

Going There Episode 6: What's in a Name, Anyway?

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A Lake Superior College podcast exploring campus mindfulness, equity, and community hosted with Tara McCoy, Steve Dalager, and Dan Riihiluoma.

This episode was recorded prior to campus closing, so it's a nostalgic visit to BCE (Before Covid Era) where we talk with Jo Busick, Accounting major, LeadMN activist, vinyl aficionado ([follow him at josvinyl](#)), and also member of LSC's LGBTQ+ club (like [Mystic Raddatz from E3](#)).

Jo Busick: I would say I don't feel unsafe, but it's not super welcoming.

For me, the point of stating your pronouns is that people know it, and then call you by it to make you feel more comfortable.

"I'm thinking about going by Jo, should I do it?" And they were like, "yeah, do it," and then I did, and it was the best decision I ever made.

It is roughly \$300 just for the paperwork to get your name changed.

Two out of five community college students struggle with food insecurity.

Tara McCoy: I'm Tara McCoy, and do you remember as far back as BCE?

Steve Dalager: I'm Steve Dalager. And BCE?

Dan Riihiluoma: I'm Dan Riihiluoma, and right: BCE, before COVID era.

Steve: Oh, wasn't Constantine emperor then?

Tara: And didn't we meet in the library to interview people?

Dan: Didn't you guys interview Jo Busick without me because I had to physically attend a class?

Tara: Wearing bell bottoms, no doubt.

Steve: In this nostalgic episode, we return to BCE, where Tara and I did talk with Jo.

Tara: We learned about the complications of legal name changes.

Steve: And the heartbreak that happens when your school doesn't seem to know you.

Tara: Oh, and don't forget the vinyl is mentioned. Love vinyl.

Dan: Enough reminiscing the things I missed. Crank up that time machine, and let me listen to Jo myself.

Tara: To Jo then—crank it!

Steve: Three. Two. One.

Steve and Tara together: Going There.

Steve: You guessed it. The DeLorean.

Jo: Hi, I'm Jo Busick. I am the platform committee representative for the region of LeadMN. I was the president of Student Senate, and I am an accounting student here at LSC.

Steve: Welcome to Going There.

Jo: The accounting program here is very intense. I was looking at my transfer degree because I'm gonna transfer in the fall, and it's like, you have 17 of the 40 transfer credits, which means that 45 of the credits in the program are, like, very unique to business and accounting, so you definitely do see a lot of the same people. I think I've had the same class with, like, the same five to 10 people for the past two years, so there's a community in there. For me, it's kinda like high school.

Tara: Oh, okay.

Jo: You see the same people in every single class.

Steve: Let's take a step back, Jo. How long have you been a student at Lake Superior College?

Jo: This is my fourth semester. I started in fall of 2018.

Steve: Okay, so take us back to fall of 2018. As a brand new student, how did it go for you to try and connect with other students?

Jo: I was told in order to get really involved in the college, you're supposed to join two clubs, so I joined the Student Senate on the first day. Killi and Kaylie, they were the previous president and vice president. They were very nice, they offered me a cookie, and then I kinda just showed up to the meetings, and I really liked it, and so then I joined Senate. When I first got here, it was weird, to say the least, because the school's a lot bigger than my high school. I grew up in Duluth, I've lived here since I was three. I went to the charter school in downtown. That school is very LGBT positive. I wanna say 50% or over were some form of LGBT+, and then going from that to here, where I think I know, like, five gay people, and all of them are in the LGBT club, it's a lot of a difference. That was a very hard transition to make, but that would have happened in any college, I think. I don't know, it was just kind of weird because I was out of the closet, but I was very out of the closet, but I was less comfortable with my sexuality, so I... was like, should I just let everybody assume I'm straight? I don't know if you've heard my voice. Pretty obvious that I'm not, but that's, I don't know, that's kind of how it is in all new situations though. As I got here, I kinda realized it doesn't really matter.

Steve: So as a person of the LGBTQ+ community, you said you know like five gay people and they're all in that club?

Jo: At the school, yes.

Steve: So, would you say that this school, comparing it to Harbor City, it's a little less LGBTQ friendly, or how would you characterize it?

Jo: The school itself has a lot less community, and I feel like that's just because we are a commuter school. What that means is that everybody who goes to school here does not live on campus, and everybody kinda has their own schedule. I know for me personally, I have one class a day. After I'm done with my class, I'm like, well, I'm gonna chill here for like half an hour, say hi to my friends, and then go home. Unless I have the LGBT club, or something else going on, I generally just go to my class, and then go home, and that's a lot of the people that are here. This school is very focused on the degree, and less about the community, which is how most community colleges are. We are getting housing, which is very nice, and that will hopefully change the environment a little bit. I haven't had any issues with feeling safe. When you're in a group of a minority, when

you see other people in the minority, it's just kind of like a thing that you have in common, and then you're more likely to be friends. I would say I don't feel unsafe, but it's not super welcoming.

