Allyship Training Programs in Higher Education: Creating a Critical Curriculum of Change

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ALLYSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CREATING A CRITICAL CURRICULUM OF CHANGE

by

Macy Marin Keith

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

Approved:

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ABSTRACT

Allyship Training Programs in Higher Education: Creating a Critical Curriculum for Change

by

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Allies Training Programs (also known as Safe Space/Zone training) are found in many institutions of higher education. Usually provided by an LGBTQ+ or Gender and Sexuality Center staff, the goal is to prepare participants for an allyship role in hopes of promoting safe spaces on campus and decrease instances of queerphobia. This thesis examined current allies training programs to determine what content is being presented and compare to the latest critiques and definitions. After analysis it is determined that current allyship trainings are inadequately preparing higher education staff and faculty for an ally role. Using the results of this study and the works of other scholars, I offer a new approach to allyship training programs through a suggested online curriculum geared toward higher education staff and faculty.

(47 pages)
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Macy Marin Keith
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Introduction

Queer students in higher education often rely on symbols to identify their potential allies on campus. Usually these symbols are found in a sticker or placard that is rewarded to staff and faculty after completing an Ally or Safe Space/Zone training. These are usually provided by an LGBTQA+ or Gender and Sexuality Center staff member upon completion of the training. The goal of these programs is to educate participants on queer discrimination in hopes that by recruiting allies or promoting safe spaces, queer individuals may experience fewer negative effects of ignorance, bias, or outright queerphobia. According to the Campus Pride Index, these trainings are considered benchmark criteria for creating LGBTQA+ inclusive campuses. These symbols and accompanying trainings, however, often come up short of properly educating and preparing their participants for a true allyship role. A few scenarios to consider: A student may sign up for a course by a professor who has completed the training, but find themselves feeling unsafe when homophobic comments in class go unchallenged. A sticker is displayed by a resident assistant, but when a student resident raises concerns about their roommate’s partner jokingly making threats against queer individuals, the response is one of inaction. Students may collectively confront the institution on their lack of all gender facilities but are met by slow reaction and little structural change.

These are all examples that happen every day on campuses across the nation. It is not that the potential ally is unwilling to do the work. It is more likely that they simply lack the proper understanding of what it truly means to be an ally and what is expected of them. It is imperative, therefore, that these programs be rethought to better prepare those would-be allies to support queer students and colleagues, as well as change the structural problems that perpetuate their negative experiences. In order to begin to address these issues, the present study examines
current ally training programs in higher education through a qualitative content analysis. My findings suggest that current practices are over simplistic and that they tend to leave participants unprepared for a robust ally role due, in part, to the lack of concrete definitions and skills building. The overall goal of this research is to use the findings to offer suggestions for a multifaceted curriculum based on critical definitions of allyship. I utilize the findings of this study to suggest an online curriculum targeted at staff and faculty in an effort to change our current practices of educating would-be allies at institutions of higher learning.

**Literature Review**

Those seeking to become allies in higher education often rely on educational workshops and courses deemed “Ally Training Programs” to be trained in what it means to be, and at times act as, an ally (Perrin, 2013). At the same time, the trainings themselves have come under some scrutiny as of late. Woodford et al. (2014), for example, argued that the trainings are successful in some ways, but require some improvements. Their research focused on evaluating how higher education institutions conducted the training of LGBTQA+ allies and found that there was substantial room for growth. Their first step was to identify what was commonly done in the trainings. Specifically, they discovered four main learning outcomes or categories present in the majority of trainings: LGBTQA+ terminology, discrimination, privilege of heterosexual and cisgender individuals, and how to support LGBTQA+ individuals within the institution. Overall, these provided “ally trainees” with a general sense of allyship in higher academia. Their study also concluded that these trainings tended to prioritize understanding and sympathy over “preparing allies to confront LGBT prejudice and discrimination” (p. 320). Furthermore, they found that trainings are often lacking in two critical areas: “addressing key components of allyhood” and training participants on exactly how to be advocates (pp. 320-321). Thus,
participants commonly end up being what the authors deem to be, “passive bystanders to homophobia” because they do not fully understand what it means to be an “ally”. They commonly walk away with few to no skills to help them fulfill that role (p. 320).

Even if the current trainings were to shift from improving “perceptions” towards “combating homophobia” most trainings in the Woodford research were found to be between two and four hours with little to no follow-up training available. According to the authors, “preparing individuals to become allies cannot realistically occur within 4-hour training sessions”, and thus the research brief also suggested an “incremental design” for a new curriculum (p. 320). Specifically, they suggest one that focuses on catering to the individual needs of the group and prioritizes knowing the role and learning skills necessary for advocacy. A study by Devita (2018) supports these findings, citing many studies that also suggest that while these “educational programs positively affected heterosexual and cisgender individuals’ perceptions of LGBTQ+ communities,” newly trained “allies” are left with few indications of how they can combat homophobia and heterosexism in their own professional spaces (p. 64).

The absence of direction, in short, is a problem of definition and execution. These are the focal points of this thesis.

Defining Allyship

There seems to be little consensus within the community of trainers about what “Allyship” really means. Studies across the spectrum have offered a multitude of different definitions of allyship, contributing to the overall problem in ally training: There is no central definition of allyship that guides ally training across the board. In fact, in my review of the literature, I found five different definitions of allyship from both researchers and popular activists. I will address each in turn, starting with definitions from researchers. The first
The definition of allyship is a person from a dominant social group who works to “end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power” (Perrin, 2013, p. 241). The second definition of allyship involves “an individual with awareness, knowledge, and skills to support those experiencing discrimination, confront injustice, and advocate for social justice” (Woodford, 2019, p. 317). The third used interviews with LGBTQ+ individuals to form their definition as a person who “actively work[s] with LGBTQ+ individuals for LGBTQ+ justice” and does so with “consistent commitment” (DeVita, 2018, pp. 73-74). Popular activists and resources provided the final two definitions. The fourth definition created by the Anti-Oppression Network defines allyship, not as an identity, but as a process. They define allyship as “an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group” (Allyship, paras. 2). The final definition comes to us from popular educator Anne Bishop (2015) who also defines allyship as a process of “becoming” and outlines seven steps in doing so, such as step one: “understand oppression, how it came about, how it is held in place and how it stamps its pattern on the individuals and institutions that perpetuate it” (pp. 12, 14-23). Overall, these definitions seem to overlap with three positive concepts. First, an individual needs to understand the dynamics of privilege and power in order to work towards social justice. Secondly, definitions mention consistency as a critical factor in being identified as an ally. Meaning, an individual must show constant, unified action. Finally, multiple mentions show that allyship is more a process than an identity—a point that many of the academic sources seem to forgo and the popular sources favor.

