

ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF
WHITMAN COLLEGE
STUDENT SENATE
SESSION 2015 SPRING TERM

IN THE SENATE
RESOLUTION SRS15.5

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A Resolution to Incorporate Respect for Preferred Gender Pronouns into the Whitman Experience

WHEREAS preferred gender pronouns are those by which an individual feels most comfortable being referred to by (e.g., she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs, ze/hir/his using one's name as their only pronoun); and;

WHEREAS students who identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, and/or outside of the gender binary often choose to identify under a new name and/or set of preferred pronouns than those they were assigned at birth; and

WHEREAS allowing individuals the freedom to define their own identity, including the way in which they would like others to refer to them, is a vital component of respecting an individual's gender identity; and

WHEREAS Hampshire College states that allowing students the ability to define their preferred pronouns is especially important within college classroom settings because "[a]sking your students what their preferred pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected at Hampshire College or not";¹ and

WHEREAS Whitman's Statement on Diversity states, "Diversity is fundamentally important to the character and mission of Whitman College. Diversity enriches our community and enhances intellectual and personal growth. [...] By sustaining a diverse community, we strive to ensure that all individuals are valued and respected and that intellectual and personal growth are enriched because of our differences";² and

WHEREAS Whitman's Statement of Nondiscrimination declares, "Whitman College has a strong commitment to the principle of nondiscrimination. In its admission and employment practices, administration of educational policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs, Whitman College does not discriminate on the basis of [...] gender, [...] and] gender identity";³ and

WHEREAS there is currently a lack of publicized, easily accessible, yet discreet means for a student to change their preferred name and pronouns within Whitman, especially in a way that will appear on a professor's roster; and

¹ Medina, Mateo. "Preferred Gender Pronouns: For Faculty." Hampshire College, Aug. 2011.

² Whitman College Board of Trustees. "Statement on Diversity By The Trustees of Whitman College." Whitman College, 4 Nov. 2005.

³ "Statement of Nondiscrimination." Whitman College.

WHEREAS the Associated Students of Whitman College (ASWC) believes that efforts to promote a diverse student body must be partnered with efforts to ensure that students of marginalized identities feel supported in those identities during their time at Whitman; and

WHEREAS supporting students in their exploration and/or change in gender identification is vital to allow them to feel safe within the Whitman community, especially for students who have not previously felt able to safely express and explore their gender identity; and

WHEREAS the Carleton College Gender and Sexuality Center provides a set of instructions for students to change their name on ID cards, the registrar, and class rosters, and additionally gives advice on contacting professors regarding one's preferred name and pronouns;⁴ and

WHEREAS Reed College allows students to change their preferred name on class rosters without requiring a legal name or gender change;⁵ and

WHEREAS the comparable policies of many other schools problematically require students to provide proof of a legal name and/or gender change, which is insufficient to accommodate the needs of gender nonconforming individuals because these resources are inaccessible to many students for financial, social, and in many states legal reasons; and be it further

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Associated Students of Whitman College (ASWC) urges Whitman College to create an easily accessible process for students to change their first name and preferred gender pronouns; and be it further

RESOLVED that ASWC proposes that the Registrar include name and pronoun choice as part of the pre-registration process so that it will be easily accessible to students once per semester; and be it further

RESOLVED that ASWC recommends that Whitman's Chief Diversity Officer, with the input of students and other relevant parties, develop and distribute a handout to all staff, faculty, and club leaders including, but not limited to, information describing what a preferred pronoun is, why they are important, how to respect and normalize the use of preferred pronouns, examples of different lesser known pronouns, how to ask for a student or colleague's pronoun, and what to do if you or a student accidentally refers to someone with the incorrect pronoun; and be it further

RESOLVED that ASWC suggests consulting the resources developed by Hampshire College and Cornell College, found in Appendices 1 and 2, in the development of the hand-out described above; and be it further

RESOLVED that ASWC asks all professors to include in their syllabi a statement expressing their willingness to accommodate a student's choice of name and pronouns and recommends the University of Colorado Boulder's proposed statement, found in Appendix 3, as a model.

