

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of various geometric shapes and patterns. It features a dark purple base color, overlaid with numerous colorful elements including circles, ovals, and elongated bars in shades of blue, teal, orange, yellow, and light purple. Some shapes have a dotted or concentric line texture, while others are solid. The overall effect is dynamic and modern.

Get in on Inclusion:

Learning Assistance Professionals as Allies

Introductions

- Rebecca Cofer, EdD
 - GCSU Learning Center, Assistant Director
 - Former peer educator- writing center tutor
 - My experience with special populations in work and life



Top image- Rebecca sitting on step with her schnauzer and a graduation sign behind her
Bottom image- silly poses by a group of peer educators outside standing on steps

Goals of this session

- Understand the background of the term "ally"
- Learn what allyhood looks like in learning assistance in relation to multiple populations
- Examine the actions behind being an ally
- Leave with a concrete plan to apply allyhood in your center/campus



Meme of a dog wearing glasses and a suit jacket with text over top of it.



- I am NOT an expert in the field of allyhood or these special populations
- My practices are informed by experience and research
- Terms and phrases change constantly

A small note before we begin...

Begin with some background

- Higher education demographics are changing- inclusion work will be critical
- 'Ally' became a common term related to Safe Zone programs
- The Safe Zone Project ally- someone open to talking about and being supportive of LGBTQIA+ individuals
- 2018 study- students that saw rainbows and HRC stickers in public areas felt a sense of community
- Need for sense of community felt by other (special) populations



Image of a Safe Zone logo with rainbow colors and checks reading "Safe Zone Trained"

Learning Assistance as a Tool for Belonging

Campus learning centers (and the like) are often hubs of activity and may be only staff students closely work with

Support staff in higher ed are a huge asset- hold the institutional knowledge and intellectual capital to keep campus running

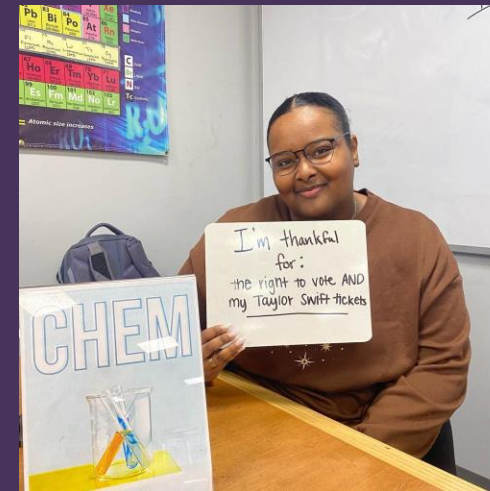
Focus has largely been on impact of academic staff on success rates, not professional staff

Staff in learning spaces can contribute directly or indirectly to these success outcomes - "provide a comprehensive range of services and facilities" (p. 7)

Some populations we may work with in learning assistance

- Let's poll the room and see common populations our centers see
- Select all the populations of students you see in your center
- Go to Pollev.com/rebeccacofer060
- Or scan the QR code

Group of students take selfie by a table.



Student sits at table holding an "I'm thankful for" sign.

Application to multiple populations

- What is a special population defined as?
- For the sake of this session- students with disabilities, military students, first gen students, students from LGBTQIA+
- Literature shows that sense of belonging on campus and persistence and interventions are connected (Davis et al., 2019)
- Strayhorn (2012) found that students who felt a sense of belonging sought out campus resources more
- Students from some minoritized groups reported lower sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012)

Learning assistance professionals as allies

- Students recognized the "diverse and comprehensive support" professional staff can provide (p. 11).
- "There was more to being an ally than simply identifying as one" (DeVita & Anders, 2018, p. 73).
- Being an ally means actively working with individuals for justice
 - "Allies would have to actually be involved in some sort of initiative, action... at any level, however local, national, international" (DeVita & Anders, 2018, p. 73).



Left: Staff member poses for a picture with a student in a cap and gown.
Below: Group picture of tutors posing silly.



