Basic LGBQIA Terminology

The definitions below are not ‘dictionary definitions.’ They have been defined using multiple sources. It is important to note that people choose their own terms for themselves and may understand the terms differently.

1. **Ally:** A person, often straight, who is accepting and supportive of the LGBT community.

2. **Asexual:** A person who is not sexually attracted to anyone or does not have a sexual orientation.

3. **Bisexual:** A person who is physically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to men and women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

4. **Closet:** Being “in the closet” or “closeted” means keeping your sexual orientation a secret. Many LGBT people remain in the closet because of fear of rejection, harassment, and anti-gay violence.

5. **Coming Out:** The developmental process in which a person acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation, as well as sharing their identity with others. Coming out is a lifelong process.

6. **Drag:** Stands for (DR)ressed (A)s a (G)irl. When a person performs in clothes or uses the mannerisms usually associated with the opposite sex or gender. Most people that do drag do not consider themselves transgender. Drag is usually done for entertainment purposes. There are Drag Queens (men dressing up as women) and Drag Kings (women dressing up as men).

7. **Gay:** Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are physically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to males. Not all men who engage in “homosexual behavior” identify as gay. Gay is also a term used to refer to the LGBTQ community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as straight.

8. **Gender:**
   - A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. Words that refer to gender include man, woman, transgender, masculine, feminine, and genderqueer.
   - One’s sense of self as male/masculine or female/feminine, regardless of external genitalia. Gender is often merged with sex. This is inaccurate because sex refers to one’s physical aspects, and gender refers to one’s psychological and sociological aspects.

9. **Genderqueer:** A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination. They can see themselves as different genders at different times, both, male, female, or no gender at all.

10. **Heterosexism:** The individual, group, or institutional norms and behaviors that result from the assumption that all people are straight. This system of oppression, which assumes that heterosexuality is inherently normal and superior, negates LGBT peoples’ lives and relationships.

11. **Homophobia:** Irrational fear and hatred of homosexuality and anyone who identifies as anything other than straight. Can often be internalized by someone who is having difficulty with their own gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation. A direct result of heterosexism.

12. **Homosexual:** A term that had been used to refer to the gay and lesbian community, but which has been replaced by most people with “LGBT,” which is a more inclusive term.

13. **Intersex:** A person with an intersex condition is born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that is not considered “standard” for either male or female. This term replaces hermaphrodite, which is considered by most to be an offensive term.

14. **Lesbian:** A woman who is physically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to females/women.

15. **LGBTQIA:** The acronym used to refer to (L)esbian, (G)ay, (B)isexual, (T)ransgender, (Q)ueer and (A)sexual. Other common abbreviations are GLBT and LGBTQIA, which incorporates (Q)ueer, (Q)uestioning, (I)ntersex, and (A)sexual.

16. **Omnisexual:** A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to all or many gender expressions.

17. **Pansexual:** A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to individuals, regardless of sex, gender or gender expression.
18. **Queer**: An umbrella term for anything not straight. Historically, it has been considered negative, but the term has recently been reclaimed by many LGBT people as a preferred self-identifier for its inclusiveness of the entire community.

19. **Questioning**: A term that can refer to a person who is searching for the truth about their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

20. **Sexual Orientation** vs. **Sexual Preference**: Sexual orientation is innate sexual attraction. Use this term instead of “sexual preference,” which is a politically charged term implying that sexuality is the result of a conscious choice.

21. **Straight**: A common term for heterosexual. A man who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to females/women. A woman who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men.
Transgender Vocabulary
Sources: The Guardian, Gender Dictionary, the Safezone Project (2015), and the 2016 LGBTQ Equality VCP
Note from the Safezone Project:
“[W]e think it is important to own that this list is neither comprehensive nor inviolable. With identity terms, trust the person who is using the term and their definition of it, above any dictionary. We don’t claim ownership of these definitions, they are part of the cultural commons, curated by us, but created by the many emails, online discussions, and in-person chats, we have had over the years. We will continue to hone and adjust this language with the goal of creating definitions resonate with at least 51 out of 100 people who use the words. We will continue to change the language as the culture changes its meaning.”

