Pronouns Frequently Asked Questions

# Why is the University publicly stating people have a choice to share their pronouns?

The intention behind this public statement is to better support our entire community while simultaneously honoring the “Principles of Community.” The choice to share pronouns is an invitation to build on inclusive best practices and is intended to allow all individuals to share their pronouns safely at CSU.

## Principles of Community:

1. Inclusion - We create and nurture inclusive environments and welcome, value and affirm all members of our community, including their various identities, skills, ideas, talents and contributions.
2. Respect - We honor the inherent dignity of all people within an environment where we are committed to freedom of expression, critical discourse, and the advancement of knowledge.
3. Social justice - We have the right to be treated and the responsibility to treat others with fairness and equity, the duty to challenge prejudice, and to uphold the laws, policies and procedures that promote justice in all respects.

In addition, proactive inclusion efforts that welcome all students, but especially LGBTQIA+ student populations, are critical to addressing trends seen in recent data, both at CSU and across higher education institutions:

## 2019 National College Health Assessment

* 1 out of 2 of LGBTQIA+ students feel like they do not belong at CSU
* CSU LGBTQ+ students experience the highest levels of psychological distress, loneliness, suicidality, and suicide attempt across all CSU populations.
* 58% of CSU LGBTQ+ students screen positive for suicide risk, a rate that is more than 2 times greater than their non-LGBTQ peers. This rate increases for CSU LGBTQ+ Racially Minoritized Students.
* Anxiety, depression, and stress impact CSU LGBTQ+ students’ academics at significantly higher rates across all CSU populations, a rate that is more than 2 times greater than their non-LGBTQ peers.

## Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021

* Affirming transgender and nonbinary young people by respecting their pronouns is associated with lower rates of suicide attempt (by 50%).

# Why are individuals sharing their pronouns on campus? Am I required to also share my pronouns?

As a community, we are all learning together about the importance of pronouns and being better allies to the trans and non-binary community on campus. You are welcome to share your pronouns if you choose to do so. You can learn more about pronouns at [mypronouns.org](https://www.mypronouns.org/what-and-why).

# How is this relevant to the work I do at the University?

Trans and non-binary individuals report greater levels of harassment and discrimination in various settings, including school, work, and community. This leads to experiencing less acceptance and support in different areas of an individual’s life. Keeping with the Principles of Community, centered in supporting the mission and vision of access, research, teaching, and engagement, as a campus community we all have a responsibility to find ways to be more inclusive and respectful to all people on the CSU campus.

## Supporting students:

Trans and non-binary students nationwide report greater levels of harassment and discrimination, have a more negative perception of campus and classroom climates, and feel less accepted as part of the campus community, as compared to cisgender students (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; James et al., 2016). A study by Dugan et al. (2012), which compared trans-identified students, cisgender LGB students, and cisgender heterosexual students, found that the trans students viewed the climate on their campuses as more hostile (i.e., less tolerant and inclusive of them as trans people), and also reported a lower sense of belonging (i.e., acceptance and integration) within their campus community. Goldberg, Kuvalanka, and dickey (2018c) found that two-thirds of trans students reported that concerns about physical/emotional safety affected how they presented their gender on campus, with many stating that they dressed and presented in ways that were in closer alignment with the gender binary than was their actual gender identity.

Some research has linked the presence of trans-inclusive policies/supports on college campuses to trans students’ psychosocial and academic outcomes. In their study of over 500 trans students, Goldberg, Beemyn, and Smith (2018a) found that the presence of trans-inclusive policies/practices was related to a greater sense of belonging and more positive perceptions of campus climate. Among the supports that students valued most were gender-inclusive restrooms, non-discrimination policies that are inclusive of gender identity, and the ability to change one’s name on campus records (Goldberg et al., 2018a).

1. The US Transgender Survey found that 24% of respondents who were out as or perceived as trans in college/vocational school reported being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed at that time—with 16% of those who experienced harassment reporting that they left college because of it (James et al., 2016). American Indian (37%), Black (28%), and Middle Eastern (27%) respondents were more likely to have had these experiences, while white (23%), Latino/a (23%), and Asian (22%) respondents were less likely (USTS 2015 survey data).
2. In a study of 152 trans college students, Woodford, Joslin, Pitcher, and Renn (2017) found that the frequency of experiencing select trans environmental microaggressions (e.g., not having access to comfortable bathrooms as a trans person) was associated with increased risk of negative academic outcomes. Finally, Seelman (2016), using data from the NTDS, found that among students who had attended college, being denied access to restrooms or gender-appropriate housing during while in college was associated with a higher risk for suicidality.

## Supporting staff/faculty:

Human capital is one of the greatest assets to the university, without the people who teach, research, and run day-to-day operations our university would not exist. Currently, there is no center for support in Fort Collins outside of the Pride Resource Center - which is focused on supporting students at CSU. Without a sense of belonging and ability to connect with their community, trans and non-binary employees do not have the same types of support and networks to work through problematic workplace situations.

The experiences of trans and non-binary employees at CSU reported more negative experiences with regard to disrespectful behavior and negative treatment on campus in the internal Campus Climate Survey conducted in 2016. There is also national data that reports on the experiences of trans and non-binary individuals in the US that provide more detail to the types of disrespectful and negative treatment experienced by CSU employees.