Students with a military background

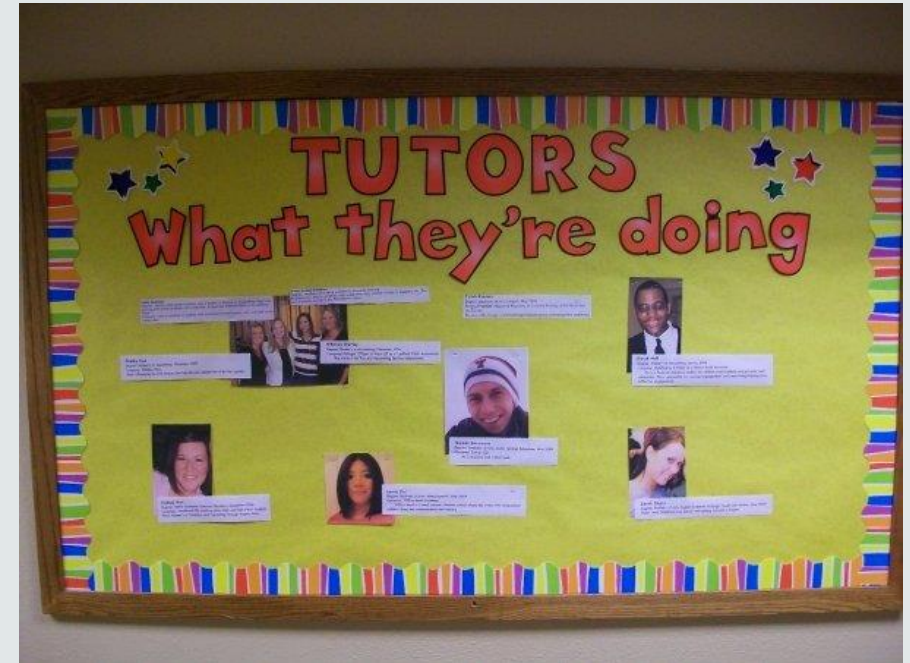
- As of 2011, 57% of the US public personally know a veteran, but contact with active duty and recent veterans is less likely (Naphan & Elliott, 2015)
- Research has defined success for military students- educational self-efficacy, academic motivations, persistence
- Depression and generalized anxiety strongest predictors of academic distress for these students
- Naphan & Elliott (2015)
 - Difficult adapting to the largely free environment of college- previously given lots of direction
 - Military operates through the collective effort, unlike society outside of this



Veteran student stands at a podium between 2 American.

Students with disabilities

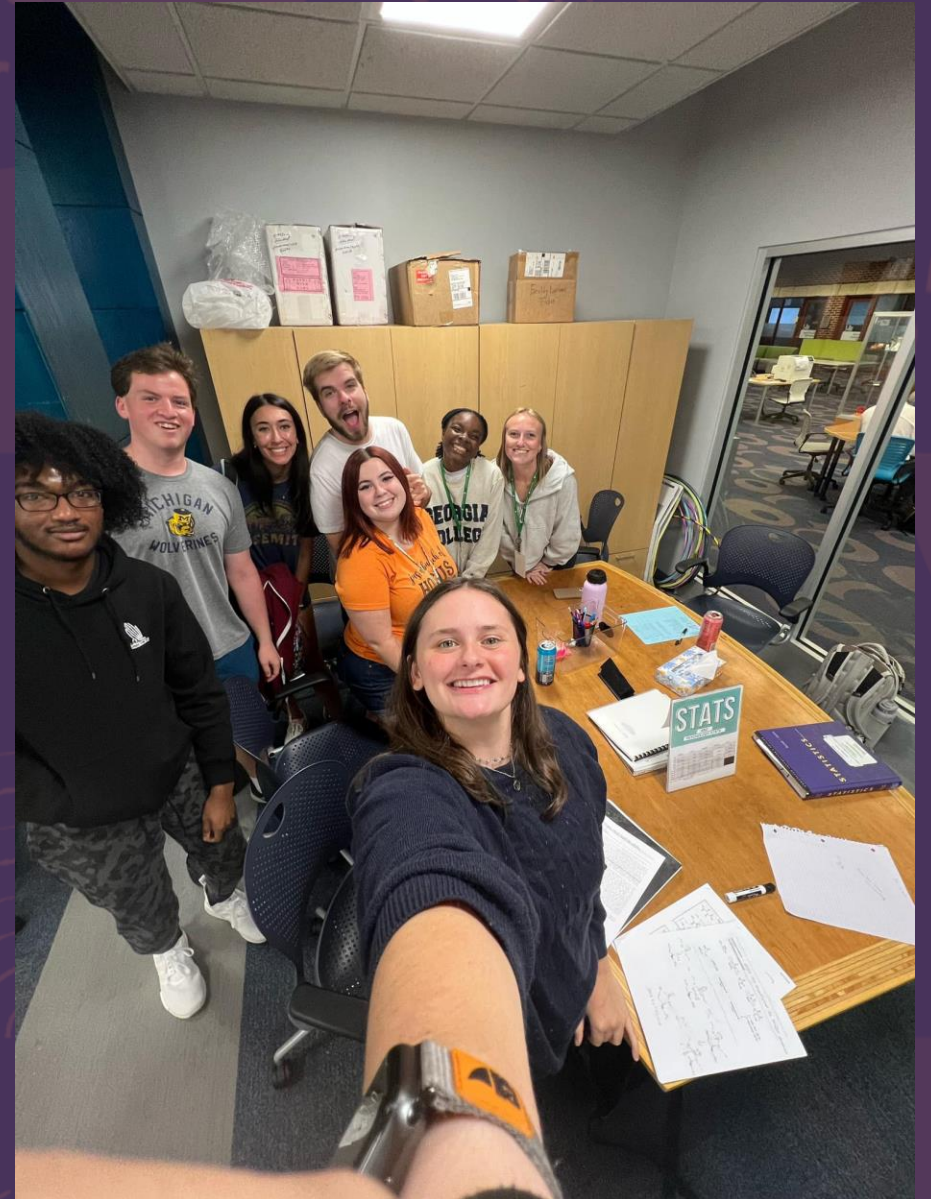
- Hong (2015)- these students experience stressors daily- they would rather take the risk and not ask for help than look weak
 - They noted negative encounters with faculty members
 - Participants noted advisors' lack of knowledge and unresponsiveness
- Daily stressors- included physical demands/environment of campus
- These students wanted to be integrated into the college like all other students- less identification than previously
- Training needs to be done early and often- done outside of the other trngs (time devoted just to this trng)



