

Person Submitting Report: Caroline Cottingham
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Institution: Centenary College of LA
Title of Project/Event: Centenary Safe Zone
Date(s) of Project: October 2006 – May 2007
Amount Awarded: \$2500

1. Original Goals and objectives

The original goal of the Centenary Safe Zone project was to create a positive environment on campus where students can celebrate diversity, combat discrimination, and provide safe havens for GLBT individuals. To achieve this goal, this project had the following objectives: a) identify and educate resident advisors, staff members, professors, administration, leaders of organizations, and other figures of authority about homophobia and heterosexism and their impact on college campuses in general and GLBT students specifically; b) implement GLBT sensitivity/Safe Zone training into RA training and faculty/staff orientation; and c) display symbols to identify allies.

2. If goals/objectives changed during the course of the project, please state the revised goals/objectives.

No changes were made in goals/objectives.

3. In what ways were the goals/objectives met? Please give examples.

To advance the first goal, we held two training sessions this spring semester. We had approximately 45 faculty, staff, administration, and students attend. Each session was about two hours. In the first half of each session, Centenary GLBT students spoke about their experiences on campus: Sarah lead an activity to help allies understand why GLBT students may feel unsafe on campus, I explained the roles and guidelines for allies, and Gala Oliver, a local licensed counselor, discussed the social and psychological processes of coming out. In the second half of each session, Dr. David Otto, a professor of religious studies, spoke about the intersection of homosexuality and religion, and Sarah and I lead group discussions in which each group received a hypothetical situation about a particular GLBT student's life. By offering these situations, we hoped to introduce a wide variety of the problems that GLBT students might face while also allowing participants to think through the best methods to help these students.

We held one-on-one training sessions with a few additional faculty members who could not attend the training sessions. We also had several people express interest in attending training sessions next fall, so we have decided to host another training session in September or October of the next year. Fortunately, we have enough training manuals and stickers left over to facilitate more training sessions without additional funding.

We are still in the process of achieving our second goal. RA training takes place in August for the two weeks before the beginning of the semester. New staff/faculty

orientation also takes place during that week. I have spoken to the administration about conducting mini-training sessions during both of these events.

The training sessions also facilitated our third goal. Almost all of the training attendees posted their stickers; a few professors even put up multiple stickers.

I personally received a lot of positive feedback about our program. Several students and professors emailed me to say how much they supported the program. A few seniors and staff members who are graduating or leaving the school even attended the program just to show support or sent messages commending our efforts.

4. Describe the evaluation/assessment process used. Summarize the results of this process? Include any instruments used to evaluate/assess your project.

We used three evaluation tools. In November, prior to training, we began with two focus groups composed of GLBT Centenary students. We used these focus groups as a way of discovering, rather than assuming, the difficulties GLBT students confront. These groups discussed their experiences with any existing homophobia or related problems on campus, along with possible solutions for dealing with these trouble areas. Our second tool was a pre-training survey conducted in January/February of the faculty, staff, resident advisors, and administration to assess their perceptions of and attitudes toward GLBT students and the difficulties they believe these individuals encounter on campus. These two tools evaluated the campus climate instead of our program; they allowed us to pinpoint discrepancies between GLBT students' experiences and what faculty/staff perceived as their experiences. We used the problems discussed in the focus groups to inform and design the training sessions, in conjunction with pre-established procedures from previous Safe Zones at other colleges.

The third tool was a more direct evaluation of the Safe Zone program. We distributed a survey to all the students, faculty, staff, and administration who participated in training. The survey included questions designed to assess what participants learned about their roles as allies and about GLBT individuals. The surveys also included two hypothetical situations in which GLBT students "asked for help." We used these situations to assess whether the training gave allies the correct information and resources to help them prepare for possible situations.

We are still working on the data collection from the focus groups and initial surveys. In the third survey which evaluated the Safe Zone program, the majority of faculty and staff cited that their perceptions of GLBT students changed because they now felt more comfortable with students or they felt more knowledgeable about students' struggles and needs. All but two of the staff and faculty cited the correct tools to use in response to the hypothetical situations. While the majority of the students said their perceptions had not changed (often because they were already GLBT-supportive), they cited the training manual and the direct instructions on allies' roles as the most

important information they had received. All of the students answered the hypothetical situations with responses which showed they were affirmative and knowledgeable about how to handle possible situations.

We will be more than happy to send the ACS a copy of my paper which will include a much more complete data analysis and evaluation of the program when it is complete. The final report and academic paper are still under construction

5. If you were to redesign your project, what would you do differently and why? (What are the “lessons learned?”)

We would definitely take more time to personally invite our professors. A handful of professors told us after the training sessions that they just didn't realize there was a need for this program, but they had attended because we had approached them on a one-on-one basis. I wish we could have talked to more professors, just to hear their thoughts on this. We think more of them would have attended if we could have personally invited them.

We also wish the administration would have been more involved. We had behind the scenes support; Provost Colson helped us considerably to coordinate the program and encourage staff and faculty to attend. But several students and staff/faculty cited a lack of open administrative support as a problem for GLBT students. We should have talked more with the administration about showing institutional support.

