

# Using Inclusive Language @ UMSL

## Why Talk About Words?

Sticks and stones are not the only things that may be hurtful. Words can significantly impact our interaction with others. Regardless of our motive and intentions, they may harm or limit effective dialogue.

Inclusive language furthers social and cultural diversity in a positive way and reduces negative stereotypes. People feel included when we adopt the correct words in conversation. Simply, the language we use can help build a stronger campus community and further our ability to thrive in an increasingly diverse environment.

Learning about the most current terminology also encourages a more productive dialogue about diversity and inclusion. Use this guide to begin learning about inclusive language.

## Inclusive Language Fundamentals

- Inclusive language is not about being politically correct. It is about human dignity and demonstrating respect.
- Understanding ‘why’ is more important than knowing ‘what.’ It’s not just about the words – it’s about the assumptions and connotations that come with the words.
- Language is fluid and contextual, so there is not always a ‘right’ answer. Terminology is always evolving.
- It’s okay to make mistakes. It’s okay not to know. It’s okay to ask questions.
- Be willing to learn. The learning process is ongoing.

## Begin with the Basics

**BIAS**—A preference for or against something or someone whether conscious or unconscious.

**DIVERSITY**—Variety in group presence and interactions based on a broad spectrum of demographic, cultural, personal experiences and philosophical differences.

**INCLUSION**—The intentional action of including groups in society who may otherwise be vulnerable, excluded or marginalized.

**MINORITY**—A small group or category within a larger demographic.

**UNDERREPRESENTED**—Refers to groups of people who traditionally and currently are represented in lower proportional numbers to dominant groups (i.e. the number of women in STEM fields, the number of minorities on campus, etc.).

## Ability

**ABLEISM**—Discrimination or prejudice, whether intentional or unintentional, against persons with disabilities.

**ACCOMMODATION**— An adaptation, whether in the classroom or in the workplace, that ensures that a person with a disability can participate and gain access on a “level playing field” as those without disabilities. Accommodations do not alter or lower the expectations or standards of the activity, but instead provide supports that provide equitable access.

**ACCESSIBLE**— Accessible spaces and programs are made to be inclusive of persons with disabilities, and generally are considered to provide better access & meaningful participation for all.

**AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**—Federal civil rights law designed to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully included in society and protected from discrimination.

**DISABILITY**—A physical, cognitive, or mental health diagnosis or experience condition that affects major life activities.

**PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE**—Use person first language when speaking about persons with disabilities. Person first language, such as saying “Person with a Disability” rather than using expressions like “handicapped,” or “challenged,” emphasizes that the person is more important than the disability.

**PERSON WITH AUTISM** - Refers to a person who identifies as having a form of autism or Asperger’s. Some persons on the spectrum prefer to “Autistic Person.”

## PERSON WITH A COGNITIVE OR INTELLECTUAL

**DISABILITY**—Refers to persons with various disabilities affecting the brain. This broad category includes, for example, persons with ADHD, and persons with Dyslexia. Many of these disabilities are also referred to as “learning disabilities.”

**PERSON WITH A HEARING DISABILITY** – Refers to a person who has a disability affecting hearing. Some persons with hearing disabilities, particularly those who speak sign language, prefer the term “Deaf Person” and view their disability as a cultural identity.

**PERSON WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY** – General term which refers to persons with various disabilities affecting functions of the body.

**PERSON WITH A PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITY** – Refers to a person with a disability that involves emotional and/or psychological issues. Examples include persons with anxiety disorders and persons with depression. Use this term rather than saying that someone is “mentally ill” or has a “mental illness.”

**PERSON WITH A VISION DISABILITY** – Refers to a person with low vision or a person who is Blind. Many persons who are Blind see their disability as a cultural identity and thus prefer to call themselves “Blind.”

**WHEELCHAIR USER** – Refers to a person who uses a wheelchair for mobility. Use this term rather than saying a person is “wheelchair-bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.”

**SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT** – Federal civil rights law which ensures that persons with disabilities have equal access to education.

## Faith and Religion

**AFFIRMING CONGREGATION** – Congregations, usually Christian churches, which welcome LGBTQ people.

**AGNOSTIC** – A person who holds the belief that a greater entity, or existence of deities, is unknown or unknowable.

**ANTI-SEMITISM** – Hatred or fear of Jewish people.

**ATHEIST** – A person who believes that there are no deities.

**HALAL** – Refers to food that is compliant with Islamic law.

**HIJAB** – Various types of cloth head and body coverings sometimes worn by Muslim women.

**INTERFAITH** – Involving people of different faiths.

Learn more! Visit the UMSL Guide to Religious Holidays:  
<https://www.umsl.edu/services/odei/religious-dates.html>

## Gender and sexuality

**CISGENDER** – Someone who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth. If someone assigned “female” is raised as a girl and identifies as a girl/woman, she is cisgender.

