New Policy Will Allow Students and Staff to Use Preferred Name on MnSCU Documents

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Due to a new policy, students and staff across the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system will be able to use a preferred name rather than their legal name on many of their documents. Metropolitan State University has not yet set an implementation date for this policy, according to Roberta Anderson, Director of Gateway Student Services.

To submit a preferred name proposal, students at Metro will need to fill out a single form at Gateway Student Services requesting the name change. Once the form is processed, both Metro and MnSCU will begin using this preferred name wherever it’s technologically and legally possible to do so. That said, this cannot be done until Metro has implemented this policy.

**What is a Preferred Name?**

In a draft document created on June 12, MnSCU defined a preferred name as a “name that a person has chosen to identify him or herself within the MnSCU system that is different, in whole or in part, than his or her legal name.” That is to say, an individual can change their first, middle, or last name on documents that do not require a legal name to be used.

**Where is it Legally Possible to Use a Preferred Name?**

Preferred names can be used on many of the documents and interfaces that students and staff use on a day-to-day basis. These include class rosters, D2L Brightspace, e-services, online directories, faculty advisee lists, alumni records, library records, student ID cards, student worker timecards, diplomas and food service cards.

A MnSCU supporting document said that in certain circumstances, only legal names can be used. Documents involving financial transactions like I-9s, financial aid documents, paychecks and paystubs will always use legal names. Official documents relating to international students, including federal immigration documents and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) will also always feature a student’s legal name.

**Other Limitations**

MnSCU said it “reserves the right to deny an inappropriate preferred name including, but not limited to those that: avoid legal obligations, misrepresent or violate other system policies.” Moreover, preferred names can’t be used to promote a company.

According to MnSCU documents, it is not technologically feasible to include preferred names on some university documents or technology. Ramon Padilla, Vice Chancellor of Information Technology at MnSCU’s system office, said third-party technology is an example of a place where these limitation exist. This technology is not part MnSCU’s Integrated Statewide Records System (ISRS), the University has no control over these third-party companies’ name policies and records.

**Who Does it Help?**

Saby Labor is Metro’s Women and LGBTQ Student Services Coordinator and Retention Specialist. She said the policy will help a variety of students at Metro. “In thinking about the audiences it impacts the most, we’ve identified [at least] four … the first being transgender students and gender nonconforming students,” said Labor. “They may or may not pass as their preferred gender, so having a preferred name policy is a way to celebrate their identity and validate it.”

International students will also be impacted, according to Labor. She said some international students have a name from their native country and a western name, and it can be difficult to know which name the person would rather use. “Often they are sort of juggling two names and it’s hard for them,” she said.

Students that identify with a nickname will be able to use that name on their documentation. Labor said there have been issues in the past with finding students in the directory if they use a nickname or shortened version of their name, so this should help alleviate those issues. This policy could also impact people with multiple last names as well. Labor said this can be common in Latino communities.

She said the switch for class rosters and D2L will positively impact students. “The piece about it being on D2L is going to be so crucial for our students because a large percentage of their interaction is in class. So, whether they’re in an online class or in person, [their preferred] name [is what will be] printed on the class roster and the name their peers see on the class discussions.”

Toyia K. Younger, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at MnSCU said that, to her knowledge, the policy was brought about by students and staff who wanted to express themselves in whatever fashion they choose to. “I think this policy also makes our campuses more welcoming,” she said. “Having this preferred name policy is actually something that is pretty common at colleges and universities across the country.”

**Implementation**

MnSCU’s Chancellor Steven Rosenstone has approved this policy for immediate implementation, according to a system office memo. This memo informed all stakeholders about the change in policy. MnSCU intends to implement these measures in two parts.

Phase One pertains more to the system office than to individual institutions, although a few significant changes need to be made at the campus level. For instance, email accounts are controlled at the campus level. However, documents like class rosters and student D2L Brightspace pages can only be edited by the system office. Likewise, ISRS is controlled by the system office.

Padilla said, from a strictly technological standpoint, ISRS is now capable of capturing preferred names. Once a preferred name request is processed through ISRS, the change to digital documents controlled by the MnSCU head office will be instant.

Likewise, Younger said that, from a policy perspective, MnSCU’s system office is prepared to begin implementation. “The timing of it and rollout of it is really going to depend on the campuses and how quickly they’re able to process the requests of individuals that come in.”

Phase Two objectives, however, do not yet have set target dates for completion. These objectives (like access to diplomas and student ID cards) mainly pertain to individual institutions in MnSCU. Anderson said that Metro needs to ensure its information technology processes can handle the requests before setting a completion date.

Metro’s information technology department could not be reached for comment.

Photo caption: Students at Metro will be able to change the name used on many of their documents.

Photo Credit: Kevin Miller