What about the Black Greeks? : supporting NPHCs at PWIs

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WHAT ABOUT THE BLACK GREEKS?
SUPPORTING NPHCs AT PWIs

A Thesis
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT | iii |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Background | 1 |
| Purpose | 4 |
| Calls for the Study | 4 |
| Conclusion | 7 |
| CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 9 |
| Black Culture | 9 |
| Importance of Ethnic Student Organizations | 11 |
| Benefits of NPHC Membership | 13 |
| Hazing | 15 |
| Need for Cultural Competency | 16 |
| Strange’s Dynamics of Campus Environments | 18 |
| Human Aggregates | 18 |
| Constructed Environments | 19 |
| CHAPTER 3 METHODS | 21 |
| Site of Study | 21 |
| Recruitment | 22 |
| Participant Selection | 23 |
| Permission | 23 |
| Data Collection | 24 |
| Data Analysis | 24 |
| Role of Researcher | 25 |
| Limitations | 25 |
| CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS | 27 |
| Comparison to IFC and PHC | 27 |
| Interest, Recruitment and Membership | 29 |
| Unity | 31 |
| Relationships with Greek Life Professionals | 32 |
| Lack of Trust | 32 |
| “Watchful Eye.” | 33 |
| Penalties Today for Yesterday’s Problems | 33 |
| Lack of Appreciation for Student Input | 34 |
| Suggestions to Greek Life Professionals | 34 |
| CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS | 36 |
| Implications for Practice | 36 |
| Implications for Research | 39 |
| Conclusion | 40 |
REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................................41
APPENDIX A INFORMED CONSENT ..........................................................................................43
APPENDIX B INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .......................................................................................45
APPENDIX C IRB APPROVAL ....................................................................................................46
VITA ............................................................................................................................................47
ABSTRACT

Many Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs) were founded at historically black colleges and universities. However, subsequent chapters were chartered at various institutional types, including predominately White institutions (PWIs). Nine BGLOs make up the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), their umbrella organization. At PWIs, this council is typically housed in the same office as the predominately White fraternity and sorority councils. Still, there are many attributes of NPHC that make it unique from the others.

To best direct this study, existing literature was reviewed. Few scholars examined NPHC specifically and little attention was given to institutional types. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences, struggles, and needs of National Pan-Hellenic Councils at large, public, predominately White institutions in the South. NPHC students were interviewed in regards to their personal Greek Life experiences. The findings identify struggles and needs of the Council and best practices were suggested for Greek Life and higher education professionals.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

For over a century, Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) have established a presence in the Black community and in higher education, with the first BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, being founded in 1906 at Cornell University (McClure, 2006). Founded by undergraduate students, the organizations originated with the purpose of uniting Black college students and more. Brown (2005) explained, “These organizations not only served to solidify bonds among African American college students but also had (and continue to have) a vision and a sense of purpose: leadership training, racial uplift, and high scholasticism” (p. 1). Still, membership was very selective as members strove to initiate the finest individuals, in both academics and involvement, into their organizations (McKenzie, 1986). Many individuals that are recognized for their world changing talents and contributions are associated with BGLOs. Brown (2005) confirmed:

It is no accident that many of the best and brightest African American leaders came from the ranks of these organizations. Dr. Charles Drew (who discovered a way to separate red and white blood cells) and Dr. Mae Jamison (an engineer and astronaut) have charted new courses in the area of science. Men and women like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer have left an indelible mark on civil rights and women’s rights. Visionaries such as Dr. Johnetta B. Cole (former president of Spelman College) and Hugh Price (director of the United Negro College Fund) have been towering figures in the area of education. Political leaders such as Carol Moseley Braun (the first female African American U.S. senator) and Thurgood Marshall (the first African American Supreme Court justice) have made tremendous contributions in politics and government. (p. 1)

While BGLOs solely functioned as separate organizations, a change came in May 1930 with the establishment of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (McKenzie, 2005). The National Pan-Hellenic Council was formed “to foster unanimity of thought and action as far as possible in the conduct of Greek Letter Collegiate Fraternities and Sororities, and consider questions and
problems of mutual interest to its member organizations” (National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc., 2013).

Originally, on May 10, 1930, the Council included the organizations of Omega Psi Phi and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternities, and Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta and Zeta Phi Beta Sororities. Alpha Phi Alpha and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternities joined in 1931. In 1937, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority joined the Council. Finally, Iota Phi Theta Fraternity was welcomed in 1997, bringing the organization total to nine (National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc., 2013). These organizations are commonly referred to as the “Divine Nine” (McKenzie, 2005). The mission statement of NPHC is as follows (Ross, 2000, p. 423-424):

The National Pan-Hellenic Council shall serve as the official coordinating agent of the nine (9) constituent member Greek letter fraternities and sororities in the furtherance of their program unity on college and university campuses and within the several communities wherein graduate and/or alumni(ae) chapters of said fraternities and sororities are located. In furtherance of this mission, the National Pan-Hellenic Council shall:

1. Assist in establishing and facilitating local councils on campuses and within communities wherein chapters of these fraternities and sororities are located.

2. Serve as the communication link between/among the constituent fraternities and sororities, especially in matters such as scheduling workshops and national meetings.

3. Conduct periodic workshops or training sessions with the officers of the local councils in order to ensure clearer understanding of common operational procedures.

4. Conduct regional conferences on a biennial basis as a means of developing operational efficiency and program effectiveness.

5. Work cooperatively with other enabling groups such as the National Black Leadership Roundtable, the National Coalition of Black Voter Participation, the NAACP, the Urban League, UNCF, among others.

6. Perform such other coordinating functions as set forth within the Constitution and Bylaws of the NPHC or as determined by the Executive Board.
Since their beginning, BGLOs have been impacting the lives of students at colleges and universities of many types. While each institutional type may have a different story as to how BGLOs came to exist on their campuses, the story for predominately White institutions (PWIs) is a unique one indeed. The majority of NPHC organizations were founded on the campus of Howard University, a historically black institution, but subsequent chapters were quickly organized at PWIs. This growth is said to be a result of discrimination that Black students faced on these campuses (Kimbrough, 2009). BGLOs provided support for Black students at these colleges and universities (Kimbrough, 2003).

At predominately White institutions, NPHC organizations are typically housed in the same Greek Life office as their predominantly White counterparts. This is fitting, being that at the end of the day, they are all fraternal organizations. Wesley (1961) identified similarities and explained that initially, BGLOs imitated the procedures of historically White Greek-letter organizations. They used vocabulary like “rush” to name the recruitment and selection process for new initiates. Kimbrough (2003) further explained, “They mirrored their White counterparts by using Greek letters, by forming chapters, and by incorporating secret handshakes and rituals” (p. 111). While there are indeed many similarities amongst historically White fraternities and sororities and BGLOs, differences also exist but are often misunderstood or unrecognized. Acknowledging the unique attributes of NPHC organizations is critical to the group’s success. McClure (2006) articulated, “On college campuses, the specific function of same-race support groups, in the form of Greek organizations, must be understood as separate and unique from the traditionally White organizations they were initially modeled after” (p. 1052).

