INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

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wgu labs

☑ **WHAT THIS GUIDE IS**	🚫 **WHAT THIS GUIDE IS NOT**
This is a lesson in **CULTURAL AGILITY.** Language is constantly changing, so the terms in this guide may be irrelevant tomorrow. **Be flexible and ready to change your vocabulary** when this guide changes to reflect new language trends.	This **IS NOT** a shortcut. Do not use a term without taking time to understand the conversations surrouding it. The point of this guide is to help us use language responsibly and thoughtfully.
This guide IS a starting point for **YOU** to do **YOUR OWN RESEARCH**. Take time for personal learning, question the ideas we've posed, and really consider if the words we've used resonate with you.	This **IS NOT** the final word for what you should or shouldn't say. There will never be a universal term to describe any person or any group. Humans are diverse individuals, and we all need to respect that individuality and experience.
This **IS A LIVING DOCUMENT** that we will update on a regular cycle. As you hear new usage and terms, bring it to our attention. Let's have open discussions about inclusive language.	This **IS NOT** a supporter of only one viewpoint. We present multiple viewpoints on these terms. We want you to think critically about the choices you make in your writing and understand the potential consequences of the terms you use.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY DO WE HAVE AN INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE?

In **educational research** we use standardized terms when discussing students. Using common terminology when we speak about different groups shows that we speak the language of academia.

However, these standardized terms often perpetuate inequity and most often "others" certain groups. When we use these terms in research that is intended to disrupt the status quo, we create a contradictory message between our words and the overall intentions of our research. This guide will help us develop an inclusive, shared vocabulary, allowing our words to match the true intentions of our research.

LANGUAGE IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING, AND WE DO NOT HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

Language is constantly changing. The terms in this guide could soon be out of date. Even though this guide is comprehensive, there are groups, identities, terms, and nuances we've most likely missed. We know this language will not resonate with everyone, and that we will make mistakes as we continue to learn.

We realize that not everyone will agree or identify with the terms we've used. These are terms we have chosen to create a shared language around diversity, equity, and inclusion at Labs for our research and communications.

ASK PEOPLE HOW THEY SELF-IDENTIFY

As Jason Thompson, WGU's Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion states, choosing to use inclusive language is about being respectful. **Many times, people argue that they are uncertain about the correct terms to use, or they suggest there are too many terms to remember.**

But Jason suggests that if our goal is respect, then the list of terms is never too long. In Jason's book Diversity and Inclusion Matters, he discusses the idea of organizing "the Davids and the Daves" to help us understand that everyone is unique with their own preferences about how they want people to address them. We know when someone wants to be called "David" or "Dave" by asking, going forward we refer to them by their choice.

We can apply this skill to the language we use to refer to groups in our research and daily lives. Ideally, we want to ask people how they choose to self-identify, rather than selecting an identity for them.

MORAL OF THE STORY: We may offer a list of terms in this guide to use, but none of them are universally accepted. Even if you are doing research and you need to use pre-determined groups in one demographic question, explain why and include a question that allows participants to self-identify. Do not just assume, even if it's written in this document.

Be aware, if you ask one person how they self-identify, this does not mean that person's identity automatically extends to others with a shared background.

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

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In this section, you will find several statements detailing the position Labs takes on inclusive language and other important DEI topics.

When writing research reports or other communications, you can draw from these statements, copying them directly into your document where needed. If you need to modify or shorten these statements, ensure that your modification maintains the overall messaging and does not contradict our official position on the issue.

WGU LABS INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE STATEMENT

At WGU Labs, we value inclusivity and representation. We know that no group is a monolith. The terms we use in writing will not accurately represent all identities and intersectionalities present within the human experience. Further, we know that language is not static and that terminology changes as we work to become a more inclusive society.

As we continue the work of inclusion at our organization, we know that we will make

mistakes. But we are dedicated to the work of inclusivity, correcting, and updating our language to challenge deficit-oriented, homogenizing language traditionally used within the education sphere.

We believe to accurately represent the populations within our research, we must ask the participants themselves how they self-identify. We know that identity is complex and cannot simply be relegated to a single checkbox. Therefore, while the terminology used in this document to describe various populations reflects IPEDS standards, we also provide ways for participants to self-identify.

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE ACROSS EDUCATION

At WGU Labs, we are committed to furthering the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion, not only at our company but across the education sphere. We openly share our DEI efforts, research, and findings with other institutions, teams, organizations, and individuals invested in this domain. Our Inclusive Language Guide helps us further this mission.

However, we also recognize that language is constantly changing. We acknowledge that we do NOT have all the answers and that the language we selected may not fit the needs of every organization. This guide's value lies in the crucial conversations it can begin across teams and organizations as they begin or continue their research to decide the type of language they'd like to use in their organization.

As more organizations commit to examining their language use, together, we can begin the work of rooting out exclusionary language across education. When we commit to this work as a field and share resources across domains, we take a united front in creating more inclusive educational spaces. This work requires thoughtfulness and a promise to honor the diveristy of identities and lived experiences in this world. We hope this guide will contribute to this mission.