Tara: A minute ago, you said, "I'm in accounting, so yeah," were you alluding to the fact that there's even less representation of the LGBTQ+ community within that particular major?

Jo: Within the major, yeah. There just isn't really a ton of representation, but it's not really like the school can do anything about that. It's just that I really like numbers, so I'm like, ooh, I'm gonna choose accounting, and I did, and I'm really glad I chose it. It's a really cool, okay, I'm somewhat glad I chose it, but a lot of the people who are in the LGBT community aren't majoring in that. It's also not a super popular major. Like, there's a large shortage of accountants in the world, so I'm basically guaranteed a job. I'm gonna get more money, so that's nice, but it's just a lot of people in that community aren't interested in that major.

Tara: Do you think that there isn't absolutely nothing that instructors in that area can do? As an instructor myself, representation is important, so are there little things like examples of accounting, using an LGBTQ+ individual, or, I don't know, do you see where I'm going with this?

Jo: I see where you're going with it, and the thing is that there isn't really world problems having to do with individual people in accounting, so it's like, sexuality just straight up never comes up. But one thing that I would like to see, and this isn't all my classes, I think I've had one class where this has happened, is pronouns. I have a slight preference for they/them. I'm not gonna introduce myself with that, but if it gets brought up, I'll mention it. If it doesn't get brought up, I'm just like, it doesn't really matter to me, but that's one thing that can increase representation.

Tara: So, you're telling me that an accounting and sexuality textbook is probably not in the making anywhere.

Tara and Steve: (laughing)

Jo: There is barely any human relationship in the accounting textbook.

Tara (laughing): Okay.

Jo: It's literally just numbers, and accounting's like a whole new language, so it's more focusing on debits and credits, and what goes where, and it's more about numbers and math-y stuff, I guess, than people. But I just wanna mention that the accounting instructors here are absolutely amazing.

Tara: Do you hear that? Increase that grade!

Tara and Jo: (laughing)

Jo: Jerry and Lori, those are the main two accounting instructors. They are very great, and very much care about the students, and I am very glad that I have them as teachers.

Steve: Jo, let's take a step back.

Jo: Okay.

Steve: You mentioned pronouns. In what context would you introduce yourself and share what pronouns you prefer?

Jo: If it's asked, so at the beginning, you know we all have that awkward thing that a lot of people hate, but I like talking, so I'm fine with it, where it's like, name your major, name three fun things about yourself, like the dreaded icebreakers. Just adding like, "and what are your pronouns?" That's when I bring it up.

Steve: You don't volunteer that as a matter of practice, only when requested.

Jo: Yup.

Steve: But what you were saying was, would you like teachers to do that, like in the beginning of a class?

Jo: Yes.

Steve: And do it for themselves?

Jo: Yeah, I feel like that'd be a really good thing to do.

Steve: And how would that change the tone of a class?

Jo: I'm gonna be honest, for most people, it really wouldn't. But for people who aren't cis, for people who

don't use like, if you're born female, you use she/her, and if you're born male, you use he/him, for the most part, it makes them feel more included and accepted. It will take, at max, two extra minutes.

Steve: Okay, let's pretend that this is the first day of class, and I'm the instructor, when we're doing the dreaded icebreaker. So I'm gonna introduce myself.

Jo: Okay.

Steve: So, then I'm gonna invite you guys to do the same. Hi, welcome to class X, I'm Steve Dalager. My favorite ice cream is moose tracks, and I prefer he/his/him pronoun, and I invite you to introduce yourselves.

Jo: Hi, my name is Jo Busick. My favorite ice cream is birthday cake, or some cake batter, birthday cake, all that fun stuff, like the super sugary stuff, I love that. And I have a slight preference for they/them pronouns, but I don't really care.

Tara: My name is Tara, and my favorite ice cream at the moment is black cherry with vanilla, and my pronouns are she/her/hers.

Steve: Okay, thank you very much.

Tara: As an instructor, at the beginning of class, I'll list off my students' names and then say, "let me know if you have a preferred pronoun," and I guess I don't know that I'm expecting them to tell me right there and then, I assume they'll tell me at some point. But part of me, I suppose, I get concerned to ask my students to share their pronouns on the first day, in case I happen to be calling somebody out, or singling somebody out. What are your thoughts, and you're speaking as an individual, I don't expect you to on behalf of all LGBTQ+ individuals.

