

# Why Pronouncing Names Correctly Matters: A Key to Better Student Experiences in Universities



Imagine stepping into a new classroom, a new country, or even a new culture, and the first thing that happens is someone stumbles over your name. You smile politely, perhaps even offer a shortened version of your name, but deep down, it stings just a little. This seemingly small moment can leave a lasting impression.

In a university setting, where diversity thrives and students bring a mosaic of cultures, pronouncing names correctly isn't just about respect—it's about inclusion, belonging, and creating an environment where every student feels seen and valued.

## A Name Is More Than Just a Word

A name isn't just a string of letters—it's a story. It carries cultural history, family pride, and personal identity. Mispronouncing or overlooking a name sends a subtle (or not-so-subtle) message: "Your identity is too difficult to be worth the effort."

For students, especially those in new or international environments, this can be isolating. Research shows that frequent mispronunciation of names can lead to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and even a diminished sense of belonging. It's a small act of carelessness that can have a big impact on student confidence and participation.

## The Ripple Effects of Mispronunciation

Universities are meant to be spaces for learning, growth, and self-expression. But when names are consistently mispronounced, students may feel alienated or excluded. Here's how this can ripple through a student's experience:

1. **Loss of Identity:** Students might feel pressure to adopt nicknames or anglicized versions of their names, disconnecting them from their heritage.

2. **Reduced Confidence:** A mispronounced name can make students hesitant to engage in class discussions or participate in group work.
3. **Academic Impact:** A diminished sense of belonging can lead to disengagement, ultimately affecting academic performance.

These impacts aren't limited to students with uncommon or international names—they affect anyone whose identity isn't fully acknowledged.

## Why It Matters for Universities

Universities that prioritize pronouncing names correctly send a clear message: every student matters. It's a commitment to inclusion that fosters stronger relationships between students, staff, and faculty. When students feel seen and respected, they're more likely to thrive academically and socially.

Think about it this way—getting a name right is the first step in building trust and rapport. For universities striving to create welcoming and inclusive campuses, this is a small yet powerful change.

## Practical Steps to Make It Happen

So, how can universities ensure they're pronouncing names correctly? Here are a few actionable steps:

1. **Leverage Technology:** Tools like Say My Name or similar platforms allow students to record the correct pronunciation of their names. Integrating such tools into university systems makes it easy for professors and staff to learn.
2. **Normalize Asking:** Encourage faculty and staff to ask, "Can you teach me how to say your name correctly?" It's a simple question that shows care and respect.
3. **Offer Training:** Workshops on cultural competence and inclusive communication can help educators understand the significance of names and learn techniques for better pronunciation.
4. **Set the Tone from the Start:** Orientation programs and welcome events should emphasize the importance of name pronunciation. It signals to students that their identity matters.
5. **Pinch Early Signs of Discomfort:** If a student shortens their name or laughs off a mispronunciation, it might be a coping mechanism. Take the time to learn their full name and pronounce it correctly.

## More Than Just Words

Pronouncing names correctly may seem like a small detail in the grand scheme of university life, but its impact is profound. It's about fostering an environment where students feel like they belong, where their identities are embraced, and where their differences are celebrated—not minimized.

At the end of the day, universities have a unique opportunity to set the tone for how we navigate diversity in the world. Taking the time to learn and respect a name is a powerful first step toward building a more inclusive, empathetic, and connected campus community.

**Because when we say a name correctly, we're not just getting it "right"—we're saying, "I see you, and you matter."**