The 2023 LGBTQ+ Law School Survey

Student Experiences: Names, Pronouns, and Honorifics

Name in Use

Schools can signal their commitment to inclusion[1] through their policies and practices pertaining to a student's name in use where it differs from a student's legal name. Close to all of the 115 schools that responded to questions about name in use practices indicated that they allow students to officially use a name that differs from their legal name (97%, n=112, slightly more than the 92% of schools which allowed this in 2021). While many students may legally change their first and/or surname during their legal education due to marriage, gender transition, adult adoption, or other personal reasons, many either have not yet or cannot undergo this legal process while in law school; nevertheless, many have developed a strong identity associated with a name different from their legal one. Therefore, ensuring that students can use their chosen names, even without a legal name change, is crucial to the law school experience for these students, and is disproportionately critical to the mental well-being of transgender and nonbinary students.

Despite the high percentage of schools reporting that they allow students to use a name other than their legal name, schools' policies and practices may not be equitable[2] depending on how easy it is for students to indicate their name in use where it differs from their legal name. The most common way that students can get their name in use into the system is via their application (86%; Figure 1). While a majority of schools (69%) reported

**Figure 1. Percentage of Schools by Whether/Where Students Can Indicate Name in Use (n=115)**
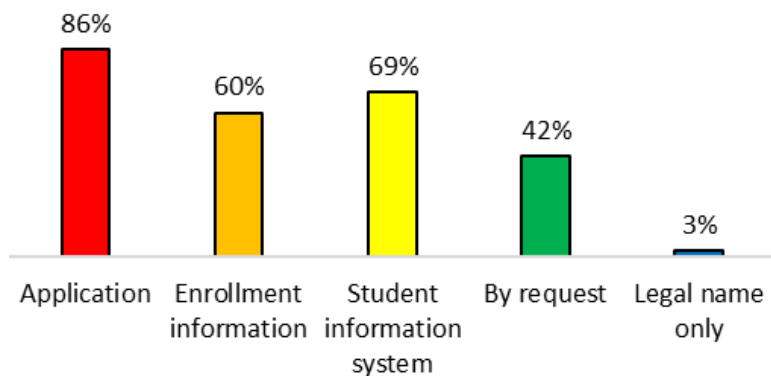
Source: 2023 LGBTQ+ Law School Survey data

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[1] Inclusion refers to an organizational climate and/or program environment where all participants are and feel respected, have a sense of belonging, and are able to participate and have an opportunity to achieve and/or demonstrate their potential.

[2] Equity refers to fair and just practices and policies that reduce or eliminate barriers to access opportunities. Equity is different than equality in that equality implies treating everyone as if their experiences are exactly the same. Equity means recognizing individuals of all races, ethnicities, genders, and other identities as individuals — not as representatives of a societally-defined group — and enabling all individuals to start on equal footing to compete for benefits, resources, and opportunities. Being equitable also means acknowledging and addressing barriers and structural inequalities — historic and current — that prevent full and fair access for some, but not others. Equity also involves and draws upon principles of universal design, i.e., building programs and resources with the variety of diverse and/or unique needs of the end-users in mind in order to reduce/eliminate barriers and improve access for all.

students could change their name in the school's student information system, if the only other option for students at the other 28% of schools that did not indicate this option is to make a request, this creates a barrier to a student employing their name in use later in their schooling once the application and enrollment processes have long since been completed.
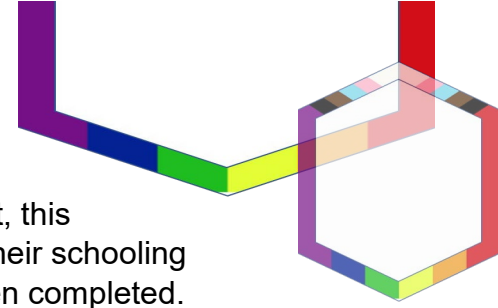
Students' ability to use their chosen names is just one part of name-related inclusive policies. Students also need to know exactly *where* their chosen name will appear (and where their former/legal name will appear instead of or in addition to their chosen name), as well as the processes involved in ensuring that their name in use appears. Schools reported that name in use where it differs from a student's legal name could appear in the following places:

- School-generated name tags at school events such as new student orientaiton (97%, n=109), about the same as reported in 2021
- Faculty class rosters (93%, n=103), similar to schools reporting in 2021
- School-generated materials for on-campus interviews (86%, n=92)
- Student diplomas (71%, n=77), up from 58% of schools indicating this in 2021
- Student transcripts that can be sent to employers (30%, n=31), down from 44% of schools reporting this in 2021