We definitely learned to plan a much longer time period for a project. The surveys took more time to distribute, receive back, and collect data from than we had expected. We didn't realize how much time it would take to put together a project of this size, especially when both Sarah and I had full class loads, work schedules, and other organizations and activities we were involved in. We wish that we had more time to plan, but we really do feel like our program was effective. Almost every individual who participated in training had a strong idea of how to handle the hypothetical situations we asked in the survey. Hearing faculty, staff, and students discuss the program and ask more questions about GLBT students makes me feel like we raised enough support and awareness for the program that it will be easier for incoming students to hear about and access help and resources.

6. How have you shared the results with ACS colleagues and beyond ACS?

We are still working on this step. Based on the results of the focus groups and the surveys, we will present recommendations to the Centenary administration regarding how to improve the campus to better the academic habits of GLBT students through accommodating their other needs. The recommendations will include: (1) formalizing this training into RA training and new staff/faculty orientation so that it will occur

annually without additional reform; (2) identifying problem areas on campus that exist; and (3) presenting possible solutions to addressing these problems.

We plan on using the procedures, training manual, and evaluation results from Safe Zone to present an analysis of the effects of this program. While we are still working with the data and formulating the results of this study, we hope to ultimately present a piece on the difficulties of diversity training using the Centenary Safe Zone as a case study.

We plan to present these results at the next ACS Gender Studies' Conference in 2008. We envision a possible roundtable discussion including students from other ACS (and non-ACS) colleges which have implemented a similar program to Safe Zone. Ideally, we would discuss the need for such programs, how they have benefited our schools, and how we can improve on the already existing procedures.

We are also looking into presenting the results of our study at other conferences, such as the annual LSU Women and Gender Studies' Conference (which Sarah and I both presented papers at last spring).

7. What are the next steps (follow-up) in your project?

Currently, we are working on data collection from both surveys along with extensive research on other Safe Zone programs, diversity problems and solutions, and the effectiveness of our program versus others. I will eventually compile all this research and data analysis into a paper on the utility and challenges of diversity training for small liberal arts campuses using Centenary's program as a case study. Dr. Wolkomir continues to assist and guide me in this study of the Centenary Safe Zone program. We hope to prepare this paper to present at conferences in 2008.

We are preparing the trainings for RA training prior to fall semester and new staff/faculty orientation along with putting together our list of recommendations to the administration, which we hope to present at the beginning of fall semester. We are also planning a third (and possibly fourth) training for next fall semester.

8. A complete financial statement, showing original budget (the breakdown of the amount awarded) and expenditures.

Budget:	
Phase I	absorbed
Phase II	\$2500
Phase III	none
Phase IV	none
Phase V	none
Total	\$2500

Phase I costs were absorbed by those working on the project. Phase II has a total cost of \$2500. These costs include \$1350 for the printing of the Safe Zone Manuals, \$750 to pay Dr. Nelson and Gala Oliver for their assistance in editing the Training Manuals and putting on the Safe Zone Training, and \$400 for the cost of snacks and supplies for those being trained. Phase III, IV, and V have no costs. The total budget is \$2500.

Actual Budget:

Phase I	absorbed
Phase II	\$2500
Phase III	none
Phase IV	none
Phase V	none
Total	\$2500

The total costs came to: \$376 for food/supplies; \$500 for Gala Oliver for her assistance in editing the Training Manuals and speaking at both training sessions; \$200 for Dr. David Otto, a Centenary professor of religious studies who spoke at both training sessions about the intersection of homosexuality and religion; \$136 for the printing of the Safe Zone stickers; \$1200 for the printing of the Safe Zone Manuals. The leftover money, about \$88, will go to supplies and food for the fall semester Safe Zone Trainings.

9. Please include a summary of your work that may be included on the ACS Diversity website.

Across campuses in the U.S., gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual students (GLBT) often struggle with harassment, threatening situations, and feelings of alienation. As a result, these students may find it hard to get the most from their college education. To begin to address this problem on our campus, the Centenary Safe Zone project set out to provide educational training for heterosexual/GLBT allies who will then be able to support and counsel GLBT individuals. Allies attended one training session and received a training manual which offered resources to allies to help the understand and meet GLBT students' needs. The training sessions also addressed issues such as: the importance of equality, the roles of allies in supporting and establishing social justice, how to deal with discrimination, etc. After completion, trainees received "Safe Zone" stickers which marked their office/residence as a place where individuals can come for help, answers, and support. A condensed version of this training will also be offered to new RA's and new staff/faculty as part of their yearly training. The training and seminars will hopefully help deter incidents such as gay bashing, name-calling, and other acts of hostility by promoting an atmosphere of inclusiveness and diversity at Centenary. Ultimately, we hope this program will provide a group of easily identifiable allies on campus which closeted and open GLBT students can turn to for support and resources.

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Final reports are due within 30 days of the end of the grant period and may be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to ACS Diversity Initiative, 1975 Century Blvd., Suite 10, Atlanta, GA 30345. Fax: 404-636-9558.