guardian uses the pronouns listed, begin to do so likewise. If the parent/guardian misgenders their child, do not correct them. You can continue to use “they/them,” the student’s name, and phrases like “your child” and “the student” so that you do not misgender the student too.
Misgendering Mistakes

• The best thing to do if you realize you just used the wrong pronoun for someone in a conversation with them is to say something right away, such as “Sorry, I meant they.” Fix it, but do not call special attention to the error. If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize to the person at your next opportunity.

• Do not go on and on to the misgendered person about how bad you feel that you messed up or how hard it is for you to get it right. It is inappropriate and makes the person who was misgendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is not their job. It is your job to remember people’s pronouns.
Misgendering Mistakes

How to react when you misgender a trans person

If someone indicates to you that you have misgendered another person, thank them for letting you know, as correcting someone is an act of care and can be risk-taking.

Sophie Labelle
What If Someone Else Mistakenly Uses the Wrong Pronouns for a Person?

• In most cases, the best thing to do if you hear someone misgender another person is to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been misgendered. You can say something, such as “Actually, Xena uses she/her pronouns for herself,” and then move on. If a person refuses to use the appropriate pronouns for someone, **do not ignore it**. It is important that the harassment of others not be tolerated. It may be appropriate to speak to the person in private to correct the misgendering behavior.

• It may also be appropriate to check-in with the person who has been misgendered and say something, such as “I noticed that you were being referred to by the wrong pronouns earlier, and I know that this can be really hurtful. Would you be okay with me taking the person aside and reminding them about your appropriate pronouns? I want to make sure that this space is safe for you.” Take your cues from the comfort level of the person who has been misgendered.
Keep in Mind

- If you’re going to invite people to share their pronouns, **DO** try to ask everyone, not just the person whose pronouns are unclear.
- **DON’T** refer to “they/them” or “ze/hir” pronouns as gender-neutral pronouns. **Non-binary pronouns** is a better description, as some trans people identify as gendered.
- **DON’T** use the phrase “preferred pronouns” or “preferred name.” A particular pronoun is **not a preference** for trans people; it affirms their identity.
- **DON’T** indicate that you don’t care what pronouns people use for you if you identify as cisgender. This **reinforces privilege and invalidates the experience** of trans people who repeatedly encounter misgendering.
Keep in Mind

Not everyone feels comfortable indicating their pronouns in every setting and they should not feel forced to do so. If you ask students to indicate their pronouns when they indicate their names, say something like, “please say your name and, if you want, please provide the pronouns you use for yourself.” You can set an example by stating your pronouns first or including your pronouns on your syllabus.
Questions?

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