Pronouns & Asserted Names with The Pride Center

Episode 115

00:00:00 **Coach Mo**

It's okay to make a mistake. You have to have your intention set that we want to see people as they really are. You know, normally, I would say, "Hey, my name is Melinda. My pronouns are she, her, hers. Madison how would you like me to know you?"

00:00:19 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:20 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie podcast.

00:00:23 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:40 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:00:45 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:52 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pamona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:00:53 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:00:58 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:05 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:07 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:11 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:22 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:26 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:34 **Christina**

Being inclusive can start with the simple act of asking and listening. And in order to make room for growth, we also have to make room for our mistakes.

00:01:41 **Christina**

Today, Sun Ezzell talks with Melinda Bowen, Pride Center Faculty Coordinator, and Maddy Stute, Pride Center Administrative Specialist. They share about the Pride Center's initiatives, what it offers students, how it's grown, and the advancements made even by the Mt. SAC IT team towards using preferred identifiers. As Coach Mo says, we all make mistakes and we all have room to grow.

00:02:07 **Christina**

Listen in on this informative and authentic conversation about how to be on a path of growth and inclusivity by creating safe spaces and taking the time to ask and listen, and sometimes, make mistakes.

00:02:24 **Coach Mo**

Hi there. My name's Melinda Bowen. My pronouns are she, her, and hers, and I am the Faculty Coordinator for the Pride Center at Mt. San Antonio College.

00:02:33 **Maddy**

And my name is Maddy Stute. I also use she, her, hers pronouns, and I am the Administrative Specialist inside of the Pride Center.

00:02:42 **Sun**

Well, Melinda and Maddy, welcome back to the podcast. I'm so excited to have a chance to talk with you today. So, to start off with, I was wondering if you could share a little bit about the evolution of the Pride Center over the last couple of years, including what it's been like to transition to online.

00:03:00 **Coach Mo**

Thanks, Sun. Before I get started on that, I do want to give a shout-out to the founders of the Pride Center at Mt. SAC; Lisa Reinhart, Kim Earhart, and Jeff Archibald. This was their love child, and they helped create the Pride Center with the help of the academic Senate.

00:03:18 **Coach Mo**

So, I actually got to step into this beautiful program in progress. And so, I've been the Pride Center Coordinator, Faculty Coordinator since 2017. And so, we've had a lot of change in the Pride Center. It's gone from being a part-time center into a full-time center with support, academic, and personnel support, we run like any other center on campus. So, that's very, very exciting.

00:03:47 **Coach Mo**

We are now operating in this pandemic as the virtual Pride Center inside of Canvas, and we're offering as many of the services to our students as possible in that forum. And so, I think for the most part, we've done a super job of transferring as many of the services and activities. Obviously, the students can't come and print in the virtual Pride Center, but we've done our best to mimic what we do in the actual Pride Center to what we can do here in Canvas.

00:04:21 **Sun**

That's really wonderful because I think that all of us miss that piece of being together on campus, that sense of community. And so, for folks to have that opportunity to be in community with each other is so important, especially while we're online right now.

00:04:36 **Coach Mo**

It's been very difficult for the students who come into the Pride Center because it's such a safe space for them. And this particular space, physical space on campus may be the only space and is often the only space that some of our students can be their true, authentic selves. And so, we're really looking forward to getting back on campus and allowing our students that safety net really, and that opportunity to grow.

00:05:04 **Sun**

And that work to create space for students to be their true, authentic selves, that seems like something that may be, we all have a part in. We all have something that we can do in our role at Mt. SAC. So, I'm really glad that we get a chance to have this conversation today.

00:05:20 **Sun**

So, one of the things we've been talking about on campus for quite some time now is the importance of names and pronouns and getting both of those right. And I was wondering if you could share a little bit more about what's so important about getting names right. What's so important about getting pronouns right?

00:05:38 **Maddy**

Sure, I would be glad to talk about that. One of the most affirming things you can do for a person is call them by their correct name. For many of the students in the Pride Center and for many folks in the LGBTQ plus community, the name that feels right to them, the name that affirms their identity isn't necessarily the name you might see on paper. It isn't their legal name.

00:06:05 **Coach Mo**

Well, and in fact, Sun, I was just going to jump in here - there's lots of reasons why we might have an asserted or preferred name. There's in our case, the folks that Maddy and I deal with every day - maybe their gender identity, maybe their legal name, their birth name doesn't match their gender identity, who they see themselves as, who they are now.

