**McGill University**

**Best Practices Resource for Front-Line Staff and Communications – Gender, Pronouns, etc.**

**About:**

Equity and inclusion are fundamental to McGill University’s principles and mission. McGill’s Policy on Discrimination and Harassment and The Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms include gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination.

This resource was developed within Enrollment Services in response to a need expressed by McGill front-line staff within and beyond that unit to have more guidance and tools to help them contribute to furthering the university’s commitments to continuing to build a campus environment where transgender and non-binary students, staff, and faculty are provided professional service, and can work or study with a sense of belonging and well-being.

Please note that the below information serves as an advisory resource on best practices, rather than set policies. This resource may change or evolve over time.

**Best Practices for Front-Line Staff and Communications (In-Person/Telephone/Web-Based):**

* Information about a person’s legal name and/or sex and gender markers should only be requested if it is necessary to perform a specific task (for example, if collecting the information is legally required for a process you are tasked with supporting/performing).
* The name a person uses may be different than the name appearing in McGill IT systems and/or from a person’s legal name. In requesting a student or employee’s name, first ask: "What is your name?”. If the name given does not match the name on their student or employee file or no results come up, ask: “Could your file be under a different name?’
* Do not assume a person’s gender identity based on their name, gender expression, voice, etc.
* If a student or employee has not yet identified their personal pronouns, avoid using terms that indicate gender. For example, say “the student” or “the patient” or identify the student or employee by their first and last name rather than by using gendered pronouns such as “he/him” or “she/her”.
* A thoughtful apology doesn’t erase the potential harm of using an incorrect name or pronoun, but it can go a long way towards changing the experience of trans and non-binary people at McGill.
* It is important to remember to keep a person’s trans status confidential if that is their preference.
* Do not assume a student or employee uses the prefix commonly associated with their name or gender identity, and only refer to students or employees using prefixes if that is how they wish to be addressed.
* Continue to use a person’s identified name and pronouns even when they are not present.
* Create an environment of accountability by doing your best to use correct names and pronouns, and engaging with colleagues to support them in doing so as well.
* Consider identifying your own pronouns in digital spaces, such as by renaming yourself in Zoom or by adding pronouns to your email tag.

**Best Practices on Data Collection (Forms/Surveys/IT Systems):**

* Ask for and record a person’s legal name only when this information is required (e.g. for legal reasons, etc.). In all other cases, allow students and employees to use their identified name on university forms and internal IT systems.
* Do not routinely collect information about prefixes or gender or sex markers. Ask yourself when creating forms “Is it necessary to collect this information to achieve my purpose?”.
* Only collect information on assigned sex using a binary M/F designation if required by law. Otherwise, if collecting information on sex use the following categories: F (female), M (male), X (non-binary).
* If collecting information on gender, please include the following options: woman, man, non-binary, please specify\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* “Male” and “female” should not be used to denote gender as these terms refer to biological sex.
* Do not automatically assume and record someone’s prefix based on their name, pronouns, or gender identity. For example, if Alex (she/her/hers) has selected “woman” and “cisgender,” do not automatically assign “Ms.” to Alex. Or if Sam (they/them/theirs) has selected nonbinary, do not automatically assign “Mx.” to Sam.
* Note that a student’s or employee’s legal name and sex marker are confidential and protected information and should always be treated as such.
* If you include the term “transgender” you should likewise include the term “cisgender” on a form.
* If collecting information on prefixes, include gender neutral options i.e. “Dr.”, “Mx.”
* If collecting information, do not list options such as ‘man’, ‘cisgender’, or ‘Mr.’, first before other options.
* In letters, avoid introductions such as “Dear Sir or Madam” and instead use salutations such as “Dear Applicant”. Continue to use gender neutral and gender inclusive language throughout the letter, i.e. parents/guardians, siblings, partners, applicant, student, employee or “their” instead of “him” or “her”.

