

GENDER PRONOUNS, TEACHING AND LEARNING, AND CULTURES OF RESPECT

Centre for Teaching and Learning | University of Alberta

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Tommy Mayberry (he/she/they)

Manager, Outreach and Recruitment

tommy.mayberry@uwaterloo.ca | [@tommymayberry](https://twitter.com/tommymayberry)



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KEYNOTE OUTCOMES

By the end of this keynote, you should be able to:

- **define** and **discuss** pronouns, including gender pronouns, as parts of speech in English language discourse, history, and culture with a knowledgeable, inclusive, and respectful vocabulary;
- **identify** and **implement** strategies and resources for positive engagement with gender pronouns and teaching;
- **use** pronoun awareness to signal cultures of respect, and **reflect** on whiteness, marginalization, trauma, and continued struggle.



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PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

What is a “pronoun”?

“[I]t’s a somewhat obscure grammar term, after all” (Spade)

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns	Possessive Pronouns
he	him	his
she	her	her(s)
they	them	their(s)
it	it	its

At their core, a pronoun is a part of speech that replaces a noun (a person, place, thing, idea, or emotion) to stand in for that noun in discourse and communication.



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PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

What is a “gender pronoun”?

When a pronoun replaces and stands in for a noun who is a person, we are grammatically responsible for aligning the pronoun standing in with that person’s gender – our language itself dictates this.

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns	Possessive Pronouns
he	him	his
she	her	her(s)
they	them	their(s)
it	it	its

But not “it.”
Never “it.”

Pronoun: “a word standing instead of a Noun, as its Substitute or Representative,” and “[i]n the Pronoun are to be considered the Person, Number, Gender and Case”

(Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar: with Critical Notes*, 1762: 31)



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PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

But...isn't "they" plural?

"I argue endless battles with **well-educated people who think their own grammar school lessons from 40 or 50 years ago preclude** them from referring to individual students as 'they'" (Manion)

"This year, my students are working to **advocate that our writing faculty stop teaching that the singular pronoun 'they/them' is grammatically incorrect** – a battle we still have to fight *even though even the mainstream press has recognized this use*" (Spade – emphasis added)

"They" as **a singular, non-binary pronoun** was named Word of the Year in 2015 (Abadi)

Abadi, Mark. "'They' was just named 2015's Word of the Year." *Business Insider*

Manion, Jen. "The Performance of Transgender Inclusion: The Pronoun Go-Round and the New Gender Binary." *Public Seminar* (November 27th, 2018)

Spade, Dean. "We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds." *DeanSpade.net* (December 3rd, 2018)



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The MLA also includes “**themselves**” as the reflexive pronoun!

PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Okay...but isn't “they” plural, in academic writing cultures?

2017 – **CSM** (Chicago Manual of Style)

“a generic third-person singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context”

2019 – *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*

“a singular indefinite pronoun [used] to refer to an unknown or unspecified person[,] to a single person whose gender is intentionally not revealed[, and/or] to a single person whose gender identity is nonbinary”

2020 – **APA** (American Psychological Association) and **MLA** (Modern Language Association)

“How do I use singular *they*?” *The MLA Style Centre*, 2020.

“Pronouns.” *The Chicago Manual of Style Online*, U of Chicago, 2017.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 7th ed., 2020.

“They.” *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2019.



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PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Fine! ...but the singular “they” is at least new, right? (...RIGHT?!)

It is remarkable that it took until 2015 (the Word of the Year) and beyond (academic culture) for this pronoun to gain “the considerable traction” that it has (Abadi) **since as early as our Middle English of the 1300s**, our language has had this in its employ:

In *The Wycliffe Bible* (1382), for instance –
“**Eche on** in **per** craft ys wijs” (*Syrach* 38:35)

In Oliver Goldsmith's *The History of England* (1771) –
“**Every person** who had been punished for seditious libels during the foregoing administration, now recovered **their** liberty, and had damages given **them** upon those who had decreed **their** punishment” (240-1)

Abadi, Mark. “‘They’ was just named 2015’s Word of the Year.” *Business Insider*
Goldsmith, Oliver. *The History of England, From the Earliest Times to the Death of George II*. Vol. 3, London, 1771. 4 vols.
The Wycliffite Bible (E.V.). 1382.



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PRONOUNS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

What are gender pronouns that people use?

When we talk about people’s personal pronouns and gender pronouns, it can be helpful to think of them in “series” as well as in cases:

“Series”	Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns	Possessive Pronouns
“He” Series	he	him	his
“She” Series	she	her	her(s)
“They” Series	they	them	their(s)
“Ze” Series	ze	hir	hirs
“Ve” Series	ve	vem	vir
“Just my name” Series	[person’s name]	[person’s name]	[person’s name + ‘s]

*This table is
neither exhaustive
nor complete!*

Notes:

- Some people use gender-neutral pronoun series that might be unfamiliar – such as “ze” and “ve” series.
- Some people prefer to be referred to by just their names and not by the use of a pronoun series.
- Some people use and are open to being referred to by more than one series of pronouns.



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TOMMY MAYBERRY (HE/SHE/THEY)

AMAB –
Assigned Male
At Birth

Visually-presents
most often as
culturally-coded
“male”

Same-sex partner
(also named Tommy)
– we appear as **gay**
male couple



I use “they” when I **refer to myself** in the third-person

Academic Drag Queen



LGBTQIA2S+

Nails did, **hair** on
fleek, and **make-**
ups on – in *and*
out of drag

Flamboyant
and **fierce**



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WHAT CAN I CLARIFY?

Language

Grammar

Pronouns

Gender Pronouns

Pronoun “Series”



“They/them”

“ze/hir/hirs”

“ve/vem/vir”

Terminology

Drag

Anything else!

[This is a photo of my Pekingese-Chihuahua, Sam. He often makes this confused face when I wake him up from napping, so this is my stock image for pausing and checking in with folks.]



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GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING

Fostering Inclusivity in Our Teaching

We can foster inclusivity in our teaching with gender pronouns in two key ways:

1. Creating and maintaining an inviting place around us as teachers
2. Modelling

And with both of these, **we need to be intentional and meaningful.**



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GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING

Creating and Maintaining an Inviting Place

“When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul – and not just individual strength, but collective understanding – to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard” (Rich)

“For students who use pronouns or names that do not match what a...professor would **assume or find on a roster**, these forms of mis-identification can make [students] **unwilling to participate** in class and can **impact their learning**” (Spade)

“[B]eing called by what you go by, rather than being mis-gendered and mis-named, can **reduce anxiety, depression, and suicidality**” (Spade)



GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING

Creating and Maintaining an Inviting Place

“[W]ith the exception of people in very special pockets of liberal arts education, most [trans/non-binary students and trans/non-binary young people] face ongoing hostility and erasure, and **crave spaces where there is an invitation to be respectfully referred to**” (Spade)

So, **how do we begin to create and maintain these inviting places?**

By **modelling our own pronouns** and by **transparently inviting our students to do so** as well.



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OLIVIA CARVALHO

Admissions and Recruitment Coordinator

Admissions and Upper-Year Transitions

519-884-8111 x28208

Pronouns: she/her

ocmcarvalho@uwaterloo.ca

SH 1012



TOMMY MAYBERRY

Manager, Outreach and Recruitment

Admissions and Upper-Year Transitions

519-884-8111 x28353

Pronouns: he/she/they



MICHELLE WATSON, CHRL

Director, Human Resources

Human Resources

519-884-8111 x28258

Pronouns: she/her

michelle.watson@uwaterloo.ca



Note: Each of these photos appears on their own slide at the end of the slideshow for future reference.



GENDER PRONOUNS AND TEACHING

Modelling

- Share your pronouns out loud the first day of class with your students
- Invite your students to share their pronouns, too*

*You could do this through a “Getting To Know You” questionnaire (for any sized class), or (for smaller classes) a Pronoun Go-Round

→ In either case, there are a few procedural things to remember, and Dean Spade outlines them very succinctly in his article [“We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds”](#)

*such as: not outing folks; anxiety over language; clearly explaining and situating pronouns → all-around teachable moments

This all comes back to intentionality and transparency.



