What's in a Name: Creating a supportive environment in the classroom for students
Document prepared by the Name Committee
Originated by Dr. Maya Poran, Associate Professor of Psychology in 2017

Many students identify themselves with names that are not matching those on the official rosters and college forms, as well as other legal documents. This is very common for students who are transgender or gender variant in some way, although there are many other reasons that someone may have a name that does not match the legal documents. These include religious and spiritual needs, traditions from various cultures and international experiences, as well as other personal and unique needs in relation to identity.

Chaired by Melissa Van Der Wall (Dean of Students), the Name Committee works to address issues regarding names, pronouns, and gendered title markers (Mr. Mrs. Ms. Miss). The committee's goal is that all members of Ramapo College are recognized, included, and given the opportunity to identify themselves as they wish.

Some students indicate that being mis-named and mis-gendered is a source of stress, anxiety, and creates an environment in which it is a challenge to learn and focus on class material. This document will help you create and maintain a positive and affirming environment that will help all students feel welcome.

Create a space in the classroom for chosen names:
Make it known that you are aware, and supportive, of a student's right to define themselves. A simple statement of your commitment to creating a safe environment for all students and working to be inclusive will go a long way. Include the statement on your syllabus and think of including at the bottom of your emails. Here is a sample statement that you are welcome to use or edit as you see fit:

"I am committed to creating a safe environment for all students by being inclusive. This includes using the name and pronouns a student uses, using gender inclusive language, and not making assumptions about one's gender identity, religion, national origin, or other identities."

Gender Pronouns
Some faculty and staff members have chosen to include their used pronouns in their e-mail signature as a way to help build inclusivity, bring awareness to gender identity, and to reject assumptions and judgments. Including used pronouns on one's e-mail signature reduces accidental mis-gendering. The goal of adding used pronouns to one's e-mail signature is to lift society from operating in assumptions and to punctuate how important using one's correct pronouns is to our community of learners. You may wish to update your e-mail signature and syllabus with your used pronouns. If you order a College nametag, you may wish to include your used pronouns on your nametag.

Example:
Debra Lukacsko
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Associate Director of Health Services
Nurse Practitioner

Name Advocacy
Let your students know that you wish to work with them to have their name fully recognized. At present, the College's student information system does not allow students to be listed under a used name, it must be a legal name. Here is a sample syllabus statement:

"Presently our computer systems do not have an option for a used or chosen name entry. I want students to be recognized for whom they are and how they wish to be referred. I am available to have these conversations with students. Students may also contact Melissa Van Der Wall, Dean of Students, if they wish to have a Name Advocacy Letter sent to their professors and other campus partners with their used name and pronouns."

You may be the recipient of the Name Advocacy Letter, so we ask that you honor the student's request. Whatever you can do to create an inclusive space in your classroom will make a difference for the students who are learning from you.

Customize Your Roster
In the beginning of the semester, you can ask students to fill out a basic information card that includes their names and gender pronouns if they wish (note: not all students are comfortable sharing their gender pronouns). You can then customize your own records (paper, electronic, etc.) so that students are properly represented.

Lead By Example
When introducing yourself to the class, you can say who you are, share your gender pronouns, as well as what you would like to be called. In addition, work to address students by their names and not general gendered language such as "ladies and gentlemen" or "guys" or gendered titles (Ms., Miss, Mrs., Mr.).

Making a Mistake
If you make a mistake, apologize and move on! Importantly, highlight awareness of a mistake and do not dwell there. This is an ongoing effort.

For further information on Name and Gender Pronouns/Gender Inclusive language and education, please contact Dr. Maya Poran, Associate Professor of Psychology (mporan@ramapo.edu) and for further information on the Name Committee please contact Melissa Van Der Wall, Dean of Students (mvanderw@ramapo.edu).

Thank you for helping to make Ramapo classrooms a welcoming place to learn for all students.