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# Perceptions of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations Impact on Leadership Development

Sherry Gunn

*Eastern Illinois University*

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Perceptions Of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations

Impact on Leadership Development

(TITLE)

BY

Sherry Gunn

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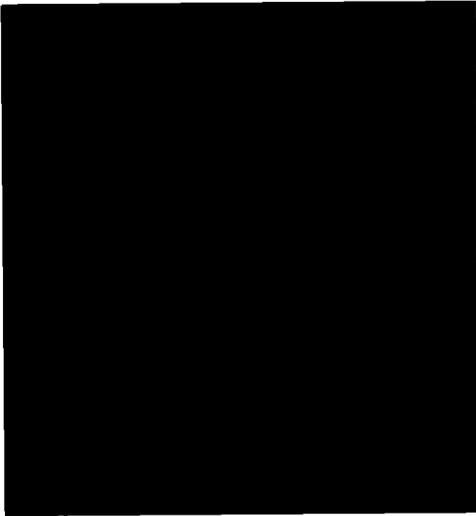
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Perceptions of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations

Impact on Leadership Development

Sherry Gunn

Committee Members

Dr. Diane Timm

Dr. Mona Davenport

Dr. Shawn Peoples

## **ABSTRACT**

Historically Black Greek – Lettered Organizations (HBGLO) have an impact on Black students at a Predominantly White Institution. As student affairs professionals, it is important to understand how these organizations affect our students and their development. This study aimed to learn how these Historically Black Greek – Lettered Organizations assisted with members gaining leadership skills, members experiences versus non - members, and members connection/ retention to the institution. The researcher conducted interviews with members of Historically Black Greek Lettered Organizations to examine the perceptions of seven participants. These participants represented four of the six Historically Black Greek Lettered Organization at the institution. Results showed that members did gain some common leadership skills, as well as different experiences from their non - HBGLO peers. Each students also gained a connection to the institution due to membership in their Historically Black Greek Lettered Organization.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Since I was you my family has always pushed me to do my best. I'm sure they may have no idea how much of an impact they have had on me but they continue to show me that I can do anything I put my mind to. My mother and father taught me to always value education. Through their guidance I have been able to accomplish things academically that I did not think were possible. My siblings always encouraged me and kept me on my toes. I knew that I couldn't let them down when I embarked on this journey because I know they look up to me.

I have faced some challenges along the way, but I remember that I am doing this for more than just myself. I know that my parent believe in me and my siblings look up to me. No matter what I will always push through to make my family proud.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I was informed that I would have to complete a thesis I wondered how I was going to be able to finish this task. I learned that if I take one step at a time I would be able to make it through the process. With support, patience, and encouragement I have been able to complete this task.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Literature on Black students' experience on a predominantly white campus indicates that these students face stress related to acceptance, fitting in, cultural conflict, help seeking, coping, lack of resources, mistrust of the institution, racism, and social support (Grier-Reed, 2010; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). Black students deal with prejudice and discrimination which can cause psychological distress, ultimately impacting students' ability to adjust to their institution (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999). Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) have historically been set up to serve White students. Black students are expected to adjust to the environment even when they do not feel affirmed by its culture (Jones & Williams, 2006). This can be hard for Black students because they have to deal with other hardships that their Caucasian peers do not (Love & Murdock, 2012). These additional factors Black students face can impede their ability to create a bond with the university. Sedlacek (1987) has contributed evidence that identification with an institution has a strong correlation to retaining Black students.

If students feel connected to the university they will stay and graduate (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). When Black students do not create a bond with the university they have a lower chance of returning and this impacts students' attainment of a degree and hurts universities that are trying to diversify their campus. There are many ways to help students connect to the campus. One way for Black students to create a bond with their

institution is through mentorship, which research shows to be a valuable retention strategy (Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring programs are established at many colleges and universities now to help minority students and to guide members of minority groups who enter college and find achievement within higher education (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Hicks, 2005; Santos & Reigadas, 2004; Santos, Reigadas & Scott, 2000; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; Welch, 1997). These mentorships can be upperclassmen to first year, faculty/staff to student, or even alumni to student.

Black students need organizations on campus that allow them to connect with peers, gain a connection with faculty members, and give back to the African American community (Museus, 2008). Often this happens through organizations which provide them the extra help and support that they need. One place where this intentionally happens is in Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs). Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations give members the opportunity to participate in mentoring as well as leadership development (Sutton & Terrell, 1997). The purpose of the nine original HBGLOs, was to implement mentoring programs, raise scholarship funds, and affect lives in a favorable manner and this continues today (Ross, 2001). Each organization is different but they all have a main goal of helping Black students and the community as a whole. Developing an understanding as to how membership in HBGLOs associates with higher retention rates is the key to fixing the issues toward retaining Black students to the institution (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005).

### **Purpose of the study**

Higher education is experiencing a contemporary crisis; PWIs continue to struggle to recruit and retain African-American students (Simmons, Lowery-Hart, Wahl

&McBride, 2013). Part of this issue is related to a lack of connection between the student and the institution. The purpose of this study was to investigate how HBGLOs of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) assist in connecting students to their PWI in addition to preparing Black students to serve as leaders. This information was found through exploration of the views on mentorship, leadership, and leadership development from members of HBGLOs. This study was seeking to identify the ways HBGLO's connect Black students to the college campus. This study provides evidence that involvement in a HBGLO allows development of more students of color into leaders. The result could also aid in the retention of students of color at institutions.

### **Research Questions**

Due to the increase in students of color and membership in HBGLO's at colleges and universities this study seeks to understand how HBGLO's impact the students' connection to the institution and prepare them to serve as leaders. This will be addressed by answering the following questions:

- RQ1      What leadership skills do students gain when participating in HBGLOs?
- RQ2      In what ways do members of HBGLO's identify that their experience is different from their peers not in a HBGLO?
- RQ3      How do members in an HBGLO describe their connection/ relationship to the institution?

### **Significance of the study**

As a Black student attending a PWI it was hard to figure out where to fit in. The researcher was doing well academically but was not connecting with any other students except for my roommate. The researcher always looked at the HBGLOs on campus and

saw the positive programs they were providing for the minority students on campus. The researcher also saw that the majority of the Black student leaders on campus were in HBGLOs. Most importantly the researcher could see the bonds that were created between members of the organizations. When the researcher became a member of a HBGLO it taught me what my strengths and weaknesses were. The researcher learned through holding leadership positions in my organization how to improve my weaknesses. Becoming a member of a HBGLO gave me the confidence to pursue other opportunities outside of my organization. The researcher loved what they were doing so much that they couldn't wait to come back to campus year after year to do more and more for my organization as well as the campus.

Minority organizations are intended to uplift the Black community on college campuses (Harper & Quaye, 2007). However, Black students are not as represented in leadership positions outside of Black organizations (Harper & Quaye, 2007) and it has been reported that Black students need help in getting connected to the university (Allen, 1992). Minority organizations give Black students a chance to serve in leadership roles that they might not otherwise find. There are various organizations specific to black students where they could become a member while at an institution including Black Student Union (BSU), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), African Student Association (ASA), in addition to HBGLOs. HBGLOs provide the African American community with different services as well as an opportunity for integration into the fabric of the university (Byrne, 2007). Through this study HBGLO members' perception of experience and attainment of leadership was investigated. This study provides insight in to how students views of participation in

organizations prepares them to serve their communities in the future. Finally, it provides institutions with information that is quite useful in retaining Black students/creating opportunities for students to connect to campus.