Jo: Okay, thank you for that. That's a lot less pressure, honestly (laughs).

Tara: Yeah, yeah, but, from your perspective, would you feel singled out, or pressured to give the traditional pronouns that we...

Jo: So, as an individual, I feel like if you say, "and also, if you want to," I probably wouldn't say anything, and that's for me, personally. I don't really care that much.

But if you say, "and also, state your preferred pronouns," less of like a, "if you want to," and more of like a, is this something I would like to know?

Tara: Okay.

Jo: Then it makes it less singling out, because everybody's doing it.

Tara: Okay.

Jo: Especially if the teacher introduces themselves with their pronouns, it kinda sets the precedent, in the class, that this is something that everybody does.

Tara: That's fair, I like that.

Steve: Do you think it would be comfortable to also state that students have an option to share their pronouns privately, like in an email, or in some sort of D2L document or something, if they're not comfortable doing it in class?

Jo: I can't answer that because the question just doesn't really make a ton of sense, to me, at least. For me, the point of stating your pronouns is that people know it, and then call you by it to make you feel more comfortable. If you're just doing it privately, it's not exactly something that you can keep private, if that makes sense. So, I guess. But it seems counterproductive.

Steve: So, the point, so that everybody knows, so that they use the pronouns that you prefer.

Jo: Yes. It's not, like, a big secret where it's like, I can't even think about a fake big secret, but it's not like a big secret that it's like, "okay, I'm not like, don't tell anybody this," it's what people call you. And like I mentioned before, Jo is my legal name, so it's like what people call you, it's not something that you can kind of really hide from people. You can maybe hide it from certain people, but if you're uncomfortable being called a certain set of pronouns, and nobody knows that, and continues to call you that, then, I don't really know where I'm going with this, but...

Tara: I mean, it makes sense.

Steve: I understand.

Jo: Okay.

Steve: I think you made your point, that's a good point.

Tara: Yeah, definitely. Jo, Jo is your chosen name. Can you tell me a little bit about the process of how you came to choosing that name, and why?

Jo: Yes, I can. So, the process of that is not a super interesting story, but at the time, I was questioning my gender, and I've kinda come to a realization, I don't really care that much. But I was questioning my gender, so I identified as non-binary, at the time, and I guess I still do, and then I'm like, okay, I never really liked my name, and that's something that I didn't realize 'til I changed it. But, Jo is a shortened version of my legal name. So I was texting a group chat I was in with my friends, and I'm like, "hey, I'm thinking of going by Jo, should I do it?" And they were like, "yeah, do it," and then I did, and it was the best decision I ever made.

Tara: Good. Yeah, you say it's the best decision you ever made, so how did you start thinking about yourself differently, now that you have this new chosen name?

Jo: My personality changed a lot. If you can believe it or not, I was an introvert beforehand. That's clearly not the case anymore.

Steve: I'm kinda having trouble...

Jo: (laughing) But, that's why I was an introvert. Before class, every day, in high school, I would always sit in my first period class and I'd play Mario Kart on my 3DS, or something along the lines of that. I did not really like talking to people. And then that kinda started developing, later on, and then as soon as I changed my name, it's kinda like exemplified itself, and I feel like a different person now. Not like the old me is bad, it was like a persona, and this is the real me, and I don't wanna go back to that person. People will ask me, like why it's so important, and why do you care so much that people call you Jo, and that's why.

Tara: Yeah, it's a representation of your identity, and that's an important thing. Yeah.

Jo: Yes.

Tara: I was gonna draw a parallel, but I don't want it to be insensitive, where it's like, it's kinda like when you go

through a break up, and you wanna cut all your hair off. But obviously, not as significant, right?

Jo: Yeah, no, that makes sense.

Tara: But sort of having that, having that signifier of pre and post.

Jo: Yeah, as soon as I started going by Jo, I started growing out my hair. I can find a picture, but I had like a buzz cut on the sides. Oh my God. I didn't really adopt a new style, my style has been very consistent. It's been a graphic tee, although it used to be a lot about video games, but I've gone more into music now. So, graphic tee and jeans, and then whatever shoes I own.

Steve: Tara, describe the T-shirt that Jo is wearing, for our listeners.

Tara: It's a pink school bus with characters out the window. They're like little cute animals, and it says the K-12 tour.

Jo: Yeah, I was in St. Louis for a conference for Student Senate, last November. This is from my favorite artist, Melanie Martinez, and I really wanted to see her live, and it worked out.

Jo: I collect records.

Tara: Okay.

Jo: Like, I collect records, I go to concerts, that's kind of what I do.

Tara: That's your thing.

