What's in a Name: Creating a Supportive Environment in the Classroom for Students
Document prepared by the Name Committee
Originated by in 2017 Dr. Maya Poran, Associate Professor of Psychology and
Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Many students identify themselves with names that are not matching those on official rosters and college forms, as well as other legal documents. This is very common for students who are transgender or non-binary, 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.

The Name Committee, chaired by Dr. Rick Brown (Director of the Center for Student Involvement), works to address issues regarding names, pronouns, and gendered title markers (e.g. Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss, Mx.). The committee's goal is for all members of Ramapo College to be 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 can help you create and maintain a positive and affirming environment that will help all students feel welcome.

Create a space in the classroom for the names students use:
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 can go a long way (See Howansky et al., 2021). 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."

Inform students of Used Name option at Ramapo:
Let your students know that you wish to work with them to have their name fully recognized. As an option for students who use a name that differs from their legal name, Ramapo College's Used Name Policy provides an opportunity for community members to identify themselves as they wish in official campus communications and documents (such as email, rosters, and so on). After filling out the short Used Name Form (located on the Dean of Students website) a member of the Name Committee will contact the student to discuss the process. In addition, you can let students know that they can change their own display names in Canvas.

Gender Pronouns
Some faculty and staff members have chosen to include their used pronouns in their email signature as a way to help build inclusivity, bring awareness to gender identity, and to reject assumptions and judgments. Including used pronouns within one's email signature reduces accidental mis-gendering. The goal of adding used pronouns to one's email 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 email 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:
Kate Levin
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Assistant Director of Sports Information

Helpful information can also be found at [Pronouns Matter](#)

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 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.). You can model using gender inclusive titles such as "Mx."

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, or the Name Committee, please contact:

Marie-Danielle Attis, Assistant Director, Center for Student Involvement (mattissp@ramapo.edu)
Dr. Rick Brown, Director, Center for Student Involvement (rbrown2@ramapo.edu)
Dr. Emily Leskinen, Associate Professor of Social Science (eleskine@ramapo.edu)
Dr. Maya Poran, Associate Professor of Psychology (mporan@ramapo.edu)
Melissa Van Der Wall, Dean of Students(mvanderw@ramapo.edu)
Dr. Leah Warner, Professor of Social Psychology (lwarner@ramapo.edu)
Sam Wittenberg, System and Web Development Librarian (switten1@ramapo.edu)
Alex Woods, Coordinator, Women's Center & LGBTQ+ Services (awoods2@ramapo.edu)
Elena Yee, Psychological Counselor, LGBTQIA+ Liaison (eyee@ramapo.edu)