**FEMINISM** – While there are many types of feminism, it is

generally seen as the belief in and advocacy for the social, political, and economic equality of all genders.

**GENDER EXPRESSION** – The physical manifestation of gender through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Gender expression may or may not be reflective of one’s sex assigned at birth. For example, a biological female may prefer masculine-looking clothes and hairstyles.

**GENDER IDENTITY VS. SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH** – Gender is the internal sense of being a woman, man, neither, both or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity, but it can be fluid. Sex assigned at birth is a classification of female, male, or intersex based on anatomy, chromosomes and hormones. **Sex does not define gender.**

**GENDER NEUTRAL/INCLUSIVE** – Spaces and language that do not describe a specific gender. For example, gender neutral bathrooms can be used by anyone regardless of gender.

**GENDERQUEER** – Someone whose gender identity or expression is neither man nor woman, is between, beyond or some combination of genders.

**HETEROSEXISM** – A form of bias and discrimination that favors people who are exclusively romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex/gender.

**INTERSEX** – General term used for someone who is born with a variation in their anatomy, chromosomes or hormones that doesn’t fit the typical definitions of female or male. *Hermaphrodite* should not be used as a synonym.

**LGBTQ ACRONYM** – Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer. The acronym sometimes includes Asexual, Intersex, Questioning, Ally, Unidentified or a + to be inclusive all orientations.

**MISOGYNY & TRANS-MISOGYNY** – Misogyny is a general hatred and hostility towards women. Trans-misogyny is the same hatred but targeted at trans-feminine people.

**NON-BINARY** – Identities that are not defined along the male/ female binary. Non-binary people may feel that they exist as both, neither or a mix of identities.

**PRONOUNS** – Gendered pronouns include she/her and he/him. Gender-neutral pronouns include the singular they/them and ze/ hir. Many other pronouns exist as well. If unsure of someone’s pronouns simply ask “what are your pronouns.”

**QUEER** – Reclaimed term used to self-identify as part of the LGBTQ community. Not everyone uses this term as it can be used as a slur. Consider context before using this term.

**ROMANTIC ATTRACTION** – Emotional connection to another individual that often involves desire to be in a romantic relationship. Sexual attraction is not a requirement.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION**—The direction of one’s erotic attraction. Asexuality, lack of sexual attraction, is also an orientation.

**TITLE IX**—Protects people from sex-based discrimination in educational programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance.

**TRANSGENDER**—Someone who does not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. Transvestite or transsexual should not be used as a synonym.

**TWO SPIRIT**—A unique Native American identity embodying traits of both men and women or of another gender than assigned.

## Race, Ethnicity and National Origin

**ASIAN**—Culture, people and customs related to the continent of Asia. Be aware of the differences in areas, such as South Asia (India, Pakistan, etc.) and East Asia (China, Japan, etc.). *Oriental* is considered offensive and should not be used as a synonym.

**BLACK & AFRICAN-AMERICAN**—*Black* refers to people of the African diaspora, which includes those in the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe. *African-American* refers to Americans of African descent. Some prefer one term over the other.

**COLOR BLIND**—This term originated from civil rights legislation, but is currently used by those who oppose race-conscious policies, like affirmative action, to argue that race does not/should not matter in decision making. It is also used to mean that one does not ‘see’ race, but can be disempowering for people whose racial identity is an important part of who they are.

**CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**—Taking and benefiting from the expression, ideas, artifacts, etc. of another culture without permission. Often done by the dominant culture. This is not *cultural exchange*, which requires mutual consent and respect.

**IMMIGRANT**—Person who moves to another country usually for permanent residence. They may or may not be citizens. Alien is considered a slur.

**LATINO/A/X**—A person of Latin American descent. Latinx is used as a gender-neutral or non-binary identity descriptor. Although Hispanic is used on the census form, it refers to relation with Spain and Latin America’s colonial history. *Latino* is recommended, but individuals may have a preference. There are also regional preferences. For example, some people of Mexican decent identify as *Chicano*. *Spanish* only refers to someone from Spain.

**MULTIRACIAL**—Representing various races or a person whose parents are of different races or ethnicities.

**NATIVE AMERICAN**—A member of any of the first groups of people living in North America. When in doubt, ask what identity label someone prefers (Native American, American Indian, First Nation or Indigenous person). Indian is seen as

an offensive term.