Jo: Yeah, that's my thing.

Tara: That's really interesting, right? We've been talking about community, right? It sounds like, and correct me if I'm wrong, that this might be where you get a large sense of your community, is through the music, and the concerts you go to, or that kind of thing.

Jo: Yes, somewhat.

Tara: Okay.

Jo: So, I go to a lot of concerts, and I go with some different people, but where I get a lot of my community

is actually, I have record account on Instagram. Go follow josvinyl, if you're listening. J-O-S vinyl. But I have quite a few followers on there, and I've made a lot of friends through there. That's where I find a lot of my community.

Tara: You've talked a little bit about LeadMN, could you tell what it is, and why it's something that you enjoy so much?

Jo: LeadMN is an organization that represents 180,000 community college students in the state of Minnesota. We lobby the Congress, we try to pass legislation, and I heard about that through Student Senate. That's how I ended up getting involved in LeadMN. All the conferences that we go to through Student Senate are with LeadMN. I really like the work that they do, because education is very important, but two thirds of jobs, at some point, in the near future, will require at least a two year degree, and that currently is unattainable to most people because college is expensive. We passed the food insecurity awareness out last year.

Tara: Okay, yes.

Jo: So, Student Senate is working towards earning that certification, which is just like, there's five things you need, it's like, have a food shelf, have an Emergency Students Fund, which we do have. If you're listening to this, and you don't know that we have one, the applications are right by the Student Senate office.

Tara: There was a term you were using, like "Hunger Free Campus."

Jo: Yup. Hunger Free Campus.

Tara: Okay.

Jo: That's the certification we're going for.

Tara: Okay, great.

Jo: So, there's five things, I'm a little brain dead right now, so I cannot remember the other ones. That is one thing that the school is currently working towards, because we are very close to having it. It's not an issue that's affected me personally, but the statistics is two out of five.

Tara: Two out of five what?

Jo: Students. Community college students.

Tara: Are hungry.

Steve: Struggle with hunger.

Jo: Struggle with food insecurity. I should also mention that number is not, like, they eat ramen every day, but would rather eat something nutritious, it's, if you eat ramen every day, you're considered food secure. So, obviously, rent would come first. But if you don't have a place to live—

Tara: Right.

Jo: You're kinda screwed. Not necessarily like, they can't afford food, but they need to pay for a bunch of other bills as well, like gas, rent.

Tara: I mean, for some, they can't afford food, because once they've paid for all the other priorities, they don't have money left over for food.

Jo: That's what I was trying to say, yes. Thank you for that.

Tara: Yeah.

Jo: But that is one thing that we are trying to work on because that's something that the president of LeadMN, and the previous president, because they have a new cabinet every year, have struggled with, so it's been something that we have been working on for the past two years. I also have a large sense of community with LeadMN. I know a lot of people there, I met some of my best friends through there.

Steve: Jo, is there a time on the LSC campus, or relating to LSC, when you have felt uncomfortable?

Jo: Yes, there is. There was an official LSC event where my legal name was printed instead of Jo, and it made me very uncomfortable, sad, hopeless, I guess, because I have been working very hard to erase that part of me. I have gone by Jo since August 2017, so it's been over two years now, and I've been working basically ever since that to get, not all the documentation, but a lot of it removed from the public eye, and then to have that

revealed made it seem like that all the hard work I've been putting in was meaningless.

Tara: And that people were gonna be, whatever your name was printed on, people were gonna be recognizing you for someone you're not.

Jo: It's more of just people would know.

Tara: Oh, okay.

Jo: My dad does not call me my legal name. I kinda have a distrust with people when they know it, because I'm afraid that that's gonna happen, just out of spite, or something. So it's more of just, they know, and that was horrifying.

Tara: And so, Jo, maybe we can transition and you can talk a little bit about why, you referred to the fact that it was your legal name printed, why haven't you taken steps to legally change it?

Jo: So, I've wanted to for a while. And, I was planning on doing it, but then I'm holding it off because, you know, things costs money, and it's also not exactly a small fee. I quit my previous job because it was very emotionally toxic, so I currently don't have an income. I still work with LeadMN. Great nonprofit, they're not a company. But I don't get paid enough to even consider changing my name legally, but it's a very expensive process. It is roughly \$300 just for the paperwork to get your name changed, then you need to change all your documentation. So, \$80 for a new passport, \$80 for a new birth certificate, \$80 for a new social security card, \$16, \$25, I don't know how much a new driver's license is. There's probably some more costs that I'm not thinking of, but that adds up to like \$500, \$750, \$750. So, it's not exactly a cheap process, and it's also very time consuming and stressful because you need to let literally everybody know, who currently knows your legal name, "hey, I've changed it, can you please go back "and do the document." I need to go to my bank, I need to go to the school, I need to go to basically everywhere that has my legal name, and I need to say like, "hey, it is no longer this, "please change it in the system, here is the my paperwork." That's also very intimidating, so I need to be able to have the money, and the time to do all of that, and that is not something that's easy to come by.