The problem with all of the definitions is that they lack specificity and any mention of systemic change made by a group of individuals, institutions, or organizations. Although we
have broadly applicable definitions, perhaps in an effort to encompass a variety of allyship efforts that individuals may engage in, the lack of detail on how to work towards equality may result in what many LGBTQ+ individuals call “institutionalized allies” (DeVita, 2018, p. 73). In other words, these loose definitions can result in individuals claiming the title of an “ally” because they went through a “formal process” to learn about their privilege but never had “to go out of [their] way to do anything extra” (p. 73). When the definition becomes more specific to what the role entails, individuals may understand that they are more responsible for fulfilling those requirements to obtain the title. This in turn may then result in individuals understanding that efforts to change systemic or institutional issues are needed. Without this understanding, allies tend to “perpetuate unexamined negative biases against sexual minorities, effectively delimiting the nature and degree of change that is possible” (Russell, 2016, p. 343), while believing that their “kindness” (p. 342) and “common cultural” (DeVita, p. 76) knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community is enough.

In fact, after interviewing multiple LGBTQ+ individuals in higher education, it was found that participants identified two distinct types of allies: “status-seeking” and “justice-seeking” (p. 73). The former relies on the vague descriptions of allyship, institutionalized training like Safe Zone, and the accompanying symbols to self-identify their “status” but often lack “consistent commitment” or understanding that “action [is] required” (pp. 73 -77). The latter type, justice-seeking, may also utilize the same symbols, however, those individuals demonstrate “action” and an understanding that their action must “produce change” (p. 76). Producing change is a key component for allyship, as identified by the study’s participants. A detailed description of allyship helps ally training participants to critically examine and problematize the current understanding of allyship towards an understanding that this role has specific requirements,
including an effort to change the institution an individual resides in. In light of the discrepancies in how different organizations and individuals define allyship, I offer my first research question:

RQ1: How do universities define “allyship” in the LGBTQ+ Ally training programs?

**Intersectionality**

One unstated goal of allies trainings is to provide trainees with an understanding of LGBTQQA+ individuals and the issues they may face as a marginalized population, making these trainings a forum for achieving cultural competency. These types of trainings, however, have been criticized as being too focused and nuanced, and therefore miss the mark on addressing the intersectional identities and experiences that exist within these communities. According to Crenshaw (2017):

> [I]ntersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things (paras 4).

She argues that without intersectionality in our efforts to confront discrimination, we perpetuate a “descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo” and “focus[es] on the most privileged group members [while] marginaliz[ing] those who are multiply-burdened” (Crenshaw, 1989). In other words, identities are usually seen as one dimensional and standalone, which disregards and erases the unique experiences of those who embody multiple marginalized identities. Using an intersectional lens centers these experiences in order to combat erasure and address their discrimination.

In the case of ally and Safe Zone trainings, DeVita and Anders (2018) argue these trainings depend heavily “on ‘common’ cultural characteristics” which “flattens the rich diversity embodied in LGBTQ+ communities and threatens to reproduce the very status quo that
practitioners within multicultural commitments want to confront” (p. 76). In other words, trainings often provide lists of definitions or statistics that seem to represent the entirety of LGBTQ+ experiences without recognizing the intersections of race, age, religion, and cultural heritage—to name only a few. For example, training may discuss the rates of bullying and discrimination of LGBTQ+ youth, but fail to account that Black and African LGBTQ+ youth are even more at risk (Kozuch, 2019), ultimately erasing their experiences of holding both racial and queer identities. Pon (2009) argues that this erasure or “forgetting” perpetuates our society’s “oppressive historical encounters with … cultural ‘others’” in favor of “rush[ing] to application” (p. 68, Britzman 2000 p. 204). These trainings often simplify one identity group, LGBTQ+, in order to help participants “master and apply knowledge” (Pon, 2009, p. 69) immediately after being trained. Such a simplistic presentation of identity, however, circumvents “the important contributions that [analyzing] power and privilege” (Garren and Rozas, 2013, p. 99) can provide for individuals seeking to become allies. This means that our attempts to fast track knowledge through a cultural competency lens, or in this case training LGBTQ+ allies, frequently makes ally trainings inadequate in teaching people how to engage in advocacy and allyship because they are unaware of how intersectionality may influence an individual’s experiences and needs.

In light of these perspectives, I offer my second research question:

RQ2: Are universities including intersectionality within their trainings (i.e. mentions of LGBTQ+ identity plus race, disability, age, religion, etc.)?

Institutional vs Individual Change

 Allies and trainers tend to be overly optimistic about the impacts of allyship, which tends to focus more on individual change and not on the discriminatory system in which the individual contributes. In a case study of a church group by Russell and Bohan (2016) they argue that allyship needs to go beyond supporting the individual. They focus on two types of change: first-
order and second-order. According to the authors: “first-order change is relatively superficial; it aims to modify existing practices but does not challenge institutional structures or hierarchies of power and privilege” (p. 341). Part of first-order change is the easy, quick fixes that will soothe and welcome the target population, but can disregard or fail to recognize discriminatory acts, attitudes, and structures that remain in place. An example of this could include adding a rainbow or a queer couple to your marketing, while also enforcing rules that discriminate against LGBTQA+ individuals or while personally perpetuating the idea that homosexuality is a sin.

Allies are commonly trained to think that they must work for, instead of with, the LGBTQA+ community, which leads to ineffective outcomes or no change at all. When looking at the ally trainings in place at higher education institutions, it is important to note that they chiefly operate within the first-order change model. For example, an office may change the pronouns in their marketing materials from he/she to they/them but fail to understand the needs of a transgender student trying to utilize their services. This can lead to the false security of inclusivity and support for LGBTQA+ community members while serving as a salve to supposed “allies” that their work starts and ends with a four-hour training.

Second-order change, according to the authors, “is foundational change; it works to alter structures and challenges hierarchies of power.” In other words, it requires a long-term approach that is not only “grounded primarily in relationships with particular individuals or in personal experiences, [but] in an analysis of the dynamics of social stigma” (Russell, p. 345). Meaning, for an institution and the individuals within it to call themselves true allies, they must be dedicated to the long-term work and discomfort that accompanies the perpetuation of discrimination. This takes an in-depth self-reflection for individuals and the institution as a whole to examine the “needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged” and
“restructuring” to resolve those problems through policy and practice (Crenshaw, p 167). Due to these discrepancies in ally trainings suggested by research, the present study seeks to determine the goals of ally training in higher education institutions. In light of the perspectives above, I offer my third research question:

RQ3: How, if at all, are universities connecting ally trainees to institutional change?

