

Creating a Gender-Affirming Classroom

GOING BEYOND THE BINARY

Gender identity may be a sociological construction, but it holds significance both inside and outside the classroom. BUSPH recognizes that gender goes beyond a binary; rather, individuals can identify as one, in-between, both, or neither. In our commitment to diversity and inclusion to strengthen our community, it is important to create classrooms that recognize gender beyond a binary construct and create classrooms that affirm spaces for trans, gender-variant, and gender non-conforming individuals.

ASKING FOR PRONOUNS

The most important element to creating a gender-affirming classroom is to ask for students' pronouns. Whether it's on the first day of class as students introduce themselves or an email request, instructors should request pronouns of ALL students, not just those who are trans, gender-variant, or non-conforming. Common pronouns include:

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Examples
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is studying. I studied with her. The book is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is studying. I studied with him. The book is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are studying. I studied with them. The book is theirs.
Name	Name	Name's	Name's self	Alex is studying. I studied with Alex. The book is Alex's.
Ze("zee")	Zir ("zere")/ Hir ("here")	Zirs/Hirs	Zirself/Hirself	Ze is studying. I studied with zir. The book is zirs.

RESPECTING AND AFFIRMING GENDER IDENTITY

It is the role of faculty members to create a safe space for students that includes allyship from all members of the class. Here are ways to respect and affirm gender in your classroom:

- Challenge your assumptions about gender norms and encourage your students to do the same. Call out transphobia when it occurs.
- Model affirming behavior by asking EACH student which pronouns and name they use and tell the class yours. Respect these requests; do not insist that students must use names or pronouns that are on official course rosters. Legally changing names and gender can be a lengthy process if a student chooses to go through it at all.
- Move beyond saying “he or she.” It’s okay to use “they” when referring to a general individual, and it is grammatically acceptable to use they as a gender-neutral singular pronoun.
- Acknowledge that nearly all public health data sources require a binary identity of “man” or “woman.” Discuss what implications this has for research and the policy implications for persons that are trans, gender-variant or non-conforming. Include trans issues in your course.
- If you make a mistake, acknowledge it and quickly correct yourself. Be sure to apologize to the student privately after class. Keep in mind that it is YOUR responsibility to remember pronouns of your students; students should not be responsible for correcting you.
- Do NOT call upon your transgender, gender-variant or non-conforming student to speak on behalf of the trans or non-binary experience. Never ask about their bodies, transition experiences, medical care, sexual orientation, or why they are non-conforming.

For additional guidance, contact Julia Lanham at janham@bu.edu.