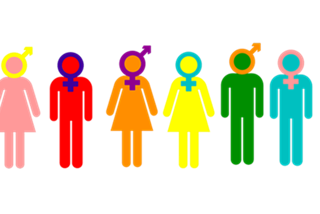
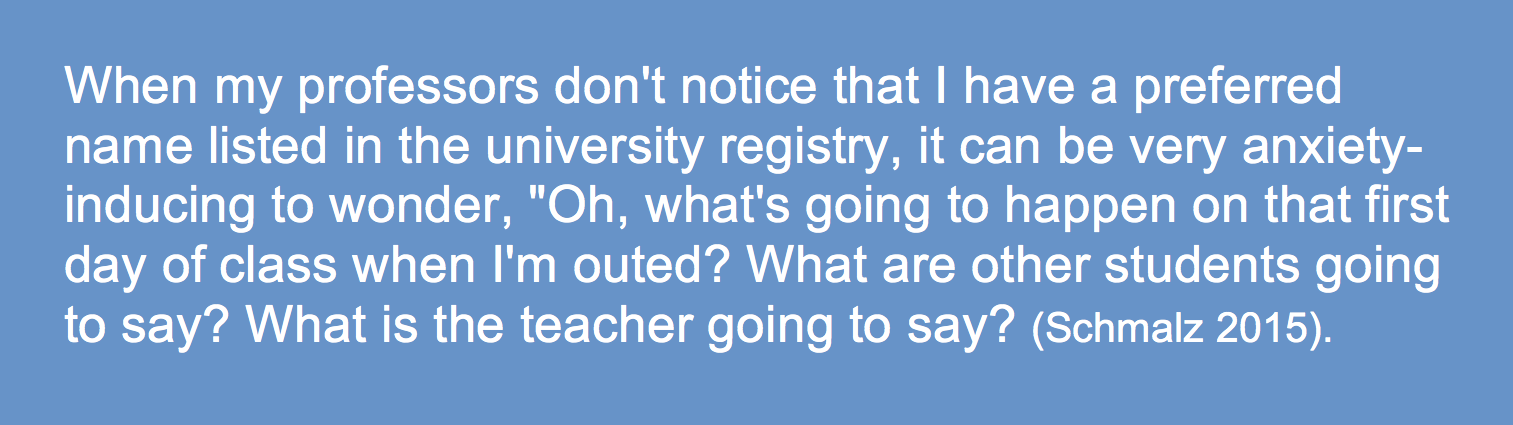
**Teaching Beyond the Gender Binary in the  
University Classroom  
*by Brielle Harbin, CFT Senior Graduate Teaching Fellow 2015-2016***[***1***](#cred)

**Introduction**

In recent years, students on campuses across the country have become increasingly vocal in resisting binary thinking with respect to gender identity and expression. In an editorial that appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Schmalz (2015) interviewed a dozen students who self-identified as gender non-conforming and found a great amount of anxiety and frustration. Several students expressed their fear of instructors and staff misgendering them or committing other indiscretions. They described their anxiety about being “outed” by professors in their classes and being forced to “come out” every semester when they must talk with faculty about their preferred names or pronouns. One student shared, “Every day it's scary to just be in class, not knowing what people are going to say” (Schmalz 2015). Another student explained:

Increased awareness around the complexities of gender identity and expression has given rise to questions regarding best practices for promoting gender inclusivity on campuses across the country. From debates about the appropriate policy regarding student name changes to awareness campaigns about pronoun usage, university administrators, professors, and students collectively are struggling to find a more just and nuanced understanding.

These shifting dynamics, coupled with Vanderbilt’s non-discrimination policy highlight the need to establish university-wide best practices for respecting gender identity and expression on Vanderbilt’s campus.

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| **Watch this video for another perspective on the complexities of being gender non-conforming in the United States.**  [The Pain & Empowerment of Choosing Your Own Gender: Alok Vaid-Menon](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=j7Gh2n9kPuA) |

Not only does this respect the chosen identities of those who are gender non-conforming, but it but it creates a culture of inclusion and diversity in education that has indirect benefits to all. Research shows that making learning spaces accessible to non-majority students benefits all students by enhancing creativity and improving problem solving and decision-making (Levine and Stark 2015; Phillips 2014).

