

Asking for Pronouns: For Faculty and Staff

What is a pronoun?

- x 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 a person's gender identity.

Why is it really important to respect your students' pronouns as a faculty or staff member?

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

- x Asking your students what pronouns they use and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected and welcomed at the College.
- x You will be setting an example for your class: If you are consistent about using someone's chosen pronouns, others are more likely to follow your example.
- x Many of your students will be learning about gender pronouns for the first time, so this will be a learning opportunity for them.
- x Discussing and correctly using pronouns sets a tone of respect and that trans and gender non-conforming students do not take for granted.

How do I ask someone what pronouns they use?

- x Try asking: "What pronouns do you use?" or "Which pronouns do you like to hear?" or "Could you remind me which pronouns you like for yourself?" It might feel awkward at first, but it is not as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- x If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what you are asking, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and what pronouns you use. For example, I'm Xena, I'm from Amazon Island, and I go by 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?

- x 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.