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CULTURES OF RESPECT

Pronoun Awareness

“[U]se **pronoun awareness** as a way to **signal a culture of respect**” (Spade)

“[I]f we explain th[e] exercise to folks really clearly, it will do the job we want it to do and **make the group spaces easier for people to participate in**, and **build skills** in each of us to **make less assumptions** about each other” (Spade)

“I wish more people would behave like my partner’s son and **simply ask, politely and without judgment**, what pronoun an individual prefers” (Halberstam 154)

- “I also wish more people would use a pronoun system based on gender and not on sex, based on comfort rather than biology, based on the presumption that there are many gendered bodies in the world and ‘male’ and ‘female’ do not even begin the hard work of **classifying them**” (Halberstam 154)

Halberstam, Jack. *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*. Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2018.

Spade, Dean. “We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds.” *DeanSpade.net*



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CULTURES OF RESPECT

Pronouns in Popular and Public Cultures

“I wish to share this with anyone who is listening — not just in this theater, but around the world — **ask the question: What is your pronoun?** Because for a lot of people it’s really hard and their pronoun is not respected or they’re not asked, and for me, **I’ve grown and changed over the years in a lot of different ways. I’ve felt misunderstood in a lot of different ways.** All of our hardships are different — I don’t mean to compare — I just mean to say we’re in this together and I’ve had a million reasons to want to give up, but sometimes, if you’re lucky you just need one good reason to stick around” — **Lady Gaga**

(Monday June 25th, 2019 during her concert at the Apollo Theatre)

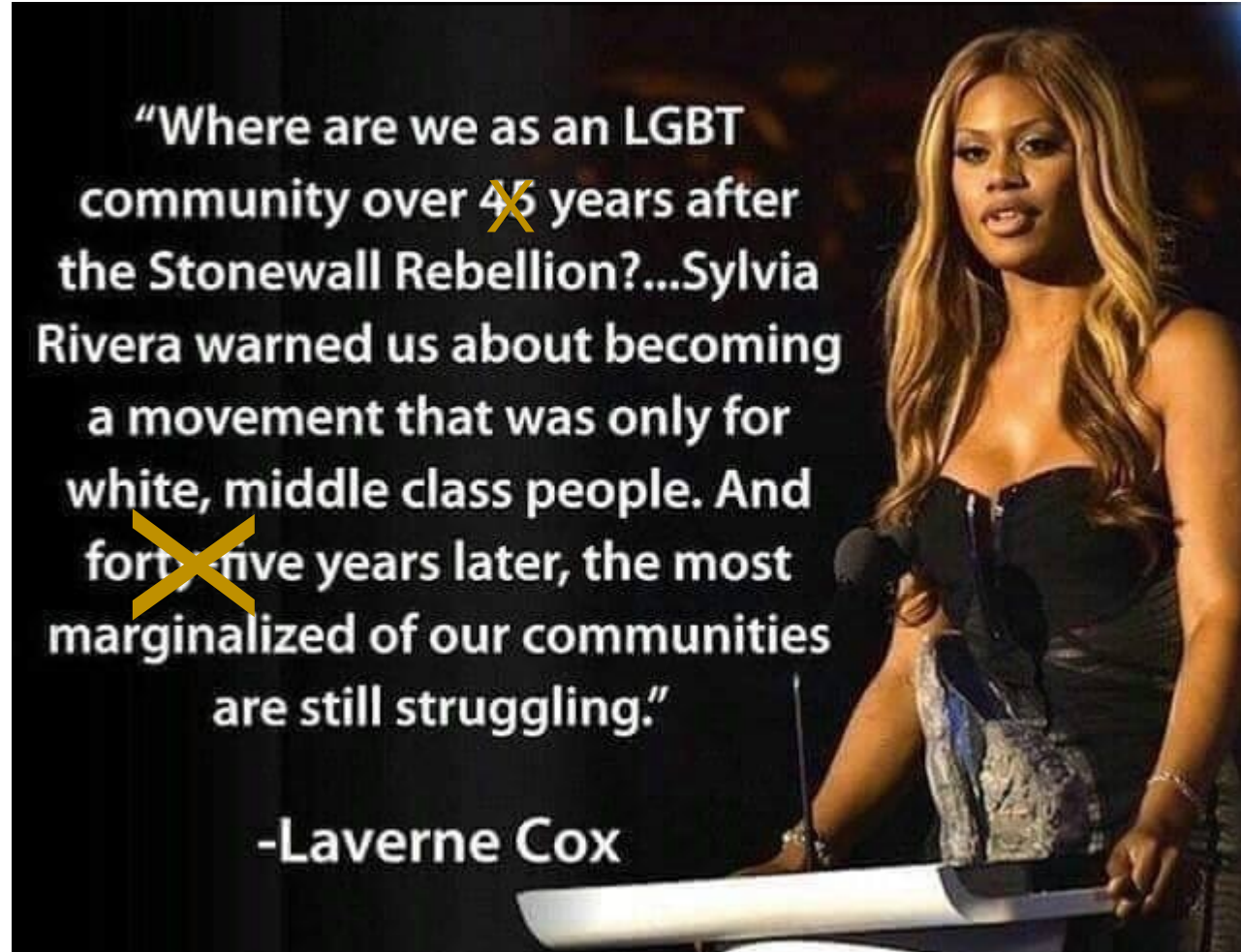


[Image on left is Lady Gaga with her perfume bottle, and image on right is Jo Calderone, Lady Gaga’s drag king persona, smoking.]



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CULTURES OF RESPECT



51 years later now. (June 28th, 1969)

Wrapping Up

But let's be caring.
And careful.

Medicalization of queer,
trans, and intersex bodies.

Trauma and retraumatization.

Reflecting on whiteness,
marginalization, and struggle.



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CULTURES OF RESPECT



[The flag pole at the front of St. Jerome's University, flying the Canadian Flag, the flag of Ontario, and the Progress Pride Flag. Front view of St. Jerome's building in background.]

Wrapping Up

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marginalization, and struggle.



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[@tommymayberry](https://twitter.com/tommymayberry)

THANK YOU! + Q&A



[This is a photo of Sam again – maybe you’re feeling like you’re coming up for air at this point.]



[Sam again – maybe you’re feeling alert and still curious about the goings-on.]



[One more Sam – maybe you’re go to go.]

Reminder:

Works Cited and modelling pronouns photos in following slides (Appendix)



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WORKS CITED

- Abadi, Mark. “‘They’ was just named 2015’s Word of the Year.” *Business Insider*, 9 Jan. 2016. <http://www.businessinsider.de/the-word-they-named-2015-word-of-the-year-2016-1?r=US&IR=T>. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.
- Goldsmith, Oliver. *The History of England, From the Earliest Times to the Death of George II. Vol. 3, London, 1771. 4 vols.*
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“Pronouns.” *The Chicago Manual of Style Online*, U of Chicago, 2017, <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/data/faq/topics/Pronouns.html>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2019.

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"They." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2020.

Spade, Dean. "We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds." *DeanSpade.net*, <http://www.deanspade.net/2018/12/01/we-still-need-pronoun-go-rounds/>. Accessed 2 Dec. 2018.

The Wycliffite Bible (E.V.). 1382.



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Untitled 2 • tommy.mayberry@uwaterloo.ca

Message Options

Send Paste

Calibri (Bod... 11 A[^] A^v A^o B I U ~~ab~~ x₂ x² Attach File Insert Link Table

To:


Cc:

Bcc:

Subject:

*My working day may not be your working day, and that's okay!
Please do not feel obliged to reply to my e-mail outside of your normal working hours.*

Tommy Mayberry, ABD PhD, MA, Joints Hons. BA
Manager, Outreach and Recruitment | St. Jerome's University
Instructional Skills Workshop Trainer and Facilitator | ISW Network
Interim Vice-Chair, Communications | Educational Developers Caucus (EDC)
tommy.mayberry@uwaterloo.ca | T. 519-884-8111 Ext. 28353

 **ST. JEROME'S**
UNIVERSITY
Federated with the University of Waterloo

290 Westmount Rd. North | Waterloo, ON N2L 3G3 | www.sju.ca

Pronouns: [he/she/they](#)

Facebook: [tommy.mayberry.5](#) | Twitter: [@tommymayberry](#)

I acknowledge, with respect, that I am a white settler-scholar living, learning, and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. St. Jerome's University and the University of Waterloo are situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land that Frederick Haldimand in 1784 promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

e-mail Signature



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Course Syllabi

University of Waterloo
Department of English Language and Literature
ENGL 193-007
Communication in the Life Sciences
Fall 2019
TTh 4:00-5:20pm, [Modern Languages \(ML\) 354](#)

Instructor Information

Instructor: Tommy Mayberry

Pronouns: he/she/they

Office: [Psychology, Anthropology, and Sociology \(PAS\)](#) 1066

Office Phone: 519-888-4567 ext. 32628*

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:30-6:30pm, and by appointment

e-mail: tommy.mayberry@uwaterloo.ca

**no voicemail, but I can usually be reached at this extension during office hours*

“None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the enticements of science. In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder.”