00:06:30 **Coach Mo**

Sometimes folks want to use an Americanized name. Sometimes we also don't really like our name. Sometimes we use a preferred name to distinguish ourselves. In fact, one of our students tried just using their first name only. You know, it comes to mind for me, Prince or share; Prince in particular. And then some of us just use nicknames.

00:06:54 **Coach Mo**

I love being called "Mo" or even "Coach Mo." Those are nicknames. They're not really my preferred name. They really are a nickname, which is a little bit different than a preferred name. So, all of those things are important reasons why one might choose to assert a different name than their legal name.

00:07:13 **Maddy**

Absolutely. And if I could hop in, Melinda, you mentioned that sometimes students are choosing preferred or asserted names that align with their gender identity. That's the case with a lot of the folks inside the Pride Center. Some of our students who identify as trans, possibly non-binary, select names that will affirm that gender identity. And it's so important to get to know your students, especially students who have a preferred name so that you can respect that name, and so that you can affirm that identity.

00:07:48 **Maddy**

If you don't take the time to get to know their preferred name, or you don't make the effort to use their preferred name, it can actually do a lot of damage. And we've heard stories of students who have dropped classes because their preferred names, their asserted names were not being respected, were not being used in class. They were being outed in class. And it's not just a matter of comfort in the classroom, which is very important, but also a matter of safety.

00:08:18 **Coach Mo**

We've taken on part of the responsibility of educating folks about why this is important. And for the most part, we have run into very little pushback in regards because the truth is that Mt. SAC is a very affirming place. We take equity very serious. We honor diversity. When we know better, we do better. And this is really what it's all about, is knowing better.

00:08:43 **Coach Mo**

I have to admit, when I first became the Pride Center Coordinator in 2017, a lot of this was really new to me. We certainly were not introducing ourselves in the kinesiology department and to our students with our pronouns. You know, if you think in general, actually, there's places where that really needs to happen. But this wasn't part of our language and words matter. Because words and language gives us consciousness.

00:09:16 **Coach Mo**

And so, that's what Maddy and I really feel. And the Pride Center advisory board, we really feel like that's the perfect job for our center, is to get marketing out, to get communications out. We've done Flex day events for the last three years. Different departments on campus have invited us in to help them serve students better.

00:09:40 **Coach Mo**

And I want to give a shout out because, in fact, departments such as financial aid have come to us and said, "We want to serve our students better. We want to keep them safe, how can we do that?" And Maddy and I just lined up, and said let's do an in-service. And gosh, how empowering is that. And so that's one.

00:10:06 **Coach Mo**

And the first part about that, if we could go back, was really making it possible, knowing that this was an issue. And then how do we make it a reality that folks can show up and be safe and assert actually to be seen as the person they want to be seen as.

00:10:29 **Coach Mo**

And so, we're still working on that, but we put together a workgroup. There's been at least 30 folks from Dr. Scroggins, managers, folks in classified staff, people in the unions, academic Senate folks, and our superstars in IT, for sure, who have been working and planning and really tossing back and forth, how can we ... the end goal. How can we get there?

00:11:00 **Coach Mo**

Which is everywhere that student shows up on campus, the only thing that we need to know is how they wish to be known. And so, it's not a perfect system yet. We now have ...and maybe this would be a good opportunity, unless Maddy, is there anything you want to add to that?

00:11:21 **Maddy**

Yeah, thanks. I would like to add that while we are working with all of these wonderful folks around campus to develop the technological infrastructure to make this a seamless process for students - we advise folks to employ some behavioral tactics that help in the interim.

00:11:43 **Maddy**

So, one piece of advice that we give folks is not to make assumptions especially when it comes to pronouns. You can see someone walking down the street who expresses femininely. And if you make an assumption that this person identifies that their gender identity is that of a woman and that they use traditionally what we've known as female pronouns, and you end up referring to them with an earshot in a way that is not accurate to how they identify, because you made the assumption and maybe didn't take a minute to ask and to verify that with them.

00:12:23 **Maddy**

That can be really hurtful. That can give the impression that you won't take the effort to get to know them or that you might not be affirming of how they actually do identify. So, we always preach not to make assumptions. Take a moment to ask, model the behavior yourself.