**Pedagogical Practices**

A study on privilege investment by Perrin et al. (2013), employed widely used strategies for creating LGBTQ+ allies and measured their effectiveness for attitude, prejudice, and behavior changes in participants. A number of strategies that can be employed to combat these issues including personal contact with LGBTQ+ individuals, class settings with LGBTQ+ readings about the realities and history of homophobia, and workshops focused on exploring stereotypes, privilege, and scenario work for combating those issues. The study found that the most effective strategies included a combination of attitude change techniques (such as stereotypes and privilege awareness activities) alongside behavior-based techniques (having them volunteer for an LGBTQ+ event). Specifically, “as heterosexuals’ propensity for social justice behaviors increased, their prejudicial attitudes decreased” (Perrin et al. 248). Accordingly, just reading lists of facts and statistics about the discrimination of LGBTQ+ individuals or simply exposing a participant to their privilege is not enough to provide an in-depth intervention or attitude change. Participants of ally training programs should also be taught how to engage in advocacy behaviors. Such a move could not only reduce their prejudice but also reinforce their understanding that a major requirement of allyship is to be an active agent in disrupting the system of oppression.
Research conducted on those who participate in ally training programs and their reactions to the content largely focuses on why programs’ participants resist the idea of allyship. Perrin et al. simplified it to three reasons: those resistant were often “blinded by privilege, downplaying the importance of oppression, and fearing responsibility for change” (242). Bishop (2015) expands these three reasons in her book titled *Becoming an Ally: Fighting the System of Oppression in People*. She designates participants into three groups:

1. The “backlashers”, who deny the existence of systemic oppression and the privilege they may hold within that system (blinded by privilege or downplaying oppression);
2. The “guilty”, who personalize the issue and become defensive and paralyzed (fearing the responsibility for change);
3. The “learners” or “allies” who use any opportunity to learn more and then act on what they learn (Bishop 87).

Bishop has suggestions on how to engage with each group, but the technique consistent throughout is to connect each participant to their own experience with oppression. Perrin et al. agree:

> [O]ne successful way to reduce prejudice and get individuals of privilege more involved in working against oppression could include counseling techniques to help them become emotionally ‘in touch’ with their own experiences of discrimination in other domains of identity, or with the experiences of people close to them (248).

The philosophy here is that the perpetuation of oppression relies on every individual having experience of being both oppressed and the oppressor. By experiencing the realities of it, participants can then clearly see how to break the cycle. Bishop argues that the system is held in place by the need to survive it. People learn, unconsciously, to protect themselves by aligning themselves within the hierarchical system, which can include the suppression of emotion (if oppressed), or the act of ignoring what the system creates for others (if privileged). To disrupt
the system and become an ally, individuals must first understand the system in play. In light of these perspectives, I offer my fourth research question:

**RQ4:** Are allies trainings incorporating pedagogical practices in their trainings that consider participants’ various reactions and help participants understand the system of oppression and their role within it?

**Practical Skills and Further Training**

Finally, I am interested in finding out what types of resources, if any, that universities provide for allies to further their understanding of allyship. In light of this, I offer my final research question:

**RQ5:** Are universities encouraging ally trainees to complete more training and if so, are they providing them with concrete resources to attain this training?

**Methods**

To examine these dynamics, I first used the Campus Pride Index and the Consortium of Higher Education listserv to identify sixty colleges and universities representing every region of the United States. I then contacted each one with requests for copies of their LGBTQ+ training content, which included instructional PowerPoints, videos, and facilitator manuals. Out of the sixty institutions contacted, seven schools offered their content to be analyzed, ten declined to share, and the rest did not respond to multiple attempts to contact them. Of those who did share their content, three were from the West, two were from the South, one was from the Mid-West, and one was from the North East. On top of their own programming two universities utilized Safe Zone Project materials, a free and public curriculum created for universities and other organizations. In a search through other university webpages, I found that Safe Zone is used by a large, unidentified number of institutions and therefore I incorporated it as an eighth sample to be coded.
I analyzed all materials using a directed content analysis approach. An initial review of materials was conducted in comparison with the research questions to determine if a content analysis was feasible. Next, I created codes based on the research questions and data gathered accordingly. I then coded the materials a second time with the identified themes and codes. I address the coding process for each research question below.

For the first research question, I identified whether or not there was a clear definition of “ally”, “safe zone”, or “safe zone ally” and coded it as present or absent (+/−). If present, I first collected these definitions from PowerPoints, fliers, and institution websites. I then documented the active and passive words used in the definitions, such as “advocate” or “collaborate” as active and “understanding” or “awareness” as passive. After the words were extracted and documented I then compared them all to identify commonalities to observe any trends in the definitions being used by higher education institutions.

To address the second research question, I created two codes for intersectionality: topical references and visibility. For topical references, I identified whether each program included topical references or explanations of intersectionality in the curriculum. For example, one program included Kimberle Crenshaw’s TedTalk on intersectionality. Another devoted a portion of the training to discuss the impact of holding multiple marginalized identities. Both of these cases were coded as “present” for topical references. For visibility, I identified whether or not the images used in each program’s LGBTQA+ trainings included representations of intersectional identities. For example, one of the training handouts depicted a person in a wheelchair while another curriculum used pictures of people of color in their PowerPoint presentation. Both of these examples were considered including visible intersectionality and coded as “present”.
To address the third research question, I determined whether the trainings were connecting individual action to systemic issues and change. In other words, were the programs training allies about how they, as individuals, could affect systemic change? To address this question, I created three codes: Individual +/-, Institutional +/-, and Ind/Inst +/-. The first code, Individual +/-, identified portions of the curriculum encouraging individual action such as including pronouns in interpersonal introductions. The second code, Institutional +/-, identified portions of the curriculum where institutional or systemic issues (such as laws about bathroom usage directed towards transgender individuals) were discussed. One example found in the materials was a medical school that discussed medical documentation and their limitations in including various gender identities. The final code, Ind/Inst +/-, identified portions of the curriculum devoted to discussing how an individual may recognize and address institutional change. This included, for example, scenario work where individuals practiced identifying a systemic issue and then discussing how they as individuals could encourage change.

In order to answer the fourth research question, I identified the activities, discussions, and reflection exercises that would employ practical skill-building. Pedagogically, these exercises of attitude and behavior changes—combined with an understanding of individual and systemic oppression—serve to help trainees reinforce their potential roles in ending oppression. For example, one institution ended their training with a partner discussion where participants were encouraged to identify past or recurring acts of discrimination and then to either practice or discuss with their partner how they might take action. This was coded as a practical skill-building and considered a pedagogical practice inclusive of various reactions from participants.

Finally, to address the fifth research question, I identified whether or not each program offered additional trainings or if they provided additional resources on their websites or in their
training manuals. If programs had multiple trainings or they included other learning materials, this was coded as “present”.

Findings

Defining Allyship

My first research question addressed how higher education institutions are defining allyship. In order to address this question, I identified all defining terms about allyship used in the materials provided to trainees and the university’s corresponding website. In all, this yielded videos, online descriptions, and handouts for analysis. There were a number of interesting findings in my analysis. First, the terms “allyship” and “ally” seemed to be used interchangeably with the term “safe zone” in much of the materials. Overall, there were few distinguishable differences in their descriptions and they were frequently used in the place of one another. In other words, according to the descriptions being used for these training sessions there are no differences in the role of an Ally and a Safe Zone. It was surprising to find these terms being used interchangeably as they are two different, and distinctly important, concepts—Allyship being a role to fulfill and the Safe Zone an atmosphere that is created. I further consider these overlapping terms in their use of descriptive words in my next finding.

Next, I found that, overall, universities used action-based words and passive-based words in their definitions, however, the latter were used much more frequently. Passive words such as ‘support’, ‘awareness’, and ‘understanding’ were the most frequent words used to describe the
Ally or Safe Zone role and appeared in all but two of the descriptions. Overall, there were few active words used in the definitions. The most frequent active word used in these definitions was ‘create,’ which usually referred to teaching trainees to “create” a safe/inclusive environment or tools and skills. This implies that taking action is defined as a necessary condition for fulfilling the ally role. I found six additional action-based words in the definitions: ‘practice’, ‘advocate’, ‘collaborate’, ‘learn’, ‘challenge’, and ‘change.’ Although these words are encouraging and inspiring on the surface, they lack specificity, leaving the door open to individuals to wonder what exactly their role may be or how to take action in that role. For example, one university used the term, Safe Zone, describing the role in this way: “to facilitate a collaborative effort… to create safe spaces for members of the LGBTQ+ communities”. Although the description encourages collaboration, which likely meant within the LGBTQIA+ community, they provided no further description of how collaboration could occur or what ‘safer spaces’ actually might look like. In fact, the curriculum focused primarily on vague terminology and broad concepts (e.g. gender binary). Without any significant time spent on understanding levels oppression and practice identifying and confronting acts of discrimination, the trainings leave participants believing that terminology and statistics are the main tools needed for being an ally. An open definition may be used for flexibility of individual actions, but the accompanying curriculum must support critical reflection and encourage continual action.

One university approaches this careful balance by using a somewhat vague, but effective, description of what they called the “Allies in Action Program,” stating that their role is primarily focused on encouraging participants to “pledge to be supportive and affirming.” In contrast with the others, this university, in contrast to the others, included specific goals and objectives for the training that provided more context for their description. Specifically, they offered:
1. Change your role in conversations,
2. Create and share tools you can use to affirm, intervene, and create new policies/practices
3. Prepare/support you as intersectional educators for campus climate change work in your spaces
4. Prepare you to describe intersectional advocacy, how affirming LGBTQIA+ people and women requires affirming people of color, people with disabilities, undocumented people, and people of more than one of these identities.

This university used these goals and objectives to frame their training. The first two points were addressed in their first training “interpersonal allyship” and the second two covered under “organizational allyship.” Overall, they offered broad goals and followed up with concepts, activities, and videos that further helped to complexify the simple descriptions. This approach stood above the others because it focused on helping participants to understand allyship in a variety of ways. First, their curriculum went beyond simply introducing terminology and broad statistics by focusing on changing a person’s role. While no specific actions are stated in their definitions, it is flexible and forthright enough to illustrate what allies should do in any given situation that may call for an ally. Just by viewing point number one, “change your role in conversations,” the training clearly communicates that allies must take action and that passivity is unacceptable in their new role. Overall, this university’s definition and curriculum help us see that ally trainings should rely on a critical definition of allyship to inform practice, a definition which balances individual and interpersonal work that affects organizations and broader influences.

Another university used a similar approach, basing their description of an Ally directly on Anne Bishop’s model. Specifically, they state that an ally is:

a person whose commitment to dismantling oppression is reflected in the willingness to do the following: educate oneself about oppression; Learn from and listen to people who are targets of oppression; Examine and challenge one’s own guilt, shame, and defensiveness…; learn and practice skills of challenge oppress[ion]…; act collaboratively with members of the target group to dismantle oppression (Bishop).
Like the previous university, they list this definition in steps. Each step builds upon the others. This provides flexibility for the participant while also complicating over-simplistic narratives, such as “create an inclusive environment.” In their official curriculum, they expounded upon this process by drawing direct parallels between the steps and their definition, focusing first on terminology and statistics, but then moving quickly into actionable tasks. In effect, they first seek to educate participants on the language and terminology of oppression and marginalization in the LGBTQA+ community. This taken alone would not be a sufficiently critical step towards allyship and can arguably be labeled as simple cultural competency training. However, this university also included additional content such as a student panel, a short Q&A (learn and listen), a privilege exercise, a reflection of homophobic attitudes (examine and challenge the self), and ended with scenario work which tasked participants with creating a plan of action to take back to their respective spaces on campus (skills of challenging oppression). The confluence of these approaches reinforces participants’ understanding of allyship by first defining it and then deliberately using that definition to teach the material and further cement the complexity of the ally role.

In short, my findings show that there are many inconsistencies in the various definitions that universities use in their Ally trainings and that they lack specificity in general. At the same time, I found that some curriculums used vague definitions with accompanying curriculums to strategically complicate the role of allyship for their participants by building from simple statements to a more complex training focused on providing trainees with a more holistic understanding of the role of ally. In short, those loose definitions ended up creating spaces for participants to discover and decide their own way of engagement, making allyship both more complex and flexible.
Intersectionality

My second research question asked if ally trainings explicitly addressed the concept of intersectionality both topically and visually in their training materials. Intersectionality is important to include in these trainings because they help to illustrate the complexity of LGBTQ+ identities. At first, I was impressed to see so many institutions including intersectionality, as five out of the eight curriculums mentioned intersectionality in some respect. However, upon further inspection, those five universities varied widely in the amount of space they spent on the subject. Three of the five curriculums included intersectionality topically. The first university mentions intersectionality directly once by sharing a TedTalk addressing intersectionality. They provided no other prompts or slides, so it seems that the video was the only learning tool utilized for teaching about intersectionality. The second university, which used an online platform, dedicated one page of their training defining intersectionality and its impact on individuals. It was not mentioned in any other pages. The third university included several slides illustrating intersectional identities by addressing how queer identities and experiences changed based on the individuals’ racial and cultural backgrounds. Along with the slides, this curriculum also depicted intersectional identities for each identity they discussed. Overall, the topical coverage of intersectionality in these trainings were inconsistent in scope and depth. By quickly brushing through intersectionality, these curriculums promote a simplistic narrative of LGBTQ+ experiences.

In terms of visual representation of intersectionality in training materials, I only found two additional curriculums. In most cases, the programs used images of a person of color to illustrate this intersection of identity. In one case, the university used a cartoon figure of a person in a wheelchair. Another used a silhouette of someone wearing a hijab. That said, not one of them explicitly addressed the importance of the visuals in their materials. Furthermore, in the
case of one university, intersectionality was actively set aside. Specifically, they dedicated one educational slide to inform their trainees that although there are many factors that go into a person’s identity, they would only be focused on the aspect of being LGBTQA+ for the sake of simplicity. Overall, these trainings display a rushed “mastery of knowledge” in favor of immediate application. However, this limits the participants understanding of how intersectionality plays a role in discrimination and oppression. Ultimately leaving the participant unprepared for the role of ally.

