Gay-Straight Alliance holds anti-bullying rally

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Recommended Citation
Gay-Straight Alliance holds anti-bullying rally
BY NANCY LAVIN
News Editor

The University of Rhode Island Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) teamed up with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Center to hold a rally protesting harassment and cyberbullying.

More than 40 students, faculty and staff came to the "Love is Louder" rally held in Atrium 1 of the Memorial Union on Wednesday. The rally was held in response to a series of derogatory Facebook posts on the URI Class of 2013 page.

"This individual, or group, made a fake account to post not just homophobic remarks, but ones that were racist, misogynist, sexist and bigoted," president of GSA Brian Sit said. "It's important that we show the students on our campus that we're not alone in our struggles, and we're not alone in our support."

Sit was one of the principle organizers behind the rally, working to delegate responsibilities and also heading the graphic design aspects of the protest.

"Students, faculty and staff sing 'When You Find Yourself Offended' at the 'Love is Louder' anti-bullying rally held yesterday in the Memorial Union Atrium."

Sit said he agreed, explaining that URI is lucky to have such a strong support group on campus.

"It's great to have people who are willing to use the university slogan, 'Think Big,' not just about themselves, but those around them," he said. "No man is an island and when one of us gets hurt, it's all of us."

In addition to the university, Sit said several student groups, such as Exposnre and the Asian Student Association, vocalized support for the protest and its message.

Chief Diversity Officer Abu Bakr also attended the rally, speaking to students about his personal and professional experiences regarding the importance of non-violence.

Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, he said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Bakr added that it is situations like these when the character of individuals and of the university can be dangerous.

"The contest originated with a generous endowment in 1993 by Edmund S. Rumowicz, a member of the URI community, and the contest is held annually to promote the work of URI English students," Resto said. "The contest is open to all URI students, and the winners are announced in the fall."
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**Rally**

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university as a whole is truly judged.

"We are always faced with a very difficult choice," he said. "First is to do the easy thing, and that is to strike back with the very weapon that has been used against us. What is much more difficult, infinitely, is to strike back at a force that's ultimately much more powerful and brings people together instead of tearing people apart."

In addition to the administration, students and faculty were eager to vocalize their support.

"This is a very important issue for me because I've known a lot of people who've gone through bullying, and I've gone through it myself," senior Ben Migreter said. "It's a very personal issue, it's a horrible thing."

Campus police Maj. Stephen Baker added that he thought it was important for the university to have a rally protesting what happened and he was glad to be a part of it.

"We quite often get the calls when bad things happen, but we also want to be involved in helping to make things better," he said.

Sit concluded the rally by encouraging students to counter the negative comments with a positive attitude.

"What we can do is show that love is louder, that love more than anything can overcome all these hateful things," he said.

**Alumni**

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active assistant to the president, Bakr is also the associate vice president for Community, Equity, and Diversity. His role is to listen to the qualms and queries from the Equity Council, the President's Commission of the Status of Women and the LGBTQ Council. According to Bakr, these departments advise him on issues that may be occurring on campus and recommend options that should be taken to fix the problem.

"Working with these departments has been a great experience," Bakr said. "It's a great way to promote inclusion."

Bakr believes that the president's commitment to establishing resources pertaining to diversity has given URI an advantage when it comes to being a more inclusive university. For example, Bakr referred to the fact that architects have been hired to make a new LGBTQ center, which is scheduled to be completed by Fall 2013. It is important, according to Bakr, for these centers to have structures in order to solidify their presence on campus.

"A lot of universities are establishing themselves when it comes to diversity issues," Bakr said. "URI has a leg up. We have the resources and the structures to support and sustain diversity. All of the work these councils are doing is a major step forward to progress."

In order for progress to continue, Bakr stressed that students must play an essential role in becoming active in promoting change, awareness and diversity.

"When a student leaves the university, they become part of a global diversity," Bakr said. "It's important for students to prepare themselves for that change and become sensitive to these issues now. That's how change is sustained."

**Contests**

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The Nancy Potter essay contests' cover page should include the title of the contest being entered, the title of the piece and whether or not it was used as a class assignment, along with the author's name, address, email, phone number and degree status.

The Rumowicz essay is recommended to be five to 20 pages long.