**Common Challenges to Gender-Inclusive Teaching and Some Evidence-Based Solutions**

There are several common challenges to gender-inclusive teaching. While these challenges often manifest differently in different disciplinary contexts, they all arise as obstacles in disrupting the long-standing misconceptions of gender as a binary construct. In the following subsections, we discuss twelve challenges that can arise when cultivating a gender-inclusive classroom environment. We interweave the discussion of the challenges with research-based practices meant to address the issues.

**Fluency with Gender Non-Conforming Vocabulary**

Cultivating a gender-inclusive classroom environment requires a familiarity with an array of concepts related to gender identity and expression. Consequently, efforts to promote a gender-inclusive environment require both consciousness raising and learning opportunities for students and leaders in the classroom. In particular, there are three conceptual distinctions that are crucial to understand when working to construct a gender-inclusive classroom.

**Biological sex versus gender identity**

Individuals often conflate biological sex with gender identity. However, these terms are distinct. Biological sex is assigned at birth by a medical practitioner, and is largely determined by physical attributes such as external genitalia, sex chromosomes, sex hormones and internal reproductive structures. While gender is attributed at birth based on sex, gender identity is actually more complicated; it is an individuals’ internal sense of themselves as either male, female, both, or neither.

**Gender identity versus gender expression**

While gender identity and gender expression can be related, they do not have to be. Gender identity is individuals’ internal understanding of themselves as male, female, both, or neither. Gender expression, on the other hand, is how individuals express their gender through clothing, demeanor, etc. How one expresses their gender is not necessarily related to their gender identity. Gender expression may be a way individuals play with external gender performance and explore roles, while gender identity is an interior sense of self.  Both can be fluid and change over the course of one's life, and they need not change together.

**Sexual identity versus gender identity**

Individuals often conflate sexual identity and gender identity. Sexual identity refers to individuals’ romantic and sexual attraction to others, or lack of attraction (asexual identity). Gender identity describes individuals’ internal understanding of themselves as male, female, both or neither. For example, a person whose sex assigned at birth is male but whose gender identity is female, may express any of the full range of sexual identities including (but not limited to): heterosexual, queer, bi-sexual, pansexual, etc.

The [Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Life](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/) has curated several gender non-conforming resources that might be useful to course instructors.

**Familiarity With and/or Commitment to Gender Non-Conforming Topics**

**Issues related to non-conforming gender identities**

Both students and leaders in the classroom may have limited prior interactions with individuals whose gender identity moves beyond the gender binary. Consequently, instructors and students may be unfamiliar with issues that arise for those who live as persons with non-conforming gender identities. These issues include (but are not limited to): feeling anxiety when using public restrooms, feeling disrespected when others ignore name and gender pronoun requests, feeling unsafe in learning spaces on campus, etc.

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| **The following provide a more detailed explanation of gender non-conforming individuals’** [**anxiety about using public restrooms**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lucas-waldron/finding-a-place-to-go-the-transgender-bathroom-dilemma_b_2189526.html)**,** [**thoughts about the intent of those who misgender them**](https://letsqueerthingsup.com/2014/09/15/what-youre-actually-saying-when-you-ignore-someones-preferred-gender-pronouns/)**, and** [**perceptions of safety on college campuses**](http://chronicle.com/article/Ask-Me-What-LGBTQ-Students/232797)**.** |

Even those who already have a more extensive knowledge of issues related to gender inclusivity may not entirely understand the impact of gender identity and expression on gender non-conforming individuals. For example, they might not understand how other dimensions of individuals’ social identity (i.e. socioeconomic, religious, race, etc.) converge with their gender identity, and affect how others perceive them.

**Learning about non-conforming gender identities**

Students may exhibit considerable variation in their commitment to learning about non-conforming gender identities. Variation in students’ commitment may be rooted in lack of familiarity with gender non-conforming individuals, ideology, culture, or religious background, and may lead to discomfort when engaging course materials that include the voices and experiences of gender non-conforming individuals. This discomfort may be rooted in fear, shame, disgust, frustration, confusion, etc.

Clark, Rand, and Vogt (2003) observe that students may sometimes hold onto their current understanding of gender roles “like lifelines in class discussion” when confronted with information that challenges their existing views (2003, 3). According to the authors, this occurs because these critiques may threaten students’ “sense of self” and, as a result, be perceived as an “attack” (Clark, Rand, Vogt 2003, 3).

**Respecting non-conforming gender identity requests**

Both students and instructors may exhibit varying levels of prior experience engaging with topics related to gender identity and expression. For those who lack experience, it may seem unclear how to ask others about their gender pronouns in a respectful manner or how to intervene when someone has been misgendered.