00:12:44 **Maddy**

So, as you noticed, at the beginning of this conversation, Coach Mo and I introduced ourselves with our pronouns. And we do that to model the behavior, to show folks that even though it might feel a little awkward at the beginning, you iron through that, and it becomes part of your normal speech patterns.

00:13:04 **Maddy**

And when other people hear it coming from you, they might be more likely to introduce themselves in that fashion as well. And when people who - especially for our students, if we introduce ourselves that way inside the Pride Center, specifically, some of our students who use what we call non-traditional pronouns like they, them, and theirs, might feel more welcome in the space, and more likely to share that detail about themselves and their identity.

00:13:34 **Sun**

I'm really glad that you shared that, and also that you shared that it might feel a little awkward at first. So, I mean, anytime we're learning or we're growing, or we're evolving in our understanding and changing our behavior, it sometimes does feel a little awkward, so I'm glad that you mentioned that

00:13:53 **Coach Mo**

That's just a great segue there because it is again, Coach Mo, 50 at the time five-year-old, Coach Mo coming into an environment to which I did not belong at that point. We weren't using pronouns down in kinesiology and athletics. And so, I made a lot of mistakes and it's okay to make mistakes. And that's something that's really important for folks to know.

00:14:17 **Coach Mo**

In fact, some people - fear is a basic human emotion that we all deal with all the time. And sometimes, in academia, those of us that are up in the front of the classroom fear making a mistake. And so, it's okay to make a mistake. You have to have your intention set that we want to see people as they really are. And so, Maddy and I will model what that looks like, and it's just really quick. And we get to model this quite often, so it's a lot of fun.

00:14:45 **Coach Mo**

So, normally, I would say, "Hey, my name is Melinda. My pronouns are she, her, hers. Madison how would you like me to know you?"

00:14:57 **Maddy**

"Thank you so much for asking. I also use she, her, hers pronouns, and I would love it if you would call me Maddy."

00:15:04 **Coach Mo**

Perfect, perfect. So, if the next time I saw Maddy and I referred to ... somebody asked me a question and I said, "Oh, his briefcase is over there." Oh boy, I just dated myself with briefcase, didn't I? "But his briefcase is over there" and Maddy says to me-

00:15:24 **Maddy**

"Oh, I actually use she, her pronouns."

00:15:28 **Coach Mo**

"I'm sorry about that, Maddy, I'll get it right. It's important to me." And then I move on. And that's the most important thing, a very quick, just a quick apology, an affirmation that it's important that you're going to get it right and move on, so that we don't put the person in a situation where we're falling all over ourselves apologizing and just bringing more attention to the mistake

00:15:52 **Maddy**

And another great way to approach it depending on how well the person, if you goof, and we all goof, is you can briefly say, "I'm sorry," and then stress how important it is to get it right. Or you can say, "Thank you for correcting me because it's important for me to get it right."

00:16:12 **Maddy**

And then rather than potentially making the first person feel like they need to take care of you in that moment, because you're sorry, you're communicating the message that you appreciate the correction, because you will be using it to speak more accurately in the future.

00:16:30 **Sun**

Thank you so much for modeling that, it's really useful to hear how that conversation can go, and to have kind of the reassurance that yes as our awareness grows, as we are changing and growing, we make mistakes. And even though we have the best intentions, so that's really helpful. Thank you for sharing that.

00:16:51 **Sun**

I'm thinking about also, maybe the interaction points when we have that opportunity to do that modeling or to learn somebody's name; are there things that faculty can do to kind of create that prepared space or that prepared community in anticipation of meeting a new class worth of students?

00:17:15 **Coach Mo**

You know, boy, I'm glad you brought that up, Sun. It's a good question. And there's several little things that we can do right off the bat. As Maddy pointed out earlier, model it in your speaking behavior. So, in your introductions. We can put it in our signature lines on our email. We can put it into our syllabi so that students see that right off the bat, that this is how we're announcing ourselves, this is how we're identifying ourselves. And folks in the community definitely see that.

00:17:43 **Coach Mo**

The other thing that I heard yesterday was really motivated by - and because again, remember, this is not only students in the LGBTQ community and our Pride Center. Often, our international students have names that are hard for some folks who are not familiar with that particular language to say. And Maddy will probably remember the professor's name from last night at the speaker series.

