

Practice Effective Allyship

This fact sheet contains recommendations on how to practice effective “allyship.” Practicing allyship means, “living your life [in a way] that doesn’t reinforce the same oppressive behaviors [and systems] you’re claiming to be against” (McKenzie, 2013). Rather than an identity, allyship is a practice that needs ongoing work and focus. The suggestions listed below apply to operating in solidarity with and advocating for the rights and well-being of people of different races, cultures, sexes, genders, abilities, ages, faiths, and other identities and affiliations.

Educate Yourself

- Learn to actively listen.
- Observe dynamics of power and privilege.
- Pay attention to who does and does not get positive attention, space, and resources.
- Expand your knowledge and awareness of domestic and global social issues by taking courses or reading books and articles.
- Identify common micro-aggressions and eliminate them from your words & actions.
- Be cognizant of the wide range of cultural and religious holidays, customs (prayer times, Sabbath), associated dietary needs, etc.
- Learn about cultural appropriation and how to avoid doing it.
- Examine ways societal structures include and exclude groups of people.
- Question the perspective of stories.
- Ask about things you do not understand, but do your own research first.
- Practice Accountability

Focus on your impact, not your intent

- Do not claim immunity to criticism if your impact is inadvertently negative. If you are working to ally with a community, you are almost certainly going to make mistakes.
- When you are criticized, use that feedback to ensure you will not make the same mistakes in the future.
- Recognize that acting as an ally shouldn’t require an audience or getting credit/praise.
- Understand the importance of giving something up to ensure that opportunities and resources are distributed more equitably.
- Reflect on your social identity and social location and their associated histories.
- Avoid retreating into privilege when you are tired, overwhelmed, or do not want to engage. Remember that those with less privilege do not have that option.
- Develop authentic relationships.
- Lean into discomfort and consider new perspectives.
- Challenge assumptions, myths, and misperceptions.

Recognize where you have privilege and how that shows up in everyday actions.

Be empowered to intervene when you observe discriminatory or bullying behavior.

Be a Role Model

- Model inclusive language.
- Offer kind and constructive feedback to “call in” (rather than judgement or shame to “call out”) those who may use oppressive language or actions. Assume there is common ground and be willing to engage.
- Resist stereotypes and acknowledge oppressive histories within and outside of your communities.
- Raise awareness around different social issues that are left out of discussions.
- Talk about the “isms” (e.g., racism, ableism, heterosexism, etc.) and the role they play in current issues, decisions, and events.
- Question and critique media bias and representation (or lack thereof) in news and entertainment.
- Create diverse leadership structures and pay attention to social identities represented in structures of power, such as campus administration and government.
- Encourage your clubs, classes, and workplaces to use inclusive practices and policies.
- Support Other Identities and Communities
- Listen and act in accordance with marginalized communities’ voiced needs and requests.
- Affirm identities when you communicate: pronounce names correctly and honor the pronouns an individual uses.
- Listen first—or ask how you can support and help—and then work in solidarity with that community.
- Talk about self-care and share resources.
- Support and help amplify the important work already happening in marginalized communities by leveraging your privilege (e.g., your connections, resources, and access).
- Take up less space in conversations and situations where you hold a privileged identity. Listen more.
- Promote and attend community events that are open to you.
- Respect space intended specifically for different group identities.
- Cite your sources and pay attention to whom you are and are not citing.
- Do not invalidate other experiences by centering yourself or your cause.
- Engage others in communities where you share privilege and social identity.
- Take Action

Make a pledge to practice accountable allyship.

- Create collaborative events with other student organizations that are inclusive of different social identities.
- Vote in student, local, and federal government elections.
- Donate time, talent, labor, and financial resources if you are able.
- Participate in protests, rallies, and marches and be aware of risks that you and others can and cannot take based on your social identities.
- Lobby policy makers. Sign petitions that advocate for socially-just policies and practices.
- Volunteer with organizations led and supported by the community they are serving.

Words Matter

The words we use have an impact on individuals and on our community.

- If you are not sure what term or word to use in a situation, avoid guessing. Either ask directly, or do some homework later on. For example, if you are not clear what pronouns a person uses, you can say, “I use the pronouns she/her/hers. And you?”
- Avoid using slang terms or outdated language that either has negative connotations or that evokes pity or fear (e.g., “foreigner,” “homo,” “handicapped,” “tranny,” “retarded,” “Oriental,” “lame,” “an illegal”).
- Make it a practice to use “people first language” to encourage equality for everyone. For example, say “a person with a disability,” not “a disabled person.”
- Recognize that individuals within a group may use words related to their identity that those outside the group should not use.
 - For example, an LGBTQ person may claim the identity of “Queer,” but that is different from an outsider labeling them “queer.” Similarly, a person with a disability may self-identify as a “crip,” but that does not give permission for others to use the same term.
- Consider sensitivities related to humor.
 - For example, marginalized individuals may use humor as a way to talk about their experiences from their point of view, but it is problematic if someone not of that identity tries to make a similar joke.
- Avoid making assumptions about someone’s lived experiences and/or their desires.
 - For example, do not assume someone with a disability feels burdened or victimized. Avoid saying things like, “You’re so brave for dealing with all you do.”
- Be open to feedback and accept others’ input as an opportunity for self-growth, understanding, and doing better in the future.
- You are going to mistakes. When you do, own it, apologize, and try again.