Developing Gender-Affirming Library Spaces, Systems, Services and Staff

VCU Libraries

library.vcu.edu

Stephen Barkley (he/him) | srbarkley@vcu.edu

Tompkins-McCaw Library, Operations Librarian

Donna E. Coghill (she/her or they/them) | decoghil@vcu.edu

Community Engagement Librarian &

Coordinator of Campus Partnerships

M. Teresa Doherty (she/her) | mtdohert@vcu.edu

Assistant Head for Information Services, &

Teaching and Learning Librarian

Erin White (they/them) | erwhite@vcu.edu

Head, Digital Engagement

Where it all began…

VCU Libraries Gender Inclusive Workgroup and final report:

go.vcu.edu/gender-inclusive-library

Words matter

Some terminology may be new to you.

Use your handout, or ask!

Selected terms

Cisgender

Person identifies as the sex assigned at birth

LGBTQIA

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans/ Transgender, Questioning/ Queer, Intersex, Asexual….

Personal gender pronouns

Way people would like to be referred in the third person: he/him; she/her; they/them; etc

Nonbinary

Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male

Deadnaming

Act of calling a transgender or nonbinary person by their given birth name, rather than name of use

Transgender / Trans

People whose gender identity differs from sex assigned at birth
Note: do not add "ed" to the end

Developing Gender Affirming...

◎ Systems & Online Spaces
◎ Services, Staffing, Culture
◎ Physical Library Spaces

Online

Systems & Online Spaces

Actively affirming identities

Systems considerations

Names are critically important.

- Allow users to have control over what name displays, where.
- If you can't allow that, don't show names if you don't have to.

What we did:

- Made a private, unobtrusive workflow for users to request name changes in our ILS.
- Updated all forms (even for staff) to not auto-populate names.
- If we display names on user interfaces, display user ID instead; or display nothing.
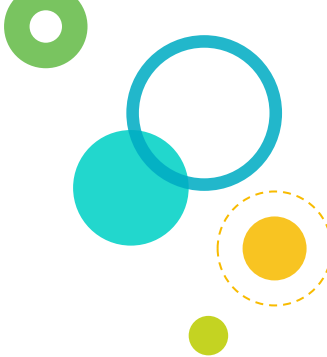
Systems considerations

Other considerations on websites/software:

- Ask for gender rarely and thoughtfully.
- Check assumptions about biology.
- Remember intersections.
- Help people see themselves.

What we did:

- Made sure we aren't asking gender on forms
- If asking for an honorific, include "Mx." (donor forms!)
- Updated style guide to include singular "they" instead of "he or she" and change Mother's room language
- Updated online floor maps for inclusive restrooms
- Diversity and equity web page (in progress)
- Published and publicized our report!

Reflection on...

Systems & Online Spaces

User names, assumptions, privacy

1 minute: self reflection

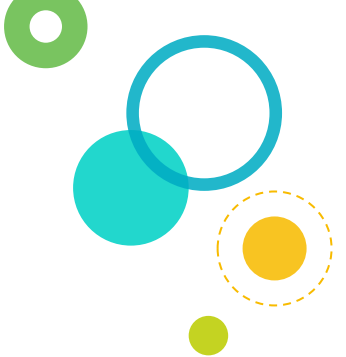3-4 minutes: small group discussion

Services

Services, Staffing, Culture

Training and more

Provide training for all service desk staff

- Invite a facilitator from outside the library to provide training.

- Offer more than a single training opportunity.

- Provide space in regular staff meetings to discuss gender inclusive practices and to answer questions.

- Invest in SafeZone or similar Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion training for staff.

Model and practice!

- Supervisors/managers should model the behavior they want staff to adopt.

- Add pronouns to nametags, email signature lines, and use in conversation.

- Use neutral collective terms (students, researchers, comrades) instead of gendered terms.

- In verifying patron accounts, offer options that don't require a deadname.

- When responding to questions about restrooms, mention all of them including universal or gender-neutral ones.

Reflection on...

Services, Staffing, Culture

Patron & staff opportunities; staff training

1 minute: self reflection

3-4 minutes: small group discussion
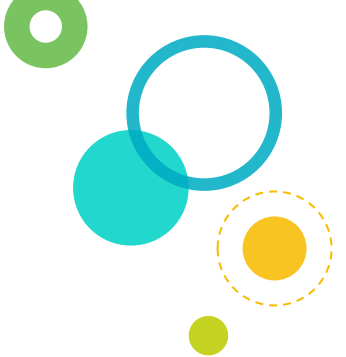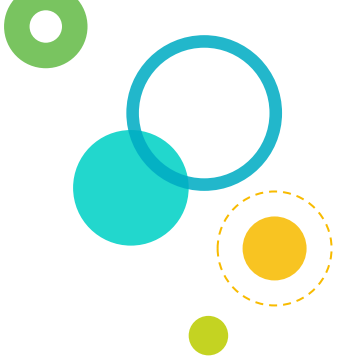
Library spaces

Restrooms and other spaces

- Highlight currently available facilities.
- Improve existing restrooms.
- Provide access to sanitary products.
- Build multi-stall, all-gender restrooms.
- Communicate.
- Privacy: Increase awareness of spaces where sound is still audible.

Library spaces

What we did:

- Publicized existing facilities.
- Began engineering study for new restrooms.
- Added sanitary receptacles.
- Added tampon vending options.
- Added signage and sound mitigation to study rooms and other spaces.

Reflection on...

Physical Library Spaces

Restrooms, signage, shared spaces

1 minute: self reflection

3-4 minutes: small group discussion

The Big Takeaway

What's your biggest takeaway?

#1

Questions?

Additional Resources

The resources below have been published since the release of the [Gender Inclusive Workgroup Report](#):

[Supporting Trans People in Libraries](#), Krueger, S, (2019)

[Trans-inclusive Design](#), White, E., A List Apart (2019)

[What It Means To Be Out: Queer, Trans, and Gender Nonconforming Identities in Library Work](#), Fisher, et.al., (2019)

More reading:
- [Transgender style guide](#)
- [Trans Allyship Workbook](#)

Remember: this is only the beginning of the conversation. These efforts are ongoing.

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Report: go.vcu.edu/gender-inclusive-library

Presentation: tinyurl.com/GenderAffirm