

Safe Zones: Creating LGBT Safe Space Ally Programs

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Increasingly, heterosexual people are called on to be advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people on many campuses. Unfortunately, these heterosexual allies have few skills or resources available to them, no information to guide their own development in advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student populations. Nonetheless, heterosexual staff, faculty and students can have a significant effect on creating a positive culture on a college or university campus.

Heterosexual allies are people who are supportive of LGBT people. Washington and Evans (1991) define an ally as "a person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population" (p.195). Allies of different groups of people, including racial/ethnic minorities, have been instrumental in affecting positive change in the dominant culture.

A number of colleges and universities have developed LGBT Safe Space Ally programs (Henquinet, Phibbs, Skoglund, 2000; Hothem & Keen, 1998; Poynter & Schroer, 1999; Poynter, & Wang, 2003; Tubbs, 2003; Tubbs, Bliss, Cook, Poynter & Viento, 2000). Names for these programs include Safe Zone, Safe Space, Safe Harbor, SAFE on Campus and Allies. Although it is unclear where

the "Safe" idea originated, the earliest reference found is the Ball State University program called SAFE On Campus (Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Student Association, 1992). Since published information has been previously unavailable, these "Safe" programs have probably been based on little knowledge or experience.

Student affairs professionals, administrators, and faculty only recently have begun to recognize the potential the development of heterosexual allies has for making the culture of a college or university campus more accepting towards LGBT students and people. Program interventions designed specifically for allies are attempting to address the development of heterosexual allies and LGBT people while providing support to LGBT students. The hallmark of these "Safe" programs is the public identification of allies by placing a "Safe" symbol, usually incorporating a pink triangle or rainbow or the word "ally" or a combination of all three, on office doors or within living spaces. Typical components of these programs consist of a resource manual and sticker or sign. Many programs go as far as to require an orientation or training session(s) of varying lengths. Other components may include a listserv, advisory board/committee, web page resources, assessment, periodic socials, and identifying objects such as key chains, buttons, and pens.

Organizing a LGBT Safe Space Ally Program

When creating an LGBT Safe Space Ally program many strategic questions must be considered. Who will organize the program? How will the campus administration respond? How will the campus LGBT community respond? What resources are available?

Programs may be student-driven or staff/faculty driven. Strengths of the student-driven model include: the energy of student organizers; students will feel they have a voice in the creation of the program, University-recognized student organizations may have access to campus resources such as meeting rooms, student activities funding or club funds to pay for training supplies or publicity. Staff/faculty driven programs benefit from the continuity of organizers who remain many years on campus, the knowledge and expertise of student affairs staff or faculty and the resources of campus offices (e.g. copy machines, desktop publishing, access to rooms and funds).

Organizers must consider the response of the campus administration. If challenged by the administration, turn to current literature on the needs of students "coming out." Use any campus climate surveys to examine whether safe spaces are needed on campus. Look at student affairs mission statements and staff job duties to emphasize the right of every student to a

safe learning environment. Collaborate with an LGBT Center director at a neighboring institution who already has a LGBT Safe Space Program for strategic advice.

When organizing for program begins, the LGBT campus community may raise concerns that the program will attempt to co-op the traditional role of LGBT student groups or speak for the LGBT community in general. Meet with student groups or LGBT campus leaders to explain the mission of the proposed program and its goals to supplement, rather than replace, current resources. Invite LGBT community members to participate in the training seminars as co-facilitators or LGBT panelists. Ask for assistance in identifying potential allies. Extend an invitation to get involved in organizing the program.

Meanwhile, many campus offices or academic department may have an interest in helping to launch the program. Approach women's centers, cross-cultural centers, counseling centers, Greek advisors, residence life, health education, student activities or student unions, academic advisors, Women's Studies departments, sexualities/LGBT studies departments and supportive student groups for assistance.

Programs created by students or by staff/faculty outside of a particular office must consider whether to seek official university recognition. Independent programs may have more freedom from administrative pressure. However, resources must be

paid with donations and fundraisers, and meeting space may be difficult to find. The campus administration may also attempt to co-op the program for political reasons, such as using its existence to defend against charges of a hostile campus climate. The pros and cons of how the program is recognized should be weighed depending on the environment of the particular campus.

