ACTIONS TO FOSTER INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, NON-BINARY AND QUEER (LGBTQ+) STUDENTS

Recognize that LGBTQ+ students are everywhere. Making an effort to create inclusive learning environments is important no matter what you teach or the size of your class.

Be proactive in setting expectations and showing respect via your syllabus. State that you expect all students to be respectful of one another throughout the course, including in the classroom, lab, and when engaged in group projects, as applicable. Be clear that words and actions that harass students based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race, national origin, religion, disability, or other aspects of identity are not acceptable. When conveying your expectations, include expectations that everyone learn to pronounce one another’s names correctly and use the correct pronouns for others in the class. Encourage students to contact you with concerns. For suggested syllabus language, see the LGBTQ+ Western website at https://lgbtq.wwu.edu.

At the beginning of each quarter, allow everyone to self-identify the name and pronoun they use. Respect this name and pronoun consistently. Some students, particularly transgender students, may use a first name other than the one on your class roster. (Through the Registrar’s Office, students may indicate a first name to be used in lieu of their legal first name, but not all students are aware of this option.) Recognize that a student may change the name and/or pronouns they use part way through the quarter.

In classes where introductions are feasible, invite everyone to introduce themselves by sharing the name they go by, their pronouns, and some fun fact that begins building rapport. Explain why sharing pronouns is important: “We can’t know someone’s gender just by looking at them. Sharing our pronouns allows us to be sure we respect each person’s gender identity.” Model how you are inviting students to introduce themselves: “I’m Professor Bhandary. I use she/her pronouns. This summer I visited family in California, and also enjoyed some amazing hikes in the North Cascades.”

In classes too large for student introductions, you can still send a signal of inclusion by sharing your pronouns when introducing yourself to the class. To learn what pronouns students use, give each student a notecard. Ask students to write on the notecard the name they go by, the pronouns they use, and any other information you think it would be helpful to know (e.g., what excites you about this class?).
Deliberately use language that includes LGBTQ+ people. Avoid words and actions that assume everyone is heterosexual or identifies within a gender binary. As relevant, use examples and case studies that incorporate LGBTQ+ people: “Mark and his partner, José …” or “Maria’s parents, Rebecca and Tina ….” Avoid calling on people in a way that assumes their gender: say “the person in the red hat” instead of “the guy in the hat.” Don’t divide the class, break into groups, or take polls where the only options are for women and men; some people identify outside this gender binary.

Speak Up. As necessary, enforce expectations you set early on about respect. Address biased or harassing language, including comments taking the form of jokes. Contact the Equal Opportunity Office if concerns about harassment arise.

If you use the wrong pronouns for a student, correct yourself. If someone else uses incorrect pronouns for a student, correct them and model using the correct pronouns: “Micah uses they/them pronouns. I’m looking forward to their presentation in class on Monday.”

Provide information about gender neutral restroom locations and breaks long enough to access them. You can print and display signs to share the gender neutral restroom locations closest to your classroom and office. If you provide a short break during the class period, provide a reasonable amount of time for students who need to access a gender neutral restroom. Students may need to travel to another floor, or another building, to access a one. Gender neutral restroom resources are available on the LGBTQ+ Western website.

Review your course materials. How, if at all, are LGBTQ+ people -- or diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity more broadly -- represented in your course materials? If LGBTQ+ people are reflected in the materials, are these representations accurate and inclusive of LGBTQ+ people of diverse racial identities, religious backgrounds, and abilities? Does the syllabus include LGBTQ+ authors or artists? If diverse LGBTQ+ people are not included, how could they be?

Be aware of campus resources for LGBTQ+ students. The LGBTQ+ Western website provides information about campus resources, student organizations, and resources beyond the university.

Learn more! Visit https://lgbtq.wwu.edu for upcoming workshops and events, and written resource materials. Contact the LGBTQ+ Director to explore ways to make your pedagogical practices and curriculum more inclusive of diverse LGBTQ+ people.