**Individual vs Institutional Action**

My third research question sought to determine the balance of attention that universities focused on individual allyship versus training individuals to affect institutional change. From my reading of all of the curriculums, I found that seven out of eight of the curriculums focused primarily on individual allyship training, or as one university called it, “interpersonal allyship,” over training individuals to affect broader, institutional change. Again, a significant portion of the curriculums were spent on introducing terminology and concepts, statistics of discrimination, and on teaching trainees about the concept of privilege. Furthermore, the majority of the scenario work also focused on the interpersonal or individual aspects of allyship. Specifically, they tended to focus on training people on how to support LGBTQA+ students directly, engaging with discriminatory comments that non-LGBTQA+ individuals make, and on training individuals on how to use correct pronouns.

At the same time, the majority of the curriculums only briefly mentioned institutional or systemic issues. Out of the eight curriculums, only four spent time spent addressing systemic issues, levels of oppression (especially organizational and cultural), cycles of socialization, or their own university’s institutional policies. Furthermore, even when the curriculum addressed these systemic issues, they subsequently paid little attention to training individuals on how to
change those issues. In fact, only three of the eight programs spent any significant time on
discussing how an individual can impact institutional oppression. For example, one university
spent a significant portion of the training on addressing “Structural Systems of Oppression and
Intersectionality.” Their focus was to train individuals on how to identify microaggressions in
both interpersonal and systemic levels. They then gave examples of how individuals could
directly address them at each level. Another university focused on addressing levels of
oppression—intentional, unintentional, and systemic—with corresponding scenario work to
reinforce the idea. The third university also focused part of their training speaking to the impact
that Post-Secondary Educational leaders can have on campus climate, identifying what
institutional and systemic oppression may look like, and suggesting actionable tasks for their
personal “allyship toolbox.” Of these three “best practice” cases, only one focused on the
relationship between the individual ally and systemic issues, while the other two lacked a solid
connection between the individual and the institution. It is important to note, however, that the
analysis of the written content lacks the review of actual facilitator talking points during the
training, so it is entirely possible that this connection is present in those sessions. Overall, my
analysis found that ATPs are spending a significant amount of time on the interpersonal aspects
of allyship (e.g. the individual’s assumptions, understanding, and subsequent actions), which is,
indeed, a necessary first step in an allyship journey. At the same time, my analysis suggests that
more work is needed across ally training programs to further solidify the connection between the
individual and institutional change.

**Practical Skills Development**

My fourth research question addressed whether university ally training programs allotted
time for participants to develop skills for interrupting individual or institutional oppression.
Practical skills development was defined as any activity or time during the training session for
participants to practice or reflect on the actions they would take as an Ally or Safe Zone. Out of the eight curriculums, five included practical skill development, two did not include any discernible framework or activities, and one institution did not provide enough information to know either way. The most popular activity was scenario work, where participants would be given scenarios and then directed to discuss possible actions that they as allies could take to solve the problems. Specifically, three out of the five institutions with practical skills development activities included some form of scenario work in their training sessions. The second most common activity—employed by two institutions—was to direct participants to practice introducing themselves with pronouns and then asking for pronouns from others. Another institution had an activity focused on instructing participants on how to identify microaggressions, both individual and institutional, and discussing ways of addressing them. The remaining activities I found in these training sessions were mainly focused on identifying participants’ privilege or reflecting on their levels of attitude. These activities were not included as practical skill building exercises. While these activities are critical for individual change, they are not actionable skills to be used when fulfilling the role of ally.

However, I found no solid evidence to suggest that practical skills training in any of these institutions included any activities focused on training participants on how to interrupt systemic issues. One university did end their training with a small group discussion prompt stating “identify one barrier for [LGBTQA+ individuals] on campus or in the community and share an idea of how we might change it”. This is a step in the right direction, but it comes off as an afterthought instead of a central part of the training because it was at the end of the training. Furthermore, considering this was the only curriculum that included any form of discussion on
this matter, it suggests that this is a need that is going unfilled in many, or even most, ally trainings.

**Additional Training**

My final research question addressed whether universities offered any additional training for their ally trainees beyond the initial training session. The findings were somewhat encouraging. Four of the eight curriculums either included further training or advertised other training available to participants. Two of those universities advertised identity specific trainings available, such as a Trans 101. One of the university’s trainings all focused on the healthcare profession and therefore included further training in that area including “LGBTQ+ Trauma-Informed Care” and “Practicing Gender Neutral Patient Care.” Another university addressed above, had their training already split into two parts, interpersonal and organizational, and provided a list of eight additional trainings including identity-specific trainings, histories, and intersectionality. All universities that offered additional trainings made them theme-specific, focused on helping participants pick the areas in which they want to further develop and learn.

**Discussion**

There are a number of important findings in this study. First, I found that allyship definitions still tend to lack criticality and specificity. This was common in most cases. I also found that some universities have remedied this by using phased and buildable definitions to inform their learning objectives and curriculum goals. Second, I found that university ally trainings tended to only lightly discuss intersectionality. Furthermore, intersectionality was addressed inconsistently between curriculums. It is, therefore, likely that the subject of intersectionality tended to be added more as an afterthought than a core component in training allies. Third, I found that ATP curriculums tend to be laser-focused on individualistic allyship.
Instances of systemic or institutional change were mentioned in few trainings, but few of them explicitly instructed individuals in how to affect institutional change. Fourth, most skill-building techniques rely solely on scenario and discussion work. The programs provided no other activities or exercises in their trainings to help participants build skills for the role of ally. Finally, additional trainings and information were either absent or sparse. Most of these trainings were an hour to three hours in duration. This seems an insufficient amount of time to prepare people for their roles as allies. Without additional training or information, participants will likely to assume that a single training is sufficient to become an effective ally.

There are also a number of important implications related to the findings in this study. When I began my research, I expected that University ATPs would tend to define allyship in vague terms and that there would be inconsistencies across university programs. Overall, I wanted to see if there was a way to help clarify, and perhaps standardize, that definition for ATP programs. I did not find a standardized definition or method of defining allyship. In fact, the universities defined allyship in vague and varying terms, but did have some overlap in the words they used in their definitions. However, two of the definitions were successful because they allowed for flexibility and criticality. This way of defining allyship helps to keep the role applicable yet complicated. In the words of Jack Halberstam, defining such a role “raise[s] questions about the ability to name to capture all the nuances of human identification” (2). In other words, defining the allyship role may limit the possibility of individuals engaging in the work of dismantling oppression. A concrete definition also eliminates the roots of queer identities, theory, and embodiment. To provide a clear definition of allyship could be seen as an attempt to make such a role static and rigid, which makes engagement or performance of this
role difficult or impossible to maintain for the individual. Vikki Reynolds puts it best as she ties allyship and queer theory together and concludes:

“Queer theory frees us from taking on being an ally as a static identity, which could require being perfect and always getting it right. Queer theory invites fluidity, movement from the fixed and certain to the confused and unstable. This is exciting for ally work because it acknowledges that we can all be allies to each other in a constant flow depending on our contexts and relationships of power” (13).

