

## Guidance on Naming Systems

Working in student service areas requires extensive work with database systems, spreadsheets and tables as well as the reconciliation of lists of names from a variety of sources around the University. Lack of familiarity with names perceived to be 'unusual' can cause misunderstanding, miscalculations and, occasionally, the creation of two sets of records for the same student.

### Common problems

- How should we refer to someone whose name/s come from a naming system that is not familiar?
- How should names that don't 'fit the format' be recorded, and how should a name be pronounced to avoid offence or confusion?
- How can lists of names be clarified to match a second list for administrative purposes?

Being aware of the established naming systems of a country or religious group can provide better understanding, but it should not be assumed that everybody from that country or group will follow the same rules. Some minority groups may adapt their names for specific ethnicity, religious or community identification. Naming systems generally reflect how family and community life is organised, and this varies widely around the world.

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# TIPS

## What problems are occurring in the following scenario?

A student whose first language is not English visits the enrolment centre to enrol for their first year of study in Australia, and waits one hour in line before being assisted by enrolment staff...

**Staff** (looking at the computer) Your student number?

**Student** Sorry, I don't have it with me

**Staff** Surname?

**Student** Pardon?

**Staff** Your surname?

**Student** What is my surname?

**Staff** Yes, what is your surname?

**Student** Do you mean my family name, my middle name or my caste name?

**Staff** Just tell me your full name!

**Student** Mohan Das Karam Chand Ghandh'i Ji

**Staff** (looks up 'Ji') – There is nothing in the system with 'Ji'...

**Student** Oh – I am not in the system?  
Is there a problem?

**Staff** The problem is that I need to know your last name!

**Student** Is it under 'Ghandh'i'?

**Staff** Oh, like the movie! How do you spell it?

Problem \_\_\_\_\_

Improve by \_\_\_\_\_

Problem \_\_\_\_\_

Improve by \_\_\_\_\_

## General Guidelines

Not everyone in Australia will follow a Western naming tradition, so it is best to avoid using the term 'Christian name', and instead use 'personal name' or 'given name'. The terms 'family name' or 'last name' should be used in place of 'surname'.

- Ask for a person's full name.
- Ask which is their first, middle and family/last name.
- Ask which name they have used to enrol at university.
- Ask how their name is spelled and pronounced.
- Ask them to write it down for you.
- Ask how they prefer to be addressed.
- Use the person's name at least once when you talk to them.
- Appreciate that naming systems may be used in a variety of ways.
- Check whether there is a family name that has not yet been provided to the university.

## Examples of Naming Systems

### Indigenous Australian names

Indigenous Australian people have diverse ways of naming themselves. For some Indigenous Australian people their first name might be a non-Indigenous name. Alternatively some Indigenous Australian people may use their Indigenous and non-Indigenous name when referring to their first name.

In some instances the student might not refer to their first name at all due to a death in the community at which time they might be referred to as 'no-name'. The use of the term 'no-name' may differ amongst Indigenous Australian communities. At such times, an Indigenous student might prefer to use their middle name, or the term 'no-name'. The term 'no-name' will not be present on formal documentation such as birth certificates but is a formal naming process within the community.

Additionally Indigenous Australian people may prefer to use their Indigenous name, which may not be present on formal documentation. This may cause complexities for student records and university staff when:

- the individual considers that their Indigenous Australian name is valid;
- the Indigenous Australian name is not recorded on any formal documentation;
- the individual does not deem it necessary to amend their name by deed poll.

Having a raised awareness of these naming variations can help to minimise potential confusion or administrative problems.

In situations where complexities arise, it is a good idea to seek advice from colleagues in La Trobe University Indigenous Australians Student Support Services Units. Local Indigenous communities will have a good knowledge of the preferred terminology and naming system/s, and will often be familiar with La Trobe's Indigenous Australian students personally.

## Hindu names

Hindu names are used mostly in India, Sri Lanka and Singapore, and usually by people of Indian origin. The naming of a child is one of the most fundamental Hindu 'samskars' or scripture based rites.

The name is selected so that its meaning can inspire the person to follow the path of righteousness. The names given to newborn babies are generally suggestive of divine qualities of the Vedic deities.

A common practice among Hindus is to name their children after the names of sages, saints, holy persons, deities and the names of the incarnation of God. It is believed that by repeatedly calling such names one is reminded of the Lord.

## Muslim names

Malay names are common in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia and reflect customary Muslim naming systems.

Names are written with either the person's religious name (a religious title) or given name first, plus bin (for men) or binti (for women), and then their father's given name. Malay people

Religious title	Given name	(male)	Father's given name
Haji	Rafik	bin	Bakar

(Haji is an honorary title that shows the person has completed a pilgrimage to Mecca)

Married title	Given name	(female)	Father's given name
Puan	Rafidah	binti	Aziz

## Chinese names

Not gender specific, Chinese names do not reveal whether a person is male or female, like many European names. The family name comes first, followed by the personal name. This can cause confusion with European systems that are the other way around. Coupled with unfamiliarity with Chinese family names, inappropriate naming could occur on graduation parchments, computer user names, name tags, etc.

Mainland Chinese names tend to comprise two words – family name in bold eg:

- **Zhang** Jianguo, **Li** Yonghong, **Wang** Zhif

## International students

Students from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Vietnam and Japan account for approximately 76% of the international students enrolled in 2007.

**These countries usually have Hindu, Muslim or Chinese naming systems.**

Northern India		
Given name	Complementary name	Family name
Manju	Rani	Agraval
Or Mahesh	Kumar	Sharma

Southern India		
Father's given name	Given name	
Krishnan	Sivanathan	
Or K	Sivanathan	

Customarily, the family name is referred to as the subcaste name.

have not traditionally used 'family' names, so a family's lineage will contain many different names. Family names are being used more frequently in recent times.

Women use the title Puan (Mrs) following marriage, from retaining their own names.

Some examples:

Taiwanese Chinese names tend to hyphenate the given names eg:

- **Tsang Ting-Hwa**, **Huong Mei-Li**, **Hsia Hsiau-Chu**

Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysian Chinese names tend to have three parts eg:

- **Cheung** Fatt Fatt, **Wong** lai Chai, **Yong** Ee Leen, **Ong** Ti Mah

**Note** – The spelling of a family name may vary considerably eg Siew, Siow, Seow and Siaw are all variants of the same name, as are Low, Loh, Lau and Lo.

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## References and Further Information

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