Developing Gender-Affirming Library Spaces, Systems, Services and Staff

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Where it all began...

VCU Libraries Gender Inclusive Workgroup and final report:

go.vcu.edu/gender-inclusive-library
Gender-Inclusive Library Workgroup Report

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Words matter
Some terminology may be new to you.

tinyurl.com/GendAffirmHandout
Developing Gender-Affirming Library Spaces, Systems, Services & Staff

VCU Libraries Gender-Inclusive Library Workgroup Report: govcu.edu/gender-inclusive-library

Includes background information, recommendations, terminology, and literature review/resources.

Terminology - See report for full list and also resources for additional context

Cisgender / Cis: "Identifies as their sex assigned at birth." Note that cisgender does not end in "-ed".

Cissexism: Social system that privileges and normalizes cisgender bodies and identities, thereby branding trans people as abnormal. Cissexism can include a variety of assumptions.

Deadnaming: Calling a transgender or nonbinary person by their given birth name, rather than the name they use.

Gender expression: How a person communicates their gender identity, usually via appearance/behavior.

Gender identity: A person’s concept of self as female, male, both, or neither. Gender identity may or may not match the sex a person was assigned at birth.

Gender nonconforming: People whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations.

Gender nonconforming people may identify as male, female, some combination of both, or neither.

LGBTQIA: A common acronym (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual) that encompasses a variety of sexual and gender minority identities. See also LGBT, LGBTQ, GLBT, etc.

Nonbinary: Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male; used as an adjective (e.g., "Jesse is a nonbinary person"). Not all nonbinary people identify as trans and not all trans people identify as nonbinary. Please ask and use the term and pronouns preferred by the individual.

Pronouns: The way people wish to be referred to in third person. If you’re not sure what someone’s pronouns are, it’s typically okay to ask. The term “preferred pronoun” is outdated; for many people, the act of being a preference invalidates the importance of using the person’s correct pronouns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cisgender</strong></td>
<td>Person identifies as the sex assigned at birth</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbinary</strong></td>
<td>Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LGBTQIA</strong></td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans/Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Intersex, Asexual…</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deadnaming</strong></td>
<td>Act of calling a transgender or nonbinary person by their given birth name, rather than name of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal gender pronouns</strong></td>
<td>Way people would like to be referred in the third person: he/him; she/her; they/them; etc</td>
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</tbody>
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| **Transgender / Trans** | People whose gender identity differs from sex assigned at birth  
  *Note: do not add “ed” to the end* |
Developing Gender Affirming...

- Systems & Online Spaces
- Services, Staffing, Culture
- Physical Library Spaces
Online
Systems & Online Spaces
Actively affirming identities
Names are critically important.

- Many trans and nonbinary folks use names that are different from their full legal first names, which can put them in precarious positions when a system displays only their legal name.
- Allow users to have control over what name displays, where.
- If you can’t allow that, don’t show names if you don’t have to.
Systems considerations: names

What we did:

- Made a private, unobtrusive workflow for users to request name changes in our ILS.
- Updated all forms (including for staff) to not auto-populate names.
- If we display default names on user interfaces, display user ID instead, or display nothing.
- Promote ORCID as an inclusive scholarly identifier.
- Leveraged connections/knowledge in central IT
Other considerations on websites/software:

- Ask for gender rarely and thoughtfully
- Check assumptions about biology
- Remember intersections
- Help people see themselves
Systems considerations

What we did:

- Made sure we aren’t asking for gender on forms
- If asking for an honorific, include “Mx.”
  - Donor forms, y’all!
- Updated style guide to include singular “they” instead of “he or she” and change Mother’s room language
- Updated online floor maps for inclusive restrooms
- Diversity and equity web page (in progress)
- Published and publicized our report!
Reflection on...

Systems & Online Spaces
User names, assumptions, privacy

Chat now!
Services

Services, Staffing, Culture

Training and more
Provide training for all service desk staff

- Invite a facilitator from outside the library to provide training.
- Offer more than a single training opportunity.
- Provide space in regular staff meetings to discuss gender inclusive practices and to answer questions.
- Invest in SafeZone or similar Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion training for staff.
Model and practice!

- Supervisors/managers should model the behavior they want staff to adopt.
- Add pronouns to nametags, email signature lines, business cards, and use in conversation.
- Use neutral collective terms (students, researchers, comrades) instead of gendered terms.
- In verifying patron accounts, offer options that don’t require a deadname.
- When responding to questions about restrooms, mention all of them, including universal or gender-neutral ones.
Reflection on...

Services, Staffing, Culture
Patron & staff opportunities; staff training

Chat now!
Spaces

Physical Library Spaces

Free to pee
Library spaces

**Restrooms**
- Highlight currently available restroom facilities.
- Improve existing restrooms.
- Provide access to sanitary products.
- Build multi-stall, all-gender restrooms.
- Communicate about access to restrooms.

**Other spaces**
- Privacy: Increase awareness of spaces where sound is still audible.
Library spaces

What we did:

● Publicized existing restroom facilities.
● Began engineering study for new universal restrooms.
● Added sanitary receptacles to gendered restrooms.
● Added tampon vending options.
● Added signage and sound mitigation to study rooms and other spaces.
Reflection on...

Physical Library Spaces
Restrooms, signage, shared spaces

Chat now!
The Big Takeaway and Questions
Additional Resources

The resources below have been published since the release of the Gender Inclusive Workgroup Report:


More reading:
- Transgender style guide
- TransAllyship Workbook
Remember: this is only the beginning of the conversation. These efforts are ongoing.
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