1. According to USTS 2015 survey data, 16% of individuals reported losing at least one job because of their gender identity or expression. 30% of respondents reported being fired,  denied a promotion, or experiencing some other form of mistreatment in the workplace related to their gender identity of expression, such as being harassed or attacked. 15% of respondents were verbally harassed, physically attacked, and/or sexually assaulted at work because of their gender identity/expression. 23% of respondents reported mistreatment such as being told by their employer to present as the wrong gender in order to keep their job or having employers or coworkers share private information about their gender status without permission. 77% of respondents reported taking steps to avoid mistreatment in the workplace, such as hiding or delaying their gender identify, gender transition or quitting their job.

# What if I’m not ready (or don’t want) to share my pronouns in public?

You don’t have to: No one is required to share their pronouns.  Nor should anyone feel pressured or obligated to share their pronouns. As an inclusive institution, we honor folks who share their pronouns so that we can all correctly address people during all forms of communication, and we honor those who do not wish to identify or are not ready to identify their pronouns.

# What if I make a mistake and use incorrect pronouns?

If you accidentally use the wrong pronouns for a person, correct yourself immediately, if possible. Don’t center your own feelings in the situation or put unwanted attention on the person. Simply correct yourself and continue forward. If you realize you misgendered someone after-the-fact, address the mistake one-on-one with the impacted party.

* Note that folks who do not use binary pronouns (she/her or he/him) may feel uncomfortable with correcting in the moment. If they have introduced their pronouns and someone misgenders them, be an ally and help correct in the moment. “Chris uses they/them pronouns”

# What are the assumptions people may make about those who choose to share (or not share) their pronouns?

Sharing or not sharing pronouns does not automatically make one an ally or a bad person. Using one’s correct pronouns contributes to an inclusive culture and shows respect for all individuals and their identity. When you correctly use another person's pronouns, it indicates that you choose to honor and respect people for who they are and that you do not wish to mislabel others or be mislabeled yourself.

# What are the suggestions for when/where/how often to share pronouns?

Appropriate times to share pronouns include any time there are introductions either in public or private settings, within email signatures, and whenever you feel comfortable in an effort to better identify yourself and/or as a show of inclusivity for others.

# How does sharing pronouns contribute to an inclusive culture?

Sharing pronouns normalize a space for people to share their pronouns, particularly for trans and non-binary people. There is a privilege of appearing in a way that fits both your gender and pronouns that others would associate with your gender through the socialized assumptions we have been conditioned to make. This practice gives our community the opportunity to actively model our inclusivity and is not intended to cause discomfort to those who do not wish to share their pronouns.

In addition, proactive inclusion efforts such as pronoun usage which welcome all students, but especially LGBTQIA+ student populations, are critical to addressing trends seen in recent data, both at CSU and across higher education institutions:

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# Why is the language of “pronouns” being used instead of “preferred gender pronouns”?

Sometimes, in conversations about transgender identity, pronouns are referred to as “preferred gender pronouns”; however, there has been a movement away from this language because the word “preferred” implies that a person addressing someone could elect to use pronouns other than the ones a person has chosen for themselves. This, however, is not the case.

# What are different pronouns and what do they mean?

Pronouns are an important part of affirming someone's identity - there are more than just she/he pronouns. When in doubt, use someone’s name or neutral pronouns like “they.”

1. she/her - A person who goes by "**she**" could actually be a man, a woman, both, neither, or something else entirely. The pronoun itself does not necessarily indicate gender, even though culturally "**she**" tends to be associated with women.
2. he/him - A person who goes by "**he**" could actually be a man, a woman, both, neither, or something else entirely. The pronoun itself does not necessarily indicate gender, even though culturally "**he**" tends to be associated with men.
3. they/them - Although the pronoun "**they**" tends to be thought of as gender neutral, a person who goes by "**they**" could actually be a man, a woman, both, neither, or something else entirely.
4. Ze/hir - Although the pronoun "**ze**" tends to be thought of as gender neutral (and many people find pronouns to be an important affirmation of identity), a person who goes by "**ze**" could actually be a man, a woman, both, neither, or something else entirely.

Some people might also prefer that you use no pronouns and just use their name.

Never use “it” or “he-she”. These are offensive slurs used against trans and non-binary individuals.

# Where can I go for more information about trans/non-binary identities?

If you are a student, faculty or staff on campus, you can attend one of the Pride Resource Center’s [Safe Zone Trainings](https://prideresourcecenter.colostate.edu/programs-services/safe-zone/) or you can request a [Visible Voices](https://prideresourcecenter.colostate.edu/programs-services/visible-voices/) panel for your staff/team meeting and/or class.

The[Pride Resource Center staff](https://prideresourcecenter.colostate.edu/about-us/staff/) is also available to answer any questions you may have. Please [call, email or stop](https://prideresourcecenter.colostate.edu/about-us/contact-us/)by the center any time.

The [Women and Gender Advocacy Center](https://wgac.colostate.edu/) and the [Center for Women’s Studies and Gender Research](https://womensstudies.colostate.edu/) are also available for support.

Additional resources:

1. [Trans Studies in Higher Education Syllabus](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uUFd5pMlLTOigvVtt9uJYmimhH2w4rZL9azrrUiqZJc/edit)
2. [Trans Student Education Resources](http://www.transstudent.org/)
3. [National Center for Transgender Equality](https://transequality.org/)
4. [GLAAD](https://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources)