

# President's Commission of the Status of Women Subcommittee on the Review of Institutional Policies/ Documents

***DRAFT***

## **Gender Neutral Language Policy**

### **Purpose:**

As an institution of higher learning dedicated to quality education, New Mexico State University has a commitment to high standards of written and oral communication. The university is sensitive as an employer to the fair and equal treatment of individuals and groups.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all official documents, publications, and presentations are written in gender neutral and / or gender inclusive language.

### **Rational:**

Gender neutral language is part of a growing awareness of the power of language and the role it plays in promoting equality. Gender-neutral language is a subtle and often overlooked aspect of equality, but so pervasive that it affects everyday thinking in the workplace, home and government. President Ivany in his Installation Address (University of Saskatchewan, February 3, 1990) stated:

Universities, traditionally, have a distinguished history of leadership in the most crucial issues facing societies. We have a moral obligation to use our privileged positions as a centre of scholarship to promote enlightenment, to stimulate discussion, and to propose action. I believe. . .people expect from us leadership in such sensitive areas as human rights, racism, and sexism. (p. 6)

Therefore, the university should seek to transform the behavior and attitudes that legitimize and perpetuate the normal and social exclusion of women. A heightened awareness of gender-neutral language needs to become evident in universities and institutional training programs. As well, our university may aid in promoting academic excellence by ensuring that university policies, programs, services and activities reflect the experiences and perspectives of the *whole* society the university serves.

Thus, the university should eliminate bias by using gender neutral language in all of its materials, especially in areas where stereotypic "norms" exist, if the university is committed to justice and to the avoidance of discrimination in all its fields of competence, notably in the area of education.

Perhaps more than any other institution, educational organizations are obligated to provide a place of work and study that enables everyone. . .to achieve their full potential. That means a place without attitudinal, environmental, or administrative barriers to access and to equal participation; [a place] that is free of discriminatory policies and procedures. (*Decision of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission under Section 47 of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code for the Approval of an Affirmative Action Program for the University of Saskatchewan, September, 1992, p.4.*)

**Avoid Using the Following:****Instead Use the Following:**

Insurance man	Insurance agent
Layman	Layperson, non-specialist, nonprofessional
Mailman or postman	Mail or letter carrier
Policeman	Police officer, law enforcement
Salesman, Saleswoman	Salesperson, sales representative
Spokesman	Spokesperson, representative
Stewardess, Steward	Flight attendant
Weatherman	Weather reporter, meteorologist
Workman	Worker
Actress	Actor

**Replacing the pronoun *he*:**

Like man, the generic use of *he* can be seen to exclude women.

**Examples:****Avoid Using the Following:****Instead Use the Following:**

When a driver approaches a red light, <i>he</i> must stop.	When drivers approach a red light, <i>they</i> must stop.
When approaching a red light, <i>he</i> or <i>she</i> must stop.	When approaching a red light, <i>a driver</i> must stop.

**Referring to members of both sexes with parallel names, titles, or descriptions:****Examples:****Avoid Using the Following:****Instead Use the Following:**

Men and ladies. . .	Men and women. . . or Ladies and Gentlemen
Man and wife	Husband and wife
Dear Sir:	Dear Sir/Madam: or To whom it may concern:

**Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin**

Some words and phrases that refer to racial and ethnic groups are clearly offensive. Other words (e.g., Oriental, colored) are outdated or inaccurate. Hispanic is generally accepted as a broad term for Spanish-speaking people of the Western Hemisphere, but more specific terms (Latino, Mexican American) are also acceptable in some cases preferred.

**Examples:****Avoid Using the Following:****Instead Use the Following:**

Mongoloid	Person with Down syndrome
Wheelchair-bound	Person who uses a wheelchair
AIDS sufferer, person afflicted with AIDS	Person living with AIDS, PWA, HIV
AIDS victim	
Polio victim	Has/ had polio
The handicapped, the disabled, crippled	Person with disabilities or person who uses crutches
Deaf-mute, deaf and dumb	Deaf person

**Patronizing or Demeaning Expressions**

These are expressions which can offend, regardless of intention. References to age, sex, religion, race and the like should only be included if they are relevant.

**Examples:****Avoid Using the Following:****Instead Use the Following:**

Girls (when referring to adult women), the fair sex	Women or woman
Sweetie, dear, dearie, honey, old maid, bachelorette	Single women (not appropriate with strangers or in public situations)
The little lady, old lady, ball and chain	Wife
Boys (when referring to adult men)	Men or man

**Languages That Excludes or Unnecessarily Emphasized Differences****Examples:****Avoid Using the Following:****Instead Use the Following:**

Lawyers and their wives	Lawyers and their spouses
A secretary and her boss	A secretary and boss
The male nurse	The nurse
Arab man denies assault charges	Man denies assault charges
The articulate black student	The articulate student
Marie Curie was a great woman scientist	Marie Curie was a great scientist
Christian name	Given name, personal name, first name