Basic Vocabulary

Binary – (noun) (1) the idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. (2) Of or pertaining to someone who identifies with one of the binary genders (man or woman). For example, there are both binary (man, woman) and non-binary (genderqueer, agender, gender-fluid) identities. See also nonbinary.

Cisgender or Cis – (adj; pronounced “siss-jendur”) frequently shortened to cis, a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., a cisman is man and male assigned at birth, a ciswoman is a woman and female assigned at birth). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not trans, they are cisgender.

- “Cis” is a latin prefix that means “on the same side [as]” or “on this side [of]”

Gender Expression – (noun) the external display of one’s gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally measured on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as “gender presentation.”

Gender Identity – (noun) the gender a person knows they are internally and how they label themselves. Common identity labels include male, female, genderqueer, non-binary, and more.

- Considered to be one aspect of sex. When gender identity conflicts with other sex characteristics, such as chromosomes or genitalia, a person’s internal gender identity replaces their sex assigned at birth.

Nonbinary - (noun) (1) refers to any gender that is not exclusively male or female. A similar term is genderqueer. (2) Also is a way of thinking that sexuality, gender, and gender expression exist on a continuous spectrum as opposed to an either/or dichotomy.

Transgender or Trans – (adj) (1) An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. (2) A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that assigned at birth.

- A trans man is a man assigned female at birth. A trans woman is a woman assigned male at birth.
- Trans does not indicate sexual attraction or sexual orientation. Transgender men attracted exclusively to men are gay; trans men attracted exclusively to women are straight. Transgender women attracted exclusively to women are lesbian; trans women attracted exclusively to men are straight. Trans (wo)men can also be bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or queer. Non-binary people, because ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ are ill-suited to describe people who do not identify as men or women, often use terms such as gynophilic/gynosexual if attracted to women, androphilic/androsexual if attracted to men, or bisexual/pansexual/asexual/queer.

Sex – (noun) a vague term used to refer to a number of characteristics traditionally associated with males and females, including, but not limited to: gender identity, sex chromosomes, genitalia (internal and external), endocrine system, and secondary sex characteristics.

- Often seen as a binary but as there are many combinations of chromosomes, hormones, and primary/secondary sex characteristics, it’s more accurate to view this as a nonbinary spectrum (which is more inclusive of intersex people)

Additional common terms

Androgynous – (adj; pronounced “an-jrah-jun-ee”) (1) a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; (2) occasionally used in place of “intersex” to describe a person with both female and male anatomy

Bigender – (adj) a person who fluctuates between traditionally “woman” and “man” gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender)

FAAB or MAAB or AFAB or AMAB – (noun) Female Assigned at Birth (FAAB) or Male Assigned at Birth (MAAB). This is generally used to denote what sex, male or female, was put on someone’s birth certificate. This is preferred to biological sex or born as male/female.

FtM or MtF – Female to Male (FtM) refers to someone who is transitioning or has transitioned from female to male, while Male to Female (MtF) refers to someone who is transitioning or has transitioned from male to female. Someone who identifies as FtM generally uses male pronouns and someone who identifies as MtF generally uses female pronouns.

- These are terms that are generally ‘in group’ terms, which should not be used except in the special circumstance that someone asks to be so identified. The proper terms are “trans man” and “trans women.” FtM still has some currency among trans men, but MtF is all but extinct.
Gender dysphoria – (noun) a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there’s a mismatch conflict between their gender identity and their current gender expression, hormonal levels, and/or body. It is sometimes referred to as gender identity disorder (GID), gender incongruence, or transgenderism; all three of these terms are outdated and should not be used.

- Note that not all trans people experience gender dysphoria, that gender dysphoria is not a prerequisite for transitioning, and that being transgender is not a disorder, disease, or illness!

Gender Fluid – (adj) gender fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of male and female. A person who is gender fluid may feel like a mix of genders at times, more male at times, and/or more female at times.

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) – (adj) someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, does not align in a predicted fashion with the normative gender-based expectations present in society.

Gender Normative / Gender Straight – (adj) someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with the normative gender-based expectations present in society.

