

## Using Inclusive Language and Approach with Students

What is *inclusive language*? The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) define inclusive language as language that “acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.”

By using inclusive language and an inclusive approach to advising students, we can help break down barriers that require students to self-disclose their life situation. An inclusive approach will help all students build problem-solving strategies and set goals. Similar to Universal Design for Learning, we know that many colleges have supports, scholarships, and opportunities for access in place, but students who are under-represented in higher education may need support in identifying and locating these opportunities. By educating ourselves and also informing all of our students about the many supports and resources already in place for them to attend college, we can help open the door for those who need the most support.

Normalizing terms and resources are a way to lift up students under-represented in college, and informs all students how there is strength in diversity at the college-level and in life. How language is used, especially by educational systems, can deeply impact how we view race, gender, culture, and more; by sharing resources in place for some students, we are helping internalize the importance and value of students from **all** identities traditionally under-represented in college.

Inclusive language and approaches are about more than replacing specific words with more acceptable terms, it’s about changing long-held attitudes and habits we don’t think twice about but that the youngest of children, who are just learning to speak and read, hear over and over.

At its core, experts say that inclusive language and approach is based on kindness and curiosity – learning and caring about others as individuals.

Linguistic Society of America <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/guidelines-inclusive-language>

University Design for Learning: <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

Following are some inclusive language recommendations and their exclusionary counterparts listed by topic. Keep in mind that not all groups may agree on what's inclusive language and what's not, because language is a living and ever-evolving thing, which means terms on this list may shift and change with time.

### Gender Inclusive Language

Instead of Using	Try
"Hey guys!" as a greeting	"Hello everyone!" or "Hi all" or "Hello folks"
Him / Her / She / He	They
Man	Person / Individual / Student
Ladies / Office girls	Office staff
Freshman	First-year student in college, or 9 <sup>th</sup> grader
Transgender(s) as a noun, transgendered	Transgender person

### Socioeconomic Language

Sometimes it's referred to as the "language of poverty" or "language related to class." Those who grew up in or currently live in places with few resources understand that words that describe socioeconomic status influence the way a person or their community is viewed and how they view themselves. Using language that maintains the dignity of individuals and communities and not laying blame on populations is pivotal. (Counseling at Northwestern University) This can also be referred to as strengths-based language, as opposed to deficit-based language; sometimes people-first language helps shift the viewpoint.

Instead of Using	Try
Inner city or "at-risk"	Under-resourced
Disadvantaged	Neighborhoods with high poverty rates
Distressed or "urban" neighborhoods	Neighborhoods with access to fewer opportunities
Poor, working poor	Working class, working hard to make ends meet, hardworking
Homeless people/students	People/students experiencing homelessness

Educators in under-resourced communities should avoid referring to students as "at risk" because it is stigmatizing and perpetuates stereotypes and negativity in the minds of students and others.

### Demographic and Race Language

Ask how someone prefers to be identified. Do not specify race or age (for example) unless there is relevance.

Instead of Using	Try
Alien, foreigner, "those people"	Immigrant, visitor
Ethnic, urban	People of color, multiracial person/people
Indian	Native American, American Indian, First Nation, Indigenous Person
Old person or young person	Person

Adapted from Counseling at Northwestern University: <https://counseling.northwestern.edu/blog/inclusive-language-guide/>

## Now You Try It!

How can you use an inclusive approach and/or inclusive language to support these students?

**Scenario #1** – You are working with a student who is thinking about attending college in the future and you see their eyes open wider when you mention the application fees for each school. What information can you share with them that may ease their potential concern?

**Scenario #2** – Carolina is a junior who you've known for a few years. From past conversations, you know that Carolina will be the first person in her family to attend a 4-year college, her parents came here from Mexico before she was born, and she is thinking about becoming a doctor. "I'm nervous about applying to college, graduating, and trying for a career that my grandma said is for men." How would you advise Carolina? What resources or supports might you mention in future meetings?

**Scenario #3** – You have been working with Vang, a senior, with college essays and applications. Vang comes to you with a look of concern and shares that his dad lost his job and he's not sure he can or should continue with the college application process. How would you advise Vang? What approach might you take? What resources or supports would you think about for Vang's situation?

**Scenario #4** – Because you work closely with them, you know that Bryant has experienced homelessness and is currently in foster care. Bryant has a B average with some Cs in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, is involved in Upward Bound, and has told you they think they want to attend college. How would you approach your college-prep meetings with Bryant? What resources and supports might you recommend?

**Scenario #5** – You are hosting a spring workshop that is mandatory for the sophomore class to attend called "Thinking about College." You want to try and be as inclusive as possible as you prepare the information for the students and their parents/guardians. What information will you include? What resources can you provide to the students and/or adults supporting them? Who (if anyone) at your school would you invite to help you present? Are there other staff/faculty at your school you want to invite to attend (or maybe you want to share the information with them after you present)?

## Resources

Pre-College Programs – TRiO / Outreach <https://uwhelp.wisconsin.edu/outreach-trio-programs/>

Pre-College (summer) Programs at UW: <https://precollege.wisconsin.edu/>

Wisconsin Foster Youth Funding: ETV: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youthservices/pdf/brighterstar-etv.pdf>

Tribal Foster Youth Funding in Wisconsin: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/tribalaffairs>

Scholarships for Wisconsin Undocumented students: <https://uwm.edu/inclusiveexcellence/scholarships-for-undocumented-students/>

Undocumented students at UW-Whitewater:

<https://www.uww.edu/Documents/financialaid/ResourceGuide.pdf>

Undocumented students at Marquette: <https://www.marquette.edu/diversity/undocumented-student-admissions.php>

## UW-Madison Specific Programs:

CAE (support for first generation, students of color, working class) <https://cae.ls.wisc.edu/>

CeO (support for first generation, working class, students with disabilities) <https://ceo.wisc.edu/>

Bucky's Tuition Promise <https://financialaid.wisc.edu/types-of-aid/tuition-promise/>

FASTrack and BANNER for students on public assistance: <https://financialaid.wisc.edu/types-of-aid/ftb/>

First Wave Scholarship for artists and activists <https://omai.wisc.edu/first-wave-scholarship-program/>

Chancellor's and Powers Knapp / Lee Scholars (for students of color and/or working class students who are leaders): <https://cspks.wisc.edu/>

Small scholarship for Madison area undocumented students: <https://madison365.com/new-scholarships-benefit-undocumented-students/>