### **Limitations of the study**

Potential limitations to the study were identified. First, students involved in greek life are usually very busy because they have to attend a lot of different events. Individual interviews for this study needed to be conducted at the right time of the school year in the fall, when the semester had less going on it. Second, members of HBGLOs may have stated untruthful answers in order to make their organization look better. For example if a student was referring to leadership skills they gained from joining their organization but they are not actually involved in anything within their group, they would not be stating the truth about the leadership they are participating in. This can occur when relying on self-reporting from students and it is called the Lake Wobegon effect (Kruger, 1999). Research depicts that students tend to overstate their achievements and below average students tend to not report anything at all (Maxwell& Lopus, 1994). This issue was addressed by gaining a rapport with students, so that they felt comfortable opening up and sharing their truth. Third, this study did not allow for a diverse random sample because a specific population has been identified, and only Black members of HBGLOs will be interviewed because this is a study of Black HBGLOs members' perspective on their leadership development. This excluded all other individuals who may have something they would like to contribute about a HBGLO.

As the researcher I am a limitation. As a Black female who completed my undergraduate degree and became a member of a HBGLO at the institution where the

study was conducted. The researcher was only one year removed from the undergraduate experience when the researcher completed this study. The researcher did not interview any of the members of my HBGLO due to the past and current relationship with the organization and its members.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Historically Black Greek Lettered Organizations (HBGLO(s))** - Fraternities and Sororities with a majority of African American members built on customs and traditions and depicted as racially closed and exclusive (Hughey, 2007)

**National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)** - the umbrella governing body of HBGLOs founded in 1930 at Howard University in Washington, DC (Hughey & Hernandez, 2010).

**Predominately White University (PWI)** - colleges or universities in which Whites make up 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

**Black student** – American students attending a college or a university with an ethnic background of black African descent.

**Leadership** – ability to lead or guide individuals  
([www.dictionary.com/browse/leadership](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/leadership)).

**Academic Resources**- information or assistance from others that will provide students with assistance in their studies.

**Mentoring** – An individual advises or trains another individual how to complete a certain task (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mentor>).

**Leadership Position** – member's elected to be in charge of a specific area of the organization.

**Prophyte-** A member who has experienced at least one intake process as a member of an organization. ([http://dos.cornell.edu/greek/about\\_our\\_office/definitions.cfm](http://dos.cornell.edu/greek/about_our_office/definitions.cfm))

### **Chapter Summary**

There is still very little understanding of the Black experience at a PWI. Research has shown that providing these students with something that can connect them to the institution will help with retention efforts. HBGLOs give Black students the opportunity to grow, develop, and potentially stay at the institution and graduate. Understanding the benefits of HBGLOs could assist Student Affairs professionals in retaining and developing their Black students. It is important to understand the Black students and the organizations they are involved with in order to assist in their growth.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

There is a lack of knowledge by professionals toward understanding the Black student experience and the history & benefits of HBGLOs. To understand the Black experience you need a bit of knowledge regarding the development of black students. Gaining more information about Black student academic and social experiences is essential to improving not only their college experience but their degree attainment rates (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). The impact of understanding HBGLOs could help with institutions retention efforts.

Staff and faculty are trying to figure out ways to retain Black students, because they may lack knowledge regarding what the needs of Black students really are (Rowser, 1997). Those working in higher education must find ways to help Black students connect to the campus community and this begins with understanding how they connect to the institution and what they need from the experience. Engaging with Black students in and out of the classroom may help students feel a stronger connection (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

There are Black organizations such as Black Student Unions along with historically Black fraternities and sororities that were created specifically by and for black males and females; these organizations were created for Black students to come together and connect at the college (Shaun & John, 2007). Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLOs) since the beginning have stressed the importance of education, philanthropy, self-improvement, leadership, and excellence specifically within the Black student community (Ross, 2001). The Black Greek culture is rich with customs and traditions unlike any other student organization (Kimbrough, 2003). These customs

and traditions connect the students to the institution in unique ways. Even though there are many benefits to membership in HBGLOs there has been a stereotype that HBGLOs are nothing more than organized educated gangs (Hughey, 2008). In reality HBGLOs are nothing like gangs and instead create leaders through the deep connection to the organizations and their history (Hughey, 2008). This literature review will provide a historical overview of HBGLOs. Additionally, information about HBGLOs will be provided.

### **Development of Black Students in College**

African American students develop in college differently from their White peers (Allen, 1992). It has been defined that racial identity is a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group (Harper & Quaye, 2007). All Black students are at different developmental stages, and they need a space in which they can develop a sense of identity which can be difficult at a PWI. William Cross in 1978 studied the development of Black individuals, specifically those of college age. Cross uses the term Nigrescence, which is a French term for the process of becoming black. Nigrescence consist of four stages that show the progression of an individual's move towards a healthy Black identity (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). His four stages consist of Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. Cross's (1994) theory can be used today to understand Black students in college. A freshman Black student attending a PWI could be seen in the encounter stage where an act of racism against them will cause them to question their black identity. They will then move to the immersion-emersion stage where they will immerse into the black culture and possibly join what they believe is a

pro-Black organization. This reasoning is why it is vital that Multicultural Groups are present at PWIs. Black students need to be exposed to a culture they are comfortable with in order to provide them with the space to find their own place in society as a Black person. Even though membership is open to all races HBGLOs have a strong connection to the black culture.

### **History of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations**

In order to understand the full history of HBGLOs it is important to see why they were created. There were other Greek organizations before the HBGLOs but they were created for White students in higher education. These Predominantly White Fraternities and Sororities were created because they gave members the opportunity to feel independent from their overbearing institutions, provided members with companionship, and created social networks members could rely on in an uncertain future of the economy (Syrett, 2009). Memberships into these fraternities was not inclusive to other people. The White Anglo-Saxon Protestants wanted membership for only members who were White Anglo-Saxon Protestants which resulted in the adoption of exclusionary policies against newly arrived groups on campus, namely Blacks, Asians, Jews, and Catholics (Putney, 2011). HBGLOs arose as a result of the refusal of White Greek letter societies to admit Black people (Frazier, 1997).

HBGLOs are fraternities and sororities created by Black men and women for Black college students. They were created during the early 1900s, a time according to Bonner (2006) when “the national climate upheld racial injustice, inequality, and separate but /un-equal/ doctrines that marginalized the existence of the African American” (p. 17). During this time fraternities and sororities were becoming popular although they were

originally designed by and for White students. HBGLOs gave Black students an opportunity to create relationships with people who also shared the same views, values, and backgrounds (Kimbrough, 1995).

During a time period where there were not many students of color at PWIs, HBGLOs were a way for Black students to gain a sense of community and relief from the hostile environments they were susceptible to on their college campus (Bonner, 2006). The first incorporated college fraternity for Black people was Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. founded by seven men whose original purpose was racial uplifting and creating a support system at Cornell University (Patton & Croom, 2009). Cornell University was and still is a private PWI so this fraternity coming together was very important for the Black students on this campus. The first incorporated sorority was Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., founded at Howard University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), with its mission of service to all mankind (Patton & Croom, 2009). Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc. was the first and only sorority of the Divine Nine to be founded at a PWI by seven educators who faced significant challenges of racism, hostility, and discrimination (Patton & Croom, 2009). The founding of this sorority is significant as well because this organization provided Black women with the opportunity to come together at a PWI.