Therefore if there is to be one, a definition must be open to movement and reinforce the idea that “becoming an ally is not a developmental process… [but] always becoming an ally” (Reynolds 15). The use of steps or phases, utilized by two universities in this study, would be an excellent approach to define allyship simply yet promote a buildable, critical, and fluid role. I identified this trend as something more universities should incorporate in one way or another and perhaps a format to which future allies training programs could eventually become. If allyship trainings came in multiple training packages, participants could then progress and learn in a structured system that provided them with a more in-depth understanding of intersectional identities, more practice with skill development, and more opportunities to explore their own attitudes and prejudices. Therefore, a definition of allyship can be found through the individual spending time engaging in exploration, reflection, and continual re-visitation of the multi-phased definition of allyship with the help of a facilitator and intentional content.

Creating a framework that begins with allyship as fluid and contextual helps participants apply this role to all forms of oppression. In other words, if framed in this way we can apply the role of allyship to the LGBTQA+ community towards other marginalized communities because participants will have the understanding that allyship relies on context and positionality. We can then center the critical ideas of Kimberle Crenshaw, Ibram X Kendi, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic which remind us that oppression is also interconnected, fluid, and intersectional.
Currently, and as noted in the findings of this study, allies training curriculums are lacking in both consistency and clarity when it comes to intersectionality. Although it is highly encouraged to include time in our trainings for this topic, further research and review should be conducted to determine what activities or discussion prompts will prove effective in teaching about intersectionality. One strategy that may be utilized can work in tandem with my next implication.

My findings confirmed that ally trainings are still chiefly operating off a first-order change model, meaning they are focused primarily on the individual and little thought is given to institutional change. While individual work is important, it fails to prepare participants to address institutionalized discrimination and therefore lasting change. Focusing too much on the individual may support small safe spaces on campus; however, it does little to improve the overall campus community. On top of self-reflection and awareness, we must dedicate more time in our trainings to educate participants on systemic oppression. Not only will this open the possibility of discussing intersectionality more in-depth, this approach will also help alleviate angry or guilt-prone participants who tend to disengage with the material. In a way, curriculums can be designed to help facilitators to ease participants through the already difficult process of confronting their own homophobia, racism, and other discriminatory biases while also encouraging them to attain a systemic perspective on allyship.

Furthermore, my findings suggest that participants of ally training programs may still walk away unprepared to act in their new role due to a lack of practical skill-building. My research shows that practical skill building, when present in the curriculum, relied heavily on scenario work and discussion. While these practices can be excellent teaching tools, ally training programs need to cater to the various types of learners and should, therefore, employ a variety of strategies to prepare participants with usable skills. Not only does skill-building need to appear
more frequently in our trainings, they must also appear in several different forms. To name only a few, ATPs could expand their approaches to include activities such as real-time role-playing and learning psychological tools to cope with discomfort and defensiveness.

Finally, I noted that most of the curriculums relied on a one-time training that lasted one to three hours and they provided only a few options or resources to participants in order for them to further their education. While additional trainings and resources are helpful, perhaps a more effective approach would be to expand trainings into more multi-phased program, which incorporates these resources in the base training. This way participants can engage more deeply in each section of the curriculum instead of having a brief introduction to difficult topics such as privilege, systems of oppression, and intersectionality, only to then be left to their own devices to round out their education. A more robust, multifaceted training seems ideal. Of course, not everything can be included, so ATPs should still have a robust offering of additional resources and education materials. Once fully trained, participants may continue to learn and explore on their own.

Allies training programs are an integral part of inclusion efforts made at institutions of higher education. However, there is a lot of work needed in order to properly prepare would-be allies to critically understand their role and make effective changes within themselves and their institutions. It must begin with a layered definition of allyship, the inclusion of intersectionality and systems of oppression in curriculums, and more opportunities for participants to build valuable skills. Implementing these changes in a phased curriculum will take more time for participants to complete but will better prepare them for their ally role. In Appendix A, I have included a curriculum I designed to attempt to address these needs more robustly. The training curriculum, which is based online and lasts seven weeks, focuses on the concept of allyship and
systemic oppression over time so that participants do not have to absorb the information in a single, four-hour training. I chose these two concepts as the foci for the training course in order to encourage facilitators and participants to complicate the narrative of allyship and illuminate the layered nature of oppression that allies must help the oppressed tackle and change. This course is online for several reasons. First, the asynchronous nature of online learning accommodates the need for more time spent on these topics while also adhering to staff and faculty’s busy schedule. Second, online learning platforms also encourage the participants to direct their own engagement with the material. Third, as discussed previously, participants attend allies trainings with various perspectives and backgrounds that can help or inhibit their openness to the material. By putting the training online, therefore, participants can dive in or take a step back as needed. All the while, participants are guided by the instructor who can act as a mentor and coach as issues and questions arise over time and as participants see the concepts play out in their everyday lives. Finally, in this format, participants will also have access to many more learning materials—including readings, discussions, and journals—that can help them fully understand and apply the learning objectives. Overall, this format encourages extensive reflection and various check-in points so that participants can bounce ideas off expert facilitators. The online curriculum is a suggestion for how we may begin to change the way we educate our potential allies and will hopefully adapt and change with input and critique. Our ally training programs must take on more critical perspectives and encourage lasting change in our universities.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Online Allyship Training for Faculty and Staff

Why Online?

In order to address some of these concerns, I offer a seven week online training geared towards staff and faculty in higher education. In *The Online Teaching Survival Guide*, they list out some key components that also highlight why an online platform would be even more beneficial.

1) “The [instructor] role shifts to more coaching, guiding, and mentoring” (Boettcher and Conrad 8). This is in line with allyship trainings because it is often a fellow colleague or the LGBTQA+ staff from a designated center that offer these trainings. They do act as an instructor but the role should be more about guiding and mentoring participants through the difficult content as it is more personal and individualistic than academic.

2) “Learners are more active and direct more of their own learning experiences” (8). Many facilitators of these trainings have a love-hate relationship with the idea that all staff and faculty should be required to take a Safe Zone or Allies training. The reason being that many talk about the value of voluntary learning about these concepts, or in other words, those who talk these courses voluntarily are less likely to be defensive towards the content and utilize the time to be self-reflexive. In fact, allyship is an individual journey and requires each person to consider their role and path in different ways. With an online course, participants can take the extra time needed to navigate the content and concepts in their own way, making the curriculum that much more meaningful.

3) “Content resources are flexible and virtually infinite” (9). Although the guide is quick to point out how overwhelming the options can be, they also provide an excellent point about utilizing characteristic number two and the “greater variety and sourcing of content resources”. The instructor of this course can direct participants to multiple resources for their own education of oppression. One of the tenants of critical allyship, that I will talk about later, is that learning is continuous and self-directed. Participants in this course will be able to access a listing of multiple resources that speak to their own interests - a practice that is offered through one of the projects of the course.

4) “Learning environments for gathering and dialogue are primarily asynchronous with occasional synchronous meetings” (9). Offering this training online provides the opportunity for participants to explore the concepts of allyship in depth and engage in conversations with an instructor and fellow learners asynchronously - meaning they can do the work but adhering to their individual schedules. This eliminates the pressure to cover incredible amounts of content in three hours, to seven entire weeks! The extra time also allows for participants to work together on collaborative projects or ideas that further inform their understanding of allyship.