Program Models – Training vs. No Training

Various models for running a safe space program exist. The three models usually employed include either training, no training, or a selection committee. The major difference between these three models is whether or not they require a orientation training for new members of the program.

The training may consist of a number of elements including panels of LGBT students, staff, and employees; referral guidelines for counseling and harassment reporting; role plays; information about identity development; resources available on and off the campus; and general LGBT information. Participants are then asked to sign a values statement affirming their participation in the program.

The drawback to requiring training is that fewer people may participate in the program. However, since those in attendance have taken the extra step to attend it is more likely that all your members are committed to the goals of the program. In

addition, people will self select whether or not participating as a member is right for them and thus you will likely not need to screen out those that can not fulfill the goals of the program such as creating a supportive and safe LGBT environment on campus. On rare occasions people interested in participating in a program will want to "save" or help LGBT people through religious conversion therapy. Providing a required training insures that you know that the participants have seriously and critically considered what it will be like to be affirmative toward LGBT people. The authors of this article wish to convey our preference for the training/orientation model.

Other LGBT safe space ally programs will not require training in favor of distributing their safe space signs or symbols to a wider audience on the campus. Information may be provided with the sign or symbols explaining that anyone hanging the sign or symbol is expected to follow guidelines. These guidelines may include an expectation that the individual will create an atmosphere where homophobia/heterosexism is not tolerated, they will affirm and support the identity of LGBT people with whom they interact, will keep conversations confidential, and will make a personal commitment to educate themselves about LGBT people/issues.

Another model that does not seem as widely used is a selection committee approval process. This involves a committee

of students, staff, and faculty that reviews application forms for membership in the safe space program. The application (Virginia Tech, 2001) may ask the potential member to identify the services they are interested in providing. These services include maintaining a membership in the program, being a facilitator in discussions and "serving as a contact person for students who need support" (Virginia Tech, 2001). Schools that use this model do not require training and most approve all applications.

Training Justification

A required training should be an integral part of a comprehensive LGBT Safe Space Ally Program. Automatically assuming that all interested participants will be able to function and communicate, when in contact with LGBT people, does not take into consideration the impediments to this contact.

A barrier to contact with LGBT people and issues can be anticipated discomfort about future interactions with LGBT people (Mohr & Sedlacek, 2000). The fear of unintentionally exhibiting homophobic or prejudiced behavior has also shown to be an impediment for future contact with LGBT people (Devine, Evett, & Vasques-Suson, 1996; Mohr & Sedlacek, 2000). Additionally, first-year students are likely to believe that their peers hold negative attitudes about LGBT people resulting

in adjustment of behavior to emulate this misperception (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001).

Providing educational interventions, such as a required training in a LGBT Safe Space Ally program, that create interpersonal contact and provide skills building activities can help reduce discomfort and fear. The public identification of allies through a LGBT Safe Space Ally Program will help to alleviate previously held misperceptions and encourage others to participate.

Example Training Outlines

Outline 1: University of California, Riverside (3 hours)

1. Introductions & Ground Rules – why people are participating; set the stage for a safe space.
2. Roles & Responsibilities – define Ally, explain purpose of the contract.
3. Common Language – define heterosexism and homophobia, demonstrate the diversity within the LGBT community, explore pejorative language and the politics of “queer,” explain history of LGBT symbols; discuss subcultures (e.g. “bears” and “bykes”).
4. Small Group Discussion – participants discuss own experiences and understanding of the LGBT community.
5. LGBT Panel – interactive Q&A with self-identified LGBT students who raise first-hand issues, concerns, and experiences on campus.

6. Resources Packet – include community resources and referrals and written handouts on topics covered during the training seminar.
7. Stages of Coming Out – use the Cass model to explain that LGBT people may have very different needs when they speak with an Ally. Emphasize that people may be at different stages in different areas of their life (school v. job v. family v. friends).
8. Stages of Becoming an Ally – use the Riddle Homophobia Scale to explain that heterosexual people may have very different needs when they speak with an Ally. Also, allows participants to examine their own level of homophobia.
9. How to Make Referrals – explain aspects of making a referral from knowing proper resources to not assuming all LGBT people need professional counseling.
10. Role Playing – ask participants to act out various scenarios. Helps prepare future Allies for the variety of questions and situations they might address.
11. Signing of a contract and evaluations – participants may receive a program sign immediately by signing a contract, or they can decide later. Evaluations are used to improve future training seminars.

Outline 2: Duke University

1. Online Preview and Sign Up (5-10 minutes) - Transgender Definitions, Referral to a Counselor, Campus Resources, Online Quiz, Sign up for Workshops.
2. Attend First Workshop (2 hours) - (Communicating with LGBT People/LGBT Development): Welcome/Introductions, Introduction/Sharing Activity, Panel of students and employees, LGBT Identity Development (Fassinger), Sexual

Identity Case Studies Activity, Transgender 101/"The Transgender Umbrella", LGBT Identity Development Digital Video Scenarios and Group Interaction.

3. Attend Second Workshop (2 hours) - (Communicating with Heterosexual People/Anti-LGBT Attitudes/Ally Development): Welcome/Introductions, Sharing Activity, Research about allies, Heterosexual Ally Development (Poynter), Ally Case Studies Activity, Ally Development Digital Video Scenarios and Group Interaction, Sign values statement contract, receive sign, sticker and button.

Outline 3: Holyoke Community College (Brown, J. personal communication, August 14, 2003)

1. Opening and Introductions (name and area where you work)
2. Ground Rules
3. GLBTQ History Timeline
4. Guided imagery
5. GLBTQ Terminology
6. Identity panel videos
7. Role-played scenes to watch
8. Voluntary sharing about role plays you watched
9. What emotions did you see in the role plays?
10. What were effective responses, and why?
11. Have you experienced similar situations?
12. How can you best respond to situations you encounter?
13. Intervention Ally Scale
14. Discussion
15. Present resource manual, contract, evaluation form

Contract

A contract is often signed by members upon training completion. The contract is an agreement to provide a "safe zone" for anyone dealing with sexual or gender orientation issues. It emphasizes what an ally is (support & referral) and is not (professional counselor). Signing the contract is required before anyone can hang or use the sign or identifiable resources of the program. The contract from UC Riverside reads:

"I, _____, hereby agree to provide a "safe zone" for anyone dealing with sexual or gender orientation issues. Although I am not an "expert" on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered issues, I will provide affirming resources and referrals to the best of my ability.

I am committed to educating myself and others about oppression, heterosexism, and homophobia, and to combating it on a personal level.

I am committed to working toward providing a safe, confidential support network for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community.

I am committed to treating everyone with the dignity and respect that they are entitled to as human beings."

Signing a contract helps staff, faculty, and students consider whether they can meet the responsibilities of being a member. One challenge some people of faith must consider is whether they can be affirming when they hold religious beliefs contrary to being supportive of LGBT people. In these cases, the potential ally can be asked if they would be able to refrain from challenging someone based on their religious beliefs, and if they could refer visitors to another ally or to a campus resource that will be supportive in spiritual matters. Many

potential allies recognize a duty to be supportive of others, especially if they are staff or faculty seeking to create a safe learning environment, regardless of their religious beliefs. Others cannot make this commitment and participate in the program. However, they have gained knowledge and resources, and sometimes they choose to join at a later time when they can sign the contract and make the commitment with sincerity.

Membership

Membership in LGBT Safe Space Ally programs can vary from campus to campus. Published research on those with negative attitudes, characteristics of affirming heterosexuals and demographics from some specific institutions provide a glimpse into who is and is not likely to become involved in these programs.

Characteristics of those that may not become involved include: heterosexuals with traditional gender role values, conservative religious people, men categorically, and introverts with low self esteem (D'Augelli, 1989; Herek, 1998; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Mohr & Sedlacek, 2000, Simoni, 1996; Patel, Long, McCammon, & Wuensch, 1995). Characteristics of those that are affirming and may get involved include women and especially people with previous interpersonal contact with LGBT people, advanced education, female, friends that have similar views and prior involvement in social justice activities for other

traditionally underrepresented groups (Herek & Capitanio, 1995, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Poynter & Burnett, 2002; Poynter & Talbot, 2003).

Demographics from two separate universities show that membership in these programs can vary based on university affiliation. At UC Riverside 366 people have joined since April of 2000 after attending a three-hour training. Sixty-four percent of the current membership at UC Riverside are undergraduate students and thirty-six percent are staff, faculty and graduate students. At Duke University 365 people have joined since February of 2000 after attending a four-hour training. Seventy percent of the current membership at Duke University are staff and faculty and thirty percent are undergraduate and graduate students.

Making a Difference

Evidence shows that these programs do make a difference. Assessment results from two different institutions (Iowa State University and Duke University) show that their individual programs increased visibility, improved the environment, increased conversations, and increased the comfort levels of the participants in the program (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Lewis, 2003).

Many participants may report that they do not have many interactions with people on campus as a result of participating

in the program (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Lewis, 2003). However, conversations do increase for some and as a result awareness around LGBT issues is created. Other tangible benefits occur, despite a lack of conversations, such as indirect interactions (LGBT people feeling an increased comfort level) and changing a perceived negative campus image (Evans, 2002).

At Duke University participation in training is required before joining the program. When conversations are broken down by demographics "fifty percent of the men and thirty six percent of the women reported having more conversations (around LGBT issues) with employees" after participating in the required training and joining the program (Poynter & Lewis, 2003, p.12). It is interesting to note that a higher percentage of heterosexual members than LGBT members reported an increase in conversations. However when asked about their level of comfort in having conversations "thirty-nine percent of the men and sixty-one percent of the women reported feeling more comfortable with any kind of LGBT issue" (Poynter & Lewis, 2003, p.12). Even if members did not report an increase in conversations, there was an increase reported in their comfort level. At worst, members reported that the program had not increased conversations or comfort due to already high comfort levels that existed prior to the program.

Assessment

Often anecdotal evidence is cited as proof that these programs are meeting their stated goals. Goals can include improving campus climate, increasing awareness, increasing conversations around LGBT issues, providing safe space, and educating and providing skills to members to confront homophobia or heterosexism. However, anecdotal evidence is not going to persuade critics, funding boards, or administrators that may hold decision-making power over the future of these programs. In addition, when attaining possibly scarce resources, the results from a good assessment component will enable you to target your resources to areas that are effective thus creating a quality program (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

A good assessment will have a number of important components. Assessment components include program goals/objectives that support the department or university mission statement, outcomes that specifically describe end results of your program, choosing an evaluation method that enables acquisition of outcomes, implementation including responsibility and schedule, analysis of results, and decisions and recommendations (Bresciani, 2003; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Items to assess in a LGBT Safe Space Ally program should include trainings, workshops, campus culture change, number and type of member conversations, member comfort level change, and

awareness of program in the LGBT community. Evaluation methods can include training exit surveys, online surveys of membership and community (Texas A&M University, 2000; Poynter & Lewis, 2003) and advisory board or focus group feedback.

Ongoing Activities and Educational Workshops

Most LGBT Safe Space Ally programs only require that members attend an initial training, display a sticker or sign and provide a "safe" environment. However, some programs provide additional components or ongoing voluntary activities. These components or activities include social events, focused educational workshops, brown bag lunch discussions, panels, train the trainer workshops, an e-mail listserv, newspaper ads and invitations to LGBT events. Some workshops, discussions or panels may also be open to the wider campus community.

Brown Bag Lunch Discussions

Often scheduled over the lunch hour, so staff and faculty may more easily attend, brown bag lunch discussions can also be open to the entire campus community. With one hour of time, the facilitator presents for 15 to 20 minutes, and then facilitate a discussion. Facilitators understand that many participants have a basic understanding level, so presentations are not "knowledge 101." The venue often only holds 25 or less people, so discussions are intimate and casual.

A positive aspect of Brown Bag Discussions is the “safe space” created for heterosexual and questioning students who wish to learn about LGBT issues but fear being labeled LGBT. This may happen, they believe, if they attend other events sponsored by an LGBT student group or LGBT Resource Center. These discussions can also provide a leadership opportunity for current students to present on LGBT topics. Students with a particular interest in a LGBT topic or those doing research in sexuality studies or gay and lesbian studies can find this a good space to hone presentation skills and receive feedback about their research.

Occasionally, speakers invited to the campus by an LGBT student group or Resource Center may be asked to facilitate a brown bag lunch discussion as an addition to a campus wide speech. This may serve as a primer to a later evening presentation. It also provides an intimate setting for questions and conversations that may not be found at a larger public presentation.

Brown Bag Discussion Topics

- “The Kinsey Scale’ – presented by staff psychologist
- “When a Family Member Comes Out” – presented by PFLAG mom
- “Stages of Coming Out” – presented by staff psychologist
- “Intersex 101” – presented by graduate student
- “LGBT Youth & Issues of Spirituality, Race, and Family” – presented by local, “out” African American minister and youth advocate

- "Racial Issues Within the LGBT Community" – panel organized by undergraduate student
- "Keeping the Faith" – presented by undergraduate student
- "Fringe Sexualities" – panel organized by undergraduate student

Guess Who's Gay Panels

Panels of people identifying with different sexual orientations answer audience questions without ever explicitly stating their orientation. Panelists leave the rooms and then audience members discuss what they think are the sexual orientations of the panelists, and why. The panelists return, reveal their true orientations, and discussion turns to stereotypes and other LGBT issues.

Guess Who's Gay panels can draw audiences of up to 150 students in residence halls, have been excellent opportunities to reach out to students about LGBT issues and to promote the respective LGBT Safe Space Ally program. The panels also offer a way for heterosexual allies to get actively involved in programming outside of one-on-one interactions.

Newspaper Advertisements/Posters

Occasional ads, sometimes full page, may be placed in a campus newspaper. The ad should contain the program logo, a listing of names with diverse departmental affiliations, and contact information for the program coordinators. The purpose of the advertisement is to raise awareness of the meaning of the

program as a "safe space", to promote where to find members and how to get involved.

Display ads in newspapers can be expensive and may not be an option for some programs. An additional option is to print posters or fliers that contain the same information as the newspaper ad.

Special Occasion Cards

Since some members may rarely interact with others as a result of displaying a LGBT Safe Space Ally Program symbol, it is important to keep in contact with them so they know they are making a difference in the lives of people on campus. One way to provide a personal touch is to create thank you cards for special occasions such as Valentines Day or National Coming Out Day. Cards can be hand delivered and slipped under office doors in the evening for an early morning surprise. A quick personal message or hello can be scrawled by participants upon delivery thus providing a personal touch.

Train the Trainer

Providing a required training for potential members often means offering several training dates throughout the academic year in order to give choices for attendance. This can be a drain on staff time and thus may limit the number of training sessions offered. Additional facilitators for the training can alleviate this problem and provide a way for members of the

program to get actively involved beyond one-on-one conversations.

A "train the trainer" program at Duke University includes issues for adult learners, learning how to cope with different personalities, an overview of the training manuals and outline used in participant training, suggested questions to use and role playing activities. Participants learn how to co-facilitate and are eventually paired with experienced facilitators for their first training session. The time commitment includes a full day "train the trainer" workshop and a commitment to co-facilitate one training a semester.

Listservs

A listserv for all members of the program can provide a means of communication particularly for members that may be isolated or one of few members in specific areas, buildings or departments. All members should be able to post messages about experiences, conversations and issues they are having as a result of membership in the program. Care should be exercised in informing potential members that they will be subscribed automatically or allow them to choose to be subscribed upon signing the program contract.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some political considerations that should be addressed when developing a "safe" ally program?

An attempt should be made to include administrators in the development of the program. Students often take it upon themselves to develop a program assuming that the university administration will not be supportive. The level of support that can be found by simply asking may be surprising. Possible administrators to approach may include the Dean of Students, Vice President of Student Affairs, Director of Housing/Residence Life, Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs, and even the President. Students should organize a committee or advisory board of faculty/staff that have previously shown their support in other ways. This committee will be crucial in providing support and recruitment of members in addition to legitimizing the program. In the end, at least notifying the administration insures that no bridges are burned.

There may be some resistance to posting a sign/sticker that is only for LGBT people. Some people, mainly faculty or staff, may say this is a "special" program and should include all people in a "safe" space. Questions may arise asking whether racial and ethnic minorities are or should be part of your "safe" program. Others may refuse to hang your sign/sticker or to be any part of the program because it is only for LGBT people. Still, some people will say "Are we going to have a sticker for every group of people on this campus?" One has to wonder why there is not a sign already posted in an

office/department decrying racism or sexism and advocating inclusion in their office if it is such a big issue for them. Homophobia and heterosexism are also coming into play when hearing these remarks.

The reality is that not all people on campus are supportive, knowledgeable, and understanding of LGBT people. Most of these people are not actively affirming either. This is the difference between a LGBT Safe Space Ally program and a blanket statement of non-discrimination already included in campus policy or a statement of inclusion that could be posted throughout an office or department. All participants in these programs should agree to be supportive and affirming of all people regardless of sexual orientation.

Posting a "safe" sign/sticker really does convey a strong message of support as opposed to a blanket watered down statement of inclusion that probably already exists in the university anti-discrimination statement. Some colleges or universities, such as Indiana University, have avoided this issue all together by designing a program that is inclusive of everyone on campus.

Additionally, many schools do not have professionally staffed LGBT offices or dedicated resources for LGBT students. In times of financial crisis when budgets are thin these programs are an inexpensive and temporary way to help alleviate

a lack of dedicated resources. It should be noted that a recognized LGBT student organization, whether it receives student activities funding or not, is an inadequate response to providing dedicated resources to provide support, education, advocacy and climate change on campus.

Also consider whether society condones racism, sexism, or other overt forms of oppression. Then consider the social acceptability of homophobic remarks or daily acts of heterosexism. Unfortunately, although most people will avoid visible acts of prejudice based on race or gender, for example, prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity continues to be unchallenged in many instances.

A survey of non-discrimination statements alone demonstrates how unwilling educational institutions are to making statements protecting LGBT people as a group. The casual use of the expression "that's so gay" as a way of labeling something as a negative, as well as other derogatory language use, provides another easy demonstration.

In addition, because a person may not be recognizable as LGBT, they may hear heterosexist or homophobic comments from people who are not aware of whom they offend. In contrast, racist and sexist comments may be censored around people of color and women, protecting them from an overt hostile climate.

As a result of the current status of LGBT people in a society that sanctions homophobia and heterosexism, many LGBT people or those questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity will assume a space is not safe until shown otherwise. A posted LGBT Safe Space Ally sign or sticker overcomes this problem by clearly identifying safe spaces.

Furthermore, LGBT role models are often not identifiable by sight, while people of color and women are identifiable as potential role models. Potential LGBT mentors may be hidden within a hostile climate. Students "coming out" may be unable to find other supportive LGBT people unless they seek out LGBT-focused student groups or LGBT resource centers. Allies, by hanging a visible sign signaling they support LGBT people, again provide access to support not otherwise obvious.

Finally, while a required training focuses on heterosexism and homophobia, attention must be given within the initial training and in follow-up continuing educations to the experiences of students experiencing multiple oppressions. The connections between forms of oppression should be explored in depth to help Allies create a true "safe space."

Some campuses have responded to the need to challenge all forms of oppression by creating multi-faceted training series. However, programs that focus on LGBT issues should be applauded for challenging a societal climate that sanctions hostility

toward LGBT people. Signs announcing a safe space for anyone dealing with sexual orientation or gender identity issues overcome issues of invisibility and often-founded fears of homophobia and heterosexism.

What about people that aren't members? People will feel pressured to join.

The intention of these programs is not to make others look bad if they do not participate. The intention is to identify support and active affirmation on campus. No one should be pressured to be a member and participation should be voluntary. An assessment at Duke University found that "members did not join the program because they were required or pressured" (Poynter & Lewis, 2003, p.1) which contradicted earlier criticism that people would feel pressured to join.

