LGBTQ* Allies and Intersectionality

By Nick Patras, M.S.

On October 10th-13th, the A&M-Commerce campus will celebrate Ally Week, specifically allies who provide the space and support for LGBTQ* (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning) students, faculty, and staff. This year marks the fifth year the campus will observe Ally Week. Safe Spaces Ally Project, in conjunction with the Counseling Center, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Serving Engaged Empowered Diverse Students (S.E.E.D.S) office, the Student Disability and Resources Office and Pride Alliance have plans for an exciting array of programming.

With the passage of same-sex marriage equality by the Supreme Court in June 2015, individuals mistakenly may think the work of allies is done. Marriage equality did not stamp out pervasive heteronormativity in the culture or workplace nor did it eliminate homophobia. Many LGBTQ* individuals do not feel the unconditional love and acceptance of family members. LGBTQ* individuals can still be fired or discriminated against in the workplace. The goal of Safe Spaces Ally Project on the A&M-Commerce campus is to achieve a culture where any person who identifies as a gender, sexual, or romantic minority (GSR) person can study/or work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment while being fully accepted, valued and appreciated. Ally Week is about taking the time to celebrate the work of straight allies who stand side-by-side with their LGBTQ* counterparts to change homophobic beliefs while making the campus, community, and world a more supportive and welcoming place.

Nadine Smith, CEO of Equality Florida is this year’s Ally Week keynote speaker. Nadine’s topic, Beyond Orlando: Intersectionality and the Role of Allies will examine how various identities that overlay and intersect with each other may create hurdles for LGBTQ* individuals. Nadine has been an activist for over two decades and was part of the historic oval office meeting with then President Bill Clinton, the first such meeting of the LGBTQ* leaders with a sitting President. Nadine was a featured commentator on several national TV networks after the horrific mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando Florida this past June. She spoke with such grace and resolve in the aftermath of the tragedy. The wisdom of her years of LGBTQ* activism was evident as she attempted to help a nation make sense of the tragedy.

Ally Week is about elevating the discussion while creating safe spaces to honor the inherent dignity and worth of every person on our campus, including LGBTQ* students, staff, and faculty. It is about embracing the gifts and talents of all people. If you don’t identify as LGBTQ* or as a straight ally then how can Ally Week 2016 be useful to you? First, take time and examine any internalized biases you may have about GSR minorities. Second, participate in some of the programming with Pride Alliance to learn from our students who identify as LGBTQ*. Third, attend our keynote presentation on Oct. 13th in Conference Room C at the RSC and learn about intersectionality and gender, sexual, and romantic minorities. Stand up and be counted as an ally!