

# Moving Toward a **COMMON LANGUAGE**



# Language Matters



Words have different meanings depending on one's lived and learned experiences. Because language is a key element of practicing diversity, equity, and inclusion, a first step to having productive conversations around DEI is adopting an accepted, shared language that guides how we engage and communicate around a myriad of topics.

Active, positive engagement around DEI requires the use of a vocabulary that is clearly defined, yet malleable, to allow for change as our language continues to evolve. Our goal is to focus DEI engagement around a common language to enhance the quality and value of discussions around our DEI work.

# Language Matters



Language is important to how we acknowledge, respect, and affirm the diversity of bodies, genders, and relationships that exist within OVPR. Use of LGBTQIA+ inclusive language, demonstrates that we embrace multiple aspects of identity and diversity and are working to foster a culture of respect and inclusivity in OVPR.

# Our Common Language...



- promotes clear and open dialogue with others
- puts people first, making all feel included and valued
- is free from words or phrases that explicitly or implicitly stereotype, discriminate, or express prejudice
- helps to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations
- can help to build trust across lines of difference
- requires an ongoing commitment to learning and evolving

## Understanding

# GENDER IDENTITY

Refers to a person's understanding and experience of their own gender. Everyone has a gender identity; for some people, it corresponds with the gender assigned at birth (cisgender), and for some others, it does not (transgender)

## Additional Context:

Gender identities are expansive and can look very different in other cultures or time periods. There is no one authority that dictates the boundaries of gender, except for the individual concerned.

# Understanding **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Describes how a person characterizes their sexual and emotional attraction to others. Sexual orientations exist on a spectrum, meaning that these aspects of identity are not static, may change over time, and can happen throughout the life course.

## **Examples:**

- Heterosexual: an attraction between people of the opposite sex or gender
- Pansexual: an attraction to people of all genders.
- Asexual / Aromantic: an instance where an individual does not experience sexual attraction. Asexuals may still be romantically, platonically, physically, and/or aesthetically attracted to people.

## Understanding

# GENDER EXPRESSION

Refers to the ways in which a person chooses to present their gender to the world around them. This can include clothing, mannerisms, pronouns, names, etc.

## Additional Context:

- Clothing, mannerisms, pronouns, etc., do not need to have a gender attached to them.
- Gender identity can sometimes inform one's gender expression
- Gender expression does not necessarily dictate someone's gender identity.

## Understanding

# CISGENDER

Cisgender describes a person whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. 'Cis' can refer to men or women since those are genders that are assigned at birth. 'Cis' is a Latin term that means "same".

## Additional Context:

A person's gender is different from their sexuality / attractionality; therefore an individual can be cisgender and be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or another sexuality. Any combination is possible; any combination can exist.



## Understanding

# NON-BINARY GENDER

Non-binary identities are neither completely male nor female—identities that are outside of the gender binary. Non-binary identities fall under the transgender umbrella, since non-binary people typically identify with a gender that is different from their assigned sex, though some non-binary individuals do not consider themselves transgender.

## Examples:

- Agender - no gender to express
- Genderfluid - moving through more than one gender identity
- Non-Conforming - gender expression does not align with sex assigned at birth

# Understanding LGBTQIA+

An acronym and umbrella term that is used to describe people who have gender identities and attractionalities that are diverse and other than cisgender and heterosexual.

## Additional Context:

The LGBTQIA+ acronym is used to be more inclusive and provide better context. There are many variations of this acronym, and it can sometimes be challenging to remember all the letters. It is most important to know that there is no “official standard”. What is preferred varies by person, region and often evolves over time. The “+” allows is there to encompass all the other identities not represented in the acronym letters.

## Understanding **LESBIAN**

A term that refers to a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other women.

## Understanding **GAY**

A term that describes a man who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other men.

## Understanding **BISEXUAL**

A term that refers to someone who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to two or more genders out of the many gender identities.

## Understanding **TRANSGENDER**

A term that describes any person who has a gender identity that is different from the gender that they were assigned at birth.

## Understanding **QUEER**

An umbrella term that sometimes refers to anyone who is not heterosexual and not cisgender. Many times, queer is used as a broad rejection of labels for gender and sexual orientation, however, because the term was historically used as a slur against people in the LGBTQIA+ community, some individuals still find the term offensive.