–Victor Frankenstein (Mary Shelley), *Frankenstein* (1818, 2017; pp. 32)

Course Description

In this course, you will learn about effective written, oral, and visual communication in the life sciences. You will have the opportunity to shape these communication skills through iterative design processes



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Zoom Names



[Change](#)

[Delete](#)

First Name

Tommy Mayberry

Last Name

(he/she/they)

Phone

Canada (+1)



519-884-8111

Department

Enrolment and Upper-Year Transitions

Job Title

Manager, Outreach and Recruitment

Company

St. Jerome's University



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Bitmoji Avatars (Search Stickers: "Pronouns")



he / him



she / her



they / them



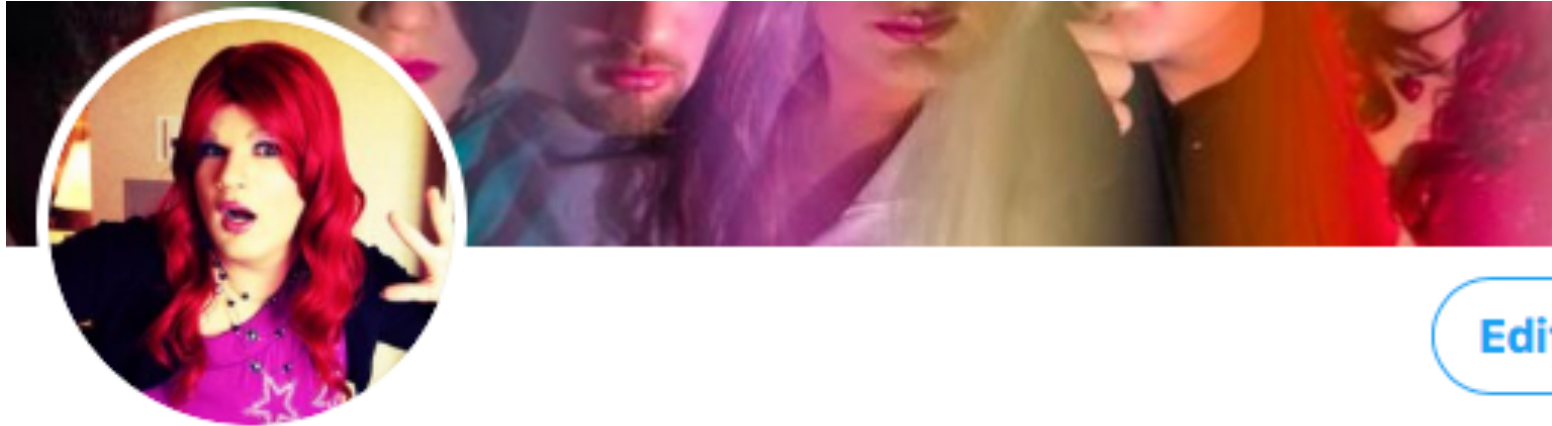
they / them



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Social Media



Tommy Mayberry

@tommymayberry

@UWaterloo's premier academic drag queen + Manager, Outreach and Recruitment @StJeromesUni

