

The Language of Identity

Using inclusive terminology

Why talk about words?

Sticks and stones are not the only things that may be hurtful. Words can significantly impact our interaction with others. Regardless of our motive and intentions, they may harm or enhance dialogue.

Inclusive language furthers social and cultural diversity in a positive way and reduces negative stereotypes. People feel included when we adopt the correct words in conversation. Simply, the language we use can help build a stronger community and further our ability to thrive in an increasingly diverse environment.

Learning about the most current terminology also encourages a more productive dialogue about diversity and inclusion. Use this guide to begin learning about inclusive language.

Begin with the basics

BIAS—A bias is a preference for or against something or someone whether conscious or unconscious.

DIVERSITY—Variety in group presence and interactions based on a broad spectrum of demographic, cultural, personal experiences and philosophical differences.

INCLUSION—The intentional action of including groups in society who may otherwise be vulnerable, excluded or marginalized.

MINORITY—A small group or category within a larger demographic.

UNDERREPRESENTED—Refers to groups of people who traditionally and currently are represented in lower proportional numbers to dominant groups (i.e. the number of women in STEM fields, the number of minorities on campus, etc.).

Ability

ABLEISM—Discrimination or prejudice, whether intentional or unintentional, against persons with disabilities.

ACCOMMODATION—An accommodation is a modification, whether in the classroom or in the workplace, that ensures that a person with a disability can participate on a “level playing field” as those without disabilities.

ACCESSIBLE—Accessible spaces and programs are made to be inclusive of persons with disabilities, and generally don’t require accommodations.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT—Federal civil rights law designed to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully included in society and protected from discrimination.

DISABILITY—A physical or mental condition that affects major life activities.

PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE—Use person first language when speaking about persons with disabilities. Person first language, such as saying “Person with a Disability” rather than using expressions like “handicapped,” or “challenged,” emphasizes that the person is more important than the disability.

PERSON ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM—Refers to a person who identifies as having a form of autism. Some persons on the spectrum prefer to say “Autistic Person.”

PERSON WITH A COGNITIVE OR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY—Refers to persons with various disabilities affecting the brain. This broad category includes, for example, persons with ADHD, and persons with Dyslexia. Many of these disabilities are also referred to as “learning disabilities.”



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PERSON WITH A HEARING DISABILITY—Refers to a person who has a disability affecting hearing. Some persons with hearing disabilities, particularly those who speak sign language, prefer the term “Deaf Person” and view their disability as a cultural identity.

PERSON WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY—General term which refers to persons with various disabilities affecting functions of the body.

PERSON WITH A PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITY—Refers to a person with a disability that involves emotional and/or psychological issues. Examples include persons with anxiety disorders and persons with depression. Use this term rather than saying that someone is “mentally ill” or has a “mental illness.”

PERSON WITH A VISION DISABILITY—Refers to a person with low vision or a person who is Blind. Many persons who are Blind see their disability as a cultural identity and thus prefer to call themselves “Blind.”

WHEELCHAIR USER—Refers to a person who uses a wheelchair for mobility. Use this term rather than saying a person is “wheelchair-bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.”

SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT—Federal civil rights law which ensures that persons with disabilities have equal access to education.

Educational opportunities for students

- LGBTQ Resource Center Safe Space Training
- Ask, listen, refer to different university and community resources
- Attend Awareness Week/Month events and lectures
- Enroll in a diversity-related academic class

Faith and Religion

AFFIRMING CONGREGATION—Congregations, usually Christian churches, which welcome LGBTQ people.

AGNOSTIC—A person who holds the belief that a greater entity, or existence of deities, is unknown or unknowable.

ANTI-SEMITISM—Hatred or fear of Jewish people.

ATHEIST—A person who believes that there are no deities.

GUIDE TO RELIGIONS (MU)—Online resource about religion with community resources. Find it at diversity.missouri.edu/guide-to-religions/.

HALAL—Refers to food that is compliant with Islamic law.

HIJAB—Various types of cloth head coverings sometimes worn by Muslim women in public.

INTERFAITH—Involving people of different faiths.

KORAN—The sacred book in Islam.

KOSHER—Food made and eaten in compliance with Jewish law.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION—MU provides reasonable accommodation for work that conflicts with religious observance upon notice. Learn more at diversity.missouri.edu/guide-to-religions/dates-practices-accommodations/.

