

# Preferred First Name Student Guide

## For

### Faculty and Staff

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The [Preferred First Name Policy](#) at Massasoit Community College provides the opportunity for all students to notify the college of a preferred name to be used in the course of college business without pursuing a legal name change or in advance of a finalized legal name change. Reasons for using a preferred name may include: students who are known by names that are different from their legal first name, students who have popular names who wish to use a different one, international students or other students who wish to adopt an English or Americanized name, or transgender or gender nonconforming students.

Preferred first name appears on:

- Student ID cards
- Diplomas, awards and recognitions

Preferred first name does NOT currently appear on:

- Email and calendar entries,
- Class rosters, grade rosters and advisor lists, and
- Learning Management Systems (LMS)

For more information on legal name changes and preferred first name procedures, click [here](#).

The College's Preferred Name Task Force, a committee comprised of staff members from key areas (e.g. Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Dean of Students, Registrar's Office, Information Technology), is actively working on processes to allow preferred first name on documents that do not yet allow this specific capability. It is projected that implementation will be in effect AY 2020/2021.

*The purpose of this guide is to provide tips and guidance for using and addressing preferred first names.*

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### Why are Preferred First Names important to our students?

- Calling a person by their preferred name shows *respect*.
- Honoring a student's preferred name contributes to the College's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion as stated in the [College's Mission](#). It is our goal to provide an empowering, safe, and nondiscriminatory educational environment. A name is an extremely important part of a person's identity. *Using the wrong name can cause unintentional harm to a person by devaluing their identity and personal autonomy.*
- Many names and pronouns are gendered in their use. Using a preferred name that matches a person's gender identity helps prevent that person from being the subject of invasive

questions about why they have a name that is inconsistent with their perceived gender expression.

- Many transgender students adopt a preferred first name as an important step towards expressing their gender identity.

### **Should I ask students for their Preferred First Name or Pronouns?**

YES! Begin the class by introducing yourself and identify your pronouns.

*“Good morning/Good afternoon, I’m Richard Smith. My pronouns are his, him, himself. Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves with our names and the pronouns you use.”*

This creates a safe and inviting space for students to similarly introduce themselves.

### **What do I tell a student who asks me to use a preferred first name in class, but whose legal first name isn’t on CANVAS or on the class roster?**

- If students provide preferred first names and pronouns, tell the student that you are happy to call them by their preferred first name and *write it down on the class roster for future classes*. In addition, direct the student to complete the [Preferred First Name Form](#). *In a few weeks, you will remember their preferred first name!*
- If, after introductions are finished, you are not uncertain of a student’s identity vis-à-vis the roster, speak to the student privately after class to ascertain whether they appear on your roster. *“Could you confirm your last name for me? I want to ensure my roster is up-to-date.”*
- The Preferred First Name procedures for rosters are in process, but you can inform the student to visit Student Central and/or Student Life to implement their preferred first name on their student IDs.
- Avoid statements such as *“You don’t look like a ‘Richard’,”* or *“How did you come up with ‘Jasmine’?”*
- Don’t say *“What is your real name?”*, *“Why don’t you use your real name?”* Instead say, *“Thank you for telling me. I will call you ‘Jasmine’.”*

### **How do I avoid inadvertently offending someone with a Preferred First Name?**

- Be respectful of privacy and avoid topics directly involving medically-assigned sex or genitalia.
- Ask yourself if personal questions about the student’s name and/or gender identity are necessary for the student to be academically successful. If not, do not ask the question. It is not the student’s responsibility to educate others about their lived experiences.
- If a personal question is necessary to the student’s success, ask permission to ask it and wait for permission to be granted before asking something that delves into a student’s private life. Avoid asking private questions in a public space or in front of an audience.

- Don't make assumptions about gender identity or expression based on observations. Instead, understand that for some students, gender identity or expression does not match physical appearance or sex assigned at birth or may change over the course of the time you know the student (genderfluidity).
- If gender or gender identity comes up as a subject in class, don't put a student on the spot by saying, "*You are trans, Dan. Can you tell the class about this issue from your perspective?*" Instead say, "*Does anyone else want to comment on this subject?*"

## **OOPS! What if I use the wrong Preferred First Name/the wrong pronoun?**

You probably will make a mistake at some point! We all do—we're human. When it happens:

- Don't make it a big deal. Acknowledge and apologize for the mistake and move forward. Harping on a mistake can focus unwanted attention on the person who was just called by the wrong name.
- Don't ever say "*I'll never get that name/pronoun right.*" This suggests that using the person's preferred first name or their pronouns is burdensome and you won't commit to honoring their identity.
- Be proactive. Ask the student (*privately*) how they would like you to handle when you (or others) make a mistake in using an incorrect name or pronoun, and respect how they would like you to remedy the mistake.

## **How do I support International Students using Preferred First Name?**

- Understand the various reasons international students choose to change their names.
  - A common reason is for the convenience of English speakers; they are tired of having to correct others' pronunciation, etc.
  - Many international students were assigned "English" names in English.
  - In some instances, students adopting a new name helps them to feel more connected to and comfortable in their new U.S. setting.
  - Be respectful and understanding of a student's decision to change their preferred first name more than once.

## **More Resources**

[\*What Are Your Pronouns?!\*](#) from the UMass Amherst Stonewall Center

[\*Creating a Trans-Inclusive Environment Through Policies and Practice\*](#) from The NCHERM Group, LLC