The original nine HBGLOs are also known as the Divine Nine and are housed under an umbrella organization called the National Pan-Hellenic Council (Mitchell, 2012; Ross, 2001). The organizations that are included in National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) are Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1906), Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1908), Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1911),

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1911), Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1913), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1914), Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1920), Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (founded in 1922), and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (founded in 1963) (<http://www.nphchq.org>). These organizations were found during the early 1900s and five out of the nine began at Howard University, an HBCU. At the institution selected for study Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho are present.

Hughey (2011) stated HBGLOs were a part of what W.E.B. Du Bois would refer to as *the talented tenth*. This was the 10 percent of blacks that would be educated, a part of the upper-class, and motivated individuals that would help the race in gaining socio-economic parity (Hughey, 2011). Many leaders in history and in the world today are members of a HBGLO. Distinguished civic, political, educational, and business leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, and Lena Horne were all members of HBGLOs (Kimbrough, 1995). These members of the organization who became civic leaders developed their leadership during their membership in an HBGLO. Those who have been members of HBGLOs can identify that membership in these organizations help students grow and develop.

### **Benefits of involvement in Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations**

In the past research indicated that Black students were 22% more likely to drop out of college than their white peers over a six-year period (Allen, 1999). Evidence shows that involvement in whatever form allows for a statistically significant and positive influence on a student's degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Participation

on campus, in organizations like fraternities and sororities can help with retention rates (Astin, 1984).

According to Patton, Flower, & Bridges (2011) “research has shown that membership in HBGLOs provide benefits to affiliated students” (p. 115). Some of the benefits members receive are becoming educated academically, socially, gaining a sense of self improvement, and having a connection to the community. Members of HBGLOs also participate in different community service projects, and have the opportunity to gain leadership experience. All students have the opportunity to receive these benefits from different organizations, but for Black students it is challenging. HBGLOs give members this opportunity and regardless of how involved a member is in a specific organization at some point in time they have been exposed to these benefits.

***Education in HBGLO:*** Black students attending PWI’s report that their White peers see them as under prepared for college (J. Davis & Borders-Patterson, 1986; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Black students begin to accept this stereotype, especially Black men, and purposely underachieve in school and may hide their intellectual competence (Harper, 2006). Members of HBGLOs consider excellence in academics very important, and place great value on the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore if a Black student wants to become a member of an HBGLO they would have to value education and achieve academic success. Most organizations hold a minimum GPA requirement in order to attain membership, and all of the organizations have strict GPA guidelines to stay a member (Whaley, 2008). This teaches these potential members as well as current members that academics is important and if you want to be a part of the organization you have to do well academically.

Members in organizations usually are required to attend regional and national conferences where they learn how to improve their organization. This is beneficial to undergraduate members of HBGLOs because they are gaining educational and professional development by learning how to conduct business properly as well as gaining new information they can take back to their organizations they may be involved in. They also learn information through retreats, and chapter meetings typically held each week. In these meetings they typically follow Roberts Rules of Order and treat the organization like a business. They go over things such as budgets, planning for events, and conflict management.

During their membership intake process members learn the most information about the organization and about themselves. They are being educated about the organization and things that are expected of them. They learn information that will help them become a better person and a stronger leader. This education they are obtaining through membership is important because it allows them to become knowledgeable leaders not only in their organization but in the community. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) students learn more by becoming involved at the institution. The more Black students are involved with their HBGLO is the more successful they will be academically and socially. Any type of rewarding encounters with academics or social systems at an institution lead to greater retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

***Leadership in HBGLO:*** Leadership can be described as a process where one or more people succeed in defining the reality of others through socially constructed interaction with others (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Becoming a leader takes knowledge, skills, and experience. Some skills and characteristics that leaders have include self-

confidence, trustworthiness, flexibility, and courage (Dubrin, 2012). Leaders typically are highly involved students who are devoted, and spend a considerable amount of energy studying, engaged on campus, participating actively in student organizations, and interacting frequently with faculty members and other students (Astin, 1984). A leader also needs to have other strong leaders around them because those closest to the leader will determine the success level of that leader (Maxwell, 2003). HBGLOs are one place that consciously turns students into leaders.

Greek-letter organizations give students opportunities to practice leadership-related skills and develop leadership abilities (Harper, 2007). HBGLOs provide an opportunity to hone their leadership skills through serving in leadership positions. When a student is involved in a HBGLO they are provided numerous opportunities to hold a leadership position. This provides them with the experience to follow the leadership that has been modeled and find their own leadership style through experience, both positive and negative (Maxwell, 2003). This is important because once they realize what works and what does not they can then turn around and help others develop as leaders.

HBGLOs are able to help students with developing these leaders through the education they are receiving from membership. Students that are not involved in a HBGLO have a smaller chance of serving in any type of leadership position. According to a study conducted by Kimbrough & Hutcheson (1998) on 183 members of HBGLO's found Greek members identified that their fraternity or sorority contributed to their leadership skill development more than non-Greek students. During the HBGLO experience students learn how to lead by following the role models found within their chapters, and have additional leadership experiences and skills within their individual

chapters and the larger Greek community (Hughes & Winston, 1987; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998).

***Self-improvement in HBGLO.*** HBGLOs created organizations for black people that promoted education, philanthropy, self-improvement, and excellence (Ross, 2001). Self – improvement is defined as the improvement of a person’s knowledge, status, or character by one’s own efforts (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>). HBGLOs provide the opportunity for members to improve themselves socially and academically. HBGLOs develop their members into the best person that they can be. For Black students this is a big deal because they are constantly being put down; however, with encouragement from others they can achieve success academically while simultaneously raising member’s self- concept, self-esteem, and academic confidence (Garibaldi, 1992). When students are successful they will want to remain at the institution.

Greek affiliated students have also been shown to foster the member’s growth in principled moral reasoning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This growth in moral development may be a leading factor in the HBGLOs drive for philanthropy. Bridges, Flowers, and Patton (2011) stated that membership in HBGLOs gave members the opportunity to stress the importance of being involved with community service. Each HBGLO has local and national community service events they put on each year. For example the Go to High School, Go to College program launched by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. This program pushes Black students to go to high school and then go on to college (Ross, 2000). By participating in these community service events members are able to grow and develop better judgment, exercise their sense of responsibility, sharpen

their intuitive skills and judge their impact on others (Harris, 1998). By developing these skills members are able to improve their personal characteristics.

### **Connection to the Institution**

Black students have a harder time gaining a connection to a Predominantly White Institution. For some students they are in a new environment which can be intimidating, especially if they are not coming from a predominantly white community. Students at the PWI's lack a critical mass of Black peers and faculty and describe campus activities as being geared toward Whites (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). It is hard for a Black student to feel a connection to an institution if the university offers few, if any, services or activities targeting a Black audience (Douglas, 1998). Research documents that students involved in campus activities are more likely to feel part of and connected to the university (Astin, 1993; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). If the institution is not intentional in providing programs that are more inclusive or are geared towards Black students it is difficult to get them connected to the University. To meet the needs of Black student's institutions need to employ the best practices to accelerate Black achievement by seeking genuine engagement with Black students in and out of the classroom which will help students feel a stronger connection (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

HBGLOs can create a community within the community for Black students on campus as they host the major social functions for Black students at predominately White institutions (Douglas, 1998; McKenzie, 1990; Perka, Matherly, Fishman, & Ridge, 1992). Not only do they create a community but HBGLOs create opportunities for members and non-members to get involved. Organizations often put on community service events or host social events for their peers to participate in. HBGLOs intentionally create

interactions between the students and the organization by hosting social and community service events. These events allow for the HBGLO to gain a connection to the institution which then allows for a connection to the community at large. If involvement is important in getting students connected to the institution Universities need to make sure the HBGLOs are on their campus to help reach the Black students.

### **Summary**

Historically Black Greek Lettered Organizations were created to provide an opportunity for black students on college campuses to connect with each other. Students develop relationships with each other and join organizations with individuals who shared the same views. Joining these organizations gives black students an opportunity to obtain a leadership role on a college campus. These HBGLOs were able to develop students into leaders that would later be able to do great things in the world.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods**

The study utilized a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. Student members of HBGLOs of the NPHC were studied to understand how they connect students to their PWI. In addition, how HBGLO's develop Black students as leaders was explored. In this study data will be collected utilizing a basic qualitative study. This design allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants and have them open up on their perceptions, creating a safe space for them to speak (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### **Design of the study**

The study was conducted utilizing an interview protocol. Fraternity and sorority members of HBGLO's at a midsized Midwestern four-year state university were invited to participate in an individual interview. The interview questions (Appendix A) consisted of open ended questions. The questions were open ended because close ended questions do not allow participants the opportunity to share their own experiences beyond one word statements (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2002). The questions utilized in this study provided the participants with an opportunity to share their experience in an HBGLO, the perceptions of leadership in HBGLO, and what leadership skills they believed they had gained through their membership.

#### **Participants**

Participants in the study are members of a HBGLO. Seven participants were selected for participation in this study. A list of all current members of HBGLO's on campus was obtained from the office of Fraternity & Sorority programs. A random

selection process was utilized to identify participants from various groups. Interviewed members were in the organization for at least one year, because these participants had experiences upon which they can reflect related to this study. There were a total of two female participants and five male participants. Six of the participants were seniors and one participant was a junior. Members from four of the six organizations served as participants and both their names and organizational identities have been altered to maintain their anonymity. The organizations that participated will be identified as the Betas, Gammas, Thetas, and Lambdas.

**Jackson.** The first participant is a member of Gamma and a senior at the institution. He chose to come to this institution at first because they had the major he wanted and it was the most affordable institution and he also felt that it was far away from home but not too far. Jackson decided to join his fraternity Gamma in March 2013, thus he has been a member for the past two years. When he became a sophomore he became the president of the campus organization of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He is also a member of the Black Student Union (BSU), and is involved with a mentoring program for African American men. This group mentors black males on campus. Jackson joined his group because he felt he could relate to the struggles his founders of the organization faced. He stated he didn't grow up with much and a lot of people would have never thought he could have made it to the place he is at right now. He said "People would never guess that he would be the president of the National Pan – Hellenic Council."

**Ethan.** Participant number two is a senior and decided to attend the institution because it had a provisional program which he needed due to him having a low high

school GPA. He felt that the institution was the best fit for him due to its comfortable feel. Ethan has been a member of Beta for four years ever since he joined in Fall 2010. He is also the president of the Student Accounting Society, and a member the African American Association for future Black teachers and emerging leaders. He joined Beta because of what he saw out of the group as a whole. Ethan wanted to be like them but at the same time find his own path.

**Matthew.** The third participant is a senior and he decided to attend this institution because it was a small campus where he felt he could get hands on experience and opportunities to talk to his professors. He is a member of Gamma and has been for three years since he was initiated in spring 2012. Aside from being a Gamma, Matthew was involved with BSU and is an active member of the mentoring group for African American men at the campus. He is currently the vice president for Gamma. He joined Gamma based off of their guide right program. He identified that the group doesn't settle for less and follows their motto and values. He knew the group would push him to focus on everything and become successful in all aspects. Their leadership on campus played a major role in him deciding to join the group as well.

**Daniel.** The fourth participant is a senior and he decided to transfer to the institution because it was affordable and it wasn't too far from home. He is a member of Theta and is currently the keeper of finances in the chapter. Daniel joined the group in spring 2013 because it was something that he always wanted to do, as he had uncles and cousins who were Theta's as well. He saw that the group had a positive influence and helped the community around him. He also wanted the opportunity to leave his own

legacy. Aside from being a member of Theta he was involved with BSU, NAACP, and the KSS Club.

**Daisy.** Participant number five is a junior and had originally planned to attend another university but she thought it was too big. She decided to attend this institution because it was not too far away from home and she thought the campus was a good size. She has been a member of Lambda since she joined in fall 2012, two years ago. When she got to the institution, Daisy didn't know anything about greek life and only knew of one sorority. When she got here she did some research and the Lambda's seemed the most approachable. Her mentor was also a Lambda and so Daisy would often get invited to Lambda events which sparked her interest. Along with being a member of Lambda she was involved with BSU and criminology club.

**Caleb.** Participant number six is a senior and has been a member of Gamma for four years since he joined in spring 2011. He decided to attend the institution because it was a family oriented institution and everyone in his family that went to college went to the same place. He is involved with Gamma, he was on the NPHC Executive board, and is involved with the mentoring program. He decided to join Gamma because he thought it was the best fit for him and he saw the way the members portrayed themselves on campus and behind closed doors was the same. Caleb identified that they understood the importance of a social life but they were more concerned about their academic work.

**Kala.** The final participant is a senior and she decided to attend this institution because when she came for a school visit she thought it was a very welcoming campus. She currently works on campus in the dining center, is a peer leader, and was a part of a praise dancing group affiliated with one of the campus ministry organizations. She

became a member of Lambda in Fall 2012 and has been involved for two years. She joined the group because she felt that when she first got to college she didn't know much about greek life. The Lambda's were the first people she saw. She said, "they were really nice and welcoming." After she did her research she decided to choose Lambda as her organization.

### **Research Site**

The research site is a midsized Midwestern four-year state university located in a rural community of about 15,000 residents with over 8,000 undergraduate students enrolled at the institution. The individual interviews were conducted in a conference room in an Academic Building. This institution has 13 national fraternities and 12 national sororities. This institution's NPHC is comprised of six of the nine HBGLOs. There are a total of 70 members in a HBGLO at the midsized institution. The HBGLO at the institution each host a week of events throughout the school year. These weeks consist of community service events, and social events. They also participate in an annual step show where groups perform to raise money for their organization to be able to host events throughout the year.

### **Data Collection**

Participants received an email (Appendix B) inviting them to participate. To avoid intense testing times throughout the semester the interviews were conducted in November. The interviews were developed in order to build rapport with the student and allow them the opportunity to open up and answer the questions in their own words. Each interview lasted between twenty – forty five minutes and was voice recorded. The questions that were asked (Appendix A) were designed to get the participants perception

of their involvement in their fraternity or sorority and it's relation to their connection to the institution. These questions allowed the participant to describe their experience in their organization and how it has affected their leadership development.

### **Data Analysis**

Once all interviews were complete they were transcribed and then coded for analysis. A code is used in qualitative research and is often a word or short phrase that essentially assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing attribute for a portion of language (Saldaña, 2013). I utilized the coding method to help analyze my data because it is the initial step towards making meaning of the data (Saldaña, 2013). The transcripts were coded based on the research questions that guided this study. As themes emerged related to each of the research questions they were further coded to develop sub-themes. To ensure that there was no bias in the analysis process the thesis advisor served as a secondary reviewer of all transcripts and assisted in the coding process.