While a student's name in use can appear in many places, how a student's name in use appears in these areas varies, as does whether their legal name appears in addition to their name in use, a policy which may result in "outing" that student as transgender. Schools reported the following practices:

- Name in use appears automatically on school-generated name tags (74%) or by student request (22%).
- Name in use appears automatically on faculty class rosters (69%) or by student request (22%). A student's legal name appears in addition to name in use at 13% of schools.
- Less than half of schools reported that name in use appears automatically on on-campus interview materials, and 5% of schools indicated students' legal names also appear on these materials.
- Only a very small proportion of schools indicated that name in use appears automatically on their diplomas (21%) and transcripts (14%). A student's legal name appears in addition to their name in use on these materials at 3% and 8% of schools, respectively.
- More than a quarter of schools reported that students' name in use *cannot* appear at all on diplomas.
- 70% of schools reported that when different from their legal name, students' name in use *cannot* appear on transcripts that can be sent to employers, a startling increase from 40% of schools reporting this in 2021.
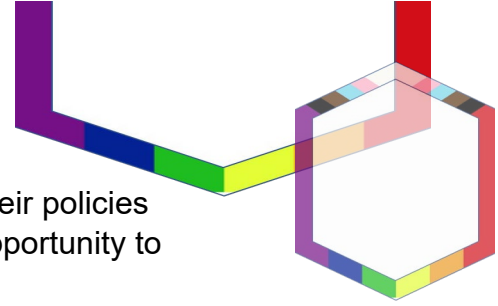
Pronouns

Schools and institutions can also demonstrate inclusivity through their policies and practices pertaining to pronouns. Schools gave students the opportunity to indicate their pronouns:

- On the school application (64%), up from 58% in 2021
- In enrollment information (54%)
- At orientation (66%)
- In the student information system (57%)

Only 2% of schools (down from 8% in 2021) did not provide any opportunity for students to indicate their pronouns. When collecting student information (e.g., pronouns), schools should be prepared to *use* that information to ensure an inclusive experience throughout a student's law school journey. However, only a very small percentage of schools automatically included pronouns on any school materials. In fact, fewer than half of responding schools indicated they included pronouns on faculty class rosters, and an even lower one-fifth of schools reported that pronouns appeared automatically rather than by student request. Including this information automatically when students will be interacting with their classmates and faculty helps prevent misgendering and plays a critical role in creating an inclusive environment.
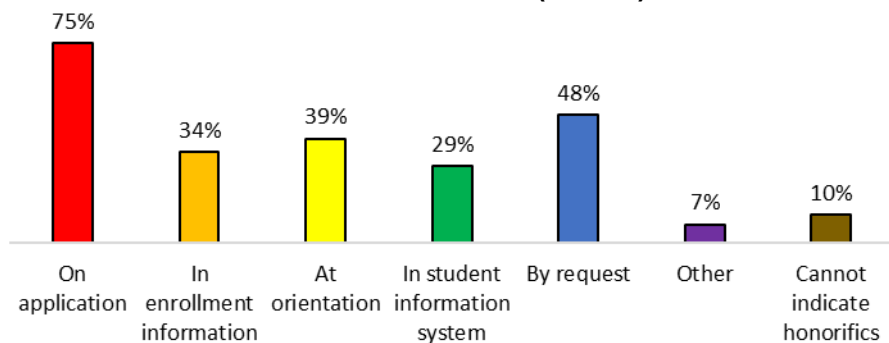
Honorifics

A longstanding tradition in law school is for faculty to call students by an honorific, such as Mr. or Ms., in front of their last name. Therefore, even if a student indicates their pronouns, without specification of a student's honorific, the student could still be called by a term that does not align with their identity. Of the 115 responding schools, 90% provided an opportunity for students to indicate their honorifics (Figure 2). Students could indicate their honorifics on their school applications at three-quarters of schools (n=86).

Apart from making a request, only between 29% and 39% of schools provided an opportunity to indicate honorifics in enrollment information, at orientation, and/or in a school's student information system.

Figure 2. Percentage of Schools by Whether/Where Students Can Indicate Honorifics (n=115)

Source: 2023 LGBTQ+ Law School Survey data

Although 90% of schools provide an opportunity for students to indicate honorifics, very few appear to use this information. Honorifics most commonly appear on name tags, although with fewer than 30% of schools indicating they can appear, it is clear that most schools do not feel that correctly identifying honorifics is important. One would expect many schools to report that honorifics appear on class rosters automatically considering their

widespread use in law school; however, only 7% of schools said they appear automatically, and only an additional 14% of schools said they appear on class rosters only by student request.

To learn about recruitment, admission, orientation, engagement, and more, [download the full report online](#).