



## Answers to Potential Concerns about the Ally Program

★ **Why do we need an Ally Program? We have a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation; isn't that enough?**

While the university constitution and bylaws prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, insensitivity, intolerance, and, in some cases, discrimination and harassment, still exist at NIU, just as in society in general. The Ally Program is one method by which the university can create an atmosphere that is more safe, secure, and accepting for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender.

★ **I don't know of any reported instances of discrimination and harassment against gay people. If discrimination isn't a problem at NIU, why do we need a special program?**

Even when there are few reported cases of discrimination and harassment, that does not mean there are no such instances. People might not report discrimination and harassment because they assume nothing will be done about it, they fear retaliation or further discrimination and harassment, they fear being "outed," or they fear losing their job. In fact, if people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender perceive the climate as unsupportive or hostile, they are even less likely to report discrimination and harassment. Even when there are few cases of overt or blatant discrimination or harassment on campus, there are still many assumptions about gender which can result in the unique needs and concerns of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender being ignored or dismissed. Also, because negative presumptions about LGBT identity and gender variance are still common, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender will not necessarily know they are in a welcoming environment unless some initiative is taken to convey that message.

★ **I support diversity issues. Why do we have to focus on LGBT? Shouldn't we have a program that encourages support of all diverse groups?**

Of course, NIU should provide support services for all diverse groups on campus. There are programs which address the unique needs and concerns of particular under-represented groups, including African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, women, and persons with disabilities. While people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender have many things in common with members of other underserved groups, they also have concerns unique to their situation. The Ally Program attempts to address these specific concerns.

★ **Special programs like this only cause divisiveness. Shouldn't we be focusing on the things we have in common, rather than what makes us different?**

Rather than being divisive, acknowledging differences among people is actually a way of being more inclusive. Ignoring differences perpetuates ignorance and acts as a barrier to mutual understanding. In the past, differences such as sexual orientation and gender identity have not only been ignored, but actively silenced. However, ignoring and repressing information about sexual orientation and gender identity did not result in a society which was more unified, but a divided society in which people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender have been excluded from policies, programs, and activities because of their

sexual orientation or gender identity, have had to hide their identity, and have faced prejudice and discrimination. Ignoring differences prevents us from being enriched by people who are different from ourselves and benefiting from the contributions they have to offer based on their unique experiences.

★ **NIU should support all people, not just gay people. If we have a special program for gay people, won't other people be turned off or feel excluded?**

There are some people who may be upset by any effort to express support for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. However, expressing support for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender does not mean expressing a lack of support for anyone else. Making an effort to be welcoming of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender is not equivalent to excluding heterosexuals.

★ **If we're talking about treating people equally, shouldn't we have a program like this for heterosexual people at NIU?**

Actually, NIU already has many programs and resources in place that serve the needs of heterosexuals. In addition, heterosexuals do not face prejudice, harassment, or institutionalized discrimination due to their sexual orientation.

★ **NIU shouldn't be in the business of promoting homosexuality or endorsing the gay lifestyle. Isn't the Ally Program biased in favor of homosexuality?**

The Ally Program is designed to give individuals an avenue for providing support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender colleagues and students. Allies do not "promote" homosexuality, they accept it, and affirm the right of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender to live and pursue their goals free from intolerance, discrimination, and harassment. Allies do promote awareness of differences, and more open communication about and understanding of the experiences and challenges of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. Allies desire to create a safe and accepting environment for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. These efforts do not involve endorsing any one sexual orientation or gender identity as preferable.

★ **Sexual orientation is a personal issue. Why should we discuss it in the workplace or classroom?**

Our personal lives touch our professional and academic lives in myriad ways. It is virtually impossible for anyone to interact with others without discussing or conveying important aspects of who they are and what they believe. Heterosexual people convey their sexual orientation all the time, usually without ever realizing it. They do this when they talk about their family life, put pictures of their loved ones in their offices, wear wedding and engagement rings, bring spouses or dates to university functions, or talk about their social activities. People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender wish to have the same freedom to be open about their daily lives without fear of judgment and prejudiced reactions.

★ **Doesn't this program encourage discrimination against people who have moral beliefs opposed to homosexuality?**

The Ally Program doesn't encourage discrimination in any form, against anyone. The views of Allies may conflict with the views of some others. That does not equate with discriminating against those individuals with opposing views. Allies are not trying to silence differing viewpoints; in fact, they welcome dialogue as an opportunity for furthering mutual understanding.

Adapted from Kishwaukee College Allies Program Manual