Genderqueer – (adj) a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).

Genderqueer people may think of themselves as one or more of the following, and they may define these terms differently:

- may combine aspects of male, female, and other identities (bigender, pangender);
- may not have a gender or identify with a gender (genderless, agender);
- may move between genders (genderfluid);
- may identify as third gender or other-gendered (includes those who do not place a name to their gender having an overlap of, or blurred lines between, gender identity and sexual and romantic orientation).

Gender Variant – (adj) someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to the normative gender-based expectations present in society (e.g. transgender, intersex, genderqueer, etc.).

Intersex – (adj) someone whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals differs from the expected patterns of male or female. In the medical care of infants the initial is DSD (“Differing/Disorders of Sex Development”). Formerly known by the outdated and derogatory term “hermaphrodite” (or hermaphroditic), which should no longer be used.

- Often seen as a problematic condition when babies or young children are identified as intersex, it was for a long term considered an “emergency” and something that doctors moved to “fix” right away in a newborn child. There has been increasing advocacy and awareness brought to this issue and many individuals advocate that intersex individuals should be allowed to remain intersex past infancy and to not treat the condition as an issue or medical emergency.

Pansexual – (adj) a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Sometimes shortened to “pan.”

Passing – (verb) (1) a term for trans people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender/sex identity (regardless of birth sex) without being identified as trans. (2) An LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

- Passing is a controversial term because it often is focusing on the person who is observing or interacting with the individual who is “passing” and puts the power/authority in observer rather than giving agency to the individual.
- While some people are looking to “pass” or perhaps more accurately be accepted for the identity that they feel most aligns with who they are “passing” is not always a positive experience.
- Some individuals experience a sense of erasure or a feeling of being invisible to their own community when they are perceived to be part of the dominant group.

Transition(ing) – (noun & verb) this term is primarily used to refer to the process a trans person undergoes when changing their outward appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

Terms to avoid that create microaggressions:

Born a girl, born a boy, biologically male, biologically female

Biological sex is considered deeply problematic and should *never* be used. It has become a weaponized term used politically against the trans community, and is inherently incoherent when discussing transgender people. In general, when an individual uses this, they *mean* to say, "sex/gender assigned at birth."

Trans with an asterisk (*) was once used to indicate that the term was an inclusive umbrella for many genders, but the asterisk has since been discarded as at best unnecessary and at worst stigmatizing and should no longer be used.
5 Simple Ways to Support Trans People

- ALWAYS use the correct name and pronouns
- Use gender neutral pronouns in class/workplace/emails
- Use your cis privilege to disrupt misconceptions and respond to bias
- Educate yourself about trans issues through campus resources (LGBTQ+ Center website, workshops, HR, etc.)
- Fight for gender neutral bathrooms on campus and in the workplace
**Things to consider:**

We all make mistakes! If you accidentally misgender someone or use the wrong name, correct yourself as soon as you notice and apologize BRIEFLY. Long apologies shift the focus to your guilt rather than the trans person's comfort.

- **YES:** "He and I were-- Sorry, I mean she and I were discussing..."
- **NO:** "He and I were-- Oh my goodness, I am so sorry! Wow! How could that have slipped out? So sorry! I meant SHE and I! Sorry!"

Remember to correct misgendering and similar mistakes even if the trans person is not there.

- **Example:**
  - Colleague: "So I was talking to that guy John today and he--"
  - Supportive Colleague: "Actually, Jo uses they/them/their pronouns."

Many people are unfamiliar or less familiar with gender neutral pronouns. Some common examples include they/them/their/themself and ze/zir/zirs/zirself. There may be confusion about the singular usage of traditionally plural words like "they," but many organizations, including the AIChE (*CEP Magazine*, February 2016), now recognize the use of they/them/their as singular.