5) “Assessment is continuous” (10). Another struggle that many facilitators of these trainings face is accurate assessment of their training. Many utilize a pre and posttest for their trainings, however, with the previously mentioned gaps, one test is difficult to measure the complicated nature of a much need-to-be-complicated idea.

Goals and Objectives
For this online training, content will focus broadly on understanding oppression and the potential ally’s role in that system as well as a focus on building skills of self-examination and advocacy; a vital necessity for being seen as an ally by students and colleagues. I outline the reasons for these foci in the following four course goals.

**Goal 1) Participants will have a firm understanding of oppression and how it works in their own circles.** Popular educator, Anne Bishop has described a variety of participants she has seen in her allyship trainings. She designates participants into three groups: The “backlashers”, who deny the existence of systemic oppression and the privilege they may hold within that system (blinded by privilege or downplaying oppression); The “guilty”, who personalize the issue and become defensive and paralyzed (fearing the responsibility for change); The “learners” or “allies” who use any opportunity to learn more and then act on what they learn (Bishop 87). Overall, those found resistant to the content were often unable to separate themselves from the oppressive structures held in place by our society. For example, they could not distinguish between “I am a racist” and “I am racist because I was brought up in a racist society.” In *White Fragility* by Angela DiAngelo, she ties the defensive attitudes to underlying and binary assumptions such as to be a racist is bad and to not be one is good. This doesn’t leave a lot of room for individuals to separate themselves from a system they had no part in creating, but that they have every bit of a role in perpetuating. Therefore the first goal of this training is to help participants understand the multilayered complexity of oppression as a both an invisible system and something they can work to disrupt.

**Goal 2) Participants will develop a critical understanding of allyship and amply reflect on their own ability to engage in the role.** After gaining an understanding of oppression, the training will focus on defining allyship - a major gap in previous trainings. I utilize multiple sources to create a more accurate depiction of allyship which relies on hearing from multiple voices and perspectives. If successful in creating a community in the group of participants, the goal is to have a successful “Community of Inquiry” - which “engages [participants] in a combination of dialogue and reflection” (Stewart 68). Throughout the course, the participants are tasked to create their own definition using the content and then reflect on whether or not they are willing to engage in the ally role. It needs to be emphasized that not everyone will be able to or willing to take on allyship. Many scholars, activists, and advocates have stressed the importance of understanding this concept. For those with a marginalized identity, there is often never a choice to opt in or opt out disrupting oppression because it often comes down to advocating for yourself or not. Allies, or those in a privileged position, are provided with this choice and to choose not to engage in the discomfort that comes with disruption is counterintuitive to the allyship role and often critically examined when one wishes to claim that title. In this course, we want participants to make an informed decision of whether or not they wish to (or are able to) commit to this lifelong role.

**Goal 3) Participants will develop skills in discussing difficult topics such as discrimination, oppression, and privilege as it relates to themselves and those around them.** Part of allyship or any advocacy role, is to navigate difficult conversations with others. Whether that be a conversation about the reality of oppression, addressing -isms or -phobias, or receiving feedback, this is not a skill we often take time to develop. Allies must be able to handle these situations in their own unique ways and this requires practice. I heavily rely on the idea of asking the right
questions and social presence in the online forum. Together, these two embody the “managed heart approach” offered by L.S. Williams - an approach that I think can facilitate a bridge between an emotional topic and confronting our own roles in oppression. In their article, they state, “coming literally face-to-face with otherwise abstract concepts can motivate reactions ranging from a brief ‘light-bulb’ moment to a transformative life experience” (128). The course is hopeful to ask the right questions with a trusted community and instructor in order to have participants come “face to face with otherwise abstract concepts”.

Goal 4) Participants will develop skills in advocacy, response, as well as identifying and addressing potential change. Going along with goal three, the training will also educate participants on how to identify opportunities for change and understand exactly how they may play a role in that change. Going back to Anne Bishop’s groups of participants, the “guilty” often become paralyzed with the overwhelming nature of oppression - and I personally think we all go through that phase at some point - so in order to address this the course needs to take time in reminding participants of their own power and their circle of influence. We may personally not be able to change a structural issue, but perhaps we know someone who knows someone. Change happens slowly and overtime, however, it has to start with someone.

Theory Informing Pedagogy

For this course I focus on the Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model, created by Chantelle Bosch. This model is driven by the content and pedagogical moves made by the instructor, making this model ideal for the course as it relies on those two aspects for successful outcomes. Also borrowing from the idea of utilizing “Multiple Intelligences”, this model serves to engage a wide range of learners while also providing multiple ways to engage and reflect on difficult content (Picciano 172). Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model is made up of six modules - content, social/emotional, questioning, evaluation, collaboration, and reflection.

The content module refers to how the content of the course is accessed, delivered, and seen. It is important that this course be on a platform that is easy to navigate so the focus can be on learning. For this particular build, I am envisioning Canvas as the platform as it is what the staff and faculty at Utah State University are familiar. This module also reminds me to include multiple types of content beyond reading articles and responding on a discussion board, such as incorporating video and activities.

The social/emotional module “posits that instruction is not simply about learning content or a skill but also supports students socially and emotionally” (Picciano 180). This is in line with the goals of the course which is to challenge the individual’s inherent contribution to systemic oppression and with that comes social and emotional investment. Combining the content module with social/emotional, I am sure to introduce the prompts each week with a video from the instructor. Using this platform grounds the course in human contact, which can be seen as lacking when on an online platform.

I also encourage participants to do group work both asynchronously and, if able, synchronously at times in the course for both connection to participants and instructor but also for the collaboration module. Collaboration is an important module in the case of allyship as provides practice in enacting second order change, which requires a group effort. As defined by Russel and Bohan, “first-order change is relatively superficial; it aims to modify existing practices but does not challenge institutional structures or hierarchies of power and privilege.
Second-order change, by contrast, is foundational change; it works to alter structures and challenges hierarchies of power” (341). Paired with the content, a social and emotional investment, and collaborative aspect, participants can work together to identify first order from second order and identify ways in which they could theoretically (or legitimately) enact those changes.

For the questioning, reflection, and evaluation purposes I rely on the discussion boards and participants personal journals. The journals provide a direct line from participant and instructor to work out high risk queries without the worry of fellow participants commenting while the discussion board can be a place for the group to work out the lower risk questions together. It is vital that both spaces be provided in order to engage participants at multiple levels of engagement.
Training Syllabus

Welcome to the Online Allyship Training course! This course will be addressing in depth the concept of allyship and systemic oppression. This course’s overall goal is to educate as well as prepare individuals to take on the role of allyship. The content, discussions, and activities will be difficult and we invite participants to come to the table to learn and listen to each other. This is one of many important steps towards becoming an ally.

