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University Park, IL,  
June  
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2021

# Taking Pride in Pronouns

As Pride Month celebrations continue across the nation, the [GSU Newsroom](#) sat down with [Governors State University](#) experts and advocates – faculty and student leaders – to discuss gender inclusivity and plans to promote it on campus.

While many essential and frontline workers spent the year working in a world with gender restricted bathrooms and gender roles still in place, the pandemic has forced social life to exist only in a digital world as the Covid-19 virus raged. Social media platforms and dating apps are beginning to evolve to become gender inclusive. In the weeks leading up to Pride Month, Instagram added a feature to allow users to put their pronouns directly on their profiles.



Jason Zingsheim, Division Chair and Professor of [Communication](#) and [Gender and Sexuality Studies](#) says the identification helps users clarify and be confident that they are being perceived as they wish to be. The option to pick the pronouns alone, sets a standard for gender inclusivity across communities.

“It affirms, structurally, that gender is not as simplistic as we might have been taught. The options are there to choose from and we can switch if we’re gender fluid,” Dr. Zingsheim explained.

For [Psychology](#) major Ruben Lopez, the pronoun option on social media platforms, websites, and dating apps, creates a sense of belonging. A senior with a concentration in gender studies, Lopez works as a peer educator in the [Counseling and Wellness Center](#).

“Not many people are aware of what acknowledging people’s pronouns can do. You can make them feel like they belong and make them feel human, when, so often, we’re taught to dehumanize minority groups,” Lopez explained.

The issue hits close to home for Lopez who was recently awarded The B. Chambers Scholarship Committee of the National Association of Black and White Men Together for his essay submission on hate he has experienced as a member of the LGBTQ community.

“Being openly gay and not worrying about who I am, leaves me open to experience hate in the community,” Lopez said with a matter-of-fact air.

In higher education, trends of positive change for gender inclusivity are beginning to show. Zingsheim notes an increase in degree programs that include gender and sexuality in their names—whether new degrees were created or existing degrees expanded to include the field of study. This expansion in higher education is recognition that this is a valuable, worthwhile, and distinct area to research.

“These degrees are meeting a need. Employers are looking for employees that are well versed in gender and sexuality as well as social and racial justice,” Zingsheim said.



At GSU, plans are underway to create gender neutral bathrooms and many faculty, staff, and students include their pronouns in their email signatures to create a climate of equity and inclusion.

Zingsheim notes that highlighting pronouns in emails sends a message that GSU doesn't take gender for granted or “presume that anyone knows how we identify and that we are open to perceiving others how they identify.”

It can also help with recruitment he says.

“We want to attract the best people to work with us, the best students to come here, and to the community we want to be a public square, and we can only do that by indicating that everyone is welcome,” Zingsheim says.

Lopez says a small act like highlighting pronouns can provide comfort to members of the LGBTQ community at GSU. With plans to continue his education with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, he hopes to one day teach in the Southland and for gender inclusivity to be a norm.

“Gender roles are socially constructed, he said. “I hope we can deconstruct them to allow people to express themselves fluidly.”