Writing Letters of Recommendation for Trans/Non Binary Students
Guidelines & Best Practices for Faculty and Staff

It can be a great honor when a student asks an important or influential faculty or staff member to write a letter of recommendation. Here are some tips to ensure that you are being respectful and inclusive.

When writing letters of recommendation or any other official communication about or for a trans or non-binary student, here are some quick questions to ask (and not ask!) in person or over email to ensure that you’re using the correct name and/or pronoun for that particular request.

- **What pronoun would you like me to use in your letter of recommendation?**
  Asking about using the correct pronouns lets a student know that you see them, respect them, and want them to be their authentic self. If you have already written the letter, you can default to using they/them pronouns until you have confirmation of what pronoun works best for the student in the letter.
  - Do not assume someone’s pronouns from their name, their gender, their legal sex, or their appearance.

- **What name would you like me to use in your letter of recommendation?**
  Using the correct name (not deadnaming - i.e. using someone’s old name before they changed it, potentially as part of their gender transition) is also a sign of respect and allows students the opportunity to be known at a new job/school/internship, etc. by the name they feel is most congruent for them. Some students may want their legal name to be included in the letter; be careful to distinguish their name from their legal name and be mindful about collaborating with the student to determine how and where they want their legal name included.

- **Always consult with the person for whom you are writing the letter before including anything in the letter about their gender, gender identity, transition process or journey.** Having a conversation with your student about the kind of support they might need at the new job/school/internship, etc. could be supportive in helping the student determine whether and/or how any needs could potentially be incorporated into the letter of recommendation.
  - Things to consider: bathroom availability/usage, dress code/uniform, health insurance, anti-discrimination practices.

At the same time, there is no need to mention anything about the students’ gender or gender identity unless they think it is relevant and could potentially be important to their job, job performance, or the support they may require in a new position.

- Keep the content of the letter to what is appropriate and needed for the particulars of the position or necessity of the letter. This is not a time to ask questions about their transition, such as their hormone regimen or potential surgeries, etc.

  A good rule of thumb: if you’re not sure, ask the student!

  You can also call or consult with a Weiland Staff member.

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