

Guidelines for Designing Gender Inclusive Forms at the University

University of San Diego

Background

It's important to remember that you have trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming students and users interacting with your marketing and programming materials. When gender diverse students encounter program applications, forms, and survey questions that neglect their identities, it can be a painful reminder of the ways their journey has not been reflected or affirmed in the world. This could prompt students to navigate away from your page, or avoid your department/program as a whole. Following these guidelines is an important step in creating a positive and affirming environment for our gender diverse students. In doing so, you signal to the entire LGBTQIA+ community an awareness of — and care for — their identities and presence.

These guidelines are based upon philosophical, legal, and practical grounds:

Mission aligned: As a Catholic university grounded in *cura personalis* (care for the whole person), University of San Diego stands in solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community. One of the ways that we set the standard as an engaged contemporary Catholic institution is by caring for our sexual and gender diverse students. These guidelines flow out of our institutional mission/values and support *Envisioning 2024's* second goal: Strengthening Diversity, Inclusion, & Social Justice.

Legal mandate: In accordance with California's Gender Recognition Act (SB 179), the state requires the option of nonbinary gender markers on all state identification and documents. Updating our approach to asking questions related to gender at University of San Diego aligns our documentation processes with that of the state. With both gender identity and gender expression as protected classes in California and at the university, these guidelines help ensure non-discriminatory practices.

Common Language: This guide provides specific language and terminology for use on forms where gender information is required. This common language, or standardized approach, ensures that all staff are aware of best practices and that students experience questions about gender the same way across different areas of the university. This consistency also provides a fuller demographic picture of student experiences and makes meaning of gendered patterns within our programming and university life.

Application

These guidelines apply to any content that asks students to self-report aspects of their identity relating to gender and/or sex assignment. With that, you should bring these design principles to all applications, surveys, and forms. There are four primary guidelines. Together, they outline (1) what types of questions to include and how often they should appear in your content, (2-3) considerations of privacy, rational, and disclosure, and (4) how to design inclusive questions for each identity category.

As you develop your forms, remember that gender is a deeply personal and sometimes fluid social construct. For many gender diverse students, these questions are weighted with their own process of self-discovery and reclamation. Throughout their time with the university, students' answers may change and comfort sharing varies widely. Holding these complexities in mind can help you develop content with sensitivity and an appreciation for the diversity of students' experiences. While, for many cisgender users, you might be asking a simple question, for trans, nonbinary, and genderconforming students, these are questions that they have thought deeply about, and will likely inform their experience of your content. If this way of thinking is new for you, see the glossary of terms and further resources in the appendix.

To start designing gender inclusive forms, keep this general hierarchy in mind:

- i. pronouns should be a standard question;
- ii. you should only ask gender identity when your program and/or assessment needs require it;
- iii. very rarely do you need to ask about anything beyond these two.

In partnership with The Commons, Student Affairs Assessment and Research recommends that all university forms relating to sex and gender follow the outline below.

Limitations

While these guidelines support you in designing gender inclusive questions, keep in mind that this practice should not exist in a vacuum. Take time to review, and implement, [gender affirming strategies](#) within your professional practice. You should also be familiar with University of San Diego [policies and resources](#) relating to our trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming students. Your familiarity not only ensures Title IX compliance; it sets you up to be a resource for students seeking accommodations, services, and support.

University of San Diego has a preferred name option in the portal for students to use to change their name. The preferred name should be used on all documents and communications with students, and staff should be attentive to where they pull student names from. A general rule is to rely on Banner to populate student information. If you are using Salesforce, be sure that you set emails up to generate any custom name fields to come from the preferred name field (this pulls from students’ legal name if the student does not have a preferred name in the system).

University of San Diego’s Guidelines for Designing Gender Inclusive Forms

1. Ask only what’s relevant

Identify what information you actually need and only ask for information within the relevant identity category(s). For the vast majority of contexts, your application, survey, or form does not need information beyond gender identity.

Identity Category	When to use it	Frequency question should appear
Pronouns	We encourage you to always use this as an optional field so you know how best to refer to your students. When you haven’t asked, work on using a student’s name until you know what pronouns they use. As you adopt this practice, remember to lead by sharing your own pronouns.	All the time
Gender identity	There are a couple of reasons why you might inquire about gender beyond what pronouns someone uses. If you want to ensure representation, track data along identity categories such as gender, or if there is a gendered aspect of the experience*, then this question might be appropriate. Many systems of reporting on campus rely on the binary; including this question will ensure more accurate reporting than existing systems/data. Note that our recommended field options do not solicit trans status; you will only know how the student identifies, not if they are trans. *If there are gendered aspects of an experience, it is important that you are transparent and clear about what this looks like (e.g. describing the housing arrangements) so that students can make informed decisions about what feels good for them.	On occasion
Gender marker	This refers to the sex/gender indicated on legal documentation. You only need this when legal data is required for reporting purposes (such as a grant or federal program) or you’re referencing information on a student’s legal ID (e.g. passport data for visa application forms).	Rarely

	Note that if it is a federal form/reporting requirement, only binary gender markers are recognized, while in the state of California, a nonbinary option, X, is mandated.	
Trans status	Do not solicit this information. As a protected identity, all programs and services must be extended to transgender and gender nonconforming students as they would any other student.	Should not appear without explicit approval from IRP and/or consultation with the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons
Sex assignment	Do not solicit this information. Outside of specific medical contexts, you don't need to know someone's sex assignment.	Should not appear

2. Take all appropriate measures to protect students' privacy

Because gender is a sensitive and not always visible identity category, it is imperative that you take precaution with how data is shared and stored.