Gender and Sexuality

CISGENDER—Someone who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth. If someone assigned “female”, raised as a girl and identifies as a girl/woman, she is cisgender.

FEMINISM—Generally seen as the advocacy of the social, political and economic equality of all genders. There are many types of feminism. It has historically been representative of white, middle-class women. Feminism that is inclusive of all races, economic standings, religions, identities and orientations is referred to as Intersectional Feminism.

GENDER EXPRESSION—The physical manifestation of gender through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Most people make their expression match their identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.

GENDER IDENTITY VS. SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH—Gender is the internal sense of being a woman, man, neither, both or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity. Sex assigned at birth is a classification of female, male, or intersex based off of anatomy, chromosomes and hormones. Sex does not define gender.

GENDER NEUTRAL/INCLUSIVE—Spaces and language that do not describe a specific gender. For example, gender neutral bathrooms can be used by anyone regardless of gender.

GENDERQUEER—Someone whose gender identity or expression is neither man nor woman, is between, beyond or some combination of genders.

HETEROSEXISM—Heterosexism is a form of bias and discrimination that favors people who are exclusively romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex/gender.

INTERSEX—General term used for someone who is born with a variation in their anatomy, chromosomes or hormones that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. Hermaphrodite should not be used as a synonym.

LGBTQ ACRONYM—Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer. The acronym sometimes includes Asexual, Intersex, Questioning, Ally, Unidentified or Genderqueer.

MISOGYNY & TRANS-MISOGYNY—Misogyny is a general hatred and hostility towards women. Trans-misogyny is the same hatred but targeted at trans-feminine people.

NON-BINARY—Identities that are not defined along the male/female binary. Non-binary people may feel that they exist as both, neither or a mix of identities.

PRONOUNS—Gendered pronouns include she/her and he/him. Gender-neutral pronouns include the singular they/them and ze/hir. Many other pronouns exist as well. If unsure of someone's pronouns simply ask “what are your pronouns.”

QUEER—Reclaimed term used to self-identify as part of the LGBTQ community. Not everyone uses this term as it can be used as a slur. Consider context before using this term.

ROMANTIC ATTRACTION—Emotional connection to another individual that often involves desire to be in a romantic relationship. Sexual attraction is not a requirement.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION—The direction of one’s erotic attraction. Asexuality, lack of sexual attraction, is also an orientation.

TITLE IX—Protects people from sex-based discrimination in educational programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance. Learn more at umsystem.edu/ums/dei/titleix.

TRANSGENDER—Someone who does not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. Transvestite or transsexual should not be used as a synonym.

TWO SPIRIT—A unique Native American identity embodying traits of both men and women or of another gender than assigned.

Race, ethnicity and national origin

ASIAN—Culture, people and customs related to the continent of Asia. Be aware of the differences in areas, such as South Asia (India, Pakistan, etc.) and East Asia (China, Japan, etc.). Oriental is considered offensive and should not be used as a synonym.

BLACK & AFRICAN-AMERICAN—Black refers to people of the African diaspora, which includes those in the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe. African-American refers to Americans of African descent. Some prefer one term over the other.

COLOR BLIND—This term originated from civil rights legislation, but is currently used by those who oppose race-conscious policies, like affirmative action, to argue that race does not/should not matter in decision making. It is also used to mean that one does not ‘see’ race, but can be disempowering for people whose racial identity is an important part of who they are.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION—Taking and benefiting from the expression, ideas, artifacts, etc. of another culture without permission. Often done by the dominant culture. This is not cultural exchange, which requires mutual consent and respect.

IMMIGRANT—Person who moves to another country usually for permanent residence. They may or may not be citizens. Alien is considered a slur.

INTERNATIONAL—Relating to two or more nations.

LATINIX—A person of Latin American descent. Hispanic refers to relation with Spain or Spanish-speaking countries. Latinix is recommended over Latino/a as it is gender neutral. Spanish only refers to someone from Spain.

MULTIRACIAL—Representing various races or a person whose parents are of different races or ethnicities.

NATIVE AMERICAN—A member of any of the first groups of people living in North America. When in doubt, ask what identity label someone prefers (Native American, American Indian, First Nation or Indigenous person). Indian is seen as an offensive term.

