

Pronouns in Our Community

A GUIDE FROM THE OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY LIFE

December | 2019

Pronouns in Our Community: A Guide from University Life

Welcome! This short guide is a resource for learning more about pronoun use by transgender and nonbinary students, faculty and staff at Columbia.

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A. Background

Students can now opt to list the pronouns they use in CourseWorks.

Why? The concept of gender is expanding. Traditionally, many people viewed gender as a binary system — with people being either male or female. But a growing number of students, as well as staff and faculty, now identify as transgender or gender nonbinary, not as male or female. Some may use the terms genderqueer or third gender to describe their identity.

Their names and appearance may also be gender neutral and may not conform to conventional gender expectations. For these students and others, being able to indicate the pronouns they use enhances their sense of inclusion and belonging on campus.

When students use this option in CourseWorks, it will allow faculty and staff to always use their correct pronouns as a way to show respect for who they are, including their gender identity.

B. Chart of Pronouns and Their Usage

Many students, including transgender students, use gendered pronouns (he/she, him/her, etc.). Other students, including many gender nonbinary students, use gender-neutral pronouns, such as they/them/theirs or ze/hir/hirs.

The chart below provides an expanded list pronouns with examples of how they may be used.

Subject	Object	Possessive	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
He	Him	His	His	Himself
"He studied"	"I called him"	"His pencil"	"That is his"	"He trusts himself"

She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
"She studied"	"I called her"	"Her pencil"	"That is hers"	"She trusts herself"
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
"They studied"	"I called them"	"Their pencil"	"That is theirs"	"They trust themselves"
Ze (or Zie)	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
"Ze studied" ("zee")	"I called hir" ("hear")	"Hir pencil"	"That is hirs" ("hears")	"Ze trusts hirself" ("hearself")

This list was created by the University of California, San Francisco. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

C. Glossary of Useful Terms

Agender refers to people that identify as having no gender at all.

Cisgender individuals are those whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth. For example, a person whose birth certificate designates their sex as male and who identifies as a man is cisgender.

Enby is a term used for nonbinary people. It is a phonetic pronunciation of the letters "NB."

Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behaviors that conform to cultural expectations are referred to as gender normative; gender nonbinary behaviors do not conform to conventional expectations.

Gender expression refers to how a person outwardly expresses gender identity.

Gender identity refers to how people experience their own gender irrespective of their sex assigned at birth.

Gender nonbinary or genderqueer are terms generally referring to forms of gender expression or identity that is not conventionally male or female. Some individuals who identify as genderqueer or nonbinary may see their gender as fluid between male and female, some may see it as a combination of male and female traits and some may feel no affinity with gendered categories as our society defines them.

Mx. (pronounced “miks”) is a gender-neutral honorific.

Sex refers to a person’s biological characteristics and is typically categorized as male, female or intersex. There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs and external genitalia.

Transgender is an umbrella term for any person whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth.

D. Frequently Asked Questions

What are pronouns in use?

A pronoun in use refers to the pronoun that people designate and want others to use when referring to them. Some individuals do not identify with the binary genders or the male and female pronouns used in many languages. For example, many gender nonbinary students use gender-neutral pronouns such as they/them/theirs or ze/hir/hirs.

How do I know what pronouns to use?

When you meet someone for the first time, you can introduce yourself and say what your pronouns are. This will give the other person the opening to reply with their name and pronouns.

Do pronouns change?

Given that people’s gender identity may change, so too can the pronouns they use.

Why is this relevant to Columbia students?

Pronouns are part of our everyday language. Using the correct pronouns demonstrates respect for a person's identity and helps to promote a culture of inclusion on campus.

How might this affect honorifics?

Gender nonbinary people often use Mx. (pronounced "miks") in lieu of Mr., Mrs., Ms. or Miss.

What if I make a mistake and use the incorrect pronoun when I address someone?

Mistakes happen. When they do, simply acknowledge them and ask the person what pronoun they would like you to use.

E. Additional Resources

- "Pronouns Matter"
MyPronouns.org
<https://www.mypronouns.org>
- "U.S. Airlines to Offer New Gender Options for Non-Binary Passengers"
The New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/15/business/airline-travel-gender-choices.html>
- [Pronouns: How Do You Ask?](#) (Video)
True Colors Fund Learning Community
- [What Are Pronouns?](#) (Video)
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F. General References

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