

## Gender Diversity in the Classroom

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### Why Should Teachers Care?

The Stanford Campus Climate Survey showed that 2% of students identify as "gender diverse" in 2015. This number is likely going to rise at the nationwide estimate for transgender individuals has doubled in the last five years. According to this survey, over 20% of these gender diverse students feel less than "somewhat safe" on campus. Gender diverse students consistently observe more homophobic or sexist remarks, as well as experience more unwanted sexual conduct. These experiences can greatly hinder the ability of these students to engage in learning. Sensitivity and respect for gender diverse students may make a significant difference in their perception of your classroom's atmosphere. Additionally, efforts to manage the social dynamics such as the interactions between you and the student or the student and their peers can limit harm and set the norm for respectful behavior.

### What Does Gender Diversity Mean?

When discussing gender diversity, it is important to distinguish between the terms **sex**, **gender**, and **sexual orientation**, although much of our terminology about all three concepts overlaps. A person's **sex** is assigned based on physical characteristics such as chromosomes and reproductive organs. Most people are assigned either male or female at birth, though up to 2% of the population may be intersex.

By contrast, **gender** refers to socially constructed behaviors and identities generally associated with masculinity, femininity, or androgyny. A person's **gender identity** (the gender they associate with internally) may or may not align with their **gender expression** (the outwardly visible performance of gender). Someone is transgender if their gender identity differs from their assigned sex, regardless of whether they have or have not physically transitioned, or whether they wish or plan to. Someone whose identity does not fit at either end of the gender spectrum might use terms like genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, or gender non-conforming. They may also prefer to be referred to by gender-neutral pronouns like "they" or "ze."

**Sexual orientation** refers to an individual's sexual and/or romantic attractions to different groups. While sexual orientation is not dependent on gender, our terminology often overlaps — e.g. a lesbian is someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to women. A great resource for visualizing these different terms and the way they intersect in an individual identity is the [Gender Unicorn by Trans Student Educational Resources](#).

**How to Be Inclusive of Gender Diverse Students:**

1. Model discussing pronouns: introduce yourself with your name and preferred pronoun and add a line in your syllabus about importance of using correct pronouns.
  2. Ask what pronouns students use – it is better to ask than to wrongly assume.
  3. If you don't know someone's pronouns, keep using their name until you can ask.
  4. Don't put the onus on the student to "educate" you, by asking lots of irrelevant questions when you can instead educate yourself through available resources.
  5. Don't ask unnecessary questions or details, especially if it is overly personal and/or not something you need to know in order to respectfully interact with them.
  6. Invite feedback: "Please correct me if I use the wrong name/pronouns." If you do make a mistake, sincerely apologize without minimizing it and move on.
  7. Do not "out" or gossip about anyone. In some situations, students may prefer that you use their legal names (e.g. on reference letters) so always clarify with the student.
  8. Manage interactions between students as needed: if another student uses the incorrect name or pronoun (misgendering), remind them of the correct name/pronoun.
    - a. If you suspect that the use of language was a mistake, you can subtly remind the student by restating what was said with the correct name or pronoun: "I think that X meant..." Or you can address this more directly: "By Y, did you mean X?" or "I think you meant to say X."
    - b. If you believe the use of language was intentional, you may privately address the student's behavior. Follow-up with the student being misnamed or misgendered to understand how they want the situation addressed.
  9. Rethink parts of your speech/practices that are gendered or perpetuate gender stereotypes. Consider rephrasing your lesson plan to be inclusive of gender variance.
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**Resources:**

Office of the Provost and Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support, Stanford University. (2015). <https://stanford.app.box.com/v/2015-campus-climate-survey>

Pan, L., Erlick, E., et al. The Gender Unicorn. Trans Student Educational Resources. <http://www.transstudent.org/gender>.

Rankin, S., Weber, G., Blumenfeld, W., and Frazer, S. (2010). The state of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. <https://www.campuspride.org/wp-content/uploads/campuspride2010lgbtreportsummary.pdf>