

“Faculty should work to create an environment that allows transgender students to feel safe, regardless of how they choose to present themselves.”

What is Transgender?

Transgender is an encompassing term of many gender identities of those who do not identify or exclusively identify with the sex assigned at birth. Some transgender people do not feel comfortable in the gender assigned to them at birth and identify with the opposite gender. However, some transgender people describe themselves as nonbinary and do not identify with the man or woman ends of the gender spectrum.

Gender Expression

Transgender students may conform to gender standards or may be gender non-conforming. Faculty and other students may have expectations regarding how different genders should look, dress, or behave. Faculty should work to create an environment that allows transgender students to feel safe regardless of how they choose to present themselves. This includes challenging myths, stereotypes, and hostilities that may arise.

Names

Some students may take part in a process to change their name and gender identity on legal documents during their transition process. Because having a legal name change for these students can be a long and complicated process, and some students may have no legally available option to accurately capture their sex or gender on official documents, students can enter a **preferred** name in MyUH which will then appear on class rosters and their Cougar Card ID. The step-by-step process can be found at uh.edu/lgbtq/transgender_affairs/.

If discrepancies arise with a student's name, questioning the student in front of the class should be avoided since transgender people are often victims of violence. Intentionally using a student's former name is known as **deadnaming** and may result in anger or emotional distress in students.

Pronoun

Student may use pronouns with which you are familiar i.e., he/him/his or she/her/hers, or they may use they/them/theirs as a singular pronoun. Students may also use other less familiar pronouns, i.e., ze, zem, zir. Announcing your pronouns at the beginning of the semester or in the syllabus helps convey that you acknowledge the spectrum of genders. You might also ask that students correct you if you happen to misgender them. In addition, if you are not sure of a person's gender, it is considered respectful to ask their pronoun. At the LGBTQ Resource Center, we try to ask this of everyone so as to not single anyone out or make assumptions.

Additional Resources

Cougar Ally Training will increase your general knowledge about LGBTQ people.
www.uh.edu/lgbtq/ - program

Interrupting Heteronormativity will give you a more indepth understanding of this issue.

The majority of the information in this brochure was taken, with permission, from *Interrupting Heteronormativity* by The Graduate School of Syracuse University, Copyright 2004.
www.syr.edu/gradschool/pdf/resourcebooksvideos/Heteronormativity.pdf

Representing LGBTQ DIVERSITY in the Classroom

REDUCING HETERONORMATIVITY & CISNORMATIVITY



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What is Heteronormativity/ Cisnormativity??

Heteronormativity is the assumption that heterosexuality is natural, normal, and right. Cisnormativity is the assumption that a person's assigned sex at birth should correspond to their gender and that diversion from that is not normal. It is the expectation that everyone is heterosexual and cisgender and should look, dress, and behave according to traditional gender ideals.

These assumptions and practices regulate the beliefs, behaviors, and desires of ALL of us, restricting the range of identification and expression for ALL of us, to such an extent that even momentary and joyful expressions (e.g. a man jumping for joy) become sources of discomfort and fear.

These norms pervade every aspect of our lives and work. In the classroom, it regulates what topics and examples we use and how we frame research questions. The unquestioned assumptions of gender and sexuality structure our thinking, limiting the scope of possibility.

Are There LGBTQ Students in Your Classroom?

Yes. Whether we choose to acknowledge them or not, LGBTQ people exist on campus and in our classrooms. Whether they feel safe, represented, respected, and part of the UH campus community is very much determined by the willingness of the faculty to validate the existence of LGBTQ people in our classrooms and in our world.

Fostering a safe and inclusive classroom

As responsible teachers, we know that our pedagogical theories and practices need to expand the kinds of learning opportunities we provide students, not restrict them.

We know that students in diverse learning environments learn more, have higher levels of satisfaction, and have greater degrees of civic engagement. They are better able to appreciate the ideas of others, and they are better prepared to enter the world they will lead.

Discussion topics and examples

It is important for students to see themselves reflected in what is around them. The simplest way to do this in the classroom is through the discussion topics and examples we choose. Here are some suggestions:

ACCOUNTING: What are the income tax filing options for lesbian couples?

ECONOMICS: What would be the economic impact on the U.S. if LGBTQ people did not experience discrimination in housing, employment, etc?

EDUCATION: In discussions on discipline, ask student teachers to discuss how they would handle students in their class saying, "That is so gay."

MARKETING: How can you be LGBTQ inclusive in marketing?

STATISTICS: What has been the effect on birth rates since marriage equality was legalized?

LITERATURE: Include works of LGBTQ authors, such as: Jacqueline Woodson, Rita Mae Brown, and Dorothy Allison on the required reading list.

ARCHITECTURE: What is the most efficient building design for non-gender-specific dorms?

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES: Discuss important figures such as Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, and Bayard Rustin, including some discussion of their sexual orientation as integral to their personal and political struggle.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT: Why and how might businesses make the work environment more inclusive of their LGBTQ employees?

SOCIOLOGY: In a discussion of relationships or families, same-sex relationships should be included.

LANGUAGES: Be sure to include vocabulary like "partner" rather than just spouse, and possibly discuss families, same-sex relationships should be included.

BIOLOGY: In discussions on chromosomes, include variations that occur in intersex people.

"Small, but significant, additions acknowledge the presence of LGBTQ-identified students, and create a more inclusive and effective learning environment."

HARD SCIENCES: Although it is true that there are more relevant examples for the social sciences, only a fraction of the entire student body may take courses that directly address sexuality and gender. Hence, the majority of students will never discuss the politics of sexuality and gender in any classroom unless faculty choose inclusive examples and facilitate discussions about LGBTQ issues when they arise.

These small, but significant, additions acknowledge the presence of LGBTQ-identified students and create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Challenge heterosexual assumptions, myths, stereotypes, and hostilities.

College is a place to not only learn facts but also to learn how to be a critical thinker. When faculty maintain heteronormativity and cisnormativity or do not address erroneous comments made by students, they are missing the opportunity to broaden students' world view.

For example:

- Ask students to examine their assumptions if they make a comment like, "Why do LGBTQ people have to flaunt their sexuality?" Be sure to make it a class discussion, with the goal of expanding the students' thinking, rather than being punitive.
- If the comment is more derogatory or hostile, then a statement such as, "That comment is disrespectful and therefore not to be used in this class," is more appropriate. Although you may get a few giggles, you will be sending a clear message to all students that it is the "norm" to respect differences in your class.

Universal Precautions

At the beginning of the semester, talk to the class about taking "universal precautions" in conversations. This means you assume ANYONE in the classroom could identify as LGBTQ or transgender, be mixed race, be diagnosed with an STI or mental illness, have a learning disability, etc. If any student makes a biased or harmful comment, remind them about the classroom policy of universal precautions.

Other Suggestions

- Attend UH's Cougar Ally Training and display your Cougar Ally placard in your office or on your briefcase.
- Announce LGBTQ related campus events at the beginning of class, along with other types of events.
- If an incident that threatens LGBTQ students occurs on campus or in the community, allow students to discuss this in class, and let them know where they can turn for support.
- Do not assume a student's sexuality, gender identity, or pronouns. Use inclusive language such as "significant other" or "partner."
- Avoid gendered greetings like, "Good morning ladies and gentlemen;" opt for gender neutral language instead like "students."
- Include a statement in the syllabus that students are equally respected in your class, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. Let students know how they can approach you with feedback if they feel uncomfortable in your classroom.