INTERSECTIONALITY

At WGU Labs, we use the term "intersectionality" when speaking about the experiences of people who have multiple, overlapping, and intersecting identities (e.g. a person who identifies as a woman, African American, and lesbian; or a person who identifies as non-binary, LatinX, and first-generation student). Kimberle Crenshaw, a lawyer and professor at Columbia Law, coined the term "Intersectionality" to offer a frame for talking about "the fact that many of our social justice problems, like racism and sexism, are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice." We must also recognize that there are differences in the types of social injustices people face – for example, sexism has different injustices than racism – however, this

does not mean that one type of injustice is greater or lesser than the other; we must look at the ways they interact together. Using Dr. Crenshaw's definition as our guide, we recognize that to gain a holistic understanding of a person's experiences, we cannot simply look at the individual pieces of their identity as singular or mutually exclusive if we truly hope to understand their experiences.

LOWERCASE "WHITE" IN WRITING

Following the guidance of the AP style guide, at WGU Labs, we lowercase the term "white" when referencing individuals who self-identify with this group. Because of the associations that capitalizing the word "white" holds with white supremacy and white supremacist groups, we choose to distance ourselves from these connotations that do not align with the mission of Labs.

We acknowledge that some suggest that not capitalizing the word "white," like you would with other identities, suggests that "white" is not a race or that it centers whiteness as a default. We acknowledge that "white" is a race with distinct culture, and we do not prescribe to the notion that "white" is the standard or an unmarked category for which all other groups are compared or judged against. We do not want our writing to be misinterpreted or misconstrued, so we lowercase the word "white."

BASIC TIPS FOR INCLUSIVE WRITING

DE-STIGMATIZING OR VIRTUE SIGNALING?

When discussing students, we often use adjectives or modifiers to categorize or place them as a member within a certain group. For example, we might say, "African American students, high-risk students, students with disabilities, etc." Before choosing to use a modifier, ask yourself if this word is important to your overall message. What is your reasoning for adding it to the text? Do you say "my Black friend" but do not use a modifier for your white friends? In many cases, we can and should simply just refer to people as "people" or students as "students" without any adjectives or modifiers.

Think of it this way: imagine you're talking to an acquaintance, and they say, "I had to meet my friend who's in a wheelchair for lunch." The fact that your acquaintance's friend uses a wheelchair is irrelevant to their story. Think about why you mention you friend's wheelchair – is it because you want to normalize and de-stigmatize speaking about disabilities? Or are you attempting to openly express your morality or character for having a friend in a wheelchair?

Of course, there are important moments in research where these modifiers are needed and can be used respectfully, but we need to think about our intentions when we write:

- By adding a modifier, who are you helping? Who are you unintentionally hurting?

- How are you positioning yourself or your institution in the narrative?

- Are you letting traditional research conventions (e.g. validated scales, standard reporting or demographic practices, common terminology like "high-risk") outweigh your mission to respectfully address and represent others in your writing?

- After writing a passage, do we step back and consider the ways the modifiers we are using are landing on our audience or the assumptions our word choice supports?

RETHINK THE NARRATIVE OF THE "STUDENT VOICE"

Sometimes in educational research, we see narratives suggesting that a student's participation in a study gives them a voice. Although it may not be our intention, these terms and phrases can imply that before our research efforts, these individuals did not have a voice or were incapable of using it on their own. We cannot empower or give voice to anyone because they already possess these traits. What we can do, instead, is help people use the power and voice they already have.

Instead of discussing the ways we "uncover" the student voice, we should restructure our narrative to state:

- In our research, we strive to create an environment where all voices can be heard.
- In our research, we strive to create conditions where students can exercise their own power.

PROBLEMATIZE SYSTEMS, NOT STUDENTS

The National Center for Institutional Diversity states: "Deficit thinking blames the students who are left behind for their predicament, rather than the policies and practices that perpetuate oppressive and inequitable systems." This statement also applies to our writing about equity. *Here's a writing tip: after writing a passage discussing disparities in student outcomes, ask yourself or a co-worker, is this messaging placing the sole responsibility on students or on an institution's policies/practices? As you revise your writing, think about the messaging in these terms: What do these institutions miss when they do not structure their systems in ways to support the assets diverse learners bring?*

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHIC ITEMS

When creating a survey, use the following language examples if possible to ask participants how they choose to self-identify. This is especially important when gathering information on personal experience on diversity, equity, and inclusion. If you must use categories that are validated and needed for longitudinal demographic data (e.g., IPEDS, census), acknowledge in the survey itself that the categories are not an accurate reflection of all identities and it is not optimal.

Refer to different sections of this guide for demographic examples. If you need to know specific infomation, identify why in your research plan. If the research does not need specific information, consider requesting broader information.