**Best Practices for Inclusive Language:**

*Please note this is a non-exhaustive list and serves as examples*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Language to Avoid** | **Language to Use** |
| Father(s), Mother(s),  Brother(s), Sister(s), Son(s), Daughter(s) | Parent(s), Guardian(s),  Sibling(s), Child(ren) |
| Wife(Wives), Husband(s),  Girlfriend(s), Boyfriend(s) | Spouse(s),  Partners |
| Freshman | First-year student |
| Chairman | Chairperson, Chair, Head, Coordinator |
| Man/Mankind | Humans/Humankind, Humanity, Human beings |
| Man-made | Human-made, Machine-made, Artificial, Synthetic |
| Sexual preference | Sexual orientation |
| Transgendered, Transexual, Transvestite | Transgender, Trans |

**Do or Do Not:**

*Please note this is a non-exhaustive list and serves as examples*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Do Not** | **Do** |
| **Do not** assume someone’s gender based on  their name, appearance, voice, etc. | **Do** provide your own name and pronouns before asking for someone’s |
| **Do not** assume someone’s sexual orientation  or ask about someone’s sexual behaviour | **Do** pursue learning through  appropriate contacts and resources |
| **Do not** assume someone’s anatomy or health care needs | **Do** respectfully ask questions, explain need  to know, protect privacy and confidentiality |
| **Do not** tolerate sexism, homophobia, or transphobia  in remarks, humor, exclusion, or unprofessional service | **Do** encourage respect, discuss issues in private, intervene and report if necessary |
| **Do not** draw overt attention to mistakes | **Do** apologize briefly and sincerely |

**APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Assigned Sex:** The biological classification of a person as female, male or intersex. It is usually assigned at birth based on a visual assessment of external anatomy.

<https://egale.ca/awareness/terms-and-concepts-updated/>

**Sex:** Refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex is usually categorized as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed.

<https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/48642.html>

**Gender Identity**: A person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person’s sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person’s gender identity may be the same as or different from their sex assignment at birth.

<https://www.the519.org/education-training/glossary>

**Gender Expression:** How a person publicly expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, and voice. A person’s chosen name and pronoun are also common ways of expressing gender. All people, regardless of their gender identity, have a gender expression and they may express it in any number of ways.

<https://www.the519.org/education-training/glossary>

**Cis/Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth.

<https://www.the519.org/education-training/glossary>

**Trans/Transgender**: A person who does not identify, either fully or in part, with the gender associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. It is often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and may be called simply “trans” for short.

<https://egale.ca/awareness/terms-and-concepts-updated/>

**Non-binary**: An umbrella term to reflect a variety of gender identities that are not exclusively man or woman. Identity terms which may fall within this category include genderqueer, agender, bigender, or pangender.

<https://egale.ca/awareness/terms-and-concepts-updated/>

**Name:**  A word or phrase that constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/name>

**Legal name:** A person's name that is usually the name given at birth and recorded on the birth certificate but that may be a different name that is used by a person consistently and independently or that has been declared the person's name by a court.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/legal%20name>

**Pronoun:** 1. Any of a small set of words (such as *I*, *she*, *he*, *you*, *it*, *we*, or *they*) in a language that are used as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases and whose referents are named or understood in the context. 2. The third person personal pronouns (such as *he/him*, *she/her*, and *they/them*) that a person goes by.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pronoun>

**Prefix:** A title used before a person's name.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prefix>

**APPENDIX B: RESOURCES**

McGill University, n.d. “Gender-Inclusive Washrooms.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.mcgill.ca/equity/resources/gender-sexuality/gender-inclusive-washrooms>

McGill University, n.d. “Gender and Sexuality.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.mcgill.ca/equity/resources/gender-sexuality>

McGill University, n.d. “Name and Preferred First Name.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.mcgill.ca/student-records/personal-information/address>

McGill University, n.d. “Queer McGill.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.queermcgill.org/>

McGill University, n.d. “Subcommittee on Queer People.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.mcgill.ca/queerequity/>

Mypronouns.org, n.d. “Resources on Personal Pronouns.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://mypronouns.org>

National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016. “Affirmative Care for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People: Best Practices for Front-Line Healthcare Staff. Boston: The Fenway Institute.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Affirmative-Care-for-Transgender-and-Gender-Non-conforming-People-Best-Practices-for-Front-line-Health-Care-Staff.pdf>

The 519, n.d. “Creating Authentic Spaces: A Gender Identity and Gender Expression Toolkit.” Accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces>