

Queer and Ally Program at the University of Denver

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The Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) at the University of Denver (DU)/Colorado Seminary offers programs and services to support students. One office, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Ally (LGBTIQ&A) provides students support services and a Queer & Ally (Q&A) training program and network. Similar to Safe Zone or Safe Space programs (Finkel, Storassli, Bandele, & Shafefer, 2003); the Q&A program provides LGBTIQ&A individuals with resources including teaching ways to speak with a staff, faculty, or fellow students about their own sexual or gender identity. LGBTIQ Allies also learn how to better support their LGBTIQ friends.

At DU, the Safe Zone Program has evolved over time. Created in 2000 at the Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP) as the DU Queer and Ally Commission (QAC), (Q&A Training Program/Network, n.d.) was the student training for diversity issues. In 2007, the QAC developed a new identity and curriculum with its move to CME. (Q&A Training Program/Network, n.d.). In 2007, based upon a campus-wide Queer and Ally Commission report, the QAC was expanded, renamed the Queer & Ally (Q&A) Training Network, and relocated to CME who is responsible for the DU community diversity awareness.

Background

University campuses can be a lonely, uncomfortable, or even hostile place for LGBTIQ &A students because of the bigoted attitudes and misperceptions by their peers about who they are and aren't and their acceptability (Eliason, 1997). Safe Zone Programs are designed to increase awareness, knowledge of, sensitivity to, and issues facing marginalized community members (Finkel, et al., 2003) with a focus on the

specific and unique needs of the LGBTIQ&A community (Safe Zone, 2010). By focusing on inclusiveness and education, university-based Safe Zone Programs provide a safe place for advocacy, skill building, and partnerships for LGBTIQ&A student, faculty, and staff members (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008).

Poynter and Tubbs (2008) report that Safe Zone Programs share a common goal of “improving the campus climate, increasing awareness, enhancing conversations around LGBT issues, providing safe space, and providing skills to members to confront homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, or heterosexism” (p. 122-123). For many Safe Zone Programs, improving campus climates have been accomplished by focusing on developing Ally training programs. According to Evans (2002), educating and training Allies of and for the LGBTIQ&A communities about LGBTIQ&A issues can empower community members, especially those less empowered to know who are safe.

For DU, the Q&A Program, like all CME programs, supports the Association of American Colleges and Universities elements of inclusive excellence:

1. A focus on student intellectual and social development
2. A purposeful development and utilization of organizational resources to enhance student learning.
3. Attention to the cultural differences learners brings to the educational experience and that enhance the enterprise.
4. A welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005)

CME’s programs and trainings are aimed to increase diversity awareness. Although not required for members of the university community, many trainings are taught as course requirements or experienced by those of voluntarily sign up for trainings.

Statement of the Problem

A programmatic assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses is needed since

the efficacy of the Q&A program for improving the DU campus climate for LGBTIQ&A individuals is unknown. Findings from this assessment will assist the Q&A program staff with maintaining effective programming as well as developing new programs that is responsive to the changing needs of the LGBTIQ&A campus community. From these efforts, the Q&A program staff can establish best practices guidelines.

Conceptual Framework

To assess the efficacy of the Q&A program, understanding what LGBTIQ&A means, how campus climate influences LGBTIQ&A student life, and how Safe Zone programs were developed will provide the contexts for the student and university needs for inclusive excellence.

Relevant Literature

Who is LGBTIQ&A?

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Ally (LGBTQI&A) describes individual's members who fall under the umbrella terms of sexual orientation, gender identity and/or societal definitions and stigma (Gender Equality Resource Center, n.d). Sexual orientation "not only involves a person's choice of sexual partners but also emotional attraction to others" (Cawthon & Guthrie, 2011 p. 293). Gender identity is how an individual identifies, perceives, and self-infers as male or female (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, n.d.). Gender identity is how a person's internalized understanding of self as male, female, somewhere in between, or outside these two identities, and is the individual's inner concept of self as a gendered being (i.e., man, woman, trans, etc.) (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, n.d.), that may not agree with their biological sex or societal gender role (Cawthon & Guthrie, 2011). According

to Cawthon and Guthrie (2011), Lesbian (L) and Gay (G) (L & G) identities are individuals “possessing an emotional attraction to the same sex, engaging in same-sex behaviors, and developing a connection to others with similar characteristics” (p. 293). However “Gay” also is used as an umbrella term for the L&G community as a whole (Gender Equity Resource Center, n.d.). A Lesbian is “a woman attracted to a woman” (Gender Equity Resource Center, n.d.). A Bi-sexual (B) is a man or woman who has “...erotic, emotional and sexual attractions to a person of the same and other gender” (Cawthon & Guthrie, 2011, p. 294), or is attracted to two sexes or two genders” (Gender Equity Resource Center, n.d.). Transgender (T) individuals gender identity conflicts with their biological sex assignment (male or female), and bends or blends genders (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, n.d.). Intersex (I) individuals are those who have ambiguous sexual organs (i.e., traits of both male and female sexual organs (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, n.d.; Safe Zone Training, 2010) Queer or (Q) are people who feel marginalized by mainstream visions of sexuality (Taulburt & Steinberg, 2000). Used as a political umbrella for sexual orientation and LGBTQ people, Queer is a political statement intended to break the binary thinking of sexual orientation and gender identity to a more flexible one (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, n.d.). Questioning (Q) individuals are individuals who are experiencing or in a process of struggling and deciding about any of their identities (Colorado Anti-Violence Programs, n.d.), but most often refers to those struggling around sexual orientation. An Ally is a person who is united to social justice issues and reaches across differences to achieve mutual goals for marginalized individuals or groups (Draughan, Elkins, & Roy, 2009; Eichler, 2011; Evans & Wall, 1991; Gender Equity Resource Center, n.d.)

Campus climate & LGBTIQ and Safe Zone Programs

Campus climate plays a significant role in all students' lives on a college/university campus. Campus climate is “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees, and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (Tetreault, et. al, 2013, p. 948). Helping students to feel a connection to campus helps to improve campus climate and is part of the role that administrators, staff, faculty, and other students play in creating connections (Poynter & Washington, 2005). Helping students connect to campus life ultimately helps everyone involved, most importantly the students (Vaccaro, 2012).

While some LGBTIQ&A students will come to a college campus as fully “out of the closet,” many come “out of the closet” during their college experience. On one hand researchers have shown that students who hid their sexual or gender identities did not think that they were being treated unfairly by faculty or staff because of their identity (Ballard, et al., 2008). On the other hand, other researchers have shown that LGBTIQ students concealed their sexual or gender identity from other students, university staff, university administrators, and university faculty if they perceived being stigmatized by the LGBTIQ label (D’Augelli, 1989) or experienced the university climate as hostile or unwelcoming (Ballard, et al., 2008; Evans, 2002). For example, statements like “That’s So Gay” and “That Fag” by presumably straight individuals toward LGBTIQ individuals and/or community creates unsafe and unwelcoming campus climates, especially for LGBTIQ&A students, faculty and staff who experience these as reflecting discriminatory and harassing attitudes (Tetreault, et al., 2013).

Importantly, researchers have shown that campus climates improved for the LGBTIQ&A community, especially when students disclosed their LGBTIQ&A their identities to staff and faculty who have attended Safe Zone type trainings (Spencer, 2006). For example Ballard, et. al (2008) reported LGBTIQ students more positively experiencing their campuses when Safe Zone stickers were displayed by LGBTIQ&A. However, this researcher also noted that not all locations displaying Safe Zone stickers were necessarily deemed safe, especially when the stickers were vandalized or the Allies were experienced as LGBTIQ biased despite their Safe Zone training. Researchers have reported that Allies must understand their heterosexual privilege and have suggested that these Allies may be struggling with their heterosexual privilege and how to be themselves without isolating or further enforcing the power of their own identities onto members of the LGBTIQ community (Draughn et al., 2009; Eichler, 2011; Evans & Wall, 1991)

Safe Zone Programs

University campuses can be a lonely, uncomfortable, or even hostile place for LGBTIQ&A students because of the bigoted attitudes and misperceptions by their peers about who they are and are not. Safe Zone Programs are designed to increase awareness, knowledge of, sensitivity to, and issues facing LGBTIQ&A and other marginalized community members (Finkel, et al., 2003; Safe Zone, n.d., NYU's Ally Program, n.d.). Unlike many diversity programs offered on university campuses, Safe Zone Programs focus on the specific and unique needs of the LGBTIQ&A community (Safe Zone, n.d.). According to Poynter and Tubbs (2008), Safe Zone Programs should have a common goal of “improving the campus climate, increasing awareness, enhancing conversations

around LGBT issues, providing safe space, and providing skills to members to confront homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, or heterosexism” (p. 122-123). By focusing on inclusiveness, Safe Zone programs have provided, a safe place for advocacy, skill building, and partnerships for LGBTQI&A student, faculty, and staff members (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008).

The traditional Safe Zone symbol is an upside down pink triangle in the middle of a green circle (Safe Zone, n.d.). Historically, the pink triangle was used in Nazi Germany to identify individuals (mostly men) who were or presumed to be gay or bisexual (Safe Zone NYU’s Ally Program, n.d.). The green circle symbolizes welcome (Finkel, et al., (2003). The pink triangle and the green circle together symbolize a LGBTIQ&A safe haven (see Appendix A.)

Safe Zone Programs are based on inclusion, education, and partnerships between the LGBTQIA professional staff and the university community and emphasizes skills building about the “how to” conversation with potential anti-gay individuals (Poynter, 2007). When creating a Safe Zone Program, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has developed Safe Zone Program guidelines that include defining the terms when describing the program or the people, creating a clear mission statement, and knowing how supportive the university administration will be (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

Program Intervention

Theoretical Framework

The University of Denver Queer & Ally Program (Q&A Program)

Based on the Safe Zone Program, the Q&A program is designed for members and Allies of LGBTIQ to examine their LGBTIQ knowledge and biases and develop skills for

dialogues with non-supportive LGBTIQ individuals. Unfortunately, common to Safe Zone Programs nationwide is an absence of theory when developing the program and according to Poynter and Tubbs (2008), “a lack of comprehensive information from others about how to implement, coordinate, facilitate training, and assess these programs. As a result, these programs can still be based on little shared knowledge or experience” p. 123).

Unfortunately, the Q&A Program is typical of many Safe Zone Programs in that it is atheoretical and has not benefitted from a program assessment. Nevertheless, the question remains of why do Allies advocate for the LGBTIQ community? To address this question, LBGT Ally Identity Theory (Vernaglia, 2000) provides a useful theoretical anchor for higher education and the DU Q&A Program.

Ally Development Models

Ally Development Models have been developed to help explain the significance of having Ally support for LGBTIQ&A communities (Vernaglia, 2000). According to researchers, contact with members of the LGBTIQ community can inspire some individuals to become advocates in order to protect those who are close to them (Fingerhut, 2011; Vernaglia, 2000). Because some LGBTIQ people see Allies as “outsiders,” many Allies attend Q&A trainings to help them grow as supporters of the LGBTIQ community by working on their own self-awareness about their own LGBTIQ misperceptions and biases (Fingerhut, 2011). Not only do they empower themselves, they can also empower LGBTIQ individuals to reframe the way they see themselves.

With Safe Zone & Q&A Programs focusing on Ally-ship, this foundational support for allies is critical. However, Allies of and for the LGBTIQ&A communities

often struggle with how to show their support despite their “fear of the unknown” (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy, 2002; Eichler, 2011), handle examples of anti-gay, homophobic, and heteronormative behavior, how to feel credible when supporting LGBTIQ&A communities and issues, and how to help empower others to learn and grow around LGBTIQ&A terminology, experiences, and individuals (Broido, E., 2000; Ji, 2008; Getz & Kirkley, 2003). Through the use of the Q&A Program, Allies can have these concerns addressed. For example, discussions, handouts, and shared experiences are incorporated into the learning. By adding models to Ally Development, the Q&A Program can become more inclusive to all identities as they enter the conversation.

Similar to how LGBTIQ individuals go through a developmental process to understand, accept, and grow in their heterosexual or straight identity; an Ally developmental process is based on their own identity development and on how others experience their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Because Allies have a varying amount of knowledge about the LGBTIQ community, issues and experiences, (Ji & Fujimoto, 2013), the Q&A Program serves as an ongoing information resource.

The LGBT Ally Identity Theory illustrates how the DU Q&A Program supports Ally personal and professional growth and development (Ji & Fujimoto, 2013). By a person assessing his or her knowledge, attitudes, skills and interpersonal abilities, they can develop into a more effective Ally for the LGBTIQ community or society as a whole (Ji & Fujimoto, 2013). Specifically, the Q&A Program has participants assess their knowledge, attitudes, skills and interpersonal abilities throughout the training. Importantly, within higher education, the LGBT Identity Development Theory can be useful to empower staff, students, and faculty by assessing their own identities.

A challenge to evaluating the Q&A Program and Safe Zone programs is how to identify and measure common outcomes without a shared theoretical framework. By anchoring the Q&A Program with the LBGT Ally Identity Theory, the assessment of the Q&A Program can begin developing program curricula, assessments, and common guidelines for Q&A type programs nationwide.

Program Plan

The Q&A Program is a voluntary program. Its mission is to increase sensitivity and awareness of the needs and issues of the LGBTIQ&A community. The Q&A program has three optional training levels: Level 1 provides participants with foundational knowledge, awareness, and skills regarding members of the LGBTIQ&A communities. Level 2 is an intermediate level training focused on the intersections of LGBTIQ&A identities and other social identities including Ally Identity Theory development. Level 3 is designed to meet the needs of a larger group using an interactive discussion format (Q&A Training/Network, 2013). It should be noted the DU community that participates in the Q&A Program predominantly attends Level 1 training only.

Assessment Plan

A major activity of Q&A Program assessment is reviewing and updating the objectives and measurable outcomes of the program. Clarifying the objectives can better direct program staff on what programmatic areas are effective, less effective, and what should be strengthened. Limited short-term outcomes (see Appendix B) are measured using the current Q&A Program Objectives (see Appendix C). One way to improve the assessment is to have a pre and post-test of the topics/terms taught in the training. While the development of an actual pre -and post-test will not be part of this capstone project.

Discussion & Analysis

Safe Zone Programs can improve campus climates for all students. By evaluating how the DU Q&A Program has changed attitudes and behaviors of the university community (students, staff, faculty, departments, and university as a whole), program staff can be more responsive to the campus needs. Examining how the LBGT Ally Identity Theory improves the campus climate by decreasing bias and bigotry in the DU community and Denver should be explored.

Implementation

The purpose of this capstone paper is to provide information and suggestions to DU Q&A Program staff about strengths and areas to consider for future activities for the Q&A Program. Some suggested implementations for the Q&A Program include: reviewing the learning objectives for each level of the program, developing and expanding the Q&A Network for students, faculty, and staff, and examining the program within the context of the wider campus diversity programs to aid in gaining additional support from Deans of each School/College & Central Administration.

Currently, the Q&A Program follows objectives that intend to help move participants to a new level of understanding of the issues of the LGBTIQ&A community. While the main focus of the program is to develop strong Allies for members of the LGBTIQ community, these objectives should be reviewed to determine whether the trainings should have greater or lesser focus on content and/or audiences. (i.e., better outreach to the campus community, the Denver community, etc.) .

Currently the Q&A Program's "visibility" is limited CME's website. To increase the Q&A visibility university-wide, is to have a Q&A Program link on the main DU

website. Additionally, working with the CME administration, administrators across campus should encourage network membership to staff and faculty members. For example, each Dean could align their school's Inclusive Excellence efforts with the Q&A Program objectives and make the trainings available to their faculty and staff. If this change and equal representation across campus can happen, this can further demonstrate DU's commitment to Inclusive Excellence that fosters a healthy and open minded campus community for all (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008).

Theory of Change

Theory of Change for the Q&A Program is to examine how the Q&A program staff can improve the program and network while maintaining the program's historical successes. Today the majority of college age students, the faculty and staff who work with students, and many graduate level students have an understanding of what the LGBTIQ letters mean. As a theory of change the Q&A Program needs to examine the needs of today's university staff, faculty and students. For example, a significant life event for LGBTIQ&A students is his or her coming out process. By sharing one's own story of coming out through face-to-face discussions and other social media (i.e., YouTube, online blogs, and Facebook), can de-pathologies and de-mythologize the coming out process. The university community can be a supportive partner, especially during this time of students exploring their identities. The importance of having a Q&A type program is not only as a resource for individuals who identify as LGBTIQ but also as a resource for their heterosexual allies.

Contribution

Missing pieces from the Safe Zone Programs and Q&A Program literature are a theoretical model, program guidelines, and consistency between university programs. However, because these programs are responsive to local needs, Safe Zone Programs are not or should not be “cookie cutter” programs, but programs that should share general principles. Guidelines based on a theoretical model should be developed so universities who wish to establish a Safe Zone or similar programs can have benefit from existing program’s experiences. The hope of this capstone is to demonstrate how a theoretical model (LBGT Ally Identity Theory) can inform and ground a Safe Zone Program Training model.

The Q&A Program at DU is an example of how a Safe Zone Program can be developed to meet the needs of a campus community. Having individuals trained through the Q&A Program is not only a benefit to the university but also helps the larger Denver community have individuals who are knowledgeable about the LGBTIQ&A community. The current network (including network alumni) also helps LGBTIQ community members and their Allies with the work of furthering of LGBTIQ inclusion.

Conclusion

Safe Zone Programs play an important role in helping make higher education a supportive place for LGBTIQ&A individuals. Recommendations about future directions for research and assessment and personal reflections will support the importance of Safe Zone programs.

Recommendations

Ideally, Safe Zone programs should be available to all staff, faculty, and students at every university. This can be accomplished by providing training options such as guest trainers or offering web-based training. . Specific to DU, expanding outreach efforts will increase the visibility of the Q&A Program. For example, Deans/Directors of units can encourage or require Q&A annual training

Future Research

The lack of a unified theoretical framework or guidelines for Safe Zone Programs has resulted in an inability for researchers to assess and compare programs since each program is individualized for each university. Future research on Safe Zone Programs & Q&A Program at DU will benefit from programs sharing common theoretical bases, guidelines, and measurable outcomes. My hope is that this capstone project will provide the foundation for this to occur.

Assessment

A formal assessment can be completed surveying and interviewing current and past participants. Currently the program has formative assessments as trainings occur, but no summative assessment to evaluate the entire program. An assessment of the program as a whole can record what is successful and what can be improved. This will make the Q&A Program better respond to the needs of the current and future DU community.

Final Thoughts

LGBTIQ&A students on college campuses need additional support, and encouragement. One way to build a strong and safe community for LGBTIQ&A students is through Safe Zone Training. At DU. the Q&A Program has been an essential to help

educate the community about what being LGBTIQ&A means providing a safe space for friends, strangers and Allies to become better informed about LGBTIQ issues.

Reflection

I have always approached higher education and student affairs in a student focused manner. I was affirmed by a conversation I had with a Social Work student about why higher education fits me. Student success comes first and I want to be that one person that makes a difference in a student's life. Every student needs someone who believes in him or her. Unfortunately, the realities of budgets, legal and policy restrictions, and personal bias can affect how a higher education professional works. But at the end of the day higher education would not exist without students. My own experiences in higher education (both positive and negative), my mentors, friends and family and have profoundly shaped my higher education philosophy and practices.

My upbringing and experiences in customer service have taught me the value of respect and genuine support toward everyone. As a customer service person you are expected to make every customer feel welcome, and listen to whatever issue they have. Students are similar. They want to feel welcome to a campus and feel they are an important part of the community. Students come with a wide variety of unique backgrounds and listening to individual stories is critical. For me, I had a faculty member whose encouragement and guidance are reasons I am continuing my education today.

Who I am shapes my higher education efforts and scholarship. As a bi-racial gay man, I often have felt excluded and marginalized. Because my identities empower me, my hope is to empower, teach, and transform the experiences of LGBTIQ Students of Color since I believe everyone has the right to feel safe and included.

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Appendix A



(About the Safe Zone Symbol, n.d.)

Appendix B

Level 1:

- Recognize self as an ally within the LGBTIQ communities or of the LGBTIQ communities
- Be able to identify at least one campus resource that folks within the LGBTIQ community can utilize if needed.
- Ability to demonstrate some self-awareness of one's own identities, biases, and attitudes and how they influence one's interactions with others. (Q&A Training/Network, n.d.)

Level 2:

- Demonstrate an ability to notice instances and patterns of heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia
- Demonstrate an ability to notice instances and patterns of heterosexual and cisgender privilege
- Demonstrate ways to be self-aware and brainstorm strategies for overcoming barriers to being an effective ally for the LGBTIQ communities. (Q&A Training/Network, n.d.)

Appendix C

LEVEL 1

Designed to provide participants with foundational knowledge, awareness, and skills regarding LGBTIQ&A communities at DU and beyond. This Level can be mandatory for employee groups, courses, academic programs, etc., at the discretion of the supervisor or faculty.

Learning objectives of Level 1 curriculum:

1. Gain awareness of diversity of identities within LGBTIQ communities
2. Recognize that there are a variety of terms used by LGBTIQ communities used to describe themselves
3. Gain a beginning understanding of concepts of oppression and privilege related to LGBTIQ communities
4. Recognize that allies are essential to ending oppression
5. Recognize self as potential allies of LGBTIQ people
6. Be familiar with the elements of an affirming response to someone coming out and understanding that coming out is not a safe option or end goal for many LGBTIQ people
7. Identify at least one on-campus resource
8. Demonstrate self-awareness regarding one's own identities, biases and attitudes and how they influence their interactions with others. (Q&A Training/Network, n.d.)

LEVEL 2

Is an optional and intermediate level training, focusing on the intersections of LGBTIQ&A identities with other social identities, and on expanding and deepening the conversations regarding privilege, oppression and ally development that begin in Q&A Level 1. Registrants must have completed a Q&A Training Level 1 within the 12 months prior to attending Level 2.

Learning objectives of the Level 2 curriculum:

1. Increase awareness of how LGBTIQ identities intersect with other social and personal identities
2. Understand the continuums of sexual orientation and gender identity
3. Demonstrate an ability to connect historical events to current realities facing LGBTIQ people
4. Demonstrate an ability to notice instances and patterns of heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia at different levels (personal, societal and institutional)
5. Demonstrate an ability to notice instances and patterns of heterosexual and non-transgender privilege (personal, societal, and institutional)
6. Demonstrate self-awareness and brainstorm strategies for overcoming barriers to being an effective ally. (Q&A Training/Network, n.d.)

Appendix C (continued)**LEVEL 3**

Level 3 trainings are not a pre-set curriculum or objectives, but rather a discussion/consultation, tailored specifically to meet the needs of you/your group. For example, *a graduating student in Counseling Psychology met with our staff to discuss specific actions he could take to ensure his private practice would be actively, consistently and intentionally inclusive of LGBTIQ clients and colleagues.* (Q&A Training/Network, n.d.)