That's not my name.

Actually, I go by…

Student Preferred Names

It's pronounced….

Call me…

As national dialogue continues around a student's ability to redefine their identities, schools are considering how to best accommodate students' self-expression, including naming and other self-identifiers such as pronouns. Consider how educational systems communicate student names to you as faculty and how to communicate naming protocols accordingly.

Students Choosing Their Names

There are many cases where a student's birth name is not how a student identifies themselves on a daily basis. They may go by a nickname, a middle name, or an entirely different name. Consider ways to allow students to define their names.

On the first day of class,

- **Use desk name tags.** On the first day of class, give students a blank piece of paper and have them fold it into thirds to make a tent. Using thick permanent marker, have them write the name they go by on the two sides of the "tent" so that you and classmates sitting behind the student can see the name. This holds many benefits: you can learn names faster, while you are still learning names you can still refer to them by name at a quick glance, students learn one another's names, and you know the name students prefer to go by.

- **As students introduce themselves, be ready to record pronunciation**. Rather than going through "roll call," a sure way to mess up a student's name pronunciation, provide an opportunity for all students to pronounce their names themselves so that you can hear the correct pronunciation and write it down phonetically. Bring to class a list of student names, and mark the ones you are unsure how to pronounce. This is also a way to find out if students identify themselves by a different name than your roster reads. In this case, as the student with a different name to talk with you after class to match them up with their roster name for record-keeping purposes.

In an Online Learning Environment

- Some learning management systems (Moodle, Blackboard, etc.) automatically display students' legal names. In interactions where students see each other's names, ask students to sign off their forum posts or other communications with the name they go by. If students are responding to one another, ask students to address students by the name they go by, not the name in the LMS.

- Some online learning environments never require instructor or students to pronounce each other's names. If you will encounter a situation of "voice talking" to online students, consider prior opportunities to have students share pronunciation. If you do an introductory activity online, consider asking students to upload an audio recording rather than only text. This has many benefits: it breaks up the use of text in online learning; gives personality to each student, which increases empathy; and allows students to express themselves in a different mode.

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Student Preferred Names

Other notes on names,

- **Request pronunciation.** If you aren't sure how to pronounce a student's name, try and try again! Students with names that people struggle to pronounce will appreciate your effort to pronounce their name. Every student deserves to be named, even if the professor doesn't say it very well!
- **Beware of name bias.** Getting names right is important. By giving up on remembering or pronouncing certain students' names, you could unintentionally favor attention to students with more accessible names, which often means misses an opportunity to tap into diverse perspectives.

Your Preferred Name

The name each instructor decides to go by in class is an individual and political choice. Whatever you choose, go with it and make sure students know how they should refer to you. (Understand that they have to navigate a different naming structure for each instructor they have.) Students will try to go the whole semester by not calling you anything, so repeat your name often and insist they refer to you that way!

- **On day 1, introduce yourself by your preferred name**. Announce to the class your preferred name and title. Your name in the university's communication systems may not be what you go by, so this is important for you too!
- **On day 1, make your own desk name tag.** If you have students do this activity from page 1, make your own as well. This reinforces for the student your preferred title. *Dr. Smith....Prof. Smith....Marcy.....Ms. Smith......Master Smith.......*
- **Repeat your preferred name in hypothetical situations.** Students need to see and hear your preferred name often so that they are certain this is how you want to be referred to. Therefore, say it when you are going over student questions or other hypothetical situations. *Example: "Students often ask me, 'Dr. Smith, why are we covering this issue in this class?'"*
- **Sign off emails with your preferred name.** This is what instructors most often do to reinforce this naming norm. It's repetitious and visual—a good tool to use.

At Oakland University in Fall 2016, a resolution passed to allow students to control how their name appears in university communication systems. The technology systems associate with this policy are currently working to fully implement this resolution.

Resources on Naming in Higher Education

Preston, C. J. (2016 Nov 2) Do you make them call you professor? *Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved from http://www.chronicle.com/article/Do-You-Make-Them-Call-You/238282

Beemyn, G. (2016). Colleges and universities that allow students to change the name and gender on campus records, *Campus Pride.* Retrieved from https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/records/

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