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.

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. 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.

Being aware 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 at UQ’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (ATSIS) Unit.

International students

UQ’s success as a premier destination for international students, and Australia’s growing multiculturalism, has transformed UQ campuses into vibrant, multicultural hubs where people from diverse backgrounds meet to share learning and culture. In 2006, 6607 international students from 118 countries attended UQ.

Interacting with people from other cultures can be an exciting and rewarding experience. By learning more about cultural sensitivities and conventions, like naming systems, you can deepen your cross-cultural experience.
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 name 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.

Northern India -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Given name</th>
<th>Complementary name</th>
<th>Family name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manju</td>
<td>Rani</td>
<td>Agraval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Mahesh</td>
<td>Kumar</td>
<td>Shama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Southern India -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s given name</th>
<th>Given names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krishnan</td>
<td>Sivanathan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or K</td>
<td>Sivanathan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Muslim names

Malay names are common in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia and reflect customary Muslim naming systems. This naming system is of course common in the predominantly Muslim Gulf Countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.

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 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, often retaining their own names.

Some examples -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious title</th>
<th>Given name</th>
<th>Father’s given name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haji</td>
<td>Abu</td>
<td>Bakar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Married title</th>
<th>Given name</th>
<th>Father’s given name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puan</td>
<td>Rafidah</td>
<td>Aziz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, e.g.

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

Taiwanese Chinese names tend to hyphenate the given names e.g.

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

Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysian Chinese names tend to have three parts, e.g.

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

Note – The spelling of a family name may vary considerably, e.g. Siew, Slow, Seow and Siauw are all variants of the same name, as are Low, Loh, Lau and Lo.

Vietnamese names

Vietnamese family name is order family name, middle name, given name.

- **Phan** Van Khai is the Prime Minister of Vietnam (2005). In formal usage, he is referred to by his given name (“Mr Khai”), not by his family name (“Mr. Phan”).

Spanish/Latin American names

Latin-American names basically follow European naming conventions i.e. first name, middle name and last name. However, Latin-American names tend to comprise four words; two given names (first and middle) and two family names (father’s and mother’s surnames)

- **Emma Pilar Bielich Alejos**

Upon marriage, the mother’s name is dropped in favour of the husband’s name

- **Emma Pilar Bielich Zumaeta**

Sometimes the family names become hyphenated and are carried through and acquired as such by the children:

- **Sofia Racquel Zumaeta-Bielich**

Upon marriage, this name could become

- **Sofia Racquel Zumaeta-Bielich Basadur**

Russian names

Russian names are gender-specific. The family name comes first, followed by the first name and the patronymic name (based on the father's first name), or the name order may be similar to English i.e. first name, patronymic name and last name. Some examples

- **Tatiana Petrovna Smirnova**

Note female names usually have ‘a’ at the end. There are exceptions in the case of last names e.g.

- **Tatiana Nikolaevna Petrovich**

Note male names usually do not have endings. Typically, the last letter in the last name is ‘y’.

- **Ivan Alexandrovich Ivanov**

References and further information


http://www.atsis.uq.edu.au/

UQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.