Spade (2011) offers several tips for respecting individuals’ gender identity and expression requests. Among these tips is a [Pronoun Etiquette Sheet](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/Pronoun-Etiquette-Sheet.pdf) that instructors can use in discussions about gender identity and expression.

**Other gender affirming practices include:**

* Only call roll or read the class roster aloud after providing students with an opportunity to share their requested name and pronouns, and what they care to disclose to the class.
* Allow students to self-identify the name and pronouns they prefer.
* Set a tone of respect the first day of class as part of the course expectations and connect this discussion with honoring one another’s requested names and pronouns.
* Acknowledge when you’ve made a mistake about someone’s pronoun and correct yourself.
* Honor students’ requested names in all university settings including (but not limited to): office hours, classroom, student group meetings, or when speaking with other faculty or staff.
* Politely provide a correction whether the person who was misgendered is present or not.
* Do not ask personal questions of gender non-conforming people that you would not ask of others. Such questions include inquiries about a gender non-conforming person’s body, medical care, former name, why or how they knew they were gender non-conforming, their sexual orientation or practices, their family’s reaction to their gender identity, or any other questions that are irrelevant to the classroom context unless the student explicitly invites these questions or voluntarily offers this information.
* Do not disclose students’ gender identity unless you have obtained their consent.

**Implementing Gender-Inclusive Pedagogical Practices**

The Gender Inclusivity Task Force at Vanderbilt recently developed a [gender pronoun poster](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/wp-content/uploads/What-Should-I-Call-You-Pronouns-Poster.pdf) which provides information on gender pronoun usage and proactive ways for instructors to affirm Vanderbilt’s commitment to gender inclusion. This poster includes a set of terms that are common in the current context, however students’ gender identities are personal and can be fluid. As such, this poster is meant to serve as a guide, not a definitive list of gender pronouns. The Vanderbilt English Language Center has produced a [supplement](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/resources/pronoun-guide/) to this pronoun guide that may be of special interest to foreign-born students, faculty, and staff.

**These strategies include:**

* Offering your name and pronouns when introducing yourself, even to familiar colleagues and students.
* Including your gender pronouns in your email signature and syllabus.
* Asking students their names and pronouns rather than making assumptions from the class roster or their gender presentation.
* Referring to students by their requested names and pronouns both inside and outside of the classroom.
* Substituting gender binary language for more inclusive language such as “everybody”, “folks” or “this person.”
* Respecting students’ privacy and only sharing their gender identities after receiving their consent.
* Apologizing when you make a mistake and misgender someone.

**Collecting information about students’ gender pronouns**

Inquiring about students’ gender pronoun preferences may, at first, feel awkward for educators. This discomfort may be a result of feelings of uncertainty about how to ask students about their gender identity. Uneasiness may also stem from uncertainty about how to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect over the course of a semester.

Professors must decide individually whether (and how) to collect this information. There are at least two considerations that may influence this decision:

* First, is asking a student for their requested name and pronouns overly invasive?
* Second, does asking students to share their pronouns force them to repeatedly “come out?”

Instructors’ views on these questions likely shape their beliefs about the most appropriate course of action.

There are a variety of approaches that can be adapted by instructors based on the discipline, class size, course topic, etc. These approaches include:

* Create a pre-class survey that provides a space to disclose this information using Survey Monkey, Google Forms, or a related polling platform.
* Pass around a seating chart or sign-in sheet that ask students for their name and pronouns. Consider including a blank space when inquiring about gender identity rather than a box to check. The former approach allows students to express a wider range of requested pronouns.
* Encourage or require students to meet with you in office hours to learn more about what will help them to learn and flourish in the class, which could entail discussion of many issues, including preferred names and pronouns.

Once you have collected students’ requested names, it is important to honor these requests in all course-related classroom interactions. Doing so fosters a sense of mutual respect that is crucial in cultivating inclusive classrooms.

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| **Here are several techniques for** [**learning (and remembering) students’ names**](http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/teaching/names) |

Finally, when gathering information about students’ gender identity, it is imperative that course instructors not expect gender non-conforming students to “represent” the “gender non-conforming perspective” in classroom discussions. Instead, consider including course materials that offer feedback from self-identified gender non-conforming scholars to flush out the multitude of perspectives on a given topic (Abbott 2009). The latter approach reduces the burden placed on gender non-confirming students.