Tara: Absolutely, right. And I'm thinking about all the times where I've seen on paperwork, "have you ever changed your name?" And then still having to...

Steve: Right, or if you've ever donated blood under a different name.

Tara: Yeah.

Jo: But I know the sooner I do it, it will be easier in the long run, but it's just, money is hard to come by, and also, time is hard to come by. Like I said, I'm taking 16 credits this semester. Last semester, I took 19. I barely survived. That was a horrible, don't. If you're listening to this, for the love of God, do not take 19 credits, it was a horrible idea. Do not do it. But 16 is still a lot of credits, full-time is 12. And I'm focusing on my school work, I'm focusing on my mental health, and money is not exactly something that's... It's a priority for me, but it's not something I can afford.

Tara: Right, and so I think it would be cool to talk, too, you mentioned being in the LGBTQ+ club, or other clubs on campus, you can't be the first person here who's wanted to change their legal name, and so it would be interesting to see if LSC could, in conjunction with some clubs on campus, try to find fundraising, and maybe make the process easier where there's a fact sheet, and someone you can go to on campus, to say, "I wanna change my name, "how should I go about doing this?" Because it sounds like you took a lot of research to figure this out.

Jo: I did not, actually. I just have a lot of people who have changed their name legally, or I just kind of know a lot of information, but I still have no clue, I somewhat know what to do because I just have a lot of trans friends who have changed their names legally. Once I actually do it, it's like, I know you're supposed to change your social security card first, then everything else becomes easier, but it's still very intimidating of a process, and that I don't really know what to do. I don't even know where to begin the research.

Tara: Okay, so like appoint a person at LSC who you could go to and say, "okay, I wanna start this process, where the heck do I begin?"

Jo: Yeah, that would be very nice.

Steve: Awesome. Well, it has been a pleasure talking with you, Jo.

Jo: It's been a pleasure being here.

Steve: Thank you for "Going There" with us, today. Do you have any last thing you wanna say?

Jo: If you're listening, I hope you have a lovely rest of your day.

Tara: Yay!

Steve: All right, you too.

Tara: Wait, wait: let's do the sign out.

Tara, Steve and Jo together: And that's Going There.

Dan: I wasn't there, but it sounds like Jo has a lot going on in their life.

Steve: That is certainly true, Dan. Jo is a busy and successful student.

Tara: I mean, they are doing accounting classes, involved in multiple student organization, it's incredible.

Steve: Yeah, I don't know how Jo does it all. I thought one of the most interesting things that Jo had to share had to do with the process of changing their name.

Tara: Yeah, they have hit a few hiccups in that road, and I was grateful that Jo was willing to share that.

Steve: What a daunting task that is for anyone in that situation to face. All the entities that need to be informed, and the sheer cost. I mean, that just doesn't seem fair.

Tara: And, unfortunately, for the rest of their lives, once the name has changed, there's gonna be forms that asks for previous legal names, so it's not gonna be completely absolved.

Steve: Interestingly enough, even though on this campus, Jo's name has more or less changed, it was sad to hear that at an official LSC event, the system basically regressed to his legal name, which he no longer uses.

Tara: But I was happy, also, to listen to Jo talk about pronoun usage. I know we had heard that from Mystic, but even as an educator, to hear them break it down by saying, this can be a public thing, it doesn't have to be private, because it negates the use of talking about pronouns if you ask them privately. I was really happy to hear that.

Steve: Right, what's the point of just telling your instructor when the point is you want everyone in the class to use the right pronoun?

Dan: If you want everyone to call you they or them, then you gotta tell everyone.

Steve: That pretty much wraps up episode six here, with Jo Busick. Thank you to Jo. We look forward, in episode seven, to talking with Alyssa Heinlein in our special COVID-19 and mental health edition.

Tara: We're going beyond the BCE era.

Steve: ACE, not to be confused with ACDC.

Dan: Or "accadacca," as they call it in Australia.

Steve: Signing off.

Tara: All right. Bye.

Steve: You've been listening to Going There, a Lake Superior College podcast focusing on mindfulness and equity. I'm Steve Dalager, and on behalf of co-hosts, Tara McCoy, and Dan Riihiloma, thank you for listening. Special thanks today to Jo Busick for sharing so much with us. Signing off. Mic drop.