



## *Inclusive Practice Series*

### **PART 3: Creating Inclusive Classroom Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Students**

UC Davis has a history of active support for our LGBTQIA+ student population. In 2016, the advocacy group Campus Pride ranked UC Davis in the **top 30 LGBT-friendly** institutions of higher education in the US, giving our campus a rating of **4.5 out of 5 stars** on their Campus Pride Index (a measure of an institution's commitment to LGBT-inclusive policies and practices). This type of institutional support is vital as research has shown that students in the LGBTQIA+ community are more at risk for experiencing psychological, social, and academic distress when compared to their heterosexual and gender-conforming peers (Kirsch, Conley, & Riley, 2015, p. 155; see also Ridner et al., 2016). This increased stress on students, particularly in their first year of college, can result in internalization of psychological distress, as well as increased engagement in risk behaviors and maladaptive coping strategies (Riley et al., 2016). Classroom instructors and GSIs play a critical role in supporting students, not only in terms of their academic success, but also in their social and emotional health. This resource will provide strategies and suggestions for supporting students from the LGBTQIA+ community, both in and out of the classroom.

#### **Acknowledging, Respecting, and Making Visible LGBTQIA+ Identities**

College is an important period of time for identity formation and it is critical that instructors create inclusive spaces where students' unique identities are both acknowledged and respected--this is especially true for students from the LGBTQIA+ community.

Strategies	Explanation	Examples/Suggestions
Provide opportunities for students to share their preferred names and pronouns	LGBTQIA+ students can experience significant stress related to first day of class activities like taking attendance and individual introductions (Schmalz, 2015). This stress can be caused by a constellation of factors, including whether course rosters include their preferred name or whether your classroom is a safe space to request the use of their preferred pronouns.	The UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Resource Center suggests asking all students in your classes to include both their preferred name and pronouns in their introductions to their peers at the beginning of the term. This can help gender-variant students feel more comfortable sharing their preferred pronouns, as they are not the only student doing so.
		Additionally, instructors themselves should include their preferred pronouns in their own introductions, as well as on their syllabi and email signatures (Zane, 2016). For example, you could introduce yourself using the following script: "Hello, my name is [title and name]. I use [she, her, and hers] pronouns."
Use gender-neutral terms when possible and remind students to respect each other's preferred pronouns throughout the term	It is also important to make sure that acknowledgement of students' preferred names and pronouns is not simply relegated to the first day. For example, students may forget their peers' preferred pronouns during class or group discussions in later classes, which can result in accidental misgendering. Additionally, you or your students may unintentionally use gendering language like "you guys" or "ladies and gentlemen," which can again exclude students for whom those terms do not apply.	Use gender-neutral terms whenever possible, and encourage students to do so as well. For example, instead of "you guys" you could say "y'all" or "everyone" (Zane, 2016). Additionally, if a student accidentally uses the incorrect pronouns for a peer, politely and unobtrusively correct them--this can help a gender-variant student feel acknowledged and included without singling them out.



Make LGBTQIA+ topics visible in your curriculum	Normative perspectives often tend to be overrepresented in courses across the curriculum. For example, instructors may unintentionally only include perspectives that validate normative sexual or gender identities (i.e., heterosexuality, cisgender). Renn (2017), however, argues that “minoritized students report that they are motivated to learn when their identities are affirmed and included in the curriculum.”	Consider including perspectives from scholars across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum in your readings and course materials, and/or design projects or course units that ask questions relevant to the experiences of students from these communities. For example, when possible, allow students to choose topics that are relevant to their identities—for example, students could explore issues important to their communities, including the LGBTQIA+ community related to the course subject matter.
		Additionally, try not to present heterosexual or gender-conforming identities as “normal,” as this can further marginalize and exclude students across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum whose identities do not fit within the normative mold.

### Syllabus Statement

In addition to the above strategies and suggestions, the UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Resource Center also recommends adding the following statement in your syllabus:

*Pronouns are linguistic tools that we use to refer to people. (i.e. they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his). Because pronouns in English are often associated with gender identity, using each other's correct pronouns is an important way to show respect to each other and create a learning environment that is inclusive to trans\* and gender-non-conforming scholars. Consistent with core values for this course, we will collectively create an inclusive learning environment by doing the following:*

1. Offer opportunities for our classmates to share their correct pronouns
2. Use each other's pronouns correctly, or if pronouns are not known, refer to people by name or with gender neutral language
3. Discuss the group using gender neutral language (i.e. "y'all" or "everyone" versus "you guys")

For more suggestions on how to be an ally to students from the LGBTQIA+ community, see the UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Resource Center's ["Ally Tips"](#) page.

### Normalizing and Promoting Help-Seeking for Students

A recent study by Rutgers University (Intrabartola, 2017) analyzing survey responses from over 90,000 students across 902 institutions found that students who identified as LGBTQIA+ were far more likely to report having engaged in self-injury behavior, experienced severe depression, or seriously contemplated suicide when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. This research corroborated findings from other studies indicating that students from the LGBTQIA+ community are more likely to experience feelings of psychological and social distress than their heterosexual and gender-conforming peers (Kirsch, Conley, & Riley, 2015; Ridner et al., 2016; Riley et al., 2016). It is also important to consider that students' identities are intersectional (i.e., students may experience multiple sociocultural identities at once). LGBTQIA+ students may also identify with other minoritized communities, such as: communities of color, first-generation college students, low-income students, and other sociocultural identities (Consortium of Higher Education, 2016; Renn, 2017). For example, LGBTQIA+ students of color may experience social, psychological, and academic challenges related to their both their racial identity(ies) and their sexuality/gender-identification.

Consider including information about on campus social-emotional support services and wellness resources in your syllabus and on Canvas, highlighting this information on the first day of class. Doing so both normalizes and promotes the importance of help seeking, not just for LGBTQIA+ students, but all students. Potential resources for students include:

- [UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Resource Center](#)
- [UC Davis Counseling Services](#)



- [UC Davis Student Health and Wellness Center](#)
- [UC Davis Women's Resource and Research Center \(WRRRC\)](#)
- A more complete list of campus resources for you and your students can be found [here](#).

### Additional Resources

- UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Resource Center's [Glossary](#)
- UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Resource Center's [Ally Tips](#)
- UC Davis LGBTQIA+ Center's [Guide to Pronouns](#)
- [Education Resources at Gender Spectrum](#)
  - NOTE: these resources are written for a K-12 context, but the pedagogical strategies and considerations they advance are still valuable for higher education contexts as well.
- The Chronicle: [“Ask Me’: What LGBTQ Students Want Their Professors to Know”](#)

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### References

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