**Maintaining a classroom environment that is fully respectful of students’ gender identity and expression over the course of the semester**

Conflict may arise when creating (and trying to maintain) a gender-inclusive classroom environment. In these moments, instructors and teaching assistants may feel uncertain about how to appropriately intervene, particularly when a student has been misgendered or when microaggressions occur. Despite discomfort, it is the instructor and teaching assistants' role as the leaders in the classroom to intervene. This is often the case even when these “teaching moments” are not directly related to the course content.

One of the best ways to maintain a positive classroom environment is be proactive about establishing norms of mutual respect from the first class meeting. For many instructors, it is customary to communicate expectations about course assignments and attendance on the first day; however, incorporating expectations about healthy communication, conflict and respecting one another’s gender identity tends to be more rare. As a result, instructors may miss an important opportunity to cultivate a welcoming and gender-inclusive classroom atmosphere. More importantly, modeling such behavior may give students a better sense of how to conduct themselves and greater trust in the support in the learning community of the classroom.

For those who choose to communicate their expectations about communication, conflict and mutual respect, there are many ways this conversation might unfold. One possible approach is to begin the semester with a conversation about the importance of honoring one another by correctly pronouncing names and using requested pronouns.

Another approach is to develop a document that outlines your expectations of mutual respect and present it to students during the first week of class. After presenting it to students, you might allow them to add to the document and use the final product as “ground rules” in your classroom. Or, the document may be developed with students from the start, particularly in courses where complex and challenging issues may be discussed on a regular basis.

This [mutual respect document](http://www.physics.ohio-state.edu/~wilkins/sciandsoc/mutual.html) was developed in the Physics department at Ohio State University.

Beginning the course in this way provides an opening to talk about conflict before it arises. As part of this conversation, you might discuss how you will react when a student or you yourself misgenders a student. Some phrases might include:

**“Actually, Billy uses she pronouns”…and then moving on.**

**or**

**“I meant she”…and then moving on.**

Discussing this language outside of a “hot moment” allows students to learn about issues of gender identity and expression without activating defensive reactions. Moreover, it may head off potential conflict by having students engage in these important conversations before a breakdown of understanding occurs.

When hot moments do arise, it is not advisable to avoid difficult or uncomfortable conversations. While it may feel awkward to stop and correct your (or a students’) pronoun usage, failing to act is a personal affront against gender non-conforming individuals since it disrespects, excludes, or erases their identity.

Remember, students will naturally look to you for cues about the importance of gender-inclusivity owing to your role as a leader in the classroom. Be mindful of the verbal (and non-verbal) messages you send. If you are consistent in using students’ requested names and pronouns, in most cases students will follow your lead and exert a similar level of effort in respecting their peers’ gender identity and expression.

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| **For additional ideas about establishing a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment, check out the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching’s teaching guide titled** [**"First Day of Class"**](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/first-day-of-class/)**.** |

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| **For further ideas on establishing a positive environment and providing a space for students to get to know one another in the classroom setting, check out these** [**first day ice-breakers activity ideas**](http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingettes/icebreakers.aspx)**.** |

**Incorporating gender non-conforming voices into course materials appropriately**

Course instructors may decide to include authors with non-conforming gender identities into their syllabi with the intent to broaden the range of voices included in course materials. In doing so, however, instructors must be careful to avoid doing so in a manner that homogenizes, exoticizes, or tokenizes gender non-conforming experiences.

**AVOID #1:**

Suggesting gender non-conforming authors represent the beliefs of all gender non-conforming individual.

Students who are unfamiliar with gender identity issues, or have limited experiences interacting with gender non-conforming individuals, may be especially tempted to project the ideas of these authors onto all gender non-conforming people.

**AVOID #2:**

Allowing students to inappropriately probe into the lives of gender non-conforming individuals when first introduced to gender or sexual identity topics risks some exoticization of these individuals as Other or object, and therefore potential exploitation.

Inappropriate remarks may center on salacious details or seek to gain some kind of entertainment or pleasure value from the experiences, identities, etc of gender non-conforming individuals. Students tend to pursue this line of questioning when the learning objective for a reading or assignment is not made explicit, or when the exploitative character of exoticization is not made clear.

**AVOID #3:**

Embracing one token voice or a narrow set of gender non-conforming voices into classroom readings.