⁴ Straight, Tegra. "Transitioning at Carleton." Carleton College Gender and Sexuality Center, 31 Oct. 2014.

⁵ "Trans* and Gender Nonconforming at Reed - FAQ." Reed College.

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Appendix 1

Preferred Gender Pronouns: For Faculty

(Or, *How to Take Important Steps in Becoming a Trans Ally!*)

What is a pronoun?

- A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like *I* or *you*) or someone or something that is being talked about (like *she*, *it*, *them*, and *this*). Gender pronouns (like *he* and *hers*) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

What is a “preferred gender pronoun”?

- A "preferred gender pronoun" (or PGP) is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves. For example: If Xena's preferred pronouns are *she*, *her*, and *hers*, you could say "Xena ate *her* food because *she* was hungry."

What are some commonly used pronouns?

- *She*, *her*, *hers* and *he*, *him*, *his* are the most commonly used pronouns. Some people call these "female/feminine" and "male/masculine" pronouns, but many avoid these labels because, for example, not everyone who uses *he* feels like a "male" or "masculine."
- **There are also lots of gender-neutral pronouns in use.** Here are a few you might hear: *Ø They, them, theirs* (Xena ate *their* food because *they* were hungry.) This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun.... And yes, it *can* in fact be used in the singular. *Ø Ze, hir* (Xena ate *hir* food because *ze* was hungry.) *Ze* is pronounced like "zee" can also be spelled *zē* or *xe*, and replaces *she/he/they*. *Hir* is pronounced like "here" and replaces *her/hers/him/his/they/theirs*.
- **Just my name please!** (Xena ate Xena's food because Xena was hungry) Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.
- **Never, ever refer to a person as “it” or “he-she” (unless they specifically ask you to.)** These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals.

Why is it important to respect people's PGPs?

- You can't always know what someone's PGP is by looking at them.
- Asking and correctly using someone's preferred pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
- When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above.)
- It is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. If you have this privilege, yet fail to respect someone else's gender identity, it is not only disrespectful and hurtful, but also oppressive.

Why is it really important to respect your students' PGPs as a Faculty Member?

As a faculty member, you are often in a position of power.

- Asking your students what their preferred pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected at Hampshire College or not.
- **You will be setting an example for your class:** If you are consistent about using someone's preferred pronouns, they will follow your example.
- Many of your students will be learning about PGPs for the first time, so **this will be a learning opportunity** for them that they will keep forever.
- **Discussing and correctly using PGPs sets a tone of respect and allyship that trans and gender non-conforming students do not take for granted.** It can truly make all of the difference, especially for incoming first-year students that may feel particularly vulnerable, friendless, and scared.

How do I ask someone what their PGP is?

- Try asking: "What are your preferred pronouns?" or "Which pronouns do you like to hear?" or "Can you remind me which pronouns you like for yourself?" It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what a PGP is, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and your preferred pronoun. That means the pronoun you like to be referred to with. For example, I'm Xena, I'm from Amazon Island, and I like to be referred to with she, her, and hers pronouns. So you could say, 'she went to her car' if you were talking about me." **What if I make a mistake?**
- It's okay! Everyone slips up from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like "Sorry, I meant *she*." If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize in private and move on.
- A lot of the time it can be tempting to go on and on about how bad you feel that you messed up or how hard it is for you to get it right. But please, *don't!* **It is inappropriate and makes the person who was mis-gendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job. It is your job to remember people's PGPs. Taking an active role**
- In your classes, you may hear one of your students using the wrong pronoun for someone. In most cases, it is appropriate to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been mis-gendered. This means saying something like "Actually, Xena prefers the pronoun *she*," and then moving on. **If other students or faculty are consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, do not ignore it! It is important to let your student know that you are their ally.**
- It may be appropriate to approach them and say something like "I noticed that you were getting referred to with the wrong pronoun earlier, and I know that that can be really hurtful. Would you be okay with me taking them aside and reminding them about your preferred pronoun? I want to make sure that this group is a safe space for you." Follow up if necessary, **but take your cues from the comfort level of your student. Your actions will be greatly appreciated.**

Based on materials written by Mateo Medina for Hampshire College Orientation training, August 2011

Appendix 2

Preferred Gender Pronouns

Cornell attracts a diverse group of students every year. It is becoming increasingly common for people in the wider world to choose alternative sexual and gender identities. As part of gender identity some people may also choose to change their names, their style of dress, their hair styles, and even their personal pronouns.

