Program Seeks to Go Beyond Guilt By Empowering Students

Campaign dedicated to recognizing privileges and engaging allies

Eddie Solis Jr.
THE SANTA CLARA

It is easy to ignore privilege when you are on the receiving end of it. A three-week program at Santa Clara aims to focus on the issue of privilege within students’ lives without trying to guilt or shame anyone, but instead, by inspiring students to be allies and empowered individuals.

“Many students here have been raised in sheltered homes,” said freshman Brian Meier. “Many have not had extensive exposure with people less privileged than them. It can be difficult for students to accept that they’ve been granted better opportunities compared to less fortunate people.”

For a university like Santa Clara, where the largest racial/ethnic group is white, privilege can seem like a non-issue. Going beyond race and class, privilege can include one’s gender, sexuality, physical and mental abilities and religion. For some, these are everyday aspects of life that can go unnoticed, but still offer benefits.

That is why the Multicultural Center and Santa Clara University Programming collaborate with a variety of clubs, programs, students and academic departments to address all the aspects of privilege in our world. The first step is to make sure that students realize there is even a problem,” said Associated Student Government President Anaisi Tildenfest.

Inspired by the “Check Your Privilege” campaign at the University of San Francisco, “Beyond Guilt: Solidarity Through Action” was designed to go past the recognition of privilege or the shame connected to it. Instead the campaign focuses on finding ways to deify and support others in less fortunate positions. The campaign is packed with discussions, panels, movie screenings and other events.

In order to get Broncos thinking about how privilege works in their lives, each week focuses on a theme meant to encourage reflection, learning and action. This week’s theme is “Claiming Privilege,” in which students have the opportunity to acknowledge and understand how their own identities may benefit or challenge those around them. Last week’s theme was “Defining Privilege.”

“Student talks offered an introduction into the language of identity with words such as ‘microaggressions’ and ‘intersectionality.’

“Terminology allows students the right language to discuss the subject. A microaggression includes assumptions about a person based on stereotypes. A microaggression may seem benign, but repeated exposure to these interactions can be frustrating and ostracizing. Intersectionality is the way in which people’s many identities may intersect, challenge or compliment each other.”

“Knowing the language of privilege allows us to talk about privilege in everyday conversations. The language allows for more accurate and honest communications,” said assistant director of the Multicultural Center Max Nguyen.

“Everybody has different experiences to bring,” said Chavez. “We all have experiences — people of color, transgender people, people of different socioeconomic backgrounds. When you’re willing to listen to those different experiences, it creates a better sense of understanding. That creates a better sense of community.”

While programs like “Beyond Guilt” facilitate dialogue, students can contribute to the cause on a smaller level. Participation that a large part of understanding comes from the personal interactions to be had.

“Let’s all be willing to share these experiences, be willing to start on the individual level,” said Chavez. “It may be a small start, but it could make a big difference.”

Contact Eddie Solis Jr. at soliss1@scu.edu or call (408) 554-4802.

Broncos invited to a panel of students discuss and address issues of identity and privilege in their everyday lives on Thursday. Next week’s events include empowering workshops on Tuesday and Thursday.

"If we don’t take action, we can’t stop this," said Solis. "It’s not just about me. It’s about everybody."