

Why Do We Need a Chosen Name Program on Our CCC Campus?

By Erin Pollard
Interim Coordinator of Student Equity Programs
Pride Scholars Coordinator
SOCCCD Fellow for Equity and Inclusion
Irvine Valley College

What is a Chosen Name Program?

Chosen Name Programs allow students to choose the first and middle name(s) they wish to be known as on campus. This “Chosen name,” which may also be known as “asserted,” or “declared” name, will then be used throughout campus on all unofficial documents including student ID’s, roles sheets, Canvas (online learning programs), and so on. All official documents such as medial forms, transcripts, financial aid, and admissions documents will continue to use legal name. While Chosen name programs are open to all students, they are of particular benefit to transgender students by allowing these students to be known by their chosen name on campus and supported in their gender identity.

What is the benefit to students?

Chosen Name Programs protect and support our student’s identities and privacy. All students benefit from this change. For example, international students who may adopt an American name while they are studying in the US as well as students who simply go by a nickname, or any name other than their legal first name, have the ability to be known by a name of their choosing within a Chosen name system. This saves all students, but especially transgender students, from having to contact their professors before class starts to ask them to please use another name when calling role. In fact, it saves students from having to correct their name in nearly every interaction on our campuses from Counseling appointments, to tutoring, Student Life, and beyond.

Gender Identity is legally protected in California:

California law [AB 620](#) added “gender identity” to the list of protected classes in California higher education and we are now required to take certain steps to protect our students’ gender identity and transgender statuses. In addition, a student's transgender status is to be kept private as part of their medical record (and may also be protected by FERPA). Therefore, we must take appropriate steps to protect students’ transgender status from being disclosed to faculty, staff, fellow students, or even the student’s family. Even inadvertent disclosers are potentially liable according the documents linked below.

Fair Employment and Housing Act specifies that refusing to use someone’s asserted names and/or pronouns may be liable for discriminatory behavior:

“If an employee requests to be identified with a Chosen gender, name, and/or pronoun, including gender-neutral pronouns, an employer or other covered entity who fails to abide by the employee's stated preference may be liable under the Act” -Section 11034, h, 3 (pp 7 of linked document)

While this passage pertains to employees it is clear that California is creating protections for gender identity and expression in both business and education as well as linking discriminatory practices to those not creating supportive and protective environments for trans people.

California Department of Education’s Published Guidelines clearly outline specific protective measures to be in place for transgender students, including allowing students a chosen name:

The [AB 1266 FAQ Document](#), produced by the CA Department of Education, is particularly helpful in providing guidance as we initiate protective and supportive institutional changes for transgender students. This document clearly states that schools should allow students to present and identify themselves in alignment with their gender identity. Allowing students the right to have a chosen first name on unofficial school records is a key part of their guidance.

While [AB 1266](#) is a law that applies to K-12 education, it is a nearly parallel law to AB 620 (explained above) as both laws expand the definition of gender to now include “gender identity and expression.” Given that we, in higher education, do not have a clear guiding document that lays out exactly how we should respond to AB 620, coupled with the fact that the two laws (AB 620 and AB 1266) expand the definition of gender in nearly identical ways, using the AB 1266 FAQ document by the Department of Education is the most appropriate guiding principles to use at the Community College level.

This approach is consistent with UC and Cal State protective and supportive measures:

The [UC LGBT Task Force Recommendations](#) clearly state a policy for allowing students to assert the name they wish to be known as on campus and protection of student’s legal name information as well as transgender status. The Cal State System has also adopted very similar policies, but their policies are not posted publicly.

Chosen Name Programs also help support and protect faculty and staff:

Allowing students to directly enter their own Chosen name into our student information system sets our faculty and staff up for successful interactions with students. A Chosen name system allows faculty and staff to clearly see what names our students would like to be called and removes all guesswork on the part of our employees. Students are respected and employees are protected against unintentional situations that may result in gender discrimination complaints by our students. For example, for transgender students specifically, calling out a birth name/legal name in class is a potential FERA and AB620 violation as it discloses the student’s transgender status to the whole class in addition to creating a potential safety concern for that student.

In Conclusion:

Chosen Name Programs follow California state laws as well as best practices for support of a protected class of students. If you would like to learn more about SOCCCD’s Program or have a specific idea or concern feel free to contact us below:

Erin Pollard
Co-Chair First Name Workgroup SOCCCD
Interim Coordinator of Student Equity
Pride Scholars Coordinator, Irvine Valley College
SOCCD Fellow for Equity and Inclusion

epollard@ivc.edu

949-451-5689