Why Celebrate Allies?

By Nick Patras, M.S.

On October 12-16th, A&M Commerce will celebrate the 4th Annual Ally Week, a time to honor those people who provide support and encouragement to LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning) students, faculty, and staff. Allies are often non-minority people who advocate and support the minority population. The Safe Spaces Ally Project was formed in 2011 on the A&M Commerce campus, joining other colleges and universities as well as school districts and corporations with a specific goal to achieve a culture where any person can study/work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment.

The Counseling Center has been at the forefront of providing staff and financial support to directly create the Safe Spaces Ally Project in conjunction with faculty leaders, in particular Dr. Robin Reid. Counselors and psychologists are members of professional organizations that champion the dignity and worth of all people, and in particular, those persons who identify as gender, sexual, and romantic minorities.

Allies are not easily pigeon-holed or categorized. Some have children or relatives who identify as a sexual minority, while others just simply believe that all people, regardless of whom they love, deserve to be able to be fully who they are while contributing their unique gifts and talents to make the university community a richer and more diverse place to learn, teach or work. Allies don’t claim to be counselors, experts, or content experts. They do commit to participating in specialized training and pledge to be a supportive ally by signing a contract to serve in the role of an ally.

On October 13, at 6 PM in the RSC, Safe Spaces Ally Project is pleased to host Dr. Ellen Greenwald, from the University of Texas-Dallas Counseling Center who will present on her research topic of gender, sexual and romantic minorities. Dr. Greenwald’s presentation topic is: LGBTQ to GSRM: What is Happening to the Alphabet Soup? This will allow students, faculty, classes, and staff to learn about the work of allies, how the fight for equality has evolved, and even how these minorities are viewed in a rapidly changing world which now includes same-sex marriage equality.

Other events for Ally Week 2015 include four 1-hour Ally training opportunities at noon on October 12-15 in the RSC. Participants who want to become trained allies must attend all four segments of the training in order to become an ally. Seating is limited to the first 25 participants and is done on the Safe Spaces Ally Project website at http://www.tamuc.edu/CampusLife/CampusServices/safeSpaces/default.aspx.

A moderated panel discussion featuring students from Pride Alliance will be held on Oct. 14 at 5:30 PM in RSC Traditions. The title of the discussion is: Allies from a Student Perspective. The panel discussion is sponsored by the S.E. E. D. S. office, Price Alliance, and Safe Spaces Ally Project.

The theme for Ally Week 2015 is Under the Umbrella. When you think about it, regardless of whom you are; we are all working, studying, growing, and yearning to be our best selves. I challenge you to come to some or all of these events and be willing to stretch and grow outside your comfort zone. There is room under the umbrella for each of you!