What are PGPs?

Pronouns are parts of speech that replace other nouns, such as I, we and they. Gender pronouns are pronouns that indicate a person's gender, such as she or he. A preferred gender pronoun is a consciously chosen set of pronouns that allow a person to accurately represent their gender identity in a way that is comfortable for them. For example, a trans* person may begin using a gender-neutral pronoun prior to transitioning, and a gendered pronoun afterwards, or an agender, bigender or third-gender person may choose to use a neutral or invented pronoun.

Why are PGPs important?

People who make conscious choices about their gender identity may face obstacles from all directions. Recognizing and accepting alternative gender pronouns helps gender-non-conforming people feel more comfortable with their gender identities and highlights the problems created by our culture's strict gender binary.

One cannot always tell what a person's PGP is by looking at them. Asking and using their PGP is the most basic way to show respect for their gender identity.

How to normalize gender neutral pronouns and asking for PGPs

Some recommendations for normalizing asking and providing PGPs are:

- Introducing yourself with your pronouns: "Hi my name is Dave, I'm a visiting professor, and my pronouns are he/him/his." Then ask students to include their personal pronouns when introducing themselves as well.
- When choosing readings for class, try to include articles or examples that use gender neutral language or that feature gender-neutral or gender-ambiguous people.

Faculty Tips:

As a faculty member you are often in a position of power, both in and outside of the classroom. So, it is doubly important to ask for and use preferred gender pronouns to ensure that students feel respected on our campus. Further, as a faculty member you will be setting an example for both your classes and the rest of the campus. If you use a person's preferred pronouns other will too.

While PGPs are in the media, they are far from mainstream, in fact this may be your first time learning about them. Likewise, your students may not know about them either, so your use of PGPs during introductions and class time will be a learning experience for them too. Faculty and Students coming together to recognize and use people's PGPs creates a campus culture of trans* acceptance and allyship.

What if I misspeak?

It can be difficult to remember a person's PGPs when you're first learning about them, but it doesn't have to

be an awkward situation. Apologize, and correct yourself—”Sorry, I meant they.” Don’t go on and on apologizing, it’ll just make it painful for everyone. If you forget what someone’s PGP is, apologize and ask again, they will appreciate it much more than if you had used the wrong one. If you forget a person’s PGP, you can also use a person’s name rather than any pronouns ! If another student or faculty member is using a wrong pronoun and you know their PGP speak up.

Some Examples of PGPs (<https://apps.carleton.edu/student/orgs/saga/pronouns/>)

-----Getting to Know Gender-Neutral Pronouns! -----

Traditional Masculine	He laughed	I called him	His eyes gleam	That is his	He likes himself
Traditional Feminine	She laughed	I called her	Her eyes gleam	That is hers	She likes herself
Gender Neutral (Singular They)	They laughed	I called them	Their eyes gleam	That is theirs	They like themselves
Gender Neutral (Ze)	Ze laughed (pronounced: “zee” as in the letter ‘z’)	I called hir (pronounced: “here”)	Hir eyes gleam (pronounced: “here”)	That is hirs (pronounced: “here’s”)	Ze likes hirsself (pronounced: “here-self”)

There are many PGPs that people may choose to use that are not on this chart, but they typically work similarly.

If you have more questions, or wish to research further, here are some extra resources:

Huffington Post: “Preferred’ Pronouns Gain Traction at US Colleges” <http://tinyurl.com/or68sz5>

The New York Times: “The Freedom to Choose your Pronoun”

<http://tinyurl.com/osz8oaz>

Non-binary Wikia entry on Pronouns:

<http://nonbinary.org/wiki/Pronouns>

Appendix 3

“Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.”

Excerpted from “Name, Pronoun, & Gender Marker Changes,” a resource provided by the University of Colorado Boulder GLBTQ Center.