University Task Force on Individual, Institutional and Systemic Bias

The Executive Committee of the Task Force on Individual, Institutional and Systemic Bias on April 30, 2019 approved in concept several preliminary recommendations of task force work groups for referral to appropriate administrative units to explore implementation. Specific details of implementing the frameworks set forth in the recommendations will be developed by these units, with in-depth consideration of associated concerns and processes, after which the recommendations will presented to senior leadership for adoption.
COMMUNICATION, DATA SYSTEMS & REPORTING WORK GROUP

QUESTION #1
How can we become better at recognizing and respecting people’s identities? What updates can be made in university systems and practices, regarding use of names, gender and pronouns? Email communications, ID cards and class rosters?

Task.ISB Executive Committee Meeting - April 30, 2019
Problem/situation
Current VCU policies and practices for name of use and gender markers are non-inclusive and create substantial difficulty for many of our community members.
Research

• Current research clearly supports the need and value of creating more inclusive options for name of use and gender identification processes, procedures and policies at VCU. (Pilcher, 2017; Borgione, 2018; VCU Libraries, 2018)

• The literature indicates that these practices should be across the board and these changes have significant positive benefit for student and employee health and performance.
Recommendations

1. Update and sync all VCU databases to include an additional field for gender/gender identity with comprehensive options that include transgender and non-binary identities. This would be a field in addition to the federally required “legal sex” field.

2. Update and sync all VCU databases to include an additional field for “name of use” for everyone to indicate their preferred first name. This would again be in addition to the federally required legal name field.

3. Update and sync all VCU databases to include an additional field that allows individuals to select their pronouns and assure that this field has comprehensive options that include transgender and non-binary identities.

4. Update honorifics field to include comprehensive options that include transgender and non-binary identities.
   a. Separate out honorifics field from legal name field to assure that honorifics never auto-populate based on name.

5. The “name of use” field will be a public directory field. For individuals who cannot use this field (for safety and privacy reasons), provide the option to display eID usernames (rather than legal name) in the public directory.

6. Create an education plan
Recommendations cont.

7. Create a communication plan to effectively inform the university of these changes and their impacts. This plan should have a multi-pronged approach.

8. Determine who will be tasked with communicating these changes.

9. Develop effective means of communication that reinforce these messages (i.e., students will hear from multiple sources what changing their name of use will imply, with particular attention given to potential hurdles, such as the fact that name of use will be used for all correspondences).

10. Repetition and reinforcement should also be built into both the communication and education plans. For instance, the work group discussed the possibility of adding training on name of use/gender identity in mandatory Title IX training. This could be supplemented with additional unit-level education or training at new faculty orientations.

11. Have University Relations update its brand standards guide to include a new section, titled “Inclusion,” to collect best practices in inclusive communication. It should also update its editorial style guidelines to:
   a. Incorporate the use of the singular “they” for all pronoun use unless specifically indicated otherwise by the referred individual
   b. Remove the use of honorifics to avoid potential mis-gendering (i.e., no use of Mr., Ms., Mrs.) unless specifically indicated by the referred individual

12. Once the above changes have been implemented, the university should continue to expand this process as a model to address any and all identities reflected in naming and self identifying within VCU systems. This is imperative at two levels:
   a. The creation of such fields allows for more inclusive name identification practices in terms of other marginalized groups as well (i.e. some Latinx community members have two given names and two surnames--maternal and paternal--but only go by one given name and one last name; accents can be left off or ignored, etc.)
   b. VCU can move forward in reviewing and updating other social identity marker categories to reflect a more inclusive, representative VCU. For example, this process can be done in terms of race identification, ability status identification, college generation identification, etc.