00:18:13 **Coach Mo**

One of the professors told us a story about coming across the name list prior to the beginning of the semester. And he recognized a name, this particular professor recognized a name that he was not familiar with. And he Googled that name so that he could learn how to pronounce it correctly. And he went a little bit further in finding out like this particular name had a historical importance.

00:18:40 **Coach Mo**

And so, when school started, that professor was able to call out the student's name in the proper way, and also connect with that student as to what the name actually historically meant. And the student shared with the professor, that that person was the only person in all of their years of education to get their name correct.

00:19:04 **Sun**

Wow!

00:19:04 **Coach Mo**

So, yeah, I felt small in that very moment and thought this person, this professor is somebody that I have just learned something immensely from. And I can double the kind of professor that I can show up as in the classroom, just by sharing the obstacles and sharing what works and so beautiful.

00:19:26 **Coach Mo**

I think one of the students in the forum said, "Can we make that mandatory for all professors," which I thought was just a terrific idea as well, we'll run that by the union.

00:19:39 **Coach Mo**

The other thing - just following up on some other things that we're doing, Sun, we now have the preferred name and pronoun option available in the student portal and the faculty and classified portal. So, anyone that works on campus and any student on campus can select their preferred name and also their pronouns.

00:20:00 **Coach Mo**

For students and faculty, that will result in you being able now to get a Mounty ID card that has only your preferred name and your pronouns. So, that'll definitely make it easier for some of our students as they navigate the Mt. SAC system, to be able to hand somebody that ID Maddy mentioned earlier.

00:20:23 **Coach Mo**

Sometimes what we think a gender identity looks like may not be what we're used to. And so, this gives a buffer for that student or faculty member or staff member as well. We all get to get these. So, mine definitely is going to say "Coach Mo."

00:20:38 **Coach Mo**

The other thing that we have done - and with the help of our brothers and sisters in IT - and this is a huge shout out to Eric Turner and Antonio Bangloy and Chuong Tran, these folks have just worked night and day for over three and a half years to help make this all happen.

00:20:56 **Coach Mo**

But in Banner, we now can change our preferred name like we spoke about in our portals. And for faculty, that preferred name will be pushed to our roll sheets, our grade sheets, and yes, the summary class list. So, if a student does change their name to their preferred name or asserts their preferred name and pronouns, that's all the professor is going to see.

00:21:20 **Coach Mo**

So, the challenge has been during the pandemic, that Canvas was not ready for this. And so, sometimes our students were being outed inside Canvas. And the three individuals in IT (Eric, Antonio, and Chuong) that I identified earlier have worked night and day to fix that on the Mt. SAC side of campus. And it's no small feat.

00:21:45 **Coach Mo**

But now, everywhere that you show up in Canvas, is the students' preferred name. We still have some work to do. So, emails are not completely fixed yet. So, they're working on that so that the email identification line that comes out reflects the preferred name and also Zoom.

00:22:08 **Coach Mo**

So, we had several students, I'm so sorry to say, drop out of school during the pandemic, because when they came into the Zoom meeting, they couldn't change their name quick enough. And it was really dehumanizing to them not to be able to show up as the person that they really are.

00:22:29 **Coach Mo**

So, those are the things that we've been working on, on campus that hopefully, in the future, a student can walk into financial aid and there won't be any need for the legal name to be used other than between the college and the State, the government. And the same is true in health services. We don't want students sitting in spaces and having their dead name called out or their legal name - our students call it their deadname. So, Maddy, did I miss anything there?

00:23:08 **Maddy**

Well, right at the end, you used a term that I think is important to expand on for the folks listening to this podcast. You mentioned that for some of our students who use preferred and asserted names, that if their legal name were to be called out - you called it their "deadname."

00:23:30 **Maddy**

And so, just bouncing back really quickly to the importance of respecting preferred names. Some of our folks in the Pride Center and many in the LGBTQ community who use preferred names and show up using that preferred name, that is their identity, that's how they see themselves. That's how they want the world to see themselves.

00:23:55 **Maddy**

If they go into a space that doesn't have access to their preferred name, only has their legal name written down on a piece of paper - and that legal name is called out, they are dead named. We use the term "deadnamed."

00:24:12 **Maddy**

And that's because that individual sees that legal name as dead to them. That is no longer who they are and maybe never was who they are. And the experience of being addressed by that name can be so invalidating and so traumatic at times that they consider it being deadnamed.