**ALTERNATIVE:**

Instructors may unintentionally include a narrow set of gender non-conforming voices into their courses, which reinforce other forms of social power. It is important to take care to include a diversity of gender non-conforming backgrounds. For example, gender non-conforming individuals exhibit a wide array of racial/ethnic, socio-economic, educational, etc. backgrounds. Given this diversity, it is important to avoid privileging some voices/backgrounds over others when incorporating gender non-conforming voices into your syllabi.

**AVOID #4:**

Focusing on “coming out” stories when incorporating gender non-conforming voices.

Instructors may include gender non-conforming course materials that center on the experience of “coming out” as gender non-conforming in an effort to provide an accessible starting point in gender identity classroom discussions. This practice is often harmful because it trains students’ attention to anecdotal experiences rather than interrogating broader systems of power (Courvant 2011, 30). Consequently, students miss the opportunity to explore the ideological dimensions of gender and sexuality and how broader structures can disproportionately privilege some voices over others, even within gender non-conforming communities.

**AVOID #5:**

Reducing the complexity of gender non-conforming individuals’ experience in an attempt to “avoid confusion” (Courvant 2011, 30).

**ALTERNATIVE:**

Instructors may avoid incorporating the stories of gender non-conforming individuals that disagree with one another in their syllabi because they fear confusing students. Focusing solely on the needs of the non-trans audience when constructing learning opportunities often results in an inattention to the needs of gender non-conforming individuals in these teaching moments (Courvant 2011, 30). Instructors’ willingness to present conflicting viewpoints, and nuanced arguments, can offer students a worthwhile opportunity to consider course content more deeply.

**AVOID #6:**

Including gender non-conforming topics and/or voices in separate unit(s) of a syllabus.

**ALTERNATIVE:**

Instructors may incorporate gender non-conforming topics and/or voices into a single unit of their syllabus. This approach often hinders students’ ability to think beyond the gender binary because this framing “reproduces normative assumptions about the dominance of some groups over others” (Valle-Ruiz et al. 2015). This occurs because students “visit” gender non-conforming topics without being forced to engage the full complexities of social power and hierarchies that these topics highlight, and it doesn't help students think through the way gender identity or expression intersects with other differences. A more ideal approach is for instructors to incorporate gender non-conforming materials in multiple course topics and discuss the many questions that these materials provoke throughout a course (Preston 2011).

**AVOID #7:**

Including only a narrow range of gender non-conforming topics in your syllabus.

**ALTERNATIVE:**

Instructors may be inclined to include gender non-conforming materials that exclusively focus on the negative experiences of marginalization that gender non-conforming individuals face in their everyday lives. Abbott (2009) points to the importance of moving beyond depictions of transphobic violence and other bleak realities such as gang rape, domestic violence and murder when incorporating gender non-conforming experiences into course syllabi. Moving beyond this focus, Abbott explains, creates an opening to engage in conversations about fostering “greater tolerance, self-realization and equity” (2009, 160).

**Effectively drawing connections between gender non-conforming perspectives and broader course learning goals and objectives**

In an effort to create more inclusive courses, instructors may elect to integrate authors with non-conforming gender identities into their course. While integrating a wider array of voices is an important component of creating more gender-inclusive course content, doing so without giving full consideration to how these voices contribute to, and enhance, the course learning goals is often confusing for students. Moreover, when the value of these additional voices is unclear, students may misdirect their attention and miss the learning potential.

Incorporating gender non-conforming voices into course materials can be an important tool for unpacking students’ assumptions about gender identity and expression. However, it is essential that instructors include these texts with a clear sense of how they relate to the broader course objectives and goals. Moreover, it is imperative that instructors explicitly communicate these connections to students.

In cases where students are unclear about the relevance of these readings to broader course goals, students’ existing assumptions about gender may be reaffirmed. Moreover, failing to account for how gender non-conforming voices enhance course learning goals may actually hinder efforts to cultivate a more gender-inclusive classroom.

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| **See the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching’s teaching guide titled “**[**Difficult Dialogues**](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/)**” which provides instruction about how to think carefully about how difficult topics connect with your subject area and course learning goals.** |

**Integrating non-conforming gender topics into courses that are seemingly unrelated to gender**

Instructors in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) classrooms may believe that the content of the courses they lead are less amenable to acknowledging the fluidity of gender identity. Given this assumption, instructors in these disciplines may fail to fully consider the range of ways that gender identity affects the learning environment in classroom spaces.