Training Goals:
1. Participants will have a firm understanding of oppression and how it works in their own circles.
2. Participants will develop a critical understanding of allyship and amply reflect on their own ability to engage in the role.
3. Participants will develop skills in discussing difficult topics such as discrimination, oppression, and privilege as it relates to themselves and those around them.
4. Participants will develop skills in advocacy, response, as well as identifying and addressing potential change.

Training Requirements
Think of this as a pass/fail class. At the end of this course, instead of receiving a grade, those who have successfully satisfied the course requirements will receive the much-coveted “allies sticker”. To satisfy the requirements, participants must earn at least 80%.

- Participation/Discussions (40%)
  - Participation includes completing the readings and engaging in online discussions throughout the week and will begin with a video introduction by the instructor. Expect to do one post or response per day on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, with a final “take away” journal/blog post on Friday. Monday is your day to do your readings and reflect on the discussion prompts. Please be sure to practice self-care and take your weekends to relax.

- Activities (20%)
  - Some weeks you will be asked to participate in a collaborative online activity as an entire group or in smaller pairs. This may require you to schedule with others a time to collaborate synchronously online or in person. The weeks that these activities are being held, it is important to participate in order to fully engage in the discussion.

- Journal/Blog (10%)
At the end of each week, you are to post a short journal-type blog post on a designated discussion board. Only you and the instructor will see this. This is a space to talk about what you have thought about the past week, what questions you have, or simply a space to process. The instructor may or may not comment on your posts so please state whether or not you are open to having that dialogue on your post.

- Final Project (30%)
  - For the final project, you will be required to create your very own plan of action. This can be done in a variety of ways but must satisfy the following requirements:
    - Oppression is vast and interconnected, but we have to start somewhere. What ism/phobia are you going to learn more in-depth about and what exactly is your plan to educate yourself? Remember to include the actions you can take within your community to begin engaging right away.
    - Reflect on your current position and circle of influence, what can you identify as an opportunity for change and how can you take action?
    - What are your three biggest takeaways from this course and how do they play a part in your plan of action?

Required Texts
- Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People 3rd Edition, by Anne Bishop
- All other readings available via Canvas.

Course Schedule

Week 1 - Preparing Ourselves and Building Community

This week is purely devoted to getting to know the participants and instructors. It is vital that a community and rules of engagement are established for this course as the content will be difficult and rather personal for some. Most of the time will be spent in getting to know each other as well as understanding what is expected for participation.

Weekly objectives:
1. Prepare for the potentially difficult discussions;
2. Build trust amongst the group of participants and instructor;

Readings
- Rules of engagement proposed by instructor
- Diangelo, Robin. White Fragility: Why it’s so hard for white people to talk about race. Chapter 9, pp. 115 – 122.
Discussion/Activity:

- Word Bubble Activity inspired by *White Fragility* (Through PollEverywhere)
  - Participants must submit one-word responses to a prompt before completing their readings. They will be required to do the activity again at the end of the week after the readings and a small discussion. This activity will be both visual as well as (hopefully) build community engagement and trust by seeing that they have similar responses to the content.
- Introduce yourself in 200 words, include a picture of you!
- Why are you in this course (100 words or less)?
- Respond to reading/Prompts about the reading.

**Week 2 - Understanding Oppression and Our Part**

Week 2 will be all about looking at the system of oppression. Again, I include an activity that requires groups to collaborate to further instill a sense of community and learning together. The major goal this week will be to see oppression as a system and the individual as a part of that system, but not the creator.

**Weekly Objectives:**

1. Develop an understanding of how oppression works;
2. Discuss how we perpetuate this oppression in our own ways.

**Readings:**

- Bishop, pp. 14-59.*
- Steele, Claude E. *Whistling Vivaldi: how stereotypes affect us and what we can do.* Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 44-84.
- Rothenburg, Paula S. *White Privilege: essential readings on the other side of racism.* Part 2, chapters 1-3, pp. 29-43

**Discussion/Activity:**

- Oppression matrix (Using Mindmoto)
  - Small pairs or groups of people will get to decide if they would like to schedule time together or work on this asynchronously. They will do a joint post by Wednesday.
  - Activity description found in Bishop reading for this week (pp 14 &15)*
- Discussion - Interconnectedness of oppression;
  - How do you personally perpetuate one of the isms/phobias?

**Week 3 - Critical Understanding of Oppression and Intersectionality**
Weekly Objectives:
1. Understand that oppression works differently depending on identity;
2. Intersectionality and how it complicates experience;

Readings:
- Bishop, pp. 60 – 75
- Rothenburg, pp. 59 – 69

Discussion/Activity:
- Discussion Prompt:
  - How has reading about the different types of discrimination informed your understanding of systemic oppression? What is similar? What is the difference?

**Week 4 - Concrete Understanding of Allyship**

Directly linked to Goal #2, this week is devoted to informing our own definitions of allyship and what exactly constitutes this role. We also discuss allyship on an institutional level.

Weekly Objectives:
- Complicate our understanding of allyship
- How allyship extends to institutions

Readings:
- Bishop, pp. 87-107

Discussion/Activity:
- Discussion Prompt:
  - With this understanding, do you agree or disagree that allyship is not for everyone?
  - How might an individual affect institutional allyship?
  - At the end of the week, in 200 words or less, what would your definition of allyship be?
Week 5 - Challenging Ourselves and Receiving Feedback

Allyship requires self-reflexivity, on-going personal education, and sometimes receiving feedback for a mistake we will eventually make. This week is dedicated to theorizing those scenarios and exploring our thoughts, feelings, and assumptions.

Weekly Objectives:
1. Reflect further on our participation in oppression;
2. Strategies challenging/growing ourselves and receiving feedback;

Readings:
- Bishop, pp. 76-85
- The Royal Society, Understanding Unconscious Bias Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE

Discussion/Activity:
- Group Activity
  - Small groups will be organized, you are tasked to respond to two different case studies and post by Wednesday your reasoning.
- Discussion Prompt:
  - Think of a time you received some feedback or critique. What feelings came about? What underlying assumptions informed those feelings? How did you behave? How might you challenge those thoughts and feelings to be more productive?

Week 6 - Defining Actions and Personal Growth

Weekly Objectives:
1. Start creating a plan of action for your own journey of becoming an ally
2. Identify your circle of influence and potential change;

Readings:
- Bishop, 128-132

Activity/Discussion:
- Activity:
  - Using the handout on pg. 164 in Bishop, being your “building social change strategy plan”;
- Discussion Prompt:
- Post your thoughts on the chapter read this week and brainstorm your plan of action; be sure to incorporate how your strategy plan may incorporate intersectionality.
- What other questions do you have that you would like addressed in our final week?

**Week 7 - Final Projects and Take-Aways**

Weekly Objectives:
1. Present PoA’s and receive feedback for your plan.
2. Wrap up the course and discuss any final questions/thoughts/etc.

Activity/Discussion
- Present your PoA’s as powerpoints, a paper, or infographic - include an overview paragraph for any visual presentations.
- Discuss any final questions/thoughts/ideas.
- Post your top 5 take-aways from the course and submit feedback form for instructor.