🚫 **DO NOT** add the option "Other" for participants and their identities. Even when creating a write-in option, avoid using the term "Other" proceeding the write-in line (see the example below for alternatives). The term "Other" often feels dehumanizing.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR SURVEY QUESTION EXAMPLES

Survey Question Examples

RACE, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY

Would you consider yourself . . .

☐ Black and/or African American

☐ Alaska Native or Native American

☐ Asian

☐ Hispanic or Latino/a, Latine (LatinX)

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐ North African or Middle Eastern

☐ white

☐ I self-identify as _____

☐ I prefer not to answer

GENDER

Do you identify as . . .

☐ Man

☐ Woman

☐ Non-binary

☐ I self-identify as _____

☐ I prefer not to answer

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Considering your own income and the income from any other people who help you, how would you describe your overall financial situation? Would you say you... (Select one)

☐ don't meet basic expenses

☐ just meet basic expenses with nothing left over

☐ meet needs with a little left over

☐ live comfortably

☐ prefer not to answer

IF YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY INCOME, USE RANGES INSTEAD OF ASKING FOR SPECIFICS.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are taken directly from Jason Thompson, WGU's VP of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion's book, Diversity and Inclusion Matters.

☑ **DIVERSITY**

Reflecting the mixture of differences and similarities that we find in the world and acknowledging the related tension as we strive to develop more inclusive and high-performing environments.

☑ **EQUITY**

The principle of creating full access and removing barriers to participation. Equity is fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups.

☑ **INCLUSION**

Actively making people feel welcomed and valued. Inclusion is retention.

Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality Terms

The best practice when it comes to race, ethnicity, and nationality is to **ask** people how they self-identify rather than assigning them a specific identity. Many of the terms listed below are still not representative of the full human experience, and should be used with caution.

- ■ **DO NOT** use race or ethnicity as collective nouns, only as adjectives.
  Example: Do NOT use *the blacks, the hispanics, the asians*
  Instead use: *Black people, Asian faculty, Hispanic students*, etc.

- ■ **DO NOT** hyphenate national origins.
  Example: Do NOT use Japanese-American, Native-American, African-American
  Instead use : *Japanese American, Native American, African American*, etc.

African American and/or Black

African American and Black are not always synonyms for each other.
Many individuals may identify as Black but not African or African American, so it is important to use the words "and/or". Conversely, some may identify as African American.

🚫 **DO NOT** add a slash between these terms, i.e. *"African American/Black."* Instead use "and/or" i.e. *"African American and/or Black."*

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Individuals who identify as Afro-Latin (a/o), Afro-LatinX (Afro-Latiné), or Afro-Caribbean may identify as Black but not African or African American. When referring to a specific group, use phrasing like "Black students," "Black faculty," "Black communities," "Black institutions."

Capitalize the word "Black" in all communications.

Careful. If you use the term "African American" without "Black" it leaves questions about race vs. ethnicity. There are many people who self-identify as white who are from Africa, but have moved to America. **As always, ask people how they choose to self-identify.**

Alaska Native

Be specific whenever possible. The Diversity Style Guide states: "Alaska Native is an umbrella term that includes Eskimo (Inupiat and Yupik), Alaskan Indians (Athabascan, Haida, Tlingit and Tsimshian) and Aleut."

🚫 **DO NOT** use Eskimo.

Many Alaska Natives prefer to identify with the linguistic terms used within their native languages. For example: Inupiaq or Yupik. Some Alaska Natives also self-identify with the terms "Inuit."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Many sources suggest NOT grouping Alaska Natives and Native Americans, whenever possible. The Diversity Style Guide stresses that "They are culturally distinct and most prefer to be called Alaska Native instead of being grouped as American Indian."

Asian

According to the US Census Bureau, the word "Asian" refers to "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, *Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.*

🚫 **DO NOT** use as a specific term if, for example, you mean "Chinese descent" (see notes).

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

The term Asian is very broad. Rather than using monolithic terms like "Asian," be specific whenever possible (e.g., Korean, Chinese American, South Asian, East Asian). Some individuals of Indian descent identify with the term "Desi."

In the year 2000, "Pacific Islanders" were removed from being grouped with people of Asian descent in the census because the distinction did not provide an accurate representation of the Pacific Islander experience.

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)

BIPOC This term was created to center conversations on police brutality and violence and focus specifically on groups who are most disproportionately impacted, rather than simply saying "People of Color."

Some use "minoritized groups" because such groups have been defined by others; another option is to use "communities of color."

WATCH: *The origin of the Phrase "Women of Color"*

Loretta Ross, Sistersong, Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
https://youtu.be/82vl34mi4Iw

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

This term is still under debate about its meaning and usage. Some suggest that while this term attempts to center certain groups in conversations of police brutality, it still serves to merely view distinct groups as a single amalgamation, defeating its purpose. For example, many Indigenous people identify with their tribe that has a different culture and experience from people in other tribes, yet they are often combined as having a single, monolithic experience. When possible, gather data about communities, instead of aggregating the groups together.

