Welcome back fabulous students, faculty, and staff! For our new students, faculty, and staff welcome to FIU and our LGBTQA Familia!

I would like to start by thanking all our amazing GA’s, practicum students, LGBTQA ambassadors, and volunteers for all their hard work this past semester. Without them our LGBTQA Initiatives would not be what it is today, a vibrant and strong community. A very special thank you to Sebastian Ojeda, our GA at the Beautiful Biscayne Campus. Sebastian was our rock this past year at BBC, and it will be tough to find someone to fill his shoes. Sebastian graduated in December with his Masters in Higher Education from FIU, congratulations Sebastian! We will miss him terribly, and wish him all the best as he heads out West to California to start his new job!

Fall 2017 semester was amazing filled with a ton of programs, workshops, and events. This past semester the MPAS LGBTQA Initiatives team hosted 42 events (BBC 17 & MMC 25) with close to 2,000 participants in attendance (BBC 657 & MMC 1,283). Thank you all for a great semester.

Now I hope you are ready for an amazing SPRING 2018 Semester! We have over 20 programs planned for you already this Spring Semester (check the last page of this newsletter for a full listing), and we have several more still on the way! We are looking for individuals to join the FIU Miami Gay Pride Parade Contingency Committee. If you are interested and would like to get involved please send an email to lgbt@fiu.edu or stop by the MPAS office in GC 216 or WUC 253 for more information. If this is your first semester I encourage you to get involved! We have so many groups, clubs, and activities that you can join.

I would also like to personally invite everyone to join us at our MPAS LGBTQA Welcome Receptions happening the second week in January. They are on January 10th at MMC from 3:30pm to 5:30pm in GC Panther Suite and January 11at BBC from 12:30pm to 2:30pm in WUC 155. Feel free to RSVP for the welcome reception or any of our other events here: go.fiu.edu/LGBTQARSVIP1718. Please checkout our social media or website at lgbt.fiu.edu for upcoming events and happenings around town.

Lastly, I would like to invite you to join our FIU LGBTQA Team for the Miami-Dade, “OUT OF THE DARKNESS, SUICIDE PREVENTION WALK”, on February 11th at Tropical Park. If you would like to make a difference and create awareness about suicide prevention, please join our team by following this link: FIU LGBTQA Panther Pride. I look forward to seeing many of you in the office and at our events this year. Best of luck to all as you begin the spring semester!
CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION ON SEXUAL ASSAULT

Richard Moreno
MPAS LGBTQA Initiatives
Graduate Assistant, MMC

During the latter portion of 2017, we saw numerous accounts of sexual assault allegations surface against famous individuals. Time Magazine’s “Person of the Year” feature highlighted the voices of those allegations, including Tarana Burke who is the founder of the “MeToo” campaign. Seeing the conversation of sexual assault catapulted into the mainstream conversation reminded me of the importance of bringing visibility to issues to highlight their impact across communities. However, the voices of many individuals who have been impacted by sexual violence continue to remain silent. The sudden shift in visibility of sexual violence brings with it important conversations to have with friends, family, and within your communities.

Sexual violence against and within the LGBTQ community remains an issue that must be addressed with proper education, advocacy, and support to ensure this form of violence stops. Research has shown that LGBTQ students are four times more likely to experience an attempted or completed assault than their heterosexual counterparts (Porter & Williams, 2011). LGBTQ individuals face unique challenges and need to be included in the conversations surrounding sexual assault. Experiences of trans women of color must be in the forefront of the conversation on sexual assault. Advocacy for survivors of sexual violence must be queer and trans inclusive. So many people who are affected by sexual violence the most are being left out of the discussion, so it is important to provide visibility to the marginalized to ensure their voices are heard. No one can be left behind in this conversation.

Educating one another is an important step to beginning the conversation on sexual assault. Challenge problematic language that has deeply rooted misogynistic sentiments or devalues the importance of consent. Introduce topics of safety and communication when talking about sex. Strive to incorporate gender inclusive language on a daily basis, and especially about conversations about sexual assault, as everyone, regardless of gender, can be affected by it. One person can make a tremendous impact across communities if they remain persistent on their willingness to take a stand against sexual violence.

I write this article with the intention of continuing the conversation on sexual violence and to shed light on an issue loaded with stigma and hesitant conversations. FIU Women’s Center hosts a Sexual Assault Awareness Month every April, which is a campus-wide collaborative that features a month-long calendar of events on prevention and education of sexual assault and domestic violence. FIU also hosts the “It’s On Us” campaign to educate the campus community on how to take accountability on engaging with issues of sexual violence. Counseling and Psychological Services on campus also houses a Victim Empowerment Program that provides education and support for the campus community. These are just a few of the resources on campus that focus on the importance of sexual assault education and prevention.

As always, the LGBTQA Initiatives office is here to help students who need it! We have a wealth of on and off-campus resources dedicated to providing support and advocacy to survivors of sexual violence, others who have been impacted by sexual violence, and many who specialize in providing advocacy to LGBTQ survivors. Together we can put an end to rape culture through community empowerment and education. Let’s strive to continue the conversation together.

A FOND FARWELL!

Sebastian Ojeda,
MPAS LGBTQA Initiatives
Graduate Assistant, BBC

The end of the semester is always an exciting time for everyone. Classes are over and a much deserved break is on the horizon. It is the end of one chapter, but the start of another. This has been my final semester at FIU and with MPAS LGBTQA Initiatives. I am excited to say that I have graduated with my Master of Science degree in Higher Education Administration on December 15!

I have enjoyed my time here and have learned so much in what feels like such a short amount of time. There have been challenges and triumphs along the way, but I was able to succeed thanks to the support of friends, family, and co-workers. I cannot stress enough the difference a strong support system can make in your life. The FIU LGBTQA familia has helped me in so many ways and does the same thing for students! I encourage you to attend our workshops and programs or get involved with the mentors program or ambassador program. It’s a great way to meet new people, learn new skills, and have a special group of individuals who you know will always have your back.

I want to give special shout-outs to a few individuals. First, it has been an honor to learn from my amazing supervisor Dr. Gisela Vega. The work that you do for the students at FIU is inspiring. Richard, my fellow graduate assistant – I always knew I could turn to you when I had questions or doubts. Thanks for being my friend! Finally, I would like to thank the LGBTQA student ambassadors. The work you do with our office is invaluable and you really help us in supporting the larger FIU LGBTQA population. I do have to give special mention to the ambassadors who specifically work at BBC – Adam and Aaron. Getting to work with you was always what I looked forward to the most.

It is exciting to think about what the future might have in store for me. I am currently job searching and have done interviews for several positions on the West Coast and the Northeast of the U.S. Even though there is much that is unclear about my future, I know that I will be able to tackle anything that comes my way thanks to all the experience I’ve received at FIU. I also know that the bonds I forged with people here will last a lifetime.
Support FIU LGBTQA Panther Pride as we walk to fight suicide in the annual Out of the Darkness Miami-Dade County Walk

On February 11, 2018 we are joining the community of nearly 250k people walking in hundreds of cities across the country in support of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s mission to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide.

We will participate in Miami’s Out of the Darkness Walk In Tropical Park starting at 8:00a.m.

Please help us reach our fundraising goal by donating to a team member. Join here: http://go.fiu.edu/FIULGBTQAPANTHERPRIDE17