Towards More Trans-Inclusive Classrooms: An Introduction

Students learn better in inclusive environments that value their identities and wellbeing and foster essential learning outcomes such as critical thinking and effective group work skills. Inclusive classrooms are especially important for trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit students whose educational experiences can be fraught, including in higher education (Niccolazzo, 2017).

Practicing trans inclusion in various aspects of your courses helps ensure that trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit students feel valued and can invest in all parts of the learning process. Trans-inclusive learning environments also benefit people of all genders and gender expressions. By liberating your classroom from gendered expectations and assumptions, you are also opening up the learning space for all students to more freely explore and engage with the materials.

This resource offers some steps you might take to develop a more trans-inclusive environment, as a part of a larger process of creating more inclusive learning spaces. Implement these ideas regardless of whether you know that there are trans students in your class (you may not even know they are there!). In doing so, you will become more confident about trans-inclusive practices and create an environment where trans students will not have to advocate for themselves.

1.0   Before the first day

- Embed trans inclusion into your syllabus (see **inclusive syllabus** resource)
  - Include pronouns for you and your teaching assistant (TA) in your contact information (make sure to ask your TA for their pronouns and permission first).
  - If relevant, feature trans researchers from your field and/or trans studies.
  - Include on-campus resources for students such as the Equity & Inclusion Office (**UBC Vancouver** or **UBC Okanagan**).
- Get into the habit of asking for pronouns when you meet someone new (not just when their appearance seems 'ambiguous' to you). Doing this can help challenge the assumption that we can tell people's gender by looking at them.
- Include your pronouns in your email signature and practice using the pronouns they/them in your everyday conversation.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of the gender-neutral washroom nearest your classroom so you can share this information with students.

2.0   On the first day

- Create opportunities for students to share their pronouns with you if they would like to do so. This can include:
  - Sharing your pronouns first and mentioning that students may share their pronouns in their introductions if they feel comfortable.

- Suggesting that students email you after class if there is anything you should know about them, such as their pronouns.

- Inviting students to share their pronouns when filling out introduction cards so you can get to know them better.

- **DO NOT** require that students share their pronouns in group introductions, as students may still be assessing how out they want to be in class, and what the risks might be for disclosing their pronouns. When asking students for personal information, always make it clear that they can choose what and how much to share. When students choose not to share any pronouns, use their names to avoid making assumptions.

■ Use the students' chosen name (also known as preferred name).

- On all UBC campuses, class lists should display students' chosen name (or their legal names if they have not entered a chosen name).

> Although UBC systems use the phrase "preferred name," for many people, this name is not simply a preference, it is the only name they use, and it is central to their identity.

- Encourage students to update their chosen name via the **Student Service Centre** to make sure you have access to the most recent information.

- Administrators who have access to the Student Information System will see a student's legal name in parentheses. If you are getting help with administrative tasks, remind staff that a student's legal name should never be used for teaching or any course administration (e.g., assignment boxes, field trip forms, etc.).

- If you need to verify a student's identity, you can cross-reference their last name, student number, and their photo.

■ Mention where the closest gender-neutral washrooms are and remind students that everyone can access the washroom that they feel most comfortable using.

■ If you expect to discuss trans topics in your class (or any topics related to identities that students in the class might have), have a plan for how to respond to transphobic ideas in the classroom and let students know what will happen if this arises (see **classroom guidelines** resource).

3.0   Throughout the term

■ Use inclusive language when addressing students (e.g., "students," "people," "folks," etc. instead of "ladies and gentlemen" or "guys") and when talking about the materials unless there is a reason to be specific.

■ Be mindful of the materials, examples and case studies that you use during class so that you can avoid common assumptions:

- When using examples, are you using visuals or names that suggest people of varying genders?

- Are you framing gender as a binary (everyone is either a man or a woman)?

- Do your examples always present couples as heterosexual?

■ Learn your students' pronouns. If you are unfamiliar with some pronouns, practice using them outside of class time to gain fluency.

■ Interrupt transphobic behaviours or comments. For example, if you hear someone make a transphobic comment in class, pause and explain why the comment is unacceptable in your classroom.

4.0   Moving forward

It's okay to make mistakes. Unlearning gendered ideas and habits takes time, and mistakes can help us learn. If you make a mistake, use it as an opportunity to model a suitable apology for your students, which is also a great skill for them to develop! A good apology involves: acknowledging the mistake, apologizing briefly, moving on, and practicing so you can avoid that mistake in the future. Be patient with yourself and make an ongoing commitment to creating more trans-affirming classrooms.

5.0   Resources

- **FAQ on gender diversity** (UBC Equity & Inclusion Office)
- **How to Develop a Trans Inclusive Syllabus and Classroom Handout** (UBCO Pride Resource Centre)
- **How to get better at using a coworker's nonbinary pronouns** by Alison Green
- **Promoting Trans Literacies Workshop** (UBC Social Justice Institute)
- **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Initiative** (UBC Faculty of Education)
- **Strategies for Creating More Trans*-Affirmative Classrooms** by Z Nicolazzo

For UBC students:

- **Pride Collective** (UBCV) and **Pride Resource Centre** (UBCO)
- **Trans and gender diversity** (UBC Student Services)
- **We're queer, we're here: Queer and trans visibility at UBC**

6.0   References

Nicolazzo, Z. (2017). *Trans* In College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion*. Stylus Publishing: Sterling, VA.