Hispanic, Latino/a, Latine, LatinX

These terms should not automatically be considered interchangeable. For example, some say that those who identify as "Hispanic" are people who speak Spanish or descend from Spanish speaking countries, like Spain, whereas others say that those who identify as "Latina/o or LatinX or Latine are descendants of Latin America."

Additionally, the terms LatinX or Latine are used by those who self-identify as gender non-binary, and it provides a gender neutral alternative to "Latina or Latino." *See also* Non-binary on page 19.

Latine and Latiné (with an accent on the e) are interchangeable.

🚫 **DO NOT** add a slash between the main terms, i.e. *Hispanic/LatinX.* instead use "or", i.e. *Hispanic or LatinX.*

The term Hispanic often comes with imperialist associations, so some denounce this term because of that history. But some people self-identify as both "Hispanic and Latino/Latina."

Be specific whenever possible (e.g., Mexican American, Guatemalan, El Salvadorian), rather than using monolithic terms like "Hispanic or Latino."

"LatinX/Latine": Linguistically, there is no pronunciation in the Spanish language for the term "LatinX." There is a movement to use the term "Latine," which already provides a gender neutral ending in Spanish, offering greater linguistic relevance to Spanish speakers.

LatinX is currently receiving a lot of pushback with people rejecting this term. It is mainly a term used by academic researchers. **For research demographic data, ask people how they choose to self-identify.**

Indigenous Peoples

The Diversity Style guide suggests that there is no universally accepted definition for Indigenous Peoples. However, "in the case of the United States, tribal membership or citizenship denotes Indigenous identity."

🚫 **DO NOT** refer to Indigenous Peoples as property of states or countries, for example, *"Wyoming's Indigenous Peoples"*

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Be specific whenever and wherever possible. The term "Indigenous Peoples" often encompasses the following identities: Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Meso American Indigenous. **For research demographic data, ask people how they choose to self-identify.**

Multiracial or Multiethnic

These terms offer a more representative expression of people who identify with more than one racial or ethnic background than a term like "biracial" might because it only references two possible racial backgrounds and excludes ethnicity.

🚫 **DO NOT** say "Mulatto."

🚫 **DO NOT** add a slash between the main terms, i.e. *multiracial/multiethnic.* instead use "or", i.e. *multiracial or multiethnic.*

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Some suggest that these terms (multiracial, biracial, multiethnic, etc.) do not acknowledge the fact that no one comes from a completely homogeneous racial background.

Some suggest the term "mixed" perpetuates stereotypical notions that those with multiple backgrounds are "confused," or "don't know who they are, etc." But some people with this identity prefer "mixed or mixed race" or "biracial."
For research demographic data, ask people how they choose to self-identify.

Native American

See also [Indigenous Peoples on page 15](#)
One sector of Indigenous peoples in the United States (e.g. Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians are also considered Indigenous Peoples). The Diversity Style Guide suggests that there is no universally accepted definition for Indigenous. However, "in the case of the United States, tribal membership or citizenship denotes Indigenous identity."

Something to consider: some say that the term "Native American" was merely created out of political correctness that still, while a valiant effort, denies the reality of what these groups would like to self-identify as. See notes for more on this.

⊘ **DO NOT** say "Indian" unless referring to people from India.

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Be specific whenever and wherever possible. Many people self-identify in terms of their tribal name (e.g., Navajo, Quileute, Lakota, etc. rather than a monolithic term like "Native American."

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

See also [Indigenous Peoples on page 15](#)
According to the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence: "Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian or Chamorro, Fijian, Tongan, or Marshallese peoples and encompasses the people within the United States jurisdictions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia."

A person might not identify as Native Hawaiian while still identifying as a Pacific Islander.

⊘ **DO NOT** add a slash between the main terms, i.e. *Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander;* instead use "or," i.e. *Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.*

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Many census documents group together Asian and Pacific Islanders, but some Pacific Islanders suggest that these identities are separate and by grouping them, we ignore or erase the culture and heritage of Pacific Islanders and how those lived experiences differ from the Asian experience.

North African or Middle Eastern

Sometimes referred to as the MENA region, including peoples from "Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara and Yemen."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Many census records and forms classify "Middle Easterners" and "North Africans" as white. However, considering historic, geographic, and cultural distinctions, many individuals from these communities prefer not to be identified. This is an act that could be considered as an erasure of a community—just something to consider and keep in mind when grouping people.

Some people from these countries/regions do NOT see the North African and Middle Eastern regions as one and the same.

white

According to the [Diversity Style Guide](#), "white" refers to "People who share a lineage that can be traced directly or indirectly to Europe."

🚫 **DO NOT** capitalize "white", because in many circles, capitalizing the word "white" has associations with white supremacy.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "Caucasian" unless an individual very specifically comes from the Caucasus Mountains, which is unlikely.