### **Treatment of Data**

Before starting the interviews participants were required to read and agree to an informed consent (Appendix C) in order to continue. Pseudonyms were given to participants in the interviews and to organizations. All contact information will be deleted from the data collection process. Also information was kept on two flash drives to maintain confidentiality of the participants as well as decrease the risk of losing information. The flash drives will be kept in a locked box only the researcher can access. Data will be kept for three years after completion of the research, per IRB policy, after which both flash drives will be destroyed.

**Conclusion**

Utilizing a qualitative method allows for participants to open up and answer questions in their own words. When conducting a study about a unique group it is important to gain a rapport with them in order to get the participants to answer questions honestly. It is also important to ask open ended questions that are appropriate to the research being conducted. It is essential that data is treated appropriately in order to maintain confidentiality.

## Chapter IV

### Results

This chapter displays the information collected from the seven members of the HBGLO's about their leadership development and connection to the institution related to their membership in a HBGLO. This was achieved through the information gained from a face to face interview. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What leadership skills do students gain when participating in HBGLOs?
2. In what ways do members of HBGLO's identify that their experience is different from their peers not in a HBGLO?
3. How do members in an HBGLO describe their connection/relationship to the institution?

In an effort to respect confidentiality, participants and organizations were identified utilizing pseudonyms. From transcription, coding, and analysis of data, common themes and subthemes were revealed in the responses of the face to face interviews. This chapter will provide an examination of the themes and subthemes in an attempt to answer the research questions.

#### **Student Leadership Skills Gained Through Membership in an HBGLO**

All of the participants have been a member of their organization for at least two years. Every participant except for one has held a leadership position in their chapter. All of the participants identified that their membership has helped them gain leadership skills. They stated that they are leaders and have to carry themselves in a positive manner at all times. Kala stated, "I do have to watch how I act because if these are our principles then I have to exemplify those principles and you can't slack off." What Kala is referring

to is her group's motto or values statement that she believes makes her group stand out from the rest. Similarly Caleb was told that he would need to be seen more, sharing that his prophytes told him, "You are going to have to take the spotlight of this organization." Daisy reported that in her organization it is an expectation to be a strong woman and hold one's self to a higher standard. Ethan stated, "Black leaders of the organization are to uphold the standard, being successful and doing the best they can whether it be grades or social activities."

Some participants already had leadership skills before they became a member. Jackson who is a member of the Black Student Union, NAACP, and NPHC, in addition to his fraternity stated, "I already had leadership skills so I didn't have to get in the fraternity for the fraternity to have to put me in front of people to help me speak publicly because I had already done it." All of the participants reported being a member of another group before they were a member of their fraternity or sorority. Jackson was the only participant who held a leadership position before he was a member of his fraternity.

Participants discussed a variety of leadership skills they gained from their membership. Communication, responsibility, networking, and patience emerged as themes from the face to face interviews.

***Communication.*** When asked about leadership skills the participants gained from their membership in a HBGLO all of the participants stated communication skills. They declared that their organization gave them the opportunity to use their voice. They were able to use their voice to communicate with other members and speak in front of people that they did not know. Kala expressed that throughout her first year of membership in

the organization she had trouble speaking up and stating what she felt. Kala, specifically stated,

I think I've gained more of a sense of communication, or a voice. When I first got in my organization I didn't talk much I just observed, now if I don't feel like it's right I at least need to voice my opinion.

Caleb explained that he joined his organization within his first year of being at his institution. He explained that he was active at his school but was not able to communicate well with everyone he interacted with. Caleb stated,

I could talk to people before but I was only interacting with people I knew. After I became a member of my organization it really brought out the potential in me to go up to random people and say hey how are you doing? How is your day going?

**Responsibility.** In reference to responsibility members had many different forms of responsibility placed upon them in their organization. Members stated that they had a responsibility to say what is needed to other members even if it could hurt their feelings. Daisy was able to express the good and bad of being a member in a HGBLO. Daisy stated, "Sometimes you have to hurt someone's feelings for them to understand." They also stated that they had a responsibility placed on them to hold themselves and other members to a higher standard. One responsibility placed on some members was to be honest with others. Kala also was able to be genuine and express the necessity of honesty. When asked about characteristics a leader would need to possess in order to be effective Kala, a senior member of her sorority stated, "honesty because you have to be able to be honest with people." There was recognition that sometimes being responsible means being honest which means sometimes hurting people's feelings. Daisy stated,

“Sometimes you have to hurt someone’s feelings for them to understand this is life and I don’t feel like people think that way anymore.”

Members also identified that they have a responsibility to be a role model. Ethan, who serves in multiple leadership roles, stated “it’s important for a Black leader of the organization to uphold the standard, being successful and doing the best they can whether it be grades or social activities.” Many members acknowledged that people look up to them. In acknowledging this role model responsibility, Daniel stated “my peers who are not in my fraternity key in on every word you say so you have to be careful about what you say and what you do.”

*Networking.* The participants identified that they have learned about networking as members of their organizations, because they are always representing their group. Participants addressed their opportunities to network off campus. Jackson reflected on an opportunity to attend a national conference, “I traveled to Indiana to a fraternity leadership conference and I met my fraternity brothers from all over the country so you know it opens it up.” Each participant spoke about the opportunity to travel to different places and make connections with people who are in their organization at other institutions. Daniel stated,

It allows me to experience going to different places and traveling a lot. You get to meet so many different people and interact with people you probably never would have interacted with before. You see people and think, “me and him probably would not get along,” but once you talk to them you realize they are a good person.

Members said that becoming a member allowed them to network with people at their own school and encouraged them to speak to other people on campus. They also stated that being able to interact with alumni was beneficial. Ethan, who got to attend regional and district conferences stated, “when I started being around them [alumni], networking and feeding off what other leaders have done before, as far as what worked for them and what has not worked for them.” Ethan and others identified that networking made them better leaders and taught them how to better support one another and their individual organizations. Caleb touched on the importance of networking when he stated,

As Black Greeks I feel like this is the only thing that we have as far as Blacks and being nationally recognized. This is all we have so why can't we be brothers and sisters. Those colors and letters honestly don't mean a thing because we are all fighting for the same thing so networking is awesome!

***Patience.*** When asked what was a major skill members gained from their organization they all shared examples of how they gained a sense of patience. As a member who has had some good and some bad experiences during her time as a member of Lambda, Daisy proclaimed that leaders need to be patient. She stated, “I speak when I feel that I need to say something. If I see that things aren't going the way they need to I will step in when I need to say something.” Jackson, who has been a member of multiple groups and was able to gain other leadership skills prior to membership in his HBGLO expressed that patience was the number one thing he has gotten from joining his fraternity because it is a part of working with people, “You need patience because you can't do this on your own. We didn't come here to beat each other down because we aren't at the same speed as each other.” He figured out you have to learn to adapt to

other people, and work at the same pace as other people, put up with other people, and be patient with them because you need everyone to make the organization work.

### **Members of HBGLO identify different experience from peers not in HBGLO**

Students who join a HBGLO get the opportunity to serve in leadership roles that may be different from their non-member peers. Participants were asked questions about their experiences and how they perceived these experiences to be different from those of their peers. The main themes they identified were growth, accountability, and interactions with faculty and staff.