For those who teach courses that are not explicitly related to themes of gender and identity, there are still opportunities to design gender-inclusive courses. For instance, one small non-content related modification would be to add an inclusivity statement that invites students to communicate their name and pronoun requests. Another small modification would be to add a brief explanation of the importance of mutual respect in learning spaces, particularly with respect to gender identity and expression.

However, there also may be opportunities to address course content creatively in STEM courses, particularly in biological fields where gender can shape much of our analysis of the body and its treatment. Case, Stewart, and Tittsworth (2009) offer several recommendations for adapting STEM course content that considers gender non-conforming experiences. Focused on the bio-medical fields, they suggest that instructors dig more deeply into gendered assumptions that shape medical treatments for intersex individuals who seek corrective surgery. Instructors might also discuss medical diagnoses that have emerged in light of intersex patients. Another recommendation is to incorporate a class debate about the impact of gender labeling on the development of criteria for diagnosis, drug development and medical treatment. Lastly, the authors suggest that instructors might incorporate debates around the research on gender non-conforming brain structures, such as that of the the female limbic nucleus neuron counts for male-to-female transsexuals.

For some, the latter recommendation may seem problematic given the history of biological sexism and racism in the United States. However, attending to these differences in a respectful manner not only communicates respect for a variety of gender identities, but also has the added benefit of increasing the disciplinary accumulation of knowledge regarding issues of health and safety for all members of society.

**Other potential modifications include:**

* In business classrooms, including case studies for companies that develop products for gender non-conforming clients.
* In engineering classrooms, encouraging students to think about how existing technologies might require modification if one were to consider the needs of gender non-confirming individuals.
* In biology classrooms, incorporating readings about the variation of gender identity and expression when presenting about sex chromosomes.
* In medical school classrooms, incorporating materials about the medical needs of gender non-conforming individuals in broader training about standards of care, developing a friendly bedside manner and obstacles to treatment in different segments of the population.

Brondani and Paterson (2011) offer additional applications in dental education. Safer and Pearce (2013) provide empirical evidence that even small content changes can increase medical students' comfort with transgender patients.

**Implementing standard and fair assessment practices related to non-conforming gender topics**

Given the range of prior experiences with issues of gender identity, students may exhibit varying levels of expertise in how to identify credible sources, formulate rigorous arguments, and evaluate evidence used to examine claims related to these topics. In these cases, it is imperative that instructors clearly communicate course expectations and exhibit transparency in the method (and standards) of assessment.

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| **See the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching’s teaching guide titled “**[**Grading Student Work**](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/grading-student-work/#criteria)**” which includes a discussion of developing a grading criteria and providing meaningful feedback to students.**  **See a** [**sample rubric**](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/Bandy-Rubric-for-Writing-.docx) **created by CFT Assistant Director Joe Bandy** |

**Vanderbilt’s Name and Preferred Pronoun Change Policy**

There are currently two name change options available to gender non-conforming students at Vanderbilt.

* The first option is to **submit an undocumented name change request.** This option allows students to opt to have only their legal first and middle initials show in most university systems.
* The second option is to **submit a chosen name request**. This option allows students to specify a chosen name that appears in select internal university systems.

For more information about the name change process, please visit the [Name Changes Policy Page](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/transvu/name-changes) of Vanderbilt's K.C. Potter Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, & Intersex Life.

**Additional Campus Resources**

[Continuum (Vanderbilt Psychological and Counseling Center)](https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/pcc/continuum) process-oriented therapy group for students wishing to give and receive support around sexual identity and/or gender identity.

[Equal Opportunity, Affirmation Action and Disability Services Department](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/ead/contact_odc.html) assists the university with the interpretation, understanding and application of federal and state laws which impose special obligations in the areas of equal opportunity and affirmative action.

[Frequently asked questions for Trans students at Vanderbilt Divinity School](http://divinity.vanderbilt.edu/FAQ%20for%20Trans_%20Students.pdf)

[LGBTQI Life Affinity Groups](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/programs/affinity-groups) provide an affirming and brave space for Vanderbilt students to discuss their needs, challenges and successes.

[Vanderbilt Trans Buddy Program](https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/lgbti/trans-buddy-program) provides emotional support to transgender patients during healthcare visits.

[Trans@VU](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/transvu) gathers information and resources related to gender identity and expression for the Vanderbilt community.

[Vanderbilt Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Life](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/) cultural center and a place of affirmation for individuals of all identities, and a resource for information and support about gender and sexuality at Vanderbilt.

