

## Tips for Trans & Gender-nonconforming Students Entering a New Placement

*Developed in Spring 2017 by Davey Shlasko (adjunct faculty and 2017–18 Sotomayor Fellow), Rory Crath (resident faculty) and three student leaders — Jixia Ao, Noah Cochran, and Rickey Thorn*

In any placement, you deserve to have your name, gender and privacy respected by colleagues, and to receive useful supervision about how gender comes up with clients and colleagues. This document is meant to be a place to start thinking about:

- what you might want and need around gender in your placement
- what you should be able to expect from colleagues and supervisors (which is not to say it will always go perfectly)
- steps you can take to help everything go smoothly
- support that's available to you in this process, from the Field Office and beyond

### Outness

You have a range of options about how out to be about your gender, depending on how people are likely to perceive you and on how you want to handle that.

- *If people are likely to guess your gender correctly, or to guess something that feels “close enough,”* you may choose to be “stealth” and not disclose your trans identity/history. Or, if you prefer for people to know, you could choose to disclose it — to everyone, to colleagues but not clients, to only your supervisor, or some other combination. Of course, once you disclose to anyone, you lose control over who that person might share the information with. However, you should be able to expect colleagues to respect your privacy, and it is totally appropriate to ask some colleagues to keep your gender information private from others and/or from clients.
- *If people are likely to guess your gender incorrectly,* you have pretty much the same options as above, although they will likely feel very different. You can let people refer to your gender incorrectly; you can disclose, either explicitly or by asking people to refer to your gender correctly; or, you can make different choices with different people. For example, you might decide to let clients call you whatever they guess while insisting that colleagues refer to your gender correctly. If you decide to disclose to colleagues but not clients, you will probably

need to have some conversations with colleagues about how they should refer to you in front of clients.

- *If people are likely to know by looking that you're trans*, you still have some choice about how broadly to speak about it. One end of the scale, you can hold a boundary that your gender is not something you talk about at work. If people ask, you can tell them your pronoun and/or current gender identity and leave it at that. On the other end, you can discuss it openly with everyone. You should be able to expect basic gender respect from colleagues regardless of “passing.” If your gender is likely to come up with clients, you should definitely be in conversation with your supervisor about how to address it.

### Names

If your legal name differs from the name you use, you need to know which documents require a legal name and which don't. Documents that must use your legal name include:

- Employment application form (only the form itself, not supporting documents like resumés — and, you can usually put both names on the application form)
- Financial and tax forms (pay checks, reimbursement checks, I-9, W-2 etc.)
- Licensure documents
- Background checks (usually ask for previous names as well)

On the other hand you do *not* need to use your legal name on:

- Your resumé, CV, cover letter or letters of reference
- Publications you author (but generally should be listed on your CV with the name they were published under)
- Name tags
- Id cards in most agencies (some require legal names, especially government facilities)
- Any place your name is visible in the workplace (on a locker, name plate, staff list etc.)

Your legal name, if it's not the one you use, should be kept confidential within the placement organization. People who need to know it, such as the HR and payroll offices, your supervisor, and/or the Training Director, should take steps to obscure this information from people who do not need to know. For example, a reimbursement check made out to your legal name should be

placed in an envelope labeled with your preferred name. If staff at your placement are unsure how to handle legal and preferred names, the Field Office can support them.

### **Resources**

#### *Field Office staff*

- The Field Office is available to meet with you before you're placed and/or before you're interviewed you to discuss your thinking about how out you want to be in your next placement, how Field Office staff should refer to you when talking with placement personnel, and any needs around being in a trans-competent workplace. For example:
  - If any documents are likely to out you (résumé, id, licensure, background check, etc.) the Field Office can take steps to make sure that information doesn't go beyond the few individuals in the placement site who need to see that document.
  - If you want to be out, and/or if people are likely to guess that you're trans or guess your gender/pronoun wrong, the Field Office can prep your supervisor on your pronouns and on how to support you around that in the placement.
- The Field Office maintains a continually updated list of placements that have been found to be trans-competent.
- Moving forward, the placement form will include a place to indicate your pronoun, which can be one of many opportunities to initiate a collaborative process with the Field Office to make sure your gender is respected in placement.

#### *Supervisors (and/ or Training Director, if applicable)*

- Your supervisor can be your first line of support for any gender-related issues that come up in the placement with clients, colleagues and/or agency systems (such as bathrooms, paperwork, etc.).
- You can always be in conversation with your supervisor about how your gender (or any of your identities) is coming up in sessions with clients, including if you are choosing to disclose or if clients know/guess that you're trans.

*Field Faculty Advisors*

- FFAs are available to help you think through or practice potentially challenging conversations with your supervisor or colleagues.
- Definitely contact your FFA if you feel your supervisor is not supporting you appropriately.
- Monthly narratives are an opportunity for you to reflect on how gender is coming up in your placement, if that would be helpful for you.

*Sotomayor Fellows*

Sotomayor Fellows are available to help you think through challenging situations, discuss how best to utilize your other resources, prepare for challenging conversations with supervisors and/or FFAs, and any time you are not sure where else to go. The Sotomayor Fellows are a confidential resources, and no specifics of any consultation conversation will be shared without permission.

*Student Representatives and Organizations*

A full list of student representatives you can contact throughout the year for support can be found on the Smith SSW website at the following link:

<https://www.smith.edu/ssw/student-life/student-organizations-groups/student-org-reps>

Additionally, there are student groups that meet during the summer to offer support, community building and resource-sharing amongst queer, trans and gender-nonconforming students:

- *Alliance (Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity)*: Alliance meets weekly throughout the summer. It can serve as a space to discuss the experiences of queer students in field, and to build relationships with other students who can then serve as resources, mentors and witnesses throughout the field placement year.
- *Trans and Gender-Nonconforming Student (TGNC) Group*: In the last couple years, a group of tgnc students began meeting to discuss the experience of tgnc SSW students and to organize for greater gender competency in SSW. The group can also serve as a network of peer support that can be called upon during the placement year.