**Growth.** The participants were asked to talk about how their involvement and experiences with their HBGLO was different from those of their peers not in a HBGLO. Ethan thought that membership in a HBGLO was an opportunity that would help him grow as a person while in college. He knew he did not do as well as he could in high school so he was looking for something that could help him do better in college. When asked about his social interactions and his overall success in college Ethan stated, “Joining Beta was an opportunity that I saw. I had an opportunity that I thought would complement me and I went for it and here I am. I did not start off like this.” He figured out that the organization helped him become a better person.

**Accountability.** Members voiced that they are held to a higher standard by other members in their organization, and that many non-members may not fully understand what membership means. Daisy had a conversation with a friend who stated she wanted to join a HBGLO just so she could wear the paraphernalia. Daisy spoke about how many people think it is just the fun, social, and visible aspects, “people feed into the misconceptions and they think it’s just strolling and stepping and it’s so much more than

that.” Members expressed that people don’t know the things that go into being a member of a HBGLO. Kala stated, “My organization made me work harder because when I wasn’t involved in anything I slacked more because I didn’t have anything to do.”

Members shared that once they joined the organization they were expected to live up to a different set of standards imposed on them by their group. Caleb stated, “We kind of hold ourselves to the expectation or standard where we stay on each other’s back about each other’s grades and what we need to get done and how it should be followed through.”

*Interaction with faculty and staff.* Participants in this study identified that they have a different interaction with faculty and staff at the institution. Matthew stated, “Being Greek helps me get a name for myself. I can walk into an office and know someone will recognize me by face.” It allows for students to become a familiar face with the administration. Participants spoke about knowing specific faculty and staff by name and receiving information more directly from these individuals. Kala stated, “It makes us more aware because within my organization we get a lot of emails of stuff that’s going on around campus.”

#### **Membership in HBGLO and connection/relationship to the institution**

Participants stated that as members they get the opportunity to interact with a lot of different people. The participants of this study expressed that membership in their HBGLO provided them with a multitude of opportunities. Members of the organization identified that they gained a better connection to the institution because they understood the rules and regulations put into place by administration. They also identified ways they feel connected to their organization and the institution.

*Understanding rules and regulations.* Participants in this study indicated that their membership in an HBGLO provided them with an opportunity to have contact with faculty and staff on a more regular basis than they perceive happening for their non HBGLO peers. Matthew a senior member of Gamma stated,

Membership in my HBGLO helps connect me to this institution just off the fact that this institution is small so it helps me get a name for myself. I can go into an office and I know someone that can address me by face saying you're the vice president of Gamma. You become a familiar face with the administration on campus with the staff and faculty.

Participants spoke about how this familiarity with administration allows them to gain a better understanding of rules and regulations that are put in place. Participants talked about being able to understand why certain rules have been put into place, when their non HBGLO peers may not understand the new changes.

Participants also spoke about having positive connections to offices and people at the institution. Caleb stated "I met a lot of people that were on the board of EIU. People that pretty much run the union, are in charge of student affairs, or the community service office." As a member of his organization and a leader on campus Caleb identified his interaction with upper administration and spoke about having a good rapport with them. Ethan stated,

A lot of students don't understand and say this school is racist and they look at everybody as being racist. Being Greek you build relationships with the administration and gain a better understanding of when things happen and realize it is out of their control sometimes.

Participants identified that their understanding of the rules made them have a more positive feeling towards the institution. Daren who is a senior that transferred to the institution stated,

Everything has been pretty positive. People say it's them against us but I never looked at it that way. It's about interactions with people; giving them a positive influence which I feel being in this organization has allowed us to do.

*Sense of belonging.* Participants, as they spoke about their connection to their organization and the institution identified that they felt connected and that they had a place not only in their group but at the institution. Members admitted that their organization gave them a reason to try harder and want to stay at the institution. Kala stated, "Before I became a member I wasn't active and I didn't do much as a freshman but stay in my room. I became Greek and I got to meet more people because being Greek forces you to be social." She expressed that her new social life allowed her to get out and meet new people. Participants also spoke about events that groups provide that are specifically targeted to the HBGLO groups in addition to the Black community at the institution. Kala commented, "It's a good place to do stuff because the black community we have here is so strong no matter what happens we always do something."

Participants identified that Black students at the institution want to join the HBGLO because they have such a big impact on the Black community. Matthew stated, "HBGLOs were leaders on campus when I first came here and they were really influential in me deciding what I wanted to do in college." The participants stated that they do not think non-members understand everything that goes into membership in a HBGLO. Jackson, in talking about making the decision to join an HBGLO, states, "Make

sure it's something you want. A lot of people think its glitz and glamour but it's a lot of hard work that goes into it." The participants expressed that the hard work they put into their organization helped them appreciate their membership more.

### **SUMMARY**

Participants voiced how their membership had an effect on their time at the institution. This chapter addressed the perspectives of the seven participants who are members of a HBGLO. Their responses allowed for a look into their thoughts on how their membership in a HBGLO impacted their leadership development and connected them to the institution. Identified participants provided insight in to how their membership in these organizations impacted their overall experience in college.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to investigate how HBGLOs assist in connecting students to their PWI in addition to preparing Black students to serve as leaders. This chapter will review findings of the research, identify conclusions, and propose suggestions for future research. This chapter will also provide recommendations for fraternity and sorority programs, upper administrators for student affairs, and students who are members of HBGLOs.

#### **Significance of Findings**

The purpose of the nine original HBGLOs was to implement mentoring programs, raise scholarship funds, and affect Black lives in a favorable manner (Ross, 2001). HBGLOs also were intended to provide a place on campus where Black students could connect with one another along with providing them avenues for connecting to the college administrators and faculty (Museus, 2008). The participants in this study reported that their HBGLO had a positive effect on their life by further developing their leadership skills, allowing them to interact with new people, providing them with important institutional contacts, and helping them to grow as a person. HBGLOs since their beginning have stressed the importance of education, philanthropy, self-improvement, leadership, and excellence specifically within the Black student community (Ross, 2001). Based on the participant responses their organizations still stress the importance of education, service, leadership, and for members to be the best that they can be. Participants stated different leadership skills that they gained or were able to further develop based on membership and leadership opportunities in their

HBGLO. They also reported ways that their experience at the institution was different from their non HBGLO peers.

**Leadership skills obtained by members of HBGLOs.** Harper (2007) identified that Greek-letter organizations give students opportunities to practice leadership-related skills and develop leadership abilities. The participants in this study were able to identify different leadership skills they gained and strengthened through membership in their organization. During the HBGLO experience students learn how to lead by following the role models found within their chapters (Hughes & Winston, 1987; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Participants were intentionally selected because they had been in their organization long enough to observe different leaders and all discussed ways they had improved on their leadership skills. It is also important to note that all of the participants were or had been members of other student organizations prior to and during their membership in their organization. Several of the participants spoke more broadly about their leadership skills and how they were developed or enhanced through their membership in the HBGLO and in reference to their involvement in these other organizations. The three leadership skills that were reported the most by the participants were communication, networking, and responsibility.