**Glossary of Basic Concepts and Definitions**

The following are terms that are frequently employed in conversations about gender identity and expression. This list is neither comprehensive nor inviolable. Rather, it is a set of basic terms related to gender identity and expression that is meant to help individuals enter into conversations about promoting gender inclusivity. Several of these terms are used throughout this teaching guide.

**Agender**: a term that is used to refer to individuals who do not express a gender identity or consider themselves gender neutral. Agender literally means “without gender.”

**Androgynous**: a gender expression that incorporates elements of both femininity and masculinity.

**Cisgender**: a person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth align (e.g. a man whose sex was assigned male at birth).

**Cisnormativity/Cissexism**: a prevailing assumption among individuals, and within institutions, that everyone is cisgender. This assumption may make it more difficult to address the needs of those with non-cisgender identities.

**Feminine of Center**: a term used to describe individuals whose gender and gender expression is structured around a sense of femininity. These individuals need not be a woman and/or someone assigned female at birth.

**Gender Binary**: a term that refers to the idea that there are only two genders (e.g. man/woman) and individuals should be gendered as either man or woman.

**Gender Expression**: a term that refers to individuals’ external display of their gender either through clothing, demeanor, social behavior and other factors. Also referred to as gender presentation.

**Gender Fluid**: a term that is used to refer to individuals who identify in a way that flows between genders, or whose gender identity fluctuates or shifts. This shift may flow between all genders or any subset of genders.

**Gender Identity**: an individuals’ internal sense of themselves as either male, female, both or neither.

**Gender Non-Conforming**: a person whose gender presentation does not align with socially-constructed gender expectations.

**Gender Normative/Gender Straight**: a person whose gender expression aligns with socially-constructed gender expectations.

**Genderqueer**: a gender identity label that is often used by people who do not identify with the man/woman gender binary. It is also sometimes used as an umbrella term for the spectrum of non-binary gender identities.

**Gender Variant**: a term that refers to individuals who do not conform with socially-constructed gender expectations.

**Heteronormative**: a prevailing assumption among individuals, and within institutions, that everyone is heterosexual. This assumption assumes that being heterosexual is “normal” and makes it more difficult to address the needs of those with non-heterosexual sexual identities.

**Intersex**: an individual whose combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal or external sex organs, etc. differs from the two traditionally prescribed patterns of male (XX) or female (XY). In the past, some used the term hermaphrodite, which is now considered outdated and derogatory.

**Masculine of Center**: a term that covers a variety of identities and brings depth to queer/lesbian/women who structure their gender and gender expression from a masculine hue.

**Microaggression**: a term used to refer to everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based on their marginalized group membership.

**Misgender**: a term used to describe the act of failing to acknowledge (or use) an individual’s requested gender pronouns or using gendered language when referring to them (i.e. ma’am, sir, guy, girl, etc.). The possibility of being misgendered is often anxiety provoking for gender non-conforming individuals. Moreover, being misgendered is disrespectful and violent, putting the misgendered individual at risk for discrimination.

**Non-binary**: a term used to describe individuals who do not identify with the man/woman gender binary. In some cases, individuals may use this term to describe their gender identity.

**Sex Assigned at Birth**: a medical term used to refer to the physiological (chromosomal, hormonal, etc.) characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female, male, or intersex at birth. Biological sex is more commonly referred to as “sex”, “physical sex” or “sex assigned at birth”

**They/Them**: gender neutral pronouns that are preferred by some individuals who identify as gender non-conforming.

**Trans**: an umbrella term often used to refer to anyone who identifies as a gender other than their gender designated at birth. However, some people choose not to identify as trans.

**Transition/ing**: a term used to refer to the multiple processes (social, physical, emotional, etc.) a gender non-conforming person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance to better align with their gender identity.

**Transphobia**: a term used to refer to fear, hatred or discrimination against individuals who identify as gender non-conforming and/or are ambiguous with respect to gender expression.

**Two-spirit**: a term traditionally used by Native American people to describe individuals who exhibit qualities that are associated with traditional expectations of male and female gender expression.

**Ze/Hir**: gender neutral pronouns that are preferred by some individuals who identify as gender non-conforming.

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***1******Many thanks to the following individuals for their helpful feedback and edits:  
Dr. Melanie Adley, Dr. Joe Bandy, Dr. Richard Coble, Dr. Vivian Finch, Jane Hirtle, Corey Jansen, Liv N. Parks and Chris Purcell.***