## Understanding **QUESTIONING**

A term that refers to someone who is not sure how they identify. Someone can be questioning their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity.

# Understanding **INTERSEX**

A term that refers to people who naturally have (are born with) biological traits such as chromosome patterns, hormonal levels, or genitalia that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.

## **Additional Context:**

There are many different intersex variations. In some cases, intersex traits are visible at birth while in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal intersex variations may not be physically apparent at all. Being intersex is not linked to sexual orientation or gender identity; intersex people can have different sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

## Understanding **ASEXUAL**

This is an umbrella term used for individuals who do not experience, or experience a low level, of sexual desire. This identity can include those who are interested in having romantic relationships, and those who are not. People of different sexual orientations and gender identities can be asexual.

## Understanding **AGENDER**

This term refers to someone who has no gender to express, or who is not sure how they identify.

# Understanding **PLUS (+)**

Encompasses the other identities not represented in the LGBTQIA acronym alone.

## **Additional Context:**

Addition of the “+” is an additional effort towards inclusivity, and recognition of the diversity that exists within our community.



# Understanding

# PRONOUNS

Pronouns are markers of identity that are used to refer to someone without using their name. Use of someone's correct pronouns is a way to foster a respectful and inclusive environment.

## Additional Context:

Commonly used pronouns:

- He/Him (masculine)
- She/Her (feminine)
- They/Them (gender neutral; plural and singular)
- Ze/Zim; Sie/Hir; Xe/Xem (gender neutral)

Some individuals may prefer not to use pronouns at all and will ask to be referred to by their name alone.

# Making mistakes...



Because cultural competency around DEI-focused topics is an evolving skillset, it requires time and practice, continuous engagement with ourselves, and learning from and about others. It is impossible to always “get it right”, and the fear of saying something wrong or harmful can prevent us from engaging meaningfully, especially across differences.

Move away from the idea of perfection, and instead, lean into learning how to engage with others using language that minimizes harm. It is important that we learn to acknowledge our mistakes, take accountability for our actions, and then apologize with humility and vulnerability. Invest in owning your **impact**, not just your **intent**.

# When you make a mistake...



- **Own it** - Don't ignore it or pretend the harm did not occur. Be aware of the impact of your words or actions, take accountability, and commit to doing better
- **Take action** - Acknowledge your mistake and apologize for its impact, then modify your language and/or behavior to prevent that mistake from occurring in the future
- **Educate yourself** - It is YOUR responsibility to engage in learning opportunities that help you understand why your actions or words were problematic
- **Forgive yourself** - Mistakes are inevitable. We ALL make them from time to time. Give yourself grace and then move forward
- **Share** - Help educate others so they don't make the same mistakes

# Sources / Resources



- LGBTQIA+: An Introduction to Inclusive Language: <https://hr.umich.edu/working-u-m/professional-development/courses/lgbtqia-introduction-inclusive-language>
- LGBTQ+ Health: <https://www.uofmhealth.org/patient-visitor-guide/lgbtq-health>
- U-M Spectrum Center: <https://spectrumcenter.umich.edu>
- National Institutes of Health, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion - Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office: <https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/sgmro>
- Respecting Names and Pronouns: [https://mlearningmedia.med.umich.edu/media/t/l\\_berzjiti](https://mlearningmedia.med.umich.edu/media/t/l_berzjiti)
- OutRight Action International: <https://outrightinternational.org/content/acronyms-explained>
- Let's Say Gay: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/23/opinion/queer-gay-identity.html>
- National LGBT Health Education Center: <https://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/publication/understanding-health-needs-lgbt-people/>
- Researching for LGBTQ2S+ Health: <https://lgbtqhealth.ca/community/two-spirit.php>
- UN Free & Equal - United Nations - Intersex Fact Sheet: <https://www.unfe.org/en/know-the-facts/challenges-solutions/intersex>
- Trans Student Educational Resources - The Gender Unicorn: <https://transstudent.org/gender/>
- Gender Transition Resource for faculty and staff at U-M: <https://hr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/gender-transition-resource.pdf>
- National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center: <https://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/resources/>