PEOPLE OR PERSON OF COLOR—Umbrella term for anyone who is non-White. Colored is considered offensive although some individuals still prefer it. Ethnic and urban are also considered terms with negative undertones and are not synonymous.

RACISM—Belief that there are inherent differences between racial groups. The dominant group is seen as superior with the authority to dominate others. It is a form of individual and systemic oppression of one racial group over another. Racism is different than racial prejudice. Prejudice is a prejudgment about a person or group on an individual level.

XENOPHOBIA—Fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners.

Educational opportunities for faculty & staff

- Diversity 101 Free Online Program
- Campus Diversity Series
- Accessibility Education
- Ask, Listen, Refer, Suicide Prevention Program
- Attend Awareness week/month events and lectures
- Enroll in a diversity-related academic class

Socio-economic status

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT—A post-secondary student whose parents never enrolled in or completed college.

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID—Form used by millions of students for financial assistance.

MINIMUM WAGE—The least amount of money per hour that workers can be paid by law. In Missouri it is \$7.65 per hour.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (SES)—A place within the social hierarchy based on factors, like education, income and occupation.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM—Commonly known as food stamps, SNAP is a federal program that assists low-income people in buying food. WIC refers to the special supplemental program for Women, Infants and Children and is also part of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

Safety Issues

CLERY ACT—The federal law that requires colleges and universities to disclose information about crime on and around campus.

CONSENT—A mutual and enthusiastic agreement between sexual partners. Partners can revoke consent at any time. Consent cannot be legally given while intoxicated.

CRISIS HOTLINE—A number to call when in crisis run by trained volunteers. Some lines serve specific groups, like transgender people, rape survivors, veterans, etc.

RAPE—According to the U.S. Department of Justice, “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”

RAPE CULTURE—A culture in which sexual assault is common and maintained by attitudes about sexuality and violence.

SEXUAL ASSAULT—Unwanted sexual contact or threat.

SURVIVOR VS. VICTIM—Debated terms focused on how to identify those who experience crime, usually sexual assault. Some use survivor as a way to empower those who have lived through an experience, while others believe it should be a chosen title.

VICTIM BLAMING—When a victim is held responsible, even partially, for a crime. Make sure to affirm survivors and avoid blaming statements, like “why didn’t you fight back.”

Other related terms

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION—an action or policy that considers attributes of historically marginalized individuals such as race, color, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin, especially in relation to employment and education (generally used in context with race).

AGEISM AND ADULTISM—Ageism is discrimination and prejudice, particularly experienced by elders, which treats them with disrespect, make them feel unemployable and useless. Adultism is prejudice and accompanying discrimination over young people.

ALLY—Someone from one identity group that actively supports members of another group.

INTERSECTIONALITY—A concept describing the interconnection of oppressive institutions and identities.

MICROAGGRESSION—Brief and commonplace verbal, nonverbal and environmental insults against someone based on their identity. They do not have to be intentional.

MINORITIZED—When underrepresented groups are made to feel “less than.”

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT—Someone who is not a full-time, straight out of high school, college student. They may be part-time, returning, commuting and/or online students. They may also be veterans, have dependents, working full-time, or do not have a high school diploma.

OPPRESSION—Use of power to privilege one group over another.

PREJUDICE VS. DISCRIMINATION—An unfair feeling or dislike for another group is prejudice. Prejudice leads to discrimination, the unfair treatment of someone.

SAFE SPACE—Area or forum where underrepresented groups can feel comfortable and supported and does not tolerate harassment or hate speech.

SOCIAL JUSTICE—Promoting a just society by valuing diversity and equal access for all social groups.

STEREOTYPES—A generalized idea applied to all people in a group, regardless of individual differences. Some may seem positive (i.e. Asian people are good at math), but still have a negative impact on the individual.

TOKENISM—Making symbolic and minimal gestures in offering opportunities to underrepresented groups.

What else can we do to promote a diverse and inclusive campus?

Anyone can help create a more inclusive and healthier campus. Here are some ways to start:

BE OPEN AND PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening is an essential part of any successful dialogue—particularly when difficult or emotionally-charged issues are discussed. Good listeners focus on understanding the other person’s viewpoint rather than planning their response.

ATTEND AN EDUCATION PROGRAM

There are many diversity-related educational programs available to students, staff and faculty at each of the UM System universities, so do not hesitate to reach out for support.