It is likely that there are a number of allies on campus that are just not ready to identify publicly. Many potential members of the program – individuals supportive of the LGBT community on a daily basis who may have great knowledge of issues and resources – never participate. They may not have the opportunity to attend a training seminar or feel unsafe participating in the program for professional reasons.

Organizers of these programs must emphasize that not all allies to the LGBT community are members of their program. Hanging a sign or displaying a sticker simply means someone has

experienced special training around LGBT issues, has gained written resources and referral information, and has signed a contract to provide support around sexual orientation and gender identity issues. Program members, however, do not represent or speak for all allies to the LGBT community.

Some staff want to participate but do not want to hang a sign or sticker.

Some staff such as counselors, therapists, and psychologists may be resistant to posting a sign on their office door. These objections to posting a symbol, sign or sticker exist because people feel that it will send a signal that they are not providing a impartial atmosphere in their counselor/client roles. This is a debatable issue. You can sometimes work around this by asking the counselor or staff member to post the sign or sticker inside their office instead of on their office door. Another possible solution is to get all the counselors on staff or employees in the department to participate in the program and then post your symbol or sign in the main lobby of the department for everyone to see. These staff may also still choose not to list their name as an ally on a web site or in newspaper advertisements. Regardless, some staff members will still feel they cannot hang a sign. However, by attending a required training, these staff have additional

knowledge and resources to assist them and others around sexual orientation or gender identity issues.

Do LGBT people need to attend training?

LGBT-identified people must consider whether to “come out” if they are going to participate in the program. Allowing them to tell their story in a training and learn about the experiences of their heterosexual peers will be valuable knowledge.

On campuses with more welcoming climates for LGBT people, “out” faculty and staff may believe attending a training session is not worth the time, given that they are already a visible resource and role model for the campus LGBT community. However, their attendance shows a commitment to the program’s purpose and expectations. They also provide a valuable perspective for others during the training. Participants less knowledgeable about the lives of LGBT people or the campus climate for “out” faculty and staff appreciate learning from other’s experiences. Finally, the experiences of LGBT people vary greatly. One may have much to learn about the needs of other members of their own community.

Heterosexual people are concerned that others may think they are gay or lesbian.

Potential members are challenged to consider how they will respond to others making assumptions about their sexual

orientation based on the sign they post or attendance at a training. While most members are heterosexual (since most of the campus population is heterosexual), an ally participating in these programs should be *anyone* who is supportive of LGBT people. This includes LGBT-identified people, people questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, and people who hate labels of any sort. The more people able to provide safe space on a campus, the better the campus climate.

Heterosexual Allies must prepare for others assuming they are LGBT-identified, while appreciating the benefits of speaking out as a heterosexual ally. Every potential member should consider the response of "Does it matter what my sexual orientation is? I'm here to be supportive and help anyone with questions about LGBT issues."

In/Conclusion

The examples and topics covered here represent the experiences of individuals working in a higher education environment in the United States of America. Although this is not intended as the only model of implementing or coordinating a LGBT Safe Space Program it is hoped that the information here can be adapted to other educational institutions such as high schools, private schools, religiously affiliated institutions and various models of education worldwide.

The authors strongly encourage that a training component become an integral part of any LGBT Safe Space Ally Program. Allowing potential participants to explore communication issues and to work through their own fears and inhibitions in advance of participating in the program will insure the long lasting success of the program.

Evidence is showing that these educational interventions are making a difference on college and university campuses. Those wishing to implement similar programs should be adequately prepared in advance while also taking into consideration the political considerations, resources required and a good assessment component that will be needed to create a successful program.

Annotated Bibliography/Helpful Resources

Hothem, K. B., & Keene C. D. (1998). Creating a safe zone project at a small private college: How hate galvanized a community. In Sanlo R. (Ed.) *Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (pp. 363-369). CT: Greenwood Press.