When advocating for gender neutral bathrooms, try to suggest signage that moves away from gendered representations of people.
Resources

To learn more about transgender individuals:

- **On the web**
  - mic.com/identities
  - Charlie Rose – Gender Identity [https://charlierose.com/videos/21056](https://charlierose.com/videos/21056)
  - [http://www.genderpsychology.org/](http://www.genderpsychology.org/)

- **Books:**
  - The Lives of Transgender People by Beemyn & Rankin (Research)
  - Trans-Sister Radio by Chris Bohjalian (Literature)
  - Transgender Rights by Paisley Currah, et al (Law/Policy)

- **Films:**
  - “No Dumb Questions” nodumbquestions.com
  - “Just Call me Kade” youtube movie [https://youtu.be/4pRt9pxMP0s](https://youtu.be/4pRt9pxMP0s)

**Student/Professional resources:**

- [o-STEM - www.ostem.org](http://www.ostem.org)
- [NOGLSTP - www.noglstp.org](http://www.noglstp.org)
- [MENTORNET - www.mentornet.net](http://www.mentornet.net)

**General LGBTQ Resources on the web**

- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)
- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org)
- Lambda Legal [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)
- National Center for Transgender Equality [http://transequality.org](http://transequality.org)
  - (202) 903-0112

- The GLBT National Youth Talkline (youth serving youth through age 25):
  - (800) 246-7743

- The Trevor Project (suicide hotline):
  - (866) 488-7386

- The Gay & Lesbian National Hotline:
  - (888) 843-4564
Safe Zone Conduct Dos:

- Recognize their courage and trust in you
- Listen, actively listen
- Hold strict confidentiality
- Offer resources, when appropriate
- Follow-through
  - Show your commitment
  - Keep in contact

Safe Zone Conduct Don’ts

- Judge or criticize
- Encourage coming out for everyone
- Force coming out for anyone
  - “Outing”
- Go it alone

Title VII
US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/enforcement_protections_lgbt_workers.cfm
LGB Case Study Scenarios

1. You arrive at your classroom a few minutes before the beginning of your Organic Chemistry class. You are ready to begin class, but a few of the students have not arrived yet. Knowing that students are often delayed in their previous class, you ask if anyone knows if the missing students are on their way. One student says “Oh, don’t worry about John, he’s probably at home trying on tights and high heels”. The students around him snicker, but you are not sure if other members of the class heard the comment.

2. You are working with an engineering colleague who knows you’re out of the closet. Your colleague makes a comment about how you are the only LGBT+ engineer there. You make a comment that there are more LGBT+ engineers than what your colleague thinks. Your colleague is surprised by this, commenting that engineering is “too masculine” to interest LGBT+ individuals.

3. One of your coworkers, Dr. T, came out of the closet to you recently. There have been rumors about his sexual orientation and people have made disparaging comments about him. He is your friend, he trusts you, and you have built a good working relationship with him. One day, you are talking to Dr. T in the main office about some changes that could be made to the curriculum. The main office is a space where a lot of the instructors, teaching assistants, and undergraduate tutors make copies. The office is always full of people. While you are talking to Dr. T, you notice that two small pills fell out of his pocket. You ask him, “Are those pills yours?” He responds, “Yes, I have a terrible headache.” One of the instructors in the office interrupts your conversation and asks Dr. T, with an unusual tone of voice, “Is that for your menstrual cramps?” The room is full of people, including female undergraduates, faculty, and teaching assistants, but everyone remains silent.

4. You are the adviser for the LGBTQ STEM student group on campus. Your new student leader is planning for the next social event and asks the college to help print out fliers. The college employee in charge of diversity agrees and is enthusiastic, but when it comes time to pick up the fliers she tells the student that she can’t post the fliers in the college, because there is “push back” against supporting the LGBTQ group from “higher up.” Upon hearing this you check the college web page to learn that your students’ group has been removed from the college list of both general student clubs and diversity student clubs. However, later that night you receive an email from the college employee stating that, contrary to what she said earlier, she has herself posted the fliers throughout the college.

5. Your family is highlighted in a local paper in an article about children with two fathers on Fathers’ Day. The next day you find the article anonymously placed in your faculty mailbox with the words indicating that you are faculty at your university underlined in the article, and you hear through the grapevine that it was concerning to some faculty that the article mentioned that you work as a professor in your department. Your colleagues have generally been respectful and supportive, but on further investigation you learn they are worried how our department’s more conservative donors may respond after learning a gay man now works in the department.