**Communication.** All but one of the participants in this study held a leadership position. Some only held positions in their HBGLO, but others also held positions outside of the HBGLO in different registered student organizations on campus. Placement in leadership positions requires participants to communicate more with members of their organization and to voice their opinions openly. Through these experiences the participants were able to more confident in the way they spoke and addressed their peers

within the group. It also allowed them to gain enough confidence to speak to people that they did not know. Daisy never held a leadership position in her HBGLO but spoke about how she gained the ability to communicate with other members of her organization. She shared that she had learned that for the greater good of the organization it was necessary to speak up when she felt it was necessary. Half of the participants stated that they were quiet or only spoke with people they knew prior to joining their organization. After gaining membership in their organization they were put in to positions that required them to communicate with other people, thus developing their ability to communicate.

*Networking.* The participants in this study stated that through their organization they were exposed to greater opportunities to network with other members of their organization, the campus community, and outside of the institution. Participants specifically spoke of the connection to members across the nation who were active or who had graduated. This happened through attendance at conferences, workshops, and meetings. Three of the men, all members of the same HBGLO, spoke specifically to having connections with other members of their organization across the United States. The participants expressed that they could go just about anywhere and meet someone in their organization.

The participants in this study also reported that they had opportunities to connect to other individuals at their institution. This included connections to students from other HBGLOs, student organizations, and student leaders across campus. The participants also spoke about opportunities to connect directly with faculty and staff on campus. The two female participants mentioned their networking opportunities, placing emphasis on specific connections to administrators at the institution. As they make these connections

with faculty and administrators they are able to reach out and get support by voicing their concerns or helping the administration understand their unique experiences at the institution. They learned that through establishing these networks they will be heard.

*Sense of responsibility.* Participants all described different forms of responsibility placed on them as a member of their organization. All of the participants reported that their organization expected them to do well in the classroom. Research states most organizations hold a minimum GPA requirement in order to attain membership, and all of the organizations have strict GPA guidelines to stay a member (Whaley, 2008). Two of the participants, Caleb and Kala, reported that their organization expected them to maintain good grades. Through these expectations it motivated them to work harder in class. They realized that receiving bad grades was no longer just on them, but that they had a responsibility to their whole organization. If they did not perform well in the classroom it would affect the entire group.

Participants also spoke about how they were becoming role models in their group to younger members and that they needed to lead by example. They identified that they couldn't tell people to do well in class if they weren't performing to the best of their abilities in the classroom. Mathew reported that he was expected to do well in his classes because his organization places importance on education. He articulated that it was necessary to live up to the values of his organization, and it valued education so he learned to value his education. As an upperclassmen in his organization he understood his place as a role model and made sure his whole organization placed an importance on doing well academically by encouraging them to get help when they needed it.

Participants also reported they had a responsibility to be role models. This included being a role model to members in their organization, and to other individuals at their institution that may not be a part of a HBGLO. Ethan reported that his organization expects him to be a good role model for newer members in his organization. He would have to teach newer members how things are done in his organization. Ethan worked with these new members on projects for his fraternity, because he knew it was his responsibility to make sure everyone was doing their part toward completing the project. He explained you have to hold people accountable and be direct with the new members and not overstep your authority as a role model. Daniel stated that people who are not Greek look up to members in a HBGLO and that as a member of his organization he has a lot of influence that he should use in a positive manner. All of the participants reported that they always have to be mindful of what they do because they are being watched, and are expected to uphold the standards of their organization. This means they have to go to class and get good grades, be good communicators and hard workers and be a positive role model on campus. They disclosed that it is important to follow the values of the organization. As college students they go out with their friends and have fun just like any other college student. However, participants explained that as a member of a HBGLO they have to remember even when they are out having fun they still need to try and uphold the standards of the organization. Ethan explained that it is ok to go out but it's important to get good grades so other people can see that you can have fun but still do well academically, which is a display of good time management skills. The ability to be a good role model helps these members prepare for their future career. The participants

explained that these organizations provide them with the opportunity to develop as role models and understand the importance of this in their lives at the institution and beyond.

**Experience gained compared to non HBGLO peers.** Participants stated that their membership allowed them to experience college differently from their non-HBGLO peers. Most participants identified that they were able to do things now that they were not able to do before they joined a student organization on campus, specifically their HBGLO. Through their membership they were able to voice their opinions without being nervous of what others would say. The participants reported that their experience opened up opportunities for them, that they did not see their peers experiencing. Kala held a position in her organization that was over membership intake into the sorority. She expressed that no other kind of organization for Black students would allow someone to help bring other new members into the organization the way a HBGLO does. She explained how it was her job to teach the new members the values of the organization and make sure to display the values of the organization at all times. In many predominantly Black registered student organizations general members who are new typically do not undergo any training, they are simply told what the organization is about and do not receive special training unless they are on the executive board. Participants spoke about how each of their organizations provided them with opportunities to serve in leadership positions and this involvement led to a greater number of opportunities to develop their skills as a leader.

The participants membership in the HBGLO provided opportunities for them to develop as leaders as well as gave them the opportunity to interact with the faculty and staff on a more intentional and consistent basis. Participants were able to talk about how

they had opportunities that their peers did not to develop relationships with faculty and staff on campus. They reported that their membership allowed them to gain a better understanding of how the institution functioned, and to ask questions as needed or provide feedback when appropriate. The participants also discussed that their peers did not always understand why certain rules were put into place, or know how to voice concerns or questions about policies. Members of HBGLOs were able to get explanations and question faculty and staff decisions because of the relationships their membership in these organizations created.

**Connection to institution.** Participation on campus, in organizations like fraternities and sororities can help with retention rates because they create a place of belonging for individual students (Astin, 1984). Participants stated that they felt a connection to the institution due to their membership in their HBGLO. They identified that through their membership in the organization they had a place where they felt they belonged within the greater institutional community. Members reported that because they were in their organization faculty and staff knew who they were and respected them as student leaders. Participants stated that they could walk into a scheduling office and the staff would know who they were and would help them out. Members reported that they were even given the opportunity to interact with upper administration at their institution and would ask their opinions about different situations on campus. This intentional connection from faculty and staff provides the students with a network of support that creates a strong sense of belonging. They know they matter at this institution.

The participants also stated that their organization provided them with a sense of belonging to the campus. They reported that all of the fraternities and sororities looked

out for each other, and the HBGLOs always made sure there was something for the Black students to participate in on campus. Participants reported that at times the HBGLOs do not get along, but they understand that at times they need to come together because they know it is what is best for their community.

The participants in this study expressed that they had developed their own community at the institution which made their connection stronger with the institution. When there is greek unity among the HBGLOs it allows for the Black community to come together and enjoy each other's company. Daniel reported that other Black students complained that there was nothing to do in the small town but he was able to identify that the institution was not bad because he went out and found something to do within his organization. Three of the participants reported that their experience at the institution is what they make it. They reported that their organization gave them the opportunity to do things at the institution that they enjoyed, and they recognized that when they got involved in their HBGLO they began to enjoy themselves more at the institution.

### **Recommendations**

**Director of Fraternity/Sorority Programs.** Many institutions have a Director of Fraternity and Sorority programs, and many of these individuals were members of historically White organizations. This means that their knowledge of HBGLOs may be quite limited. As the administrator over the HBGLOs it is important to learn as much as they can about history, structure, and purpose. It will also help them to understand the role HBGLOs play at the institution, and in the lives of its members. HBGLOs are different from the Historically White fraternities and sororities. HBGLOs have members that are a part of a population that is constantly pushed to the side and devalued. If the

Director of Fraternity and Sorority Programs wants these organizations to be successful they will need to develop a relationship with the groups and support their efforts. The Director of Fraternity and Sorority programs could provide a new membership orientation for all newly inducted members of all greek groups together. In this orientation new members could get leadership tips, and network with some of the administration they will be in contact with now that they are members. They can also get a list of expectations that the Director has for the organizations. Putting an investment into these new members could mold the greek community and build trust.