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

See special note: [Lowercase "white" in writing on page 8.](#)

Some may still use Caucasian, but at Labs we do not: from [Andrea Westby,](#) Universisty of Minnesota, "Literally speaking, 'Caucasian' refers to people from the Caucasus mountain region, which includes Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, parts of north Iran, and central southern Russia. This is a geographical ancestry term, which could have implications for genetics if used precisely. 'Caucasian' is a throwback to the racist classification system defined by German anatomist Johann Blumenbach in the late 1700s. Blumenbach differentiated five human races, which he also stratified by perceived beauty (and thus value)."

Gender and Sexuality Terms

These are general terms. We encourage you to visit GLAAD to identify the most current usage for each term.

Asexual

GLAAD defines asexual as someone who does not experience sexual attraction, regardless of gender.

🚫 **DO NOT** confuse "asexuality" with "aromanticism."

🚫 **AVOID** "aromantic"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

A person who identifies as "aromantic" does not feel romantic attraction. Romantic orientation and sexual orientation are different.

Bisexual

GLAAD states: someone who identifies as bisexual "has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender."

🚫 **DO NOT** confuse the terms "bisexual" and "gay."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Someone can self-identify as bisexual without ever physically acting on their emotions. Physicality is not a requirement for identity.

Female

See "[Woman/Man](#)*" below.*

Gay

See also "[Lesbian](#)*," "*[LGBTQIA](#)* ," and "*[Queer](#)*" below.*	🚫 **DO NOT** use homosexual, the gays, admitted homosexual, Sexual preference
Commonly used to describe men or women attracted to someone of the same sex. Example: gay woman, gay man, gay people/person	🚫 **DO NOT** use the term "gay' to describe an emotion or action.
Some women identify as "gay," but "lesbian" is often the more commonly used identifier.	

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

According to the GLAAD media reference guide, "Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Please avoid using "homosexual" except in direct quotes."

Gender

See "[Sex](#)*" and "*[Woman/Man](#)*" below.*	🚫 **DO NOT** use "other" or "preferred gender."
The World Health Organization states: "Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other."	🚫 **AVOID** using "Sex." 🚫 **AVOID** using "Queer."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

In surveys:

- Survey options should offer "gender" instead of "sex" when asking for this piece of demographic information.
- Consider using a write-in option in surveys, so that people can state how they self-identify. Do NOT use the term "Other."

There's also a difference between "gender identity" and "gender expression":

Gender Identity: one's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s).

Gender Expression: the physical manifestation of one's identity through a person's pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and/or other physical characteristics.

Careful using "Queer" or "Gender Queer": some may use the terms "Queer" or "Gender Queer" as terms they identify with, but for others who do not identify, it is not encouraged.

Lesbian

GLAAD defines a lesbian as "a woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women."

Some women identify as "gay," but "lesbian" is often the more commonly used identifier.

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

*See discussion in the section on "*Gay*" above.*

🚫 **DO NOT** identify lesbians as "homosexual" if it can be construed as derogatory.

LGBTQIA

Acronym meaning: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual. Often used as an adjective or can also stand alone. ("Questioning" describes someone who is questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.)

Usage examples:

LGBTQIA students, LGBT faculty, GLBT staff, etc.

LGBT, GLBT, and LGBTQIA+ are also commonly accepted acronyms.

'In the acronym, LGBTQIA, the "I" stands for Intersex and the "A" stands for asexual.'

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Using "gay commnity" does not accurately represent the diversity and lived experiences of all members of the community. Ask people how they choose to self-identify. Listen to what people call themselves/ want to be called and understand that if you're outside of the community, using certain terms may not be appropriate for you to use.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "gay community," "homosexual or gay lifestyle," or "gay agenda".

Non-binary

See the discussion about "Gender" *above.*

A broader, more inclusive identity for someone whose "gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

When writing demographic information for surveys, include an option for those who identify as "Non-binary," if possible. Because this term has not been widely used in research for census and demographic data, it may be difficult to include as an option; in these cases clarify this reason respectfully to the participants.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "Non-binary" as a synonym for "transgender."

Queer

An adjective used to describe someone who does not identify as solely heterosexual. For someone who identifies as "queer" the terms "bisexual" or "lesbian" may be too limiting or they do not connect their identity to these terms.

Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBTQ people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBTQ community.

🚫 **BE CAREFUL** using Queer

🚫 **DO NOT** use the term "queer" to describe an action, emotion, etc.

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

See https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq/#queer The term "questioning" is also a commonly accepted term and sometimes for some people stands for the "Q" in LGBTQ.

Sex

See the discussion about "Gender" above.

This term refers to what someone is assigned at birth.
Researchers may need to use this term.

🚫 **DO NOT CONFUSE** "sex" and "gender".

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

When writing demographic information for surveys, include an option for those who identify as "non-binary," if possible.

Transgender

See the discussion about "Gender" above.

According to GLAAD, Someone who identifies as "transgender" is a person whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth.

🚫 **NOT ALL PEOPLE** who identify as transgender automatically identify as "gender non-conforming."