6. Three faculty members from the Schools of Science and Engineering put together a presentation on LGBTQ+ issues in STEM. The School of Science offers to advertise to students, use a school colloquium time slot, and provide snacks for the presentation. The School of Engineering dean did not respond and after support from the School of Science was asked for support in name only. The dean decided the “School of Engineering” cannot appear on the poster advertising the event and that having the engineering faculty member’s name and department on the advertisement was showing enough support.
7. James is a student in your first year chemistry class. He has attended class regularly, completes assignments on time, and performs well on exams. He has come to your office a couple of times for help on homework, and when he noticed your Safe Zone sticker, he invited you to attend a meeting with the LGBTQ students on campus. After Thanksgiving you notice that he has missed several classes and fails an exam. You are concerned and ask him to drop in, and he confides that over Thanksgiving he came out to his family and it did not go well. He returned early to campus and will not be going home for the winter break. His parents will not continue to pay his tuition; he is not eligible for financial aid because his parents refuse to emancipate him. He is distraught and does not know where to turn for help.

8. You teach a project-based course in which students work in teams on a semester-long research project. Each team is assigned a different project. In the beginning of the semester you form teams according to criteria that align with the recommendations from research. The teams comprise four members of heterogeneous ability who have at least 4 hours per week of time when they can meet to work on the project. You were careful not to isolate a woman or racial minority on a team. Midway through the semester a student shares with you that she feels very uncomfortable on her team. She identifies as lesbian, and her team members make frequent homophobic comments and have told her that they find her “lifestyle” offensive; recently they have been leaving her out of team meetings.

9. During a professional development session about diversity in the workplace, a participant says in a tone of disgust, “I can’t believe our President supports the gays.” Some of the other participants express their discomfort in addressing LGTBQ issues within their workplace. Some participants expressed that dealing with LGTBQ as part of their workplace is outside the mission of the company.
Trans case study scenarios

1. At your university, professors obtain the class list from the university’s student information system, which lists student birth names – not preferred names. The university is moving toward replacing birth names with preferred names, but this will not happen until next year. In the interim, the Provost’s office emails professors to provide preferred names and pronouns and requests that professors honor them. A first year chemistry student asks your advice on handling a classroom situation. Susan is a transgender woman who is not out to the students in her Calc I class. The class is taught by an adjunct professor who continues to use the student’s birth name and masculine pronouns despite having been contacted twice by the Provost’s office. The student is upset about having been outed to the students in her Calc I class, but feels uncomfortable approaching the professor. The student does not know whether the professor just doesn’t read email, or whether the instructor is deliberately disregarding the request.

2. You are a transgender faculty member in a physics department at a research-intensive university. You tried to wait until you were tenured to begin your transition process, but your mental health was deteriorating too quickly given the other stressors in your professional life to maintain. You came out to your colleagues about six months ago with the help of the HR department and the LGBTQ+ Center on campus. While your colleagues generally treat you with respect and rarely slip with your pronouns or preferred name, your department chair, an older white man, tends to misgender you frequently during faculty meetings. You notice that when you make a suggestion or ask a question, he will acknowledge you using the wrong name or pronouns and then spend several seconds apologizing, effectively derailing your contribution to the meeting. You are not sure if he is derailing you on purpose or if he is sincerely sorry, but you are beginning to feel as though your voice is not being valued in the department.

3. While speaking with a transgender colleague, a student comes into your office area and waits to speak with you. The co-worker notices your colleague’s deep (masculine) voice, and feminine clothing, and starts to stare at her while she speaks. As your colleague walks away but is still within earshot, the students asks, “What was that?”

4. A transgender student comes to you to tell you that his professor continues to state that male vs. female is a definite binary. When you ask about how this happens, she says that in her Analytical class, the professor wrote on the board, “I am... male/female. (circle one, there are no other choices).” The student feels that the learning environment hostile as her student peers find this professor’s actions amusing as indicated by their laughing. She feels the actions are targeting her, the only openly transgender student in the chemistry major. This professor is a colleague of yours in your same department, known for his sexist and misogynistic comments in the classroom. Both of you are tenured.