- Collection & Storage: Data collection and storage devices should be password protected with a strong password and access should only be given to staff members that have been designated as “need to know.” It is recommended to use a separate codebook file if personally identifying information is to be kept, which separates data responses from student ID numbers, email addresses, or other identifying information. Any printed copies should be shredded after use.
- Dissemination: Think critically about who has access to student information and take reasonable measures to minimize how many people have access to data files. When sharing qualitative assessment data, mine the responses for any identifying information. Keep in mind that some gender diverse students who are on campus have not shared that information. Disaggregated qualitative data could be linked to a specific person.

3. Explain the reason for and use of the questions included

When asking about anything beyond pronouns, be clear about how the information will be used. Students want to know why the information is being collected and how their privacy will be protected. It is useful to include a statement of affirmation alongside this explanation.

e.g. We ask this question to assess our program outcomes across demographic lines including gender. We honor our trans participants and want to evaluate the experience for specific underrepresented communities. This information will only be shared with [Name(s)], the administrator(s) of [program], and is stored on a password protected server.

In the event you have to use a question that is rooted in the gender binary (e.g. federal system requirements), name this requirement and acknowledge the exclusivity of the form field.

e.g. This field meets our federal reporting requirements and, per the guidelines of the federal government, only has options rooted in the gender binary. Please indicate the answer that aligns with your official federal records. We recognize the limitations of these fields and will not use them within our program beyond the required report. [Program/department name] affirms the presence and participation of our trans and nonbinary students.

4. Ask questions that are inclusive and affirming of diverse genders

The following outlines question types and field options for gender inclusive design.

a. A note on names

Gender affirming strategies begin before gender and sex specific questions. Asking “*what name do you go by?*” is specific and explicit in the information you’re soliciting. When a field asks: “*first name*” it is ambiguous and may prompt

students to feel compelled to share a deadname or name that misgenders them depending upon their name(s) on record.

What name do you go by?

Field Type: Text Entry

Question: What name do you go by?

b. Pronouns

It is a best practice to provide the option for students to share their pronouns. You can offer either (1) an optional text field or (2) an optional multi-select list. Do not require this field or label pronouns as ‘preferred.’

Pronouns

Field Type: Optional text entry

Question: Pronouns

What pronouns do you use? Check all that apply.

they/them/theirs

she/her/hers

he/him/his

Custom

Field Type: Optional multi-select list

Question: What pronouns do you use? Check all that apply.

Responses: they/them/theirs; she/her/hers; he/him/his; custom (fillable option)

ii. Gender identity

When you want to track data along gender identity or if there is a gendered aspect of the experience, this question applies. It is helpful to provide options (i.e. a multi-select list) to keep your data consistent. Prefer not to disclose should always be available.

Which term(s) best describe your gender?

woman

man

nonbinary

gender nonconforming

Custom

prefer not to disclose

Field Type: Multi-select list

Question: Which term(s) best describe your gender? Select all that apply.

Responses: woman; man; nonbinary; gender nonconforming; custom (fillable option); prefer not to disclose

iii. Gender Marker

This question should only appear when the information is required per outside guidelines. If possible, add the option ‘prefer not to disclose’ and refer back to

guideline 3: *Explain the reason for and use of the questions included* suggested language as applicable.

What gender marker is on your [insert legal document]?

F

M

X

Field Type: Multi-select list

Question: What gender marker is on [insert legal document]?

Responses: F; M; X*

*Certain reporting requirements will necessitate you remove the nonbinary gender marker option. For passports, if you have international students, it should remain in place for the countries where x is an option.

Glossary of terms

- **Cisgender:** A term for someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Deadnaming:** The act of referring to a trans person’s birth name instead of their chosen name.
- **Gender binary:** A common cultural practice of referring to sex and/or gender as if there are only two options (e.g. man/woman or male/female).
- **Gender expression:** How a person outwardly expresses their gender or lack thereof. Expression can be through voice, hair, clothing, etc, generally made sense of on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as “gender presentation.”
- **Gender identity:** A person’s internal perception of who they are in terms of gender.
- **Gender nonconforming:** Describes a person whose gender expression is, or appears to be, different from what we would expect from their assigned gender.
- **LGBTQIA+:** An acronym that serves as an umbrella for individuals in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, asexual/aromatic, intersex community which includes many identities not named explicitly here.
- **Misgender:** Referring to someone using language that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.
- **Nonbinary:** A gender identity and experience that embraces a full universe of expressions and ways of being that resonate for an individual. It may be an active resistance to binary gender expectations and/or an intentional creation of new unbounded ideas of self within the world.
- **Pronouns:** Words used to refer to someone in replacement of a name. In our culture, these words are often gendered, though there are gender neutral ones.
- **Sex assignment:**The way the medical community and society assume others’ gender based upon on a quick visual assessment of the appearance of a newborn’s sexual organs.
- **Trans:** Someone whose gender identity is different than what is expected of them or assigned to them when they are born. This is an umbrella term over a variety of gender identities.

Additional resources

These questions have already been created in Qualtrics; if you would like to add them to a survey, contact [Tim Novara](#) for information. If you would like support in crafting gender affirming questions specific to your program, contact lgbt@sandiego.edu for more.

If you are in need of further education around diverse gender identities and experiences, consider enrolling in an upcoming [Safe Space Allies](#) workshop. Additionally, the Center for Health and Wellness Promotion offers a [virtual training](#) for faculty/staff around supporting LGBTQ+ students.