🚫 **DO NOT CONFUSE** "transgender" with "non-binary"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Transgender does not mean an individual person identifies as "non-binary." Many transgender people identify as a woman or a man, and describe their identity as not matching their physical gender assigned at birth.

Woman/Man

See the discussion about "Gender" above.

It depends on the context of the study about when and how we use the terms "woman" versus "female." When asking for identity, use "woman"—when needing information about the sex assigned at birth, use "female."

🚫 **BE CLEAR** when choosing to use the terms "woman" with "female"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

The New Yorker and other sources suggest that the term "'female' has biological overtones and focuses too narrowly on the reproductive system." Therefore, the word "female" would overlook a large portion of people who identify as women.

They, Their, Them

Unless the pronouns are known, avoid gender-specific, binary language, like "he or she," "him or her."

For example: When a professor needs a break, they might take a sabbatical.

Use names when possible: Use a person's name, when applicable, instead of choosing a pronoun.

🚫 **AVOID** "he or she," "him or her," "his or hers" unless pronouns are known.

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Using the pronouns, "they, their, them" are more inclusive because they do not prescribe to the binary of what is seen as traditional gender distinctions. These pronouns encompass the diversity of humanity more by being gender non-conforming. The use of the term "preferred pronoun" is now under debate; many reject this term because they don't view their prounouns as "preferred." It is simply their pronoun, no distinction necessary.

Socioeconomic Status Terms

Students living on limited income

Economic status is not an inherent part of a person.

You'll need to define and describe what is considered limited income in your writing.

🚫 **DO NOT** use socioeconomic status as an adjective to describe a person. For example, "They're a low-income student".

🚫 **DO NOT** set up comparisons between "high" and "low" when talking about socioeconomic status.

🚫 **DO NOT USE** "poor," "impoverished," "disadvantaged," "destitute"

🚫 **AVOID** "low-income," "low-wealth"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Why don't we just say poor?
There are many arguments that suggest we should not sugarcoat this language and just say that people are "poor." However the term "poor" can be taken offensively or seen as insensitive to some. If you choose to use the term "poor," illustrate in your writing that you understand the opposing viewpoints toward this term.

Discussing student-reported income
Another option is to avoid the language of assigning students to high or low income categories and to allow your participants to state the range they personally feel they fall under. For example we might say: "According to respondents who reported income below $35K/below poverty."

Students living without housing

Use person-first language when referring to the experience of homelessness.

Using "homeless" as an adjective can inadvertently suggest that "homelessness" is an inherent part of the person, rather than a condition they are experiencing.

APA Style Guide suggests: "When discussing people without a fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence, use specific language that addresses the quality or lack of housing or length of time without housing, not whether the people consider their residence a home.

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Another commonly accepted term is "housing instability". In a sentence you might say: "Students experiencing housing instability may..."

Another term discussed is "food insecurity." It's important to consider the ways that housing instability and food insecurity can impact a student's success in school.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "the homeless," "homeless person"

Ability, Disability, Neurodiversity Terms

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE – DIFFERENT APPROACHES

According to DC.gov, "person-first language puts the person before the disability, and describes what a person has, not who a person is." Additionally, some people believe that the terms "disability" and "disabled" are offensive and should be avoided at all costs, but many people believe that avoiding these terms stigmatizes them when they shouldn't be.

Some people self-identify as "disabled" or a "disabled person" and reject person-first language. Additionally, in discussions on neurodiversity, many in the autism community suggest that using person-first language makes autism seem like an illness, rather than an important part of a person's identity or natural part of their neurology. Instead, advocates suggest using language like "autistic individual" or "autistic person." Many people simply want accurate representation.

Allow people to feel safe declaring how they self-identify.

☑ USE PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE	🚫 LANGUAGE TO AVOID
Examples: • Student with a disability • Student with an intellectual disability • Student who uses a wheelchair • Student with low-vision • Student with a physical disability • Student who is deaf • Student with a mental illness • Students living with depression • Students with vision impairment	• Do NOT say handicapped • Do NOT say special needs • Do NOT refer to groups in terms of nouns. For example, Do NOT say: the blind, the deaf, the mentally ill, etc.

WHY SHOULDN'T YOU USE THE TERM "SPECIAL NEEDS"?

There are negative connotations associated with the term "special needs." This term came into use because of the misconception that the terms "disabled" and "disability" were inappropriate to use. Special needs was adapted as a euphemism. Many people assume the word "special" in this context means "good," but it has been twisted into an insult by some.

In legal terms, people with disabilities have certain rights under law, but this same distinction does not always apply when utilizing the term special needs. Lisette Torres-Gerald, board secretary for the National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities states in a USA Today article on the topic: "My needs are not 'special;' they are the same, human needs that everyone else has, and I should be able to fully participate in society just as much as the next person."