**PEOPLE OR PERSON OF COLOR**—An umbrella term used in the United States to describe any person who is not considered white, including African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans and others. The term emphasizes common experiences of systemic racism.

**RACISM**—Belief that there are inherent differences between racial groups and that one’s own group, usually the dominant, is superior with the authority to dominate others.

**XENOPHOBIA**—Fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners.

## Socio-Economic Status

**FIRST GENERATION STUDENT**—A post-secondary student whose parents never enrolled in or completed college.

**FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)**—Form used by millions of students for financial assistance.

**MINIMUM WAGE**—The least amount of money per hour that workers can be paid by law.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (SES)**—A place within the social hierarchy based on factors, like education, income and occupation.

**SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**—Commonly known as food stamps, SNAP is a federal program that assists low-income people in buying food. *WIC* refers to the special supplemental program for Women, Infants and Children and is also part of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

## Safety Issues

**CLERY ACT**—The federal law that requires colleges and universities to disclose information about crime on and around campus. At UMSL this information is called a *Clery release*.

**CONSENT**—A mutual and enthusiastic agreement between sexual partners. Partners can revoke consent at any time. Consent cannot be legally given while intoxicated.

**CRISIS HOTLINE**—A number to call when in crisis run by trained volunteers. Some lines serve specific groups, like transgender people, rape survivors, veterans, etc.

## Other Related Terms

**ADVOCATE**—a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**—an action or policy that considers attributes of historically marginalized individuals such as race, color, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin, especially in relation to employment and education.

**AGEISM AND ADULTISM**—Ageism is discrimination and prejudice, particularly experienced by elders, which treats them with disrespect, makes them feel unemployable and useless. Adultism is prejudice and accompanying discrimination toward young people.

**ALLY**—Someone from one identity group that actively supports members of another group.

**INTERSECTIONALITY**—A concept describing the interconnection of oppressive institutions and identities.

**MICROAGGRESSION**—Brief and commonplace verbal, nonverbal and environmental insults against someone based on their identity. They do not have to be intentional.

**MINORITIZED**—When underrepresented groups are made to feel “less than.”

**NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT**—Someone who is not a full-time, straight out of high school, college student. They may be part-time, returning, commuting and/or online students. They may also be veterans, have dependents, working full-time, or do not have a high school diploma.

**OPPRESSION**—Use of power to privilege one group over another.

**PREJUDICE VS. DISCRIMINATION**—An unfair feeling or dislike for another group is prejudice. Prejudice leads to discrimination, the unfair treatment of someone.

**SAFE SPACE**—Area or forum where underrepresented groups can feel comfortable and supported that does not tolerate harassment or hate speech.

## **What else can we do to promote a diverse and inclusive campus?**

Anyone can help create a more inclusive and healthier campus. Here are some ways to start:

### **BE OPEN AND PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING**

Listening is an essential part of any successful dialogue—particularly when difficult or emotionally-charged issues are discussed. Good listeners focus on understanding the other person’s viewpoint rather than planning their response.

### **ATTEND AN EDUCATION PROGRAM**

There are many diversity-related educational programs available to students, staff, and faculty at UMSL, so do not hesitate to call any of the campus offices listed here for additional information.

For additions or corrections, please email: [odei@umsl.edu](mailto:odei@umsl.edu)

## **Campus Resources for Inclusion**

### [Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)

127 Woods Hall

314-516-5695

<http://www.umsl.edu/services/odi/index.htm>

### [Disability Access Services](#)

131 Millennium Student Center

314-516-5671

<http://www.umsl.edu/services/disability>

### [LGBTQ+](#)

423 Lucas Hall

314-516-5704

<http://umsl.edu/lgbtq/>

### [Triton Pantry](#)

170 Millennium Student Center

314-516-6359

<https://www.umsl.edu/studentsocialservices/triton-pantry/index.html>

### [Multicultural Student Services](#)

225 Millennium Student Center

314-516-6807

<http://www.umsl.edu/~mcraa/index.html>

### [UMSL Veterans Center](#)

211 Clark Hall

314-516-5705

<http://www.umsl.edu/veterans/index.html>

### [Title IX Office](#)

211 Arts Admin Bldg

314-516-4538

<https://www.umsl.edu/title-ix/index.html>

### [Safe Zone](#)

131 Millennium Student Center

314-516-5711

<http://www.umsl.edu/%7esafezone/index.html>

### [UMSL Global](#)

362 Social Sciences Building

314-516-5753

<https://www.umsl.edu/global/>