00:24:36 **Maddy**

So, it's important to know that for some, it can be a traumatic experience, and hopefully, that will motivate all of us to expend the extra effort. It doesn't take too much to know and respect our students and our fellow faculty and staff, to know and address folks by their preferred name.

00:25:01 **Sun**

Thank you for sharing that. It's making me reflect that we have a somber responsibility, a beautiful, but also a somber responsibility as part of a community where students come to discover who they are and become who they are. So, thank you for helping us to evolve as a campus community, and to learn and to grow.

00:25:27 **Coach Mo**

You're welcome, Sun, it's our pleasure.

00:25:29 **Sun**

So, I've heard you use a couple of terms (preferred names and asserted names), could you talk a little bit about what the difference might be?

00:25:38 **Coach Mo**

Gosh, I'd love to. When I was first introduced to this idea of preferred name, that was a term that was being used. And I appreciated it very much, especially from a young jock who went through most of her life being called "Mo " and just loved it. Because that's a lot of who I am.

00:25:55 **Coach Mo**

But then this term "asserted names" presented itself in our community and I thought about how profound that is, being that goes beyond that idea of this is what I would prefer to be called to almost say I envision a superhero cape, opening up and saying, "World, this is who I am."

00:26:18 **Coach Mo**

So, technically, they mean the same thing, but the truth is if we're on this journey, and we talk about this and that words are important. And to me, to assert who you are is powerful. And for someone to accept you asserting who you are versus saying, "I would prefer to be called this," that almost gives an option for you not to call me that. And so, it's very powerful.

00:26:49 **Sun**

That's lovely. I'm going to imagine people with their capes blowing in the wind as they introduce themselves to each other.

00:26:55 **Coach Mo**

It is. It's really, really powerful to even to say ... I can say this with you too, but "I am woman." It's really to be able to assert that rather than to cower to that. And I'll tell you what my experience is as an almost 60-year-old woman, especially being grown up in athletics.

00:27:17 **Coach Mo**

It was always the girls' teams, girl sports. It wasn't ... you play like a girl and it wasn't empowering. And to be able to assert that I'm a female athlete is way different than somebody saying I played girl sports.

00:27:39 **Coach Mo**

I just go back to a saying that I often say, which is we will do better when we know better. And we're living in a time where there is a massive evolution of what this human experience means and a recognition of just that, of humanity. And that we all don't look the same, act the same, eat the same things. There is a diversity, but there is a commonness to us as well. At the heart, we all want to be loved. We want to love, we want to be safe. We want to share, we want to explore, we want to grow.

00:28:18 **Coach Mo**

And so, at the end of the day, that's what this is really all about. Is giving us an opportunity not only to keep our students and faculty and staff safe and affirmed and seen, but it also gives us an opportunity to grow, to see the world as bigger than the picture that's right in front of us.

00:28:37 **Coach Mo**

And that's what we hope to do in the Pride Center. And I will tell you, Coach Mo is the first one that grows every day. Because we all make mistakes and we all have a lot of room to grow. And so, I hope that our mission is being accomplished, but it will never be accomplished. There will always be something new if we're on that path and that journey of growth. And so, I think for me, that's really what it's all about.

00:29:07 **Maddy**

And there are a lot of actions that you can take to strive for allyship to the community and to strive to be a co-conspirator for the LGBTQ community. One very easy one, as we mentioned earlier in our discussion is adding your own pronouns to your email signature. And I just want to note that our wonderful IT team has incorporated this into the signature building tool that they have on their website.

00:29:37 **Maddy**

So, now, you can go in, you can, your name as you would like it to be displayed. You can write your position, your hours, your phone number, et cetera. And there's a line now for your pronouns. So, when it autogenerates your signature to put right into your emails, it will include pronouns.

00:29:58 **Sun**

That's wonderful, thank you for sharing

00:30:00 **Coach Mo**

Sun, thank you so much for inviting us. We think you're fricking awesome, but this is an amazing platform and we appreciate the work that you're doing, and we would love to be back any time. We're happy to come back. Again, thanks for thinking of us, and thanks for thinking of our community.

00:30:21 **Sun**

Wonderful. I will look forward to our upcoming conversations and huge gratitude to both of you for the work that you're doing on preferred and asserted names, on pronouns, and to keep the Pride Center growing and evolving.

00:30:34 **Coach Mo**

Great. Thanks, Sun.

00:30:37 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts, so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however you like to listen.

00:30:54 **Christina**

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