RETHINKING THE PHRASE "SERVING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES"

Recently, the education field has moved away from the narrative of "serving" students with disabilities toward the language of "teaching" or "educating" students with disabilities. The language of "serving" and "service" had the unwitting effect of making it seem that these students are

primarily meant to be "tended to" and not educated and that teachers are accountable for students' comfort and not their learning.

☑ **USE EXAMPLE**	🚫 **NOT THIS EXAMPLE**
Let's improve the ways teachers educate students with disabilities.	Let's improve how teachers serve students with disabilities.

Terms - Student Achievement

Students

Dr. Ivory Toldson states: "The factors that determine "at-risk" are often either unknown or beyond the control of the student, caregiver or educational provider. . . . Using "at-risk" as an adjective for students is problematic. It makes "at-risk" a category like honors student, student athlete or college-bound student." Toldson believes that the best alternative to this term is simply to say "students."

🚫 **DO NOT** use "at-risk."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

"If the phrase "at-risk" must be used, it should be in a sentence such as: " 'This' places students at risk for 'that'. . . ." If the "this" and "that" are not clearly defined, the "at-risk" characterization is useless at best, and harmful at worst."

"Risk" should describe a condition or situation, not a person." Therefore, [instead of saying,] "More Resources for At-Risk Students" [we should say,] "More Resources to Reduce Risk Factors for Students."

Rising Scholars

The term "rising scholar" often focuses on narratives of success and potential that all students already have, begging the question: *What can educators and systems do to ensure student success?*

Since "rising scholar" has been used in various contexts, it is important to define this term clearly in our writing and the way we are using it. Ask yourself if you are using it merely as a euphemism for students from communities of color.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "underperforming," "low-performer," "underachieving students"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Terms like "underperforming students" and "underachieving students" can create self-fulfilling prophecies for students and create deficit perspectives of students. Educators who view students through these terms may not challenge certain student groups. When students are identified in these terms, their actions may be impacted by the label. However, many students have strengths in various areas that these terms do not take into account. Using "underperforming school" gives a focus on the systemic challenges, not the students themselves.

Opportunity gap

Use the term "opportunity gap" as it more accurately describes the situation in our country, pinpointing inequity as the barrier to the opportunities that enable students to achieve success.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "achievement gap"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Why shouldn't we use the term "achievement gap?" The Close the Gap Foundation states: "The word 'achievement' implies that the reason this disparity exists is that some individuals simply don't work as hard as others to achieve their goals." Therefore, the "achievement gap" does not consider systemic issues that create unequal distributions of opportunity, resources, and wealth, making obtaining success more challenging for some.

TERMS - STUDENT POPULATIONS

Students

Use the term "students" when referring to students. If discussing students in a specific context, use the context and be careful.

For students who have taken a different path to education, offer information to clarify or explain their backgrounds (e.g. working, parents, two or more jobs, etc.) when necessary.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "non-traditional students"

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

The term "non-traditional" dismisses students and incorrectly positions them as outliers. Recent studies have shown that those who have been categorized as "non-traditional students" (e.g., over 21, not fresh out of high school, working while in school, raising families, etc.) are now making up a majority of students attending higher education. Therefore, it raises the question if we should continue using the term "non-traditional." Some have suggested also using the term "post-traditional" instead of "non-traditional"

Minoritized Students

*See also "*Students*" above*

- Minoritized Students
- Communities of Color
- Students of Color

Sotto-Santiago Sylk (2019) suggests that the use of the term by scholars in higher education as "minoritized" students and "minoritized" faculty acknowledges the understanding that minority is socially constructed (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013).

🚫 **DO NOT** use "Racialized students," "Minorities," "Non-white," "BIPOC."

See "BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)"

Sotto-Santiago Sylk (2019) states that using the verb "minoritized" instead of the noun "minority" "recognizes that systemic inequalities, oppression, and marginalization places individuals into "minority" status rather than their own characteristics."

SOURCE: Sotto-Santiago Sylk. (2019). Time to Reconsider the Word Minority in Academic Medicine. Journal of Best Practices in Health Professions Diversity, 12(1), 72–78

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Careful: When using the term "minoritized" make sure to do your research to understand current usage lies with this term. It is still highly challenged. There are some debates about the appropriateness of the use of this term. Some suggest that it still upholds the "minor" status of certain groups of individuals, creates an "us vs. them" argument, oppressor/oppressed dynamic, etc.

An alternative term to use is "communities of color," although this term could also be seen as a euphemism/sugar coating history and the ways our society is set-up for the benefit of some groups over others.

Students from under-resourced communities

Natalie S. Burke, the president and CEO of CommonHealth ACTION states: "Use underserved ONLY when talking about services."

To add a bit more inclusivity to the term "under-resourced," utilize people-first language, avoiding the use of the term as an adjective to describe the quality of a person. Instead of saying "under-resourced students," we should say: Students from under-resourced communities.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "inner city," "rural."

🚫 **DO NOT** confuse "underserved" with "under-resourced."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Burke also states that the term "underserved" mistakenly suggests that "all of [the person's] challenges relate to services when in fact their challenges reflect a lack of resources—of which services is only one.

