

How to Talk about Greek Allies

Our Mission:

“The Greek Allies project is a student run, primarily Greek based, initiative on campus focusing on developing more cohesive relationships within chapters of fraternity and sorority organizations. While the Greek Allies are an apolitical group with no assigned political directives, the aim and objective of the project is to eliminate the pressures and constraints placed upon gay, lesbian, and bisexuals who are also members of the Greek community. In recognizing that a more diverse group of unified students lends itself to the betterment of a community, the implications of such a project will extend themselves to a more productive, supporting, and beneficial brotherhood and sisterhood. The Greek Allies further recognizes that fraternities and sororities exist and continue to exist due to their education of members concerning a multitude of issues. In learning to support all members in a particular chapter, the Greek Allies are providing an educational experience to not only venues within higher education but in the real world as well.”

In other words...

We are a mix of Greek (and some non Greek) students from chapters across campus that want to work to create a more open and diverse environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexuals in our chapters. I know that when talking to the Greek community, GLB issues are somewhat uncommon and even uncouth, but our objective isn't to rally political support, it is rather to advance and educate Greek community in an ever changing diverse society. Simply stated, our focus is on Greek community as a whole, and how supporting GLB Greeks will add to the betterment of the Greek community. The idea is, with a more open and accepting atmosphere towards GLB people, are our chapters able to deal with a member that may not be straight? Is it truly a brotherhood or a sisterhood if a member chooses to hide an aspect of themselves to be accepted? The coming-out of a member can challenge a chapter, and our goal is to make it easier both for that member and for the rest of the chapter.

When Greeks graduate from this university and venture into the post-collegiate world, we need to be adequately prepared to work with a diverse myriad of people from different social identity groups. The Greek Allies are working to prepare members of our community for the challenges that lie ahead by helping to look past our own convictions and work effectively with others who may associate and self identify differently from our societal norms.

One point of our program from its inception was to focus on the Ally, not GLB students. Our mission is to educate those that identify as heterosexual on being a good ally; they in turn make the environment more safe and comfortable for GLB students. Our aim is to find and educate those who identify as “allies” as well as trying to create new ones.

We are having 2 trainers from Northwestern run a workshop this semester. We would like representation from as many chapters as possible. Once the training is complete, if chapters would like to have a similar workshop for their chapter, the Greek Allies will lead a student-run workshop (much like Rape Awareness, Drug Workshops, Self

Defense, or any other program that can be used to fulfill educational requirement for chapters).

Some key points:

- While popular media makes it seem like the gay community is doing great (Queer Eye, Ellen, Will and Grace), with increased exposure comes increased violence. Violence towards gays increase about 28% when Ellen came out, and during the presidential elections, we saw a rise in anti-gay violence of over 100% in some states.
- This violence spans other communities: 17% towards gay blacks
- Silence and apathy have led to an air of ignorance of these issues. Because people who are directly affected are afraid to speak out, those who would be considered potential allies are left unaware of these issues. The Greek Allies look not only to educate those concerned but also alert those who should be.
- The fight for tolerance has two major tenets: legal and educational. The legal battle is about 10 years ahead of the public education strategy. The Greek Allies are working to use education to promote tolerance.
- How does this affect us directly at the U of I? Two years ago, a member of a chapter was beaten up after coming out and had to find alternate housing. One year ago, a former member of the Greek community was held at knife point outside the six pack. These are just acts of violence towards gays, but towards Greeks. We as a strong Greek community cannot tolerate any type of violence towards our members.
- Key Point for straight guys: while you may be “cool with gay guys,” would you know what to say if a brother or friend came out to you? The point of this workshop is to increase your knowledge so that you can handle any situation that arises
- Homophobia doesn't only affect gays. Homophobic terminology is used to define gender roles and stigmatizes those who don't fit socialized norms. For example, a heterosexual brother who won't sleep with a girl, or is into has more artistic interests is called a faggot. The brother must either comply to these norms, and thus be untrue to himself, or be dubbed a “faggot” and thus ostracized from the group.
- How can we talk to religious or political conservatives? We not trying to change anyone's convictions. However, once we leave this university, we are going to have to work with many different types of people. Even if you don't respect Jews, blacks, women, gays, Hispanics etc, you may have to work with (or for) these people. Learning to work effectively with varying groups of people is a necessary life skill.
- While chapter claim to not have any gay members, we find that many members of Greek organizations remained closeted until graduation due to the climate of nonacceptance. Additionally, many lgb people don't even come out until their early 20s; thus, gay members may exist despite the fact that a chapter rushes only “straight” members.
- From a psychological perspective, a freshman battling with personal issues of sexual orientation may look to the Greek community as a means to avoid or

escape from their sexual orientation. In many ways, the Greek community can seem like a means by which one can reaffirm his or her masculinity or femininity.

For more educational tools:

<http://www.commercialcloset.org>

<http://www.turnout.org>

<http://www.pflag.org>

<http://www.glaad.org>

<http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org>