Bulletin board decorated with tutor alums and their pictures

First generation college students

- Research shows they differ in several ways- socioeconomic status and preparation for the rigor being 2 (Soria and Stebleton, 2012).
 - House et al. (2019)- more academic distress, work hours, and financial distress than peers
- Lower levels of engagement in higher ed
- Less confident in their academic ability and readiness for college-level work- more likely to avoid asking questions
- Need to find ways to increase formal and informal interactions with these students
- This population benefits even more from high impact practices, like learning communities
- Coach your students on using office hours for faculty-partnerships between staff and faculty for these students



Tutor Lead takes selfie at a table with several other tutors behind her.

Students from the LGBTQIA+ population

- Factors that affect LGBTQ+ students' perceptions of campus climate-involvement, peer and social interactions (Parker, 2021)
- Directly related to sense of belonging- "Minoritized students view safety and respect as key components to belonging" (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016, p. 937).
- Trans and nonbinary people are seen more on campus now, but the level of harassment is greater than their cisgender peers

Group of peer educators posing behind some tables in a learning center



Concrete strategies for you to become an ally

- Training for everyone (students staff too)- keep current on the information and students we serve
- Student-centered language- students with disabilities vs autistic students
- Find ways to informally and formally engage with students to help make them more comfortable- conferences
- Include families for specific groups (Covarrubias et al., 2019)
- Take time to explain to students policies and procedures of the college (veterans)

Group picture of tutors posing by a conference banner behind them



More concrete strategies

- "There was more to being an ally than simply identifying as one" (Hong, 2015, p. 73).
- Provide opportunities to connect students with similar backgrounds (if desired)
- Be aware of triggers for students and employees (military student may sit with back to the wall)
- Be inclusive in all ways you can consider
 - Physical space
 - PPTs for your staff (notice the descriptions of images in mine)
 - Pronouns on applications and nametags
 - Assumptions about where students live or who their family is
 - Avoid using gender-specific greetings, like "guys"



A large group of tutors and SI Leaders pose in silly ways for a staff picture

Plan Your Path to Allyhood

- Work in pairs to discuss the below prompts so that you can also bring allyhood back to your learning center/campus
 - On my campus/in my center, the populations I can be an ally to include_____
 - In what ways are you currently working to be an ally?
 - Three concrete steps I can take when I get home to become an ally are:
 - My timeline for completing these steps is_____

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Questions? Comments?



FIND ME ON LINKEDIN-
REBECCA DALY COFER



REBECCA.COFER@GCSU.EDU