This chapter shares how one school in Virginia found a campus community motivated to join a LGBT Safe Space Ally program as a result of a very public case of harassment. Readers will find the descriptive information useful as it explains the benefits and negative of this critical incident.

Poynter, K., & Schroer S. (1999) Safe on campus: A program for allies of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. *Michigan Journal of College Student Development*, 3 (1), 6-8.

This article explains how one public university in Michigan implemented a LGBT Safe Space Ally Program. Issues covered include training, staffing, resources, implementation and

assessment. Although this article is brief it could be a good primer for anyone wanting to understand such programs.

Henquinet J., Phibbs A. & Skoglund B. (2000) Supporting our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. *About Campus*, 5, (5) 24-26.

This "In Practice" article explains how the Ally Program at Metropolitan State University began and continues to benefit the institution and GLBT community. The impetus for creating the ally program was a perceived less-than-friendly classroom environment. Interesting information includes some details about training and quotes from faculty participants in the program.

Poynter, K. & Barnett, D. (2001?) How do I start or implement a safe zone program at my college or university?: Frequently asked question. Consortium Web Site www.lgbtcampus.org

The members of the National Consortium of LGBT Resources in Higher Education compiles responses on their website to frequently asked questions posed to the membership. The response to this question includes helpful links to other schools that have LGBT Safe Space Ally programs, political considerations to consider and links to online resources.

Evans, N. (2002) The impact of an lgbt safe zone project on campus climate. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43, 522-539.

This article interprets results of an ethnographic evaluation to assess the impact of a Safe Zone stickering campaign at a midwestern university. Over 5,000 stickers were distributed to anyone requesting one. A research team found 314 stickers visible in academic buildings. Interviews were conducted with people posting Safe Zone stickers and LGBT students, staff, and faculty. Concerns center around potential stress, a false sense of security, a lack of training, and the politics of declaring a "safe zone" for LGBT people. Positive outcomes include an improved campus climate for LGBT people and increased awareness and personal interactions around LGBT issues by heterosexual participants. Anyone considering a Safe Zone campaign or program on a college campus should read this article to learn about potential outcomes and challenges.

Poynter, K., & Wang, C. (2003) - SAFE on campus dvd: A free training and development resource for LGBT safe space ally programs. Duke University: Durham, NC (<http://lgbt.studentaffairs.duke.edu>)

Until the publication of this DVD there was no available resource to help institutions implement or learn how to conduct a training for a LGBT Safe Space Ally program. Users of the DVD will find digital video case studies to use during a training that cover issues such as athletics, coming out, multiple identities, gender identity, faculty interaction, residence hall living and parents. The digital videos are also meant to be a tool to learn about LGBT identity development as well as majority (ally) identity development. World Wide Web links are also provided to download a facilitator training manual, participant training manual, graphics/logos, and example assessment strategy. Users of the DVD should use the content to design a program that fits their particular campuses instead of necessarily following the example provided by Duke University. Funding provided by Duke University Division of Student Affairs, American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Educational Leadership Foundation and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Foundation.

Tubbs, N. (2003) University of California Riverside campus development worksheet for LGBT safe space ally programs. Retrieved November 25, 2003, from Duke University, Center for LGBT Life Web Site:
<http://lgbt.studentaffairs.duke.edu/programs/safe/dvddownloads.html>

This worksheet is a checklist that asks the reader to assess the resources, individuals and departments that could be instrumental in developing a LGBT Safe Space program on their own campus. Although this worksheet may not cover every specific resource by the exact name the reader should extrapolate on the ideas presented. This is a useful resource to use when beginning the planning process.

Tubbs, N. (2003) University of California Riverside development timeline for LGBT safe space ally programs. Retrieved November 25, 2003, from Duke University, Center for LGBT Life Web Site:
<http://lgbt.studentaffairs.duke.edu/programs/safe/dvddownloads.html>

Any good program or event should have a timeline of implementation. This example timeline is useful in that it encourages coordinators to include planning, logistics, implementation and continuing steps into their development schedule of dates. This timeline is general and will not provide all examples that fit every institution but should serve as a

useful template. Coordinators should list all potential steps to implementation and organize them similar to this timeline.

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