Contrary to popular belief, the distinctions of NPHCs are not results of rebellion or a lack of cooperation. Differences have evolved through the culture of its members. Kimbrough (2003)
stated, “The creativity of the members, along with the innate qualities of their African ancestry, transformed collegiate Greek life into an expressive, exciting culture on college campuses” (p. 111). The scholar elaborated:

Black and White Greek organizations, while philosophically similar, are functionally different. The recruiting of members as described, the ways in which service is performed (philanthropy versus hands-on community service), and even the ways the groups “party” have led to separate systems. (Kimbrough, 2003, p. 170)

This explains that the differences are complex and of a large variety. For this reason, identifying and gaining a better understanding of NPHC will increase their success.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of NPHC Greek students at a large, public, research-intensive predominantly White institution in the southeast. Common struggles and needs will be identified based on the collected data. The findings can assist Greek Life advisors and professionals at similar institutions to better understand and serve their students.

**Calls for the Study**

Many scholars realize that NPHC organizations are often misread. Kimbrough (2005) described them as “a very visible but marginally understood student culture” (p. 27). While most students, faculty, and staff are aware of their existence, few know or take the time to learn more about their purpose and structure. People enjoy seeing members of these organizations step, stroll, and yell Greek calls but only know little about them beyond that.

“Early research does reveal that the history and structure of the Black Greek system serves a very different purpose than that of the predominately White Greek system” (McClure, 2006, p. 1038). Even when this is understood, little effort is made to identify practices to ensure BGLOs’ success, outside of methods used for predominantly White Greek organizations. Often
times, the unique characteristics of NPHC organizations are deemed as negative and lead to obstructive perspectives from Greek Life professionals and non-BGLO students. For example, BGLOs’ chapter sizes are often a concern at PWIs. “NPHC chapters at PWIs tend to have smaller new member groups, which presents a risk not inherent with other studies of fraternal organizations, where the number of members offers more anonymity” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 60).

Kimbrough (2009) mimicked these obstructive perspectives and identified the dissonance by stating, “The so called ‘Black Greeks,’ with their small chapters, lack of student housing, and elaborate recruitment methods that seem to incorporate African customs and rituals, do not fit in well with models posed by traditional Greek organizations” (p. 603).

Additionally, current literature on fraternities and sororities typically focuses on all fraternal populations as a whole. There is little existing literature focusing on subpopulations within Greek-letter organizations. Severtis (2007) expressed, “The majority of studies on Greek-letter organizations has focused on predominately white samples and has been unable to investigate racial differences that may be associated with fraternity and sorority life” (p. 97). Researchers often used the term Greek as if their findings pertain to all Greek students when in actuality, that is not true. McClure (2006) affirmed,

Previous research on Greek organizations typically ignores the different history and structure of BGOs, as compared to their predominately White counterparts. This takes the form of writing about White Greeks but using the term Greek without a racial modifier, so that race (in this case as in most, Whiteness) is made invisible. (p. 1037).

This makes existing findings applicable to NPHC organizations but in a very limited manner. More specific literature on Black Greek students and Black Greek students at specific institutional types would be more beneficial to this group.

As previously mentioned, scholars have discovered that BGLOs function differently than other fraternal groups. While this has been found, little research exists that takes this knowledge
to the next level. Without information that identifies the distinctive needs that these differences generate, this literature is not very helpful. Higher education and student affairs professionals cannot better serve this population without understanding their unique needs, because they are indeed different than their predominately White counterparts.

There is also an abundance of literature that focuses on the negative aspects of BGLOs on college campuses. Hazing is a topic that is frequently studied for this group. This research is necessary but we must remember that Greek organization membership is more than an intake process. The students involved are still degree seekers and can benefit from the involvement in their organizations, growing as leaders and scholars. This type of growth cannot be better facilitated with research solely on negative aspects of NPHC organizations. Kimbrough (1998) concurred, “Higher education needs a broader understanding of the role and impact of Black Greek-letter organization beyond the problem areas” (p. 97).

Student affairs professionals working with Greek-letter organizations are in a unique circumstance. Some functional areas have a very narrowed and specific target population (first year students, minority students, athletes, etc.) but that spectrum is very wide for Greek Life professionals. Greek students are of a variety of subpopulations making it a difficult task to assist this broad group. Their needs are complex due to the intersection of multiple identities. It can be challenging for a professional to be equipped to meet all these needs, especially the ones that they do not identify with or have little experience in.

This research on NPHC organizations at PWIs will help increase the cultural competency of Greek Life professionals. They will have a better understanding of this group’s past, present, and future allowing them to better serve this population. Strayhorn and McCall (2012) explained the importance of having culturally competent advisors work with NPHC: “Without culturally
competent advisors, students may be treated unfairly, advised against their own cultural practices, and these actions may lead to unproductive responses” (p. 702). The scholars continued, “Such competency is perhaps even more critical for professionals who advise minority student organizations such as Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs), whose members’ cultural backgrounds frequently differ from those of their formal faculty advisors and the majority of students on campus” (p. 701).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Black-Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) have been impacting the lives of college students for over 100 years. They have created bonds among members and served as a source of personal and community empowerment. Nine Black Greek-letter organizations later joined together to form the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) to serve as an umbrella organization for all the groups.

BGLOs came to exist on predominantly White colleges and universities as a result of harsh conditions experienced by Black students on their campuses. While these organizations were originally structured after the design of predominantly White fraternities and sororities, BGLOs have a different purpose. Their unique function and needs must be recognized in order for NPHCs to be successful at PWIs.

This research will study the experiences of students in BGLOs at a specific PWI. The collected data will be used to identify struggles and needs for these organizations. This study will yield findings that can assist student affairs professionals working with NPHCs at similar colleges and universities.

Existing literature acknowledges that BGLOs have a different structure in comparison to their White counterparts but fails to provide strategies to better serve them and increase their
success. Furthermore, a great deal of research on Greek students and organizations only studies predominantly White Greek-letter organizations, despite using the general terms “Greek,” and is not fully applicable to NPHC organizations. Too much focus has been given to negative aspects of BGLOs. It is time for higher education to get an understanding of these groups beyond this.

Higher education and student affairs professionals working in the area of Greek Life can improve their cultural competence from this study. They will gain knowledge about cultural beliefs, practices, and ideas that they may or may not identify with, allowing them to better serve this student population.
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to justify the necessity of this study and to best guide this research, a large amount of literature was reviewed. From those sources, the most significant information was applied to the construct of this study. Little research focused on the experiences of NPHC students at PWIs but scholars did express the importance of ethnic student organizations on college and university campuses and investigated a problem area for the Council. The purpose of this review of literature is to examine five major topics within the literature: Black culture, impacts of ethnic student organization involvement, benefits of NPHC membership, hazing, and the need for cultural competency.

Black Culture

The Black culture cannot be ignored when examining BGLOs or any primarily Black serving student organization. Black culture typically serves as a foundation for these groups and plays a major role in their order of business and day to day function. Learning about and developing an understanding of Black culture can assist non-BGLO members in understanding the values and beliefs that guide and direct many predominantly Black organizations.

Herndon and Hirt (2004) researched the role of family and its impact on college student success. The study was conducted at two large, research-intensive, PWIs in the Mid-Atlantic region. It included 20 successful Black students and 18 of their family members.

Participating students explained that building community played a vital role in their student success. This “community” provided social support that they often found in student organizations. Herndon and Hirt (2004) explained, “In the context of the college environment, social support relates to the friendship and social networks formed by students. Student clubs and organizations are examples of social support networks” (p. 490).
The scholars also found that students established fictive kin relationships as a means to build community. “Fictive kinships are nonsanguineous relationships; however they are valued as much as sanguineous relations” (p. 503). This should come as no surprise being that fictive kin relationships are a norm within Black culture. Herndon and Hirt (2004) stated, “Family kinship among Blacks may also be described as fictive. These kinds of kinship bonds are unrelated by blood; however, they are viewed as equally significant as blood relationships. Fictive kinship networks may include neighbors, church members, and friends” (p. 493).

It must also be kept in mind that many Black students are first-generation college students. Fictive relationships can provide a sense of family and fill a void that blood family may not be able fill. The researchers articulated:

Although, for some families in which no one has attended college, it may be difficult to help children understand what it will take to get to (and through) college. In some instances, fictive kin can play a critical role. These individuals are considered as important as blood relatives. (Herndon and Hirt, 2004, p. 505)

In summary, Black culture often prioritizes non-family relationships on a deeper level when compared to other cultures. These relationships provide a sense of support and unity that is critical to the individual success of Black students. This perspective can help others understand and appreciate attributes of BGLOs that may initially seem unfavorable. Smaller membership numbers, which are often noticed in BGLOs, may compliment the value of fictive kin relationships. It allows for students to establish more intimate bonds with one another. This value also sheds light into the high level of membership selectivity that BGLOs often implement. When it is understood that members place much worth and regard on their relationships, it can also be understood as to why initiating new members is such an exclusive decision. This study is just one example as to how an increased cultural competency can provide a better understanding of BGLOs and allow student affairs professionals to better assist these students.
Importance of Ethnic Student Organizations

Ethnic student organizations are more than a way for minority students to congregate. Previous literature and studies demonstrate that college students experience an array of development, success, and college experience satisfaction because of their involvement in these groups. The findings prove that ethnic student organizations are important for students and higher education as a whole, helping colleges and universities achieve goals of student development and provide positive collegiate experiences.

Museus (2008) studied the role of ethnic organizations on minority students at a large, public, rural PWI in the Mid-Atlantic region. The scholar found that ethnic organizations served three primary roles. They “facilitated the cultural adjustment and membership of minority student participants by serving as sources of cultural familiarity, vehicles for cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation” (p. 576). Each of these can have a critical impact on minority student retention. Museus (2008) explained,

> Over half of all racial/ethnic minority students matriculating at 4-year colleges fail to graduate within 6 years. One explanation for those low graduation rates is minority students’ inability to find membership in the cultures and subcultures of their respective campuses. (p. 568)

Ethnic student organizations, including BGLOs, can provide support to groups that have been historically marginalized at institutions of higher education, allowing them to educate others and advocate for change. Students continued to refer to their organizations as a “family” and “home away from home” in this study (Museus, 2008).

Harper and Quaye (2007) researched the role of racial identity in Black male student leaders’ engagement at six large, public, research PWIs in the Midwest region. The researchers found that, “Although some held membership in mainstream campus organizations, the participants’ leadership and engagement were overwhelmingly situated in predominately Black
and minority student organizations” (p. 134). Students expressed a commitment to uplifting the Black community on their campus and holistically, and involvement in these organizations helped them to do so. The findings also showed that membership developed the participants’ Black identities. The scholars articulated, “Predominantly Black groups offered an alternative platform through which to address Black issues, connect with other African American students, and initiate dialogue and programming without feelings of tokenism” (p. 142). This study continues to demonstrate the importance of ethnic student organizations on college student development and expression of cultural values.

Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) examined trends in Black student involvement in traditional student organizations. While the findings showed that more students of color are participating in traditional organizations at PWIs, ethnic student organizations are still their main form of involvement. The researchers justified, “Minority students perceive that membership within multicultural organizations provides them greater opportunities to share their skills and talents with the African American community” (p. 32). Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) continued, “The commitment to serve disenfranchised members of the community is an additional reason African American students are actively involved with multicultural organizations” (p. 32). Again, through their membership, students fulfilled their commitment to the Black community. The scholars also found that Black Greek students at PWIs had higher GPAs than Black non-Greek students.

In review, ethnic student organizations provide an opportunity for students to celebrate their cultures. They also help students successfully transition into college, especially at predominately White institutions. Studies have shown that involvement in these organizations can positively affect minority student retention and academic success. While Black students
often are involved in traditional student organizations, ethnic student organizations continue to be a primary interest as a means of uplifting the Black community. As a prominent form of these organizations, it is important that the impact of BGLOs is understood and that they are supported in order to maximize these outcomes for students.

**Benefits of NPHC Membership**

Like ethnic student organizations, NPHC organizations have specifically been found to yield positive outcomes on the college student experience. Students have identified their BGLO memberships as primary contributors to their collegiate success, especially at PWIs. These organizations are also hoped to benefit students after graduation. The following researchers discussed this topic in detail.

McClure (2006) studied BGLO membership in relation to college success for 20 Black undergraduate men in one BGLO fraternity. The research was conducted at a large, flagship, research institution in the southeast with a history of racism. Research participants showed an increased sense of closeness to each other, the campus, and Black history. Close fraternal relationships were said to combat the risk of alienation on campus. Additionally, members believed the fraternity increased their college success and bettered their experience, allowing them to assist students outside of the organization. McClure (2006) explained,

> The members were able to connect to the campus through their fraternity. They also believed that the fraternity had a responsibility to reach out to other African American students to help them feel more a part of the campus, because it can be difficult for minority students to feel comfortable in an environment that is very different from the one they came from. (p. 1047)

Participants in this study believed they maximized their college experience by affiliating with a BGLO. Students anticipated the fraternity to be a continuous advantage to them post-graduation, serving as a social network and helpful way to secure job opportunities.
Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) examined the role and impact of BGLOs beyond the problem areas. The study included 387 Black Greek and non-Greek students from 12 institutions (7 PWIs and 5 HBCUs). Black Greek students were more involved in the six student organization types described in this study in comparison to Black non-Greek students. Black Greek students also held more elected leadership positions and appointed leadership positions than their non-Greek counterparts. Furthermore, Black Greek students experienced an increase in their overall involvement after becoming members of BGLOs.

Severtis & Christie-Mizell (2007) questioned if Greek organization membership could be a way for Black students to increase their graduation rate. They also wondered if the impact of Greek membership varied by race. Data was utilized from the General Social Survey (GSS) and included 3,712 respondents. The surveys showed that Greek-letter membership positively influenced the likelihood of college graduation by 370 percent. Additionally, it was demonstrated that Black people benefit significantly more from Greek organization affiliation than White people, making it an even bigger advantage to students of this population.

Based on these studies, it is important for BGLOs to be present at institutions because they help Black students successfully transition into college and have enjoyable experiences, particularly at PWIs. Non-Greek Black students can also benefit from their presence as Black Greek students typically consider it their responsibility to help non-members succeed at the institution, as well. BGLOs positively affect student involvement with members becoming more involved in other campus organizations post their BGLO initiation. This is valuable because it diversifies their student experiences and the experiences of the other students involved in the campus organizations. NPHC students not only declare to have better college experiences but are also more likely to graduate than non-Greek Black students. Greek organizations are even more
advantageous to Black students then White students validating the significance of supporting NPHC groups. Finally, BGLOs yield long term benefits as they serve as a networking base for students and assist them in acquiring careers after graduation.

**Hazing**

There is one problem that has already been identified as a hindrance to BGLO success: hazing. This is a topic of frequent discussion and study. Despite the positive impacts and benefits that these organizations have been found to yield, hazing is a negative aspect that is constantly in radar. Multiple scholars have put forth effort to examine this problem. Higher education and student affairs professionals could utilize this research to work towards eliminating hazing as doing so enhances NPHC success on college and university campuses.

Kimbrough (2005) investigated whether or not Black fraternities and sororities should abolish undergraduate chapters, due to the frequency of hazing cases. After having dialogue with students all over the United States on more than sixty occasions, Kimbrough rendered his verdict. Believing that NPHC undergraduate chapters are becoming more of a liability than a risk to their national organizations, the scholar declared that undergraduate chapters should be abolished. Understanding that the presence of BGLOs is endangered on college and university campuses, effort to better their state must be made if students are going to continue to have the opportunity to benefit from them.

Kimbrough (2009) discussed the transition process of BGLOs from pledging processes to membership intake processes. He acknowledged that the transition has been difficult but he also explained that successfully transitions requires taking on an even larger task. Kimbrough (2009) stated, “The real challenge now is to involve all parties, including students, alumni, national officers, and university officials in creating a new culture of the system” (p. 611). It is critical
that Greek Life professionals realize that their involvement can assist in saving BGLOs.

Kimbrough (2009) continues,

The challenge is to create a real alliance between undergraduates, graduates, national organizations, and institutions of higher learning in order to openly and honestly discuss the issues surrounding membership intake, and, together, identify ways to achieve the goal of preserving Black Greek-letter organizations. (p. 612)

The future presence of NPHC undergraduate chapters is not guaranteed. It is important that hazing is understood as an aspect hindering the success of NPHC organizations and that professionals working with BGLOs participate in collaborative efforts to promote their success. However, Greek Life professionals should also remember that the organizations have struggles outside of this one problem area, and that all chapters are not struggling with hazing. Professionals should work to identify additional struggles of the BGLOs at their respective campuses and increase their success by addressing those areas, as well.

**Need for Cultural Competency**

Colleges and universities initially had very homogenous student populations but are no longer this way today. However, particularly at PWIs, the faculty, staff, and administration demographics have not experienced the same change in diversity. This circumstance presents a difficult task to PWI professionals because they are responsible for educating, developing, advising, and promoting college success for students in which they do not identify. Thus, scholars have been lead to observe levels of cultural competence amongst professionals in the higher education setting.

Davis et al. (2004) explored the experiences of successful Black students at PWIs by interviewing eleven Black graduating seniors at a large, research, land-grant southeastern university. In this study, 5 themes were identified based on the students’ campus experiences and interactions:
2. “You have to Initiate the Conversation”: Isolation and Connection.
3. “They Seem the Same; I’m the One Who’s Different.”
4. “I have to Prove I’m Worthy to be Here.”
5. “Sometimes I’m Not Even Here/Sometimes I Have to Represent All Black Students”: Invisibility and Supervisibility. (Davis et al., 2004, p. 427)

The feelings were inflicted on students of color by both other students and faculty and staff alike. Davis et al. (2004) explained, “Many incidents related by participants involved professors or university staff who were perceived to be condescending and/or treating them unfairly on the basis of race (p. 427). While the participants in this student were able to succeed despite these trials, all students of color are not as resilient. The researchers concluded, “Cultural competency is not only possible but should be mandatory for administration and faculty alike” (p. 443).

Strayhorn and McCall (2012) specifically studied cultural competency levels of BGLO advisors at colleges and universities in America. A survey was created and administered to 71 advisors in which 70 percent were White and employed at 4-year public colleges and universities. The scholars expressed the importance of cultural competency. Strayhorn and McCall (2012) stated,

“Such competency is perhaps even more critical for professionals who advise minority student organizations such as Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs), whose members’ cultural backgrounds frequently differ from those of their formal faculty advisors and the majority of students on campus. (p. 701) When advisors do not have a keen understanding of their student’s culture, the success of the students and their organizations is at risk. Stryahorn and McCall (2012) explained, “Without culturally competent advisors, students may be treated unfairly, advised against their own cultural practices, and these actions may lead to unproductive responses” (p. 702).

At PWIs, students often experience feelings of isolation and feel that few people reach out to aid in their success. While it is important for students to achieve higher levels of cultural competence, it is even more important for higher education professionals to do so for multiple
reasons. First, professionals can better assist in the development for students when they have had successful develop in this area. Second, students look for faculty and staff to have this ability and skill because they view them as advisors and helpers. A lack of understanding from professionals who students expect to be cognizant can be discouraging and negatively impact individual and student organization success.

**Strange’s Dynamics of Campus Environments**

While this study strove to better understand the experience, struggles, and needs of NPHCs at PWIs, it considered the impact of the surrounding environment. Yes, students are ultimately the master of their experiences but these events cannot be properly examined without acknowledging the uncontrolled influence of the area around them. Conceptually, this research is based on the idea that student and student organization success is contingent upon a satisfying campus environment. For this reason, this study was guided by Strange’s (2003) concept on dynamics of campus environments.

Strange (2003) attempts to explain how students and the campus environment interact by identifying characteristics that promote student development. The construct contains four dimensions: physical components, human aggregates, organized environments, and constructed environments (Strange, 2003). However, this research draws on only human aggregates and constructed environments. The scholar states, “Recognizing them [the four dimensions], as well as their dynamics, is an important first step in understanding how they may be shaped to achieve educational purposes” (Strange, 2003, p. 299).

**Human Aggregates.** Strange (2003) explained that characteristics of the population must be collectively understood in order to predict the impact of the environment. This includes the collective effects of both demographic and psychological characteristics and types. In this
dimension, Strange (2003) introduces the congruent person. “A person is said to be congruent with a given environment if his or her type is the same or nearly the same as the dominant type within that environment” (Strange, 2003, p.302). This concept determines the person’s attraction, satisfaction, and stability in the environment. It also helps us understand the experience of those who do not identify with the dominant type such as the NPHC students who participated in this study.

**Constructed Environments.** Models of constructed environments use the perception of an environment to gage the environmental press, social climate, and culture (Strange, 2003, p. 306). Schein (1992) defined campus culture as, “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 12.). Strange (2003) identified perspectives as one of the four levels of campus culture. Perspectives are the rules and social norms that are established within an environment. They also define how things are done and what behaviors are deemed as acceptable. These norms are quickly understood by students and influence their experience. This lens of campus culture was applied with analyzing the experiences of the NPHC students.

In conclusion, an abundance of literature exists on Black culture, impacts of ethnic student organization involvement, benefits of NPHC membership, hazing, and the need for cultural competency. This research helps higher education professionals to better understand the foundation, advantages, one problem area of BGLOs, and the value of cultural competency in relation to NPHC organizations. However, the findings do not introduce readers to the struggles of the organizations, beyond hazing, that may prohibit students from reaping the potential
benefits of BGLOs. The literature is also vague with no specificity to institutional type or geographical location. Through the Dynamics of Campus Environments framework (Strange, 2003), this study will examine the experiences of NPHC students at a large, public PWI in the southeast, providing Greek Life professionals with an understanding of possible struggles that could prevent the success of BGLOs at their institution, allowing them to better aid the group.
CHAPTER 3 METHODS

The experience of NPHC Greek students varies due to interactions with the campus environment. While general Greek Life research can be helpful, it is not specific to NPHC. Even the relevancy of NPHC research can be limited as it may not consider the impact of institutional type and geographical location. This qualitative study attempts to answer the overarching question of, “What is needed to enable NPHC organizations and students to succeed at a large, public, research-intensive, predominantly White institution in the southeast?” This research will provide professionals with findings that are more specific than those that exist, making the data more applicable and useful in increasing NPHC success.

Site of Study

Louisiana State University (LSU) was the location for this study. LSU is a large, public, research-intensive, PWI in the southeast region of the United States. The institution was founded in 1860 and has been in operation for 153 years. The student population is predominately White with about 74 percent of the students identifying as White. Black students account for about 10 percent of the student population (LSU Office of Budget and Planning, 2012).

In 1867, Sigma Alpha Epsilon was the first fraternal organization chartered on LSU’s campus. Kappa Delta was the first sorority chartered at LSU in 1909. The first NPHC organization chartered at LSU was Delta Sigma Theta in 1972 (LSU Greek Life, 2012). By the time LSU approved its first NPHC organization to campus, all nine of the NPHC organizations had already been founded (as early as 1906) and had chartered subsequent chapters on multiple campuses. Today, Inter-fraternity Council (IFC) organizations and Pan Hellenic Council (PHC), the predominately White Greek fraternity and sorority councils, have been present at LSU for
over 100 years while NPHC organizations have only been present for 41 years, at most.

Currently, the LSU NPHC includes five of the nine organizations and has a total of 49 members.

This site was selected because the NPHC at this institution demonstrates signs of struggle being that only five of the organizations are currently present, with two organizations being suspended in recent years (one for three years, one for ten years) and two organizations becoming inactive due to their members graduating and no membership remaining in the chapters. Additionally, the active NPHC organizations have low membership numbers, averaging less than 10 people per chapter.

**Recruitment**

The Greek Life Office was informed of this research and the involvement of their students. The script below was provided to the Greek Life staff to aid them in explaining the proposed research to prospective participants. The office then provided the names, classification, and contact information for all forty-nine undergraduate NPHC students at the institution.

Recruitment Script:

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of NPHC Greek students at a large, public, research-intensive institution in the southeast. Participants are ideally undergraduates who meet all of the following criteria:

1. identify as Black or African-American

2. are active members in a recognized NPHC group

Students who agree to be part of this research will be asked to participate in one interview lasting approximately one hour. During the interview, participants will be asked questions about their experiences at LSU, with emphasis on their involvement in an NPHC organization.
**Participant Selection**

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling based on multiple criteria. Creswell (2012) defined, “In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 206). One active member was selected from each of the five active NPHC organizations that had at least one member present on the campus. Each participant was a senior is classification to ensure that they had multiple years of experience on the campus and at least a year of active membership in their respective BGLO. However, only four students responded and agreed to participate. The actual sample included four students from four of the five active organizations. There were two male participants and two female participants.

**Permission**

Permission was granted through the institutional review board (IRB) on the campus. Gaining permission required multiple steps: seeking permission from the IRB, creating a project description, developing an informed consent form, and review of the study (Creswell, 2012).

There were no anticipated risks to participants in this research study nor were they compensated. While there was no direct benefit, participants were aware that the information that they provided could positively impact Greek students and Greek Life professionals in higher education. The identity of participants was kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used for each person so that names were not revealed. All identifying information was removed from the data set. When the study was complete and the data was analyzed, the list of participants was destroyed. Consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet SEPARATE from paper or electronic copies and will remain there for a minimum of 3 years.
Data Collection

Interviews were selected as the data type to address the research questions. Creswell (2012) stated, “A qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers” (p. 217). Open-ended questions were asked because they yield limitless answers that could give a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of study. These types of questions allow participants to express their experiences without the restrain of the researcher (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, the advantages of interviews were of benefit to this study. Creswell (2012) explained,

Some advantages are that they provide useful information when you cannot directly observe participants, and they permit participants to describe detailed personal information. Compared to the observer, the interviewer also has better control over the types of information received, because the interviewer can ask specific questions to elicit this information. (p. 218)

Initially, an interview protocol was developed which included the questions to be asked and space to take notes on the responses (see Appendix). Data was then collected through individual one-on-one interviews with members of NPHC organizations at the institution. Participants were asked questions about their experiences at LSU, with emphasis on their involvement in an NPHC organization. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes and were recorded on an audio recording device. The audio files were then converted to text documents through a transcription service.

Data Analysis

Analyzing and interpreting the data involved four steps. First, the data was prepared and organized. Next, the data was reviewed to gain an understanding and coded, a process that reduces the text to descriptions. Thirdly, the codes were broadened and developed into themes. Finally, the findings were interpreted for meaning (Creswell, 2012).
Role of Researcher

The topic of NPHC Greek students at PWIs is of interest to me because of my experience with the council. NPHC organizations were a major contributor to my development and success as an undergraduate, when I was both a non-Greek and a Greek student in the Council. I believe that NPHC organizations have the potential to better the experiences of Greek and non-Greek students but that can only be done in a supporting environment of students, faculty, and staff. I realize that this does not exist on many campuses and would like to explain why through research.

I am particularly interested in NPHCs at PWIs because I have attended two large, public, research-intensive institutions in the southeast. Although, the institutions have these similar characteristics, NPHC Greek life looked very different leading me to believe that a phenomenon exists. NPHCs at PWIs have a very unique experience because their target population is often very small in numbers and because they are often housed in the same office as larger Greek councils that function very differently than them. With this being understood, it seems realistic to believe that there are environmental characteristics that can make it difficult for NPHCs to succeed at PWIs and that there are environmental characteristics that could be put in place to help them thrive. I am interested in making discoveries in both of these categories in an effort to help this council succeed.

Limitations

This study is limited because it was only conducted at one large, public, research-intensive, PWI in the southeast, implying that the findings may not attest to the experiences and needs of all similar institutions. This research also included a small number of participants so the data may not represent the experiences of all of NPHC students at this institution. Lastly,
this study did not include the NPHC students that were still present on campus who had been initiated as members of NPHC organizations that had recently been suspended from the campus. Because of this, there is a unique NPHC experience and perspective that is missing from this research.
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The main goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of the struggles that NPHC organizations face on predominately White campuses. The findings shed light to a variety of areas that the students viewed as challenges. Of course, each student’s experience was different from another. Each participant shared stories, perspectives, and opinions that were based off of their specific involvement in the Council. Four common themes arose as struggles: 1. comparison to IFC and PHC, 2. interest, recruitment and membership, 3. unity, and 4. relationships with Greek Life professionals. Lastly, students also offered advice to professionals working with NPHC Greeks.

Comparison to IFC and PHC

Participants expressed frustration in regards to being compared to the Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC) and Pan Hellenic Council (PHC). Students believed that their NPHC organizations varied in multiple ways including their purpose, intake processes, and expectations from their national organizations. The general policies and procedures that were put in place by the Greek Life office to guide all three councils were viewed as difficult and unreasonable for NPHC organizations. One participant explained:

Since my chapter is a smaller chapter, it’s just hard to get stuff done, how they want it all the time anyway, because it is like so strict. Like you have to have something in by this date, this date and this date and just having that…and all the [NPHC] chapters are smaller than they want so it is sometimes harder to do those guidelines.

This is an experience that is unique to PWIs because the IFC and PHC are often larger and prominent at these institutions. Because Greek Life professionals typically assist with all three groups, there is more pressure to evaluate and compare each council to the other. NPHCs at other institutional types, like HBCUs, may not experience this tension because IFC and PHC are either not present on their campuses or are there in smaller numbers than the NPHC.
Students believed different guidelines should be implemented with consideration given to each council’s unique characteristics. Even though each council consists of Greek-letter organizations, NPHC students felt that it was unfair and disadvantageous for the same rules that applied to IFC and PHC to be applied to them. A participant stated,

I guess I would say that NPHC can’t be grouped with the other organizations because they are not the same and they don’t have the resources that the other organizations have. So they can’t just thrive the same way that the other organizations thrive and you have to find different ways to help them out. And maybe some rules should be different for different councils.

Not only did participants discuss the challenge of being compared to other councils, they also spoke about pressure to conform to the structure and operation of IFC and PHC organizations. Students felt pressure from professionals to conform, with no thought being given to their distinctive purposes and traditions. A student elaborated,

We are being held to the standards of IFC and PHC because they’re so big. They—like a lot of times—they, or Greek Life I should say; Greek Life wants us to kind of just conform to like their ways of doing things and it’s just not what we want to do, because our organizations are just so different, and I think we bump heads a lot over stuff like that. And when they want us to kind of be—I don’t know, just change our traditions and stuff and want to get really involved with our intake processes and everything whereas with IFC and PHC it’s a lot more transparent but with NPHC organizations more is like held near and dear so you don’t want to let outsiders into that.

While students continually expressed concern with being compared to IFC and PC and pressure to conform, multiple students explained that there is one specific NPHC attribute that was embraced by professionals: stepping. When asked to share a story that reflected their Greek experience at their institution, participants articulated that they are often looked to for entertainment, with one of NPHC’s mandatory programs (implemented by Greek Life) being a step competition in which they teach IFC and PHC organizations how to step. A participant shared,
Fall Fest, I’m gonna say is performed for the (institution) community. It’s something where all students of (institution) get to see what you’re doing, kind of like a step show or kind of just a show. So we went over there and everybody loved it, you know, great show. I guess the experience that, you know, everybody loves the show we put on but that’s probably all they will know about NPHC…they know you for the show you put on, not for the other good things you do, or for anything else you do.

This is a struggle for NPHC at PWIs because it demonstrates a conflict between the students’ values and the professionals’ values. When NPHC students are encouraged to step and entertain but do not receive the same support and praise for their organizations’ historical values (scholarship, service, and brotherhood/sisterhood), they may feel underappreciated and misunderstood. This conveys that the institution values the performances they can give but does not appreciate the more meaningful contributions that NPHC can make.

**Interest, Recruitment and Membership**

Participants explained how their NPHC is automatically at a disadvantage because they are at a PWI. Their target audience, Black students, makes up a small portion of the student body, limiting the number of perspective members from the beginning. A participating student explained that other factors lessen the amount of potential members to even fewer:

The Black community here is like 10 percent of 30,000, about 3,000 students. Out of that 3,000, not that many are interested in becoming Greek and out of those who are interested, even fewer meet the requirements whether it be GPA or just being involved on campus.

It was also stated that students at PWIs arrive to campus with less knowledge or exposure to NPHC organizations in comparison to students at HBCUs. Participants believed that this impacted the support and interest that their organizations received from perspective students.

One NPHC student stated,

At HBCUs, I see that, to me, they get more support. A lot of the students actually come from relatives who are Greek so they kind of have a mindset of what they want to be so when they get there, it’s something that is more known on their campus. With PWIs, I feel like we come with a more diverse background where a lot of their parents are not,
you know, really aware or may be Greek or were not Greek. So when they get here they are not, you know, quite understanding of what Greek may be.

Students repeatedly emphasized the impact of not having all nine of the Divine Nine organizations on campus. Participants felt that students were less likely to seek NPHC membership because so few options were available. They believed that membership thrived and happened as a domino effect. A student explained,

I would add all of the NPHC organizations together if I could because I think that would improve the climate around here—the NPHC climate, the campus climate. I know that the previous advisors, they always talk about how the problem was that we didn’t have all the organizations here and if all the organizations were here it would just—it would bring the NPHC experience back to where it was supposed to be. Because then you would have more people wanting to join these other organizations. So when they join these, then their friends are gonna want to join these organizations and when more people are in this organization, it opens other people’s eyes who wouldn’t have seen it before and it just—it kind of opens up a cycle to where when you join something, somebody else joins something else, and somebody else joins something else. And it gets people involved. But if you have two options or one option—or you know—your option isn’t here then it just makes it hard to, kind of hard to get people interested in Greek Life. If everybody’s doing the same thing or if there is only one organization that everyone is interested in, it’s not as appealing as it would be.

Also, considering that some students have knowledge of and interest in NPHC organizations prior to college, a certain chapter’s absence may cause them to reject Greek membership completely. Students interested in NPHC membership select an organization to pursue through a careful thought process and view it as a life-long commitment. If their organization of choice is not present, it is unlikely that students will choose another organization for membership. This may also impact their involvement and support of NPHC events that are hosted for and open to all students, Greek and non-Greek. A participant articulated,

One of the biggest things, we don’t have the whole Divine Nine. So like the bigger organizations, you know—some people come to college already knowing what they want to be and they see that, you know, like the K’s (Alpha Kappa Alpha) are gone, the Kappas (Kappa Alpha Psi) are gone. When they see that, they kind of just get disinterested. They don’t even go support the other organizations because what they want to be is not here.
Students also believed that a lack of healthy competition weakened NPHC as a whole. Having more organizations present on campus encourages each organization to strive for success not only to meet requirements but to ensure that their chapter and organization is positively represented in comparison to the other NPHC organizations. Furthermore, the individual success of each organization is a good look for the entire Council. More individual success is possible when more organizations are present. A student expressed,

I would love to see all nine organizations on this campus. I do feel like that’s a big reason why maybe the face of NPHC has gone away or we’ve been looking—I guess weaker to outside people, because I do feel like when you do have all those organizations, like we thrive off of each other. Like this chapter being successful ultimately helps the whole face of NPHC and us having only what, five organizations on campus right now…it just…I think that is the reason why everybody is kind of looking like “ughhh.”

Unity

Participants of this study admitted that they struggle with establishing unity within NPHC. There is little collaboration and effort made to strengthen the organizations as a complete unit. While students have pride and confidence in their respective organizations, they demonstrated a desire to work together. However, unity had been difficult to achieve and has impacted the organizations’ campus success. One participant rendered a synopsis of this challenge,

Okay, I think—so when I first came into my organization, bring a neo (short for neophyte; a new initiate of a NPHC organization), you want to work with everybody. I mean initially you think, my organization is the best organization, nothing touching it. But I mean, you have friends who are not Greek and you have friends that are Greek in other organizations because you just became Greek. So, you initially want to work with everybody but I think—after a certain amount of time, like it becomes a headache. Everybody wants something different, everybody—nobody is willing to compromise on things and stuff and it just becomes a headache and you don’t see yourself working with organizations I think—I see that happen every year. When we bring in neos, when other organizations bring in neos, it’s just like nothing gets done as far as like doing stuff together. I think that’s an area that really needs improvement. It’s partly our fault and partly Greek Life’s fault because our organizations don’t get that cohesion event…The
funny thing about it is when we do do it randomly or when we randomly get together, we have the time of our life and we all say we want to do it but we don’t push towards doing it. I think that’s really important. I think if the overall community saw us unified and not like fighting over like stupid stuff about like what someone said on twitter and stuff like that, then we would be so much more powerful on campus and we would be—we’d get so much further. So, I think that’s something we need to work on. We need to do this.

**Relationships with Greek Life Professionals**

The majority of the participants expressed how relationships with Greek Life professionals varied depending on the student’s involvement with the actual NPHC, not just their membership in their respective NPHC organization. Members who did not serve as student leaders on the council rarely interacted with the administration. This struggle could be unique to PWIs because, as previous research stated, the majority of professionals working with NPHCs and/or Greek Life at these institutions are White. Being that NPHC is a predominately Black council, students may experience difficulty in establishing relationships with these professionals. One student explained,

I say I have a good relationship with them but as far as everybody else in the NPHC community, they probably don’t have any kind of relationship within Greek Life or Greek Life advisors because they’re not around Greek Life as much as maybe I would be or somebody else who is involved in NPHC or Greek Life as a whole. So me, and other E-Board [NPHC Executive Board] members or past members probably have a good relationship but the majority of NPHC doesn’t.

**Lack of Trust.** Additionally, the recent suspensions of multiple NPHC organizations at the institution left a lasting impact on the relationship between the remaining groups and Greek life. The circumstances caused the students to feel that the same drastic experience could happen to them, with little consideration given to less severe or alternative methods of reprimand. The following participant described the lack of trust: “When I first got here, two [NPHC] organizations had got kicked off campus like within a year. So I think around that time, it was
like the trust was kind of gone because seeing two organizations get kicked off campus within a year—I mean it kind of hinders that trust.”

“Watchful Eye.” The relationships with Greek Life professionals were also hindered because students felt they implemented rules that made it difficult to carry out the basic functions of Greek-letter organizations. The regulations were viewed as more strict in comparison to those for IFC and PHC. Students described obstacles in things like paperwork and executing campus programs. One participant stated, “Just some of the struggles that you have to go through to get events registered and just—I think there is a more watchful eye on NPHC organizations at a PWI.” Another student explained her similar experience:

I feel like it’s like here—you have to go through hell and high water to just sometimes get stuff approved. I remember one time my organization wanted to do a little yard show and it barely got approved, which I just think something as small as chanting and doing a small step shouldn’t take as much…There’s a lot of mandates and I think that’s why we feel like we can’t do anything…Sometimes NPHC is like a middle man.

Penalties Today for Yesterday’s Problems. NPHC students expressed frustration with the ongoing penalties for issues that existed in the past, some of which occurred before they were members in their organizations. The participants struggled to understand why they weren’t granted more independence and leeway when they demonstrated progress and alleviated past problems. A participant explained a situation with his fraternity and stated, “It was just a thing of—we were being punished for things that happened before we got here so there might still be—I mean, I don’t know—people still have that kind of problem.”

The students believed that administrators implemented penalties, based on previous negative experiences, to make their organizations’ goals “impossible” and indirectly keep them from achieving them. The also felt that these regulations were specific to the NPHC. The following student further explained this struggle:
We [NPHC] had an incident where we were gonna try to throw a party and we were gonna try to book the Cotillion [room in the Student Union] to do it and it was going to be where people had to pay to come to it. Well, we ended up getting like—they were trying to just tax us really, really, really hard and it was basically like—they just straight up told us it was because our organizations have had a history of unruly, I guess, conduct, I would say. So, they were gonna put like this big huge fee on just renting the place because we were charging and also they were gonna make us have, what I felt to be, an excessive amount of security there, also…I guess we are treated a little bit differently because the backgrounds of our organizations are more high risk when it comes to events thrown like that.

**Lack of Appreciation for Student Input.** Students did not always believe that their input and opinions were valued by Greek Life professionals, hindering the student-professional relationship. Participants described instances where decisions were made that impacted them but consideration was not given to their thoughts, or their input was ignored. Two students reflected on a decision that was made in regards to NPHC probates (a public show in which new members are presented to the campus and community):

Normally we do individual probates but it was suggested that we try out a joint one. And pretty much all the NPHC organizations said they were opposed to it but we were kind of forced to do it anyway. It was supposed to be a pilot program but now it’s required. So I think stuff like that, it kind of really hinders like the relationship and gets in the way.

The second participant explained that the situation was formally voted upon by NPHC but the results of the vote were not upheld.

When this was voted upon, I say a year or two ago, it didn’t pass. The delegates voted against it but when we came back to school in the fall, it was mandated which a lot of people were frustrated about because what’s the point of doing a vote? If it doesn’t pass, why did it still pass?

**Suggestions to Greek Life Professionals**

During the interviews, participants were asked to give advice to Greek Life staff and professionals advising NPHC. Students rendered various ideas based on their experiences. Participants encourage Greek Life administration to work with NPHC organizations in order to help and help them succeed. One student answered, “Definitely more cooperation from the
administration and allowing us to achieve our goals. It’s a whole lot harder to get stuff done when you don’t have somebody on the other side of the table to help.”

Participants also suggested that professionals move forward with NPHC instead of making present day decisions based on the council’s past problem areas. They asked to be granted more independence and flexibility when they demonstrate improvement. A participant explained,

If you see us doing better, like give us a chance; like don’t keep putting more rules on us at a chance that we may mess up. Like give us—like if you see one year that we’ve done really good, kind of like let us span our wings.

Lastly, participants emphasized the importance of Greek Life professionals establishing trust with NPHC groups. Students believed that more trust would improve a lot of the areas that they identified as struggles. The following statement was made by a participant:

The best advising tactics that I’ve seen thus far are not when you try to necessarily just police everything and to like, dictate everything, but when you earn the respect of the—like the people you’re advising, for one. I think that’s a big thing. You have to earn the respect of the people you’re advising. Otherwise, they’re not really going to listen to you, well completely. Then, along with that, you have to—it has to be a working relationship, so you have to give and take instead of just always telling like what to do and stuff. I think that’s very important and it goes back to the trust, like what I was saying. Trust and respect; we have to feel like we can trust you before we fully allow ourselves to follow you.
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

Again, the findings identified four struggles that could impact success for NPHCs at predominately White institutions: 1. comparison to IFC and PHC, 2. interest, recruitment and membership, 3. unity, and 4. relationships with Greek Life professionals. The participating students also conveyed the needs of the council by offering suggestions to Greek Life professionals. This study provides information that is of values to Greek Life professionals and can be used to improve NPHCs at their respective institutions. In this section, best practices will be rendered based on the findings and examining the data through Strange’s Dynamics of Campus Environments framework.

It is important to acknowledge that the following practices can only be successful with effort and cooperation of both Greek Life professionals and NPHC organizations and students. However, this research focuses on the role of Greek Life professionals and therefore provides suggestions and ideas that are specific to them.

Implications for Practice

Greek Life professionals must acknowledge, accept, and embrace the differences and unique aspects of NPHC. As previous literature explained, the functionality of ethnic student organizations (including NPHC organizations) often includes the culture and values of their respective subpopulation. Therefore, NPHC organizations have purposes and traditions that cannot be equally compared or similarly categorized with the IFC and PHC. Student affairs professionals should not encourage NPHC to conform nor should they advise them in all the same ways that they advise other Greek councils. While they are all Greek-letter organizations, single method advising cannot be expected to best serve all groups. Just as it is believed that all students cannot be served in one way, this should be understood for Greek councils, as well.
Same policies and procedures can be implemented for functions that are similar amongst the three councils. However, policies that are council specific should be considered for operations that vary from council to council. This ensures that there is harmony between the goals of the organizations and the guidelines that they adhere to, increasing their likelihood of success. Acknowledging that NPHC is unique, efforts should be made to better understand its functionality and identify effective advising methods.

To assist NPHC organizations with interest, recruitment, and membership, Greek Life professionals can help improve the Council’s campus appeal. NPHC groups do not typically participate in formal recruitment like other Greek councils. Interest is usually developed by the attraction to an organization, and by a person believing they have something to offer and gain from membership obtainment. In order for NPHC to have an increasing membership flow, the Council needs to be appealing to potential members. One way to gain appeal is through successful programming. Greek Life professionals should encourage NPHC organizations to host a variety of events (educational, service, and social) that allow non-members to get involved and learn about the values of each organization. In addition to encouragement, the Council needs support from professionals. Students should be assisted in obtaining resources, following procedures, and program promotion. Students should feel that the staff is there to help, not there to put them through “hell and high water.”

Membership can also be positively impacted when there are more NPHC organizations present on campus. More organizations increase the Council’s campus involvement with more groups’ programs and efforts falling under the NPHC umbrella. This can make a large difference at a PWI where the Council is such a small minority. Greek Life professionals can assist in having all nine (or close to) NPHC organizations on campus by being proactive instead of
reactive in anti-hazing efforts. Additionally, advisors can develop plans of action when organizations’ membership levels appear to be threatening. For example, if an organization only has 3 members, two of which are juniors and one senior, efforts can be made to help this group develop a plan to ensure that they participate in intake over the next year and avoid becoming inactive because there are no members. Because NPHC membership numbers are sometimes lower and threatening at PWIs, it is critical that this practice is considered and that preventative efforts are made on the front end.

Additionally, NPHCs can be improved by implementing opportunities for cohesion. The coming together of groups within the Council strengthens them as a unit, creates community, and opens the door to collaboration. Students can be more supportive to one another and to the Council as a whole when they feel invested and have significant relationships within it. This cohesion can also be witnessed by non-members, making the Council more appealing.

Furthermore, opportunities for cohesion are not just beneficial to the students. Greek Life staff and professionals can also benefit from these efforts. Coordinating opportunities for the Council to unite, bond, and get on one accord allows the advisors to get to know the students. They have the chance to form relationships with members beyond those that serve on the Executive Board or are in other leadership positions. Facilitating these types of events allows more students to connect with professionals and on a regular basis, strengthening the student-professional relationship and contributing to the Council’s success.

Lastly, Greek Life professionals should trust NPHC students as much as possible. Their motivation to set and reach goals can be negatively influenced when they feel they are under a “watchful eye,” causing them to not even try. Advisors should also trust and consider the students’ opinion on situations that directly affect them. Yes, decisions will ultimately be made
by the professionals but it should be kept in mind that the professionals serve the students. In times of conflicting views, consider a compromise, or at least make an effort to explain and help the students understand the decision. Finally, trust can be demonstrated by granting students independence when they demonstrate responsibility, instead of dwelling on negative experiences that may have occurred before their membership initiation.

**Implications for Research**

Though the findings provide leads on supporting NPHCs at PWIs, there are still areas that need further research to better assist this group of students. While this research was limited by a time frame and number of participants, further studies could validate the initial data and provide a more thorough understanding of the topic. The implications for research would offer a more holistic understanding of NPHCs at PWIs as they examine involved populations beyond the NPHC students.

It would also be helpful to examine the struggles and needs of NPHCs at PWIs from the Greek Life professional perspective. The success of this council requires effort and cooperation from both the students and the professionals that advise them so this piece cannot be ignored. It would be interesting to compare the findings of a study on Greek Life professionals to the findings of this study on NPHC students. Comparing the two could reveal congruence between the staff and students, confirming the struggles and areas that should be given attention. In the contrary, dissonance could demonstrate a need to realign and get staff and students on the same page before implementing strategies for improvement.

Similarly, research on NPHCs at PWIs that included non-Greek Black students as participants could be beneficial. Non-Greek students are potential NPHC students and it would be interesting to learn why they chose not to join an NPHC organization. This study could
provide information on perception and appeal, two aspects that can heavily influence a student’s decision to become Greek. It would be interesting to see if the reasons for rejecting membership are similar to the areas that NPHC students and Greek Life professionals identified as struggles and needs. Data for this study could assist Greek Life professionals and NPHC groups with alleviating any identified membership “deal breakers” that they have the power to improve.

Lastly, research similar to this study could be conducted at institutional types beyond PWIs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the existing literature on Greek organizations is very vague and not specific to councils or institutional type. Just as with any functional area within higher education, Greek Life varies from institution to institution. More specific studies on NPHC could better assist Greek Life professionals in ensuring the success of the Council at their respective institutional types.

**Conclusion**

NPHC organizations can be a contributor to student success at colleges and universities across this country. However, there are obstacles that the Council may face that could inhibit this success. This study evaluated and identified struggles and best practices specific to NPHCs at PWIs. It is important for higher education professionals to be aware of these needs and implement efforts to improve the conditions. Acknowledging these areas and strategically working to make the Council more successful can better each NPHC student’s collegiate experience and positively influence the campus environment for all students.
REFERENCES


LSU Greek Life. “History at LSU.” http://greeks.lsu.edu/history-lsu


Please read this informed consent document carefully before you decide whether or not to participate in this study.

**Project Title:** What about the Black Greeks? Supporting NPHCs at PWIs

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of NPHC Greek students at a large, public, research-intensive institution in the southeast.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** You will be asked to meet one time with the investigators to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview.

**Time Required:** Approximately 1 hour

**Anticipated Risks of Participation:** There are no anticipated risks to participants.

**Benefits/ Compensation:** There is no compensation or other direct benefit to you for participation. Information gained from this research may benefit students who participate in Black Greek Letter Organizations, Greek Life advisors and professionals in higher education.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for each person such that names are not revealed. All identifying information will be removed from the data set. When the study is complete and the data is analyzed, the list of participants will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. The consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet SEPARATE from paper or electronic copies for a minimum of 3 years.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating and you may withdraw at any time during the study if you choose to participate.

**Whom to contact if you have questions:** Please contact either Aleidra Allen at aalle62@lsu.edu or Brian Bourke, Ph.D. (225) 578-4759, bbourke@lsu.edu.

**Whom to contact about your rights in the study:** Research at Louisiana State University involving human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). For information about participants’ rights please contact: Institutional Review Board, Dr. Robert Mathews (Chair), 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, (225) 578-8692.

_______ I have read the informed consent.

_______ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a story that you think reflects your experience in an NPHC group at a predominately White institution.

2. What makes your experience different than NPHC Greek students at historically Black colleges and universities?

3. Tell me about a time when you’ve seen a difference between predominately White Greek-letter organizations and NPHC organizations.

4. How would you describe your/NPHC’s relationship with your institution’s Greek Life staff and professionals?

5. Tell me about a time (if any) when your organization/NPHC has had its differences with the Greek Life office.

6. If you could give advice to Greek Life staff and professionals advising NPHC, what would you say?

7. How does the campus climate impact your/NPHC’s Greek experience?

8. If you could change your NPHC experience at your institution, what would you change?

9. Can you think of examples of ways NPHC struggles at your institution?

10. What does NPHC need to be successful at your institution?
APPENDIX C
IRB APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts B-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://research.lsu.edu/Compliance/PoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item24737.html

A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
(D) If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php)
(F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (https://research.lsu.edu/files/item26174.pdf)

1) Principal Investigator: Aleida Allen
   Dept: School of Education
   Ph: 504.608.9203
   E-mail: aelled2@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
   Brian Bourke, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, 578.4759, bbourke@lsu.edu

3) Project Title: What about the black Greeks? Supporting NPHC at a PWI

4) Proposal? (yes or no) [ ] If Yes, LSU Proposal Number
   Also, if YES, either [ ] This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
   OR [ ] More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g., Psychology students)
   LSU students in Black Greek Letter Organizations
   [ ] *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature
   Date 2-14-13
   (No per signatures)

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Department Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted [ ] Not Exempted [ ] Category/Paragraph

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes [ ] No [ ]
Reviewers:签名
Date 2/14/2013

46
VITA

Aleidra Allen is currently a second-year master’s student in the Higher Education Administration program at Louisiana State University. Ms. Allen received her Bachelor of Science in Community Communications and Leadership Development from the University of Kentucky in 2011. Ms. Allen is currently the graduate assistant for LSU Community University Partnership, a department in the Office of Equity, Diversity & Community Outreach.