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Illinois Wesleyan Celebrates Gender Issues Week

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March 6, 2009

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Marine Staff Sergeant Eric Alva will give a presentation titled “Ending Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” on Wednesday, March 11 at 7 p.m. in the Hansen Student Center (300 E. Beecher St., Bloomington).

This event is part of Illinois Wesleyan University’s annual Gender Issues Week, which sets out to inform, educate and provide programs dealing with issues pertinent to women and men, and it is free and open to the public.

Don’t Ask Don’t Tell is a policy about homosexuality in the military. It prohibits anyone who "demonstrates a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts" from serving in the military because it "would create an unacceptable risk to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline and unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability." The don’t tell part states that homosexuals and bisexuals in the military are not allowed to disclose their sexual preference, and the don’t ask part indicates the superior officers should not question military members about their sexual preference.

Alva, a native of San Antonio, Texas, was the first American wounded in the war in Iraq. He joined the United States Marine Corps at age 19, and was a member of the Third Battalion of the Seventh Marines. At 22, Alva was deployed to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope. He was traveling in Iraq in a convoy to Basra with his battalion on March 23, 2003 when he stepped on a landmine, breaking his right arm and damaging his leg so brutally that it needed amputation. Alva was recognized by the military for his service and was awarded a Purple Heart. He received a medical discharge from the Marine Corps.

Alva has been interviewed on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and various television news shows. He has also appeared in *People* magazine and major newspapers.

Since his discharge, Alva has come out as a homosexual and is currently working with the Human Rights Campaign to speak out against the military policy “don’t ask don’t tell.” On Feb. 27, 2008, he joined representative Marty Meehan, [D-Mass.], in calling for an end to the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy.

Gender Issues Week Series of Events

Saturday, March 7: *Rocky Horror Picture Show* at 8 p.m. in the Hansen Student Center. The event is co-sponsored by Pride Alliance.

Monday, March 9: Stop by the Sodexo Steps outside of the Bertholf Commons (104 E. University St., Bloomington) at 11:30 p.m. for “Love Your Body.” Illustrate what you love about your body. The event is co-sponsored by the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance.

Wednesday, March 11: Eric Alva presents “Ending Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” in the Hansen Student Center.

Thursday, March 12: Professor Michael Young leads a discussion titled “Homosexuality: Essentialist or Constructivist” in the Evelyn Chapel basement at 9 p.m. (1301 N. Park St., Bloomington). The event is co-sponsored by Pride Alliance.

For additional information on Alva, visit the Human Rights Campaign’s Web site <http://www.hrc.org/alva/>. For additional information on Gender Issues Week contact Student Senate Awareness Events Commissioner Brittany Powell at bpowell@iwu.edu.