"Use the phrase 'under-resourced' as a more accurate way to frame larger issues. For this purpose, resources include leadership, physical assets, money, power, political will, institutions, community cohesion, and services."

Multilingual learners, English Language Learners

Use the term "multilingual learner." This phrase takes an asset-based perspective on language learning that does not privilege English.

A multilingual learner describes any student who is fluent in more than one language. This phrase better represents the experiences of students fluent in multiple languages and takes into account that these students have valuable skills and strengths from being fluent.

Often, we hear phrases like "English language learner" and "ESL students" convey a deficit perspective, privileging English as the dominant language and diminishing the value and worth of the other languages these students are fluent in that can enhance their overall learning experiences.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "English as a second language (ESL) students."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Careful: Use the term "English Language Learner" with caution. Preferably, use Multilingual Learner over this term whenever possible, unless there is a specific reason you need to discuss the student's English proficiency.

As you write about students learning English, make sure you are using asset-oriented language, highlighting their fluency in another language, something that many American learners do not have. Their fluency in another language is a strength, not a weakness as some narratives suggest. Be careful that you are not privileging English; be thoughtful in your usage.

For example, in a sentence you might say:

"Multilingual students who are still developing their fluency and proficiency in English are capable of completing a college degree at a university that primarily instructs in English.

First-Generation Students

Describes a student who is the first in their family to attend college or whose parents, guardians, or other family members did not earn a bachelor's degree.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "low-performers, at-risk"

🚫 **DO NOT EQUATE** with a student's ability or potential to succeed in education .

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

When using the term first-generation students, be aware of the connotations, assumptions, or biases that come with this term about a students'ability to succeed in higher education.

While it is true that many first-generation students experience challenges navigating higher education, we must remember that first-generation describes a student's status; the term should not signal ability and is not indicative of potential.

An article from Inside Higher Ed states: "[some] students viewed their first-generation ... [status] as a source of influence and power. [They] persist and thrive because of, not despite, their identity."

EQUITY TERMS

Support for students who have expressed need

At Labs, we can use the term "Support for students who have expressed need" to remove the "savior" complex sometimes associated with the word "help" and allow the student to determine their own level of need.

🚫 **DO NOT** use "disadvantaged," "underprivileged."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

The issue with using terms like "disadvantaged" and "underprivileged" is that they have become catch-all terms to refer to anyone from a historically minoritized group, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

In the Chronicle of Higher Education article, "Who Are You Calling Underprivileged?" A college student suggests that "simply labeling materials as 'help for students in need' would be more accurate and less insulting."

Students experiencing inequities

Instead of using "vulnerable populations" use "populations experiencing inequities."

| | **DO NOT** use "vulnerable," "vulnerable groups," "vulnerable communities." |

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Natalie S. Burke, the president and CEO of CommonHealth ACTION states, "The word 'vulnerable' is often viewed as a character assessment and creates a perception of weakness when the truth is that people experience physical, emotional, social, and economic vulnerability when systems and institutions fail to allow access, respond to, or even plan for their existence."

Resilience/Resilient

Resilience is not inherently a "bad" term or a term we should avoid, but we must consider how/why we're using that term to describe a person or group.

DO NOT use, "These students are resilient."

Are we using the term to suggest that certain aspects of a person's identity, life, or experience were barriers they had to overcome, rather than strengths that added to their success?

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

Sometimes students must show resilience to navigate inequitable educational systems, but they shouldn't have to. This illustrates problems with the design of the educational system. On other occasions, a person's resilience can be a strength that they bring to the workplace or other settings.

Author Bee Quamie states: "Before we dismissively praise someone for being resilient, we should give them room to define their experiences in their own words. We can still uplift them by saying "From my vantage point, you seem like you're handling it so well," but not try to define their experiences for them.

HIGHER EDUCATION TERMS

First-Year Student

Try to use years, rather than class names (e.g. freshman, sophomore, junior, etc.) whenever discussing how long a student has been in school.

DO NOT use "freshman."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

According to Penn State, "The word "freshman" does not adequately describe new students on campus. "First year" is a much more encompassing and flexible term. "Freshman" refers to the traditional, fresh-out-of-high-school student. While the word does not necessarily have a bad connotation, it is not truly representative of the population, which is a variety of students, including nontraditional, international, transfer, and traditional students beginning their first year on the college campus."

Careful: Some students take longer than the "expected" four years. Often those students were not prepared for the first year due to inequitites in the K-12 system. Calling out the 5-year distinction creates connotations of failure but no matter how long it takes, that should be seen as a success.

Graduate/s

Given the Latin usage defaults to the male plural and maintains the original traditions of educational intitutions only admitting male students, avoid this by using "graduate" and "graduates."

🚫 **AVOID** using "alumnus," "alumni," "alumna," "alumnae."

☑ **NOTES/ADVICE/CAUTION**

No notes

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