Pronouns: he/she/they

Research: Drag/Trans-; #WilliamBlake; #RuPaul

📍 Waterloo, Ontario 📅 Joined July 2011



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Website Bios and Photos

St. Jerome's University

OLIVIA CARVALHO

Admissions and Recruitment Coordinator

Admissions and Upper-Year Transitions

519-884-8111 x28208

Pronouns: she/her

ocmcarvalho@uwaterloo.ca

SH 1012



St. Jerome's University

TOMMY MAYBERRY

Manager, Outreach and Recruitment

Admissions and Upper-Year Transitions

519-884-8111 x28353

Pronouns: he/she/they

tommy.mayberry@uwaterloo.ca

SH 2006



St. Jerome's University

MICHELLE WATSON, CHRL

Director, Human Resources

Human Resources

519-884-8111 x28258

Pronouns: she/her

michelle.watson@uwaterloo.ca

SJ1 3001



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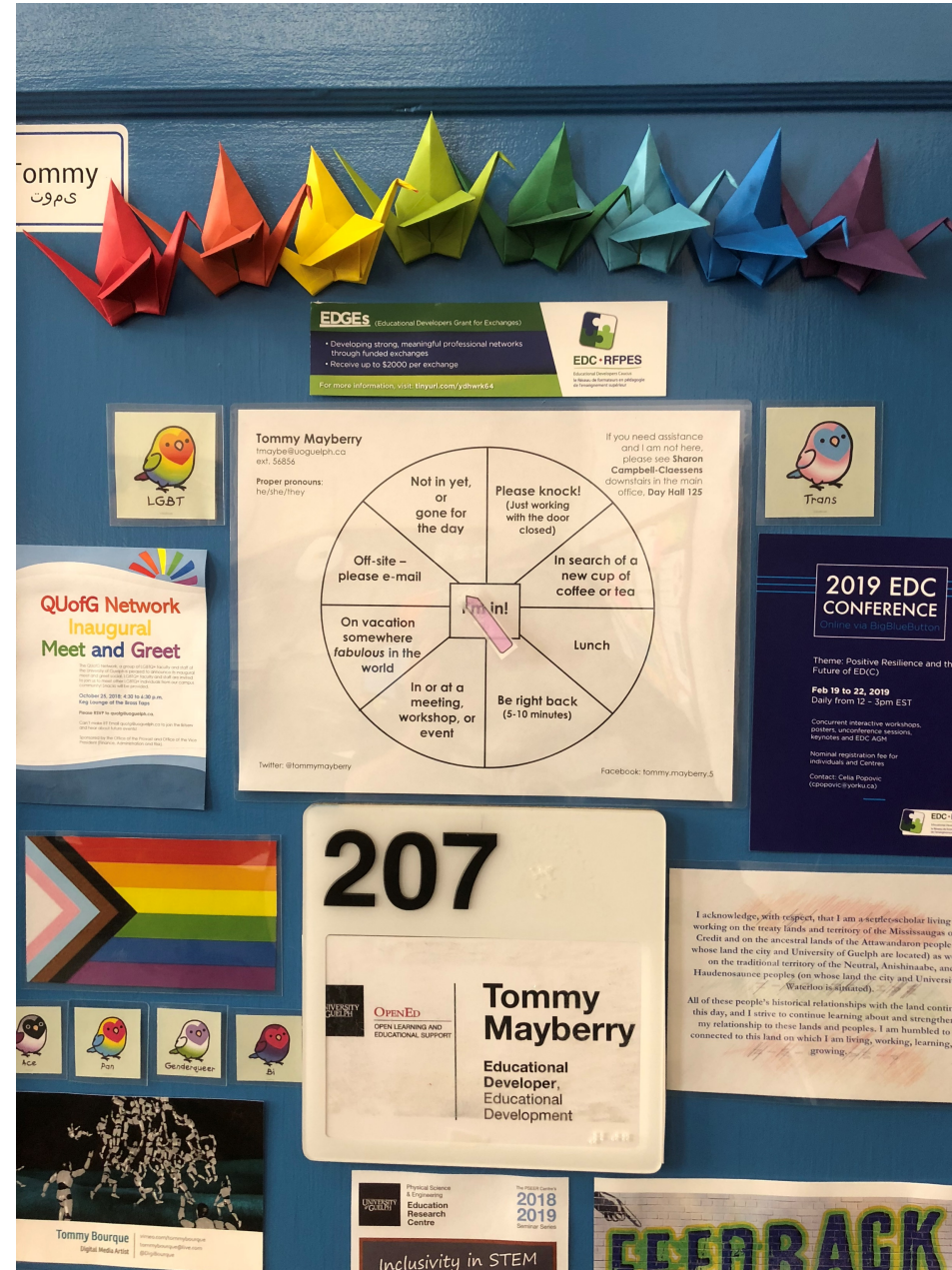
Business Cards



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APPENDIX: MODELLING PRONOUNS PHOTOS

Office Doors



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