

Mission Statement--UM-St. Louis Safe Zone program

The UM-St. Louis Safe Zone program serves to identify and train faculty, staff, and students who are sensitive and affirmative to the needs of sexual minorities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex persons. Our ultimate goal is to reduce the incidence of heterosexism and homophobia on our campus through education, thereby promoting a campus that is a safer and freer place for all, regardless of sexual orientation.

Safe Zone programs--a brief history

Although it is unclear where the idea for a campus "Safe Zone" initiated, the earliest documented program is the Ball State "SAFE On Campus" program, which began during 1992-1993. Since then, Safe Zones have emerged across the country. Currently, about 125 U.S. colleges and universities are identified as having some type of "Safe" program on campus. A common feature among these programs is the identification of LGBT allies through the use of a sticker, sign, or badge. Those who see these stickers will know that the people displaying them are open and affirmative about discussing matters of sexual orientation. On some campuses, Safe Zone volunteers undergo a training program to increase their awareness of LGBT issues.

Safe Zone at UM-St. Louis

The Safe Zone program at UM-St. Louis held its first training session in April of 2004. The training is modeled after both the Virginia Association of College and University Housing Officers' (VACUHO) "Safe Zone Virginia" project and the Safe Zone Virginia chapters at the College of William & Mary and the University of Richmond.

Participation in the UM-St. Louis Safe Zone program is completely voluntary. Those who are interested in becoming Safe Zone participants are asked to attend a three-hour training session. During the session, participants will be given a Safe Zone logo, which they may display in their office, dorm room, etc. The logo does not indicate a person's particular sexual orientation; it merely demonstrates that one is gay-affirming or gay-friendly (in other words, an ally).

The logo for the UM-St. Louis Safe Zone program features a rainbow triangle inside a green circle. The triangle is a widely-recognized symbol within the LGBT community. It is based on the inverted triangles worn by gay and lesbian prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, and serves as a reminder of solidarity in the midst of oppression. The Safe Zone triangle takes its colors from the rainbow flag, which is another symbol of pride, unity, and diversity within the LGBT community. The green circle enclosing the triangle symbolizes openness and safety.

We do not expect Safe Zone participants to be experts in the areas of sexual orientation, gender, psychology, or counseling. The main responsibility of a Safe Zone participant is to serve as a supportive and affirmative point of contact for questions related to sexual orientation. Participants may be asked questions by persons on campus who identify as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are unsure about their sexual orientation. Some questions or comments may also come from those who are curious about the Safe Zone program, or from students, faculty, or staff with rejecting views of sexual minority persons. Posting a Safe Zone sticker provides a challenge to societal homophobia and helps to create a more welcome and affirming campus environment.

The following resource manual is created for all Safe Zone participants to use as a reference. The manual includes a list of resources specifically geared towards the LGBT community, as well as other kinds of information about sexual orientation issues. For additional information, please see the UM-St. Louis Safe Zone website: www.umsl.edu/~safezone.