The Director of Fraternity and Sorority programs needs to create a respectful and trusting relationship with the members of all. The Director of Fraternity and Sorority programs also needs to establish a good relationship with individual group advisors. This trust will create allies with administration, and lead the Black community toward becoming more trusting with the administrators at the institution. White fraternities and sororities need an advisor who they can trust as well, but they do not come from a population whose trust has been broken so many times that they believe someone is out to get them. Research shows that Black students' experience on a predominantly white campus indicates that these students face stress related to acceptance, fitting in, cultural conflict, help seeking, coping, lack of resources, mistrust of the institution, racism, and social support (Tabitha, 2010; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). Directors of Fraternity and Sorority programs need to identify ways to create and develop leadership opportunities that help students develop as individuals to strengthen their organization and impact the campus community in positive ways.

Fraternity and Sorority Directors can be quite influential in making sure that HBLGOs are included in all fraternity and sorority activities. They can provide intentional ways for all greek organizations to connect and work together. This includes developing strong leadership programming, developing connections across fraternity and sorority organizations, and pushing members in HBGLOs to be leaders beyond their organization. Building these relationships with the students in these groups is important because they can have influence over other students within the Black community. Finally, Fraternity and Sorority Directors have a responsibility for connecting members of HBGLOs with faculty and administrators in positive and intentional ways.

**Upper administration in student affairs.** Upper administration in student affairs such as directors of programs, Vice Presidents including those who serve over Student Affairs, and even the President of the college need to be educated on a basic understanding of HBGLOs and their history, purpose, and role at the institution. They need to understand that these groups want to help the community, promote education, promote brotherhood and sisterhood, and develop leaders for the future. Participants stated that they were able to meet with upper administration and express some of the issues they are facing and that their input was important. These sorts of interactions need to continue because they help these administrators understand the student experience and identify ways to make improvements. This has to be an intentional and genuine and the students need to see action, this will continue to strengthen the students ability to network and communicate as leaders.

HBGLOs place a great deal of emphasis on doing well academically, and working toward graduation. Administrators can play an important role in the academic success

and completion of graduation for members in a HBGLO, as they can serve as support systems and mentors to the students. They can guide them and check in on them regularly to find out updates on their grades and identify if they are doing what is necessary to graduate in a timely manner. They can also connect them to different parts of the institution that will be beneficial for the members. Just like the Director of Fraternity and Sorority programs, upper administration need to develop and provide opportunities for members to improve as leaders. They also need to encourage them to serve in leadership positions outside of their organization.

**HBGLOs Students.** Students who are members in these HBGLOs have some work to do as well. After a while members can forget what they were taught when they joined the organization. It is important to reflect on the impact and influence that they have on the Black community and the entire college community. The study showed that as members of HBGLOs, the participants know they are being watched and know they are role models; they also know that their actions will be viewed as representative for the entire population which should encourage them to work as strong leaders. Thus, they need to step up as leaders and know the impact they make on their campus and to their fellow students. Students need to seek out leadership positions outside of their HBGLO. They are role models and need to make sure to be seen by all students outside of their organization. It would also be beneficial for the students to identify ways they can serve as mentors to incoming students to develop a stronger more positive community for black students on the campus. Members of HBGLO should use their influence as role models to help build other black students up into positive leaders on campus as well.

There are many great opportunities that come from being a member of the organization. Students gain important leadership skills, are able to network with other members and institutional officials across campus, in addition to developing long lasting relationships. Members should also take advantage of leadership opportunities hosted by the campus outside of their own organization and the fraternity/sorority community. Attending on campus conferences could be very beneficial for members.

### **Recommendations for Future research**

This study was conducted at a midsized public institution. Perhaps conducting this study at a large research based institution or a private institution would provide the opportunity for a different outlook on HBGLOs members' experience. Larger institutions may host all nine of the HBGLO organizations, and may even employ a Director of PanHellenic while smaller schools may host a smaller number of organizations; looking at the different types of institutions and how they work with members of HBGLOs could be quite insightful. It also would be interesting to see future research at a HBCU to identify what their experience is like compared to members at a PWI.

This study was unable to include participants from all nine organizations of the Divine Nine. Future research that includes all nine organizations could provide for greater insight. In this study members of both fraternities and sororities was addressed, creating a more targeted study of only males or only females would provide more specific information on their experiences in these organizations. Also exploring perspectives of Black students who are not members of a HBGLO could allow for an opportunity to see if other people think these organizations are developing these members into leaders. Finally, it would be worth looking at experiences of development from

HBGLO, NPC, and IFC because they are historically different but provide some similar outcomes. Gaining further insight into their leadership development and connection to the institution could allow for an understanding of the way membership in specific types of organizations is similar or different in addition to understanding what benefits students gain through membership in each of these organizations.

### **Summary**

Through this study the researcher found that HBGLOs do provide the opportunity for members to gain leadership skills. Some members come into the organization already possessing leadership skills which can be a great thing, while other individuals develop through their membership. The students are able to voice their opinions in ways they were not able to prior to membership in their HBGLO. They also are able to be patient with others in order to reach the end goal of being successful. Some of the opportunities that members are given only happen through membership in a HBGLO. These members are able to connect with faculty, staff, and alumni much easier due to the opportunities to hold leadership positions.

Members in HBGLOs have the opportunity to connect with the institution in a way that many of their peers do not. Because of their involvement they identify that there is always something going on at the institution. Non HBGLO peers do not always reap the benefits of feeling that same sense of belonging to the institution because they may have nothing keeping them there. Members in HBGLOs have an organization that they care about, and this allows them to care about the institution because what happens to the institution could have a domino effect of what happens to their organization. These members will utilize their connections with faculty and staff to make sure that their

organization is being taken care of well beyond their time in college. Continuing to communicate with these organizations will allow for a better community and an opportunity for the institution to create a supportive environment for its Black students. HBGLOs play an important role in the overall experience of Black students in college today.

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Appendix A  
Interview Protocol

**Interview Questions**

What year in school are you?

Why did you select this institution?

Describe your social interactions at this institution?

- What do you do outside of class for fun?
- Who are your peers/friend groups?
- What impact do your social interactions have on your overall success in college?
- What groups are you a member of at this university?

When did you join your organization?

How long have you been a member of the organization?

Why did you join your group?

Describe your group.

What sorts of things do you do with your brothers/ sisters?

- Do you have social functions?
- Do you have service activities?
- What are your meetings like? ( describe a typical meeting)

What expectations do members of your group place on you?

- As a student?
- As a member of the organization?

Describe the type of student you are? (What influence does your organization have on your academic performance?)

What is your definition of a leader?

What sorts of leadership positions have you held? In what organizations?

Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or Why not?

- Describe your leadership attributes – skills or abilities that make you a leader.
- Describe your leadership style?

What are three characteristics a leader would need to possess in order to be an effective leader?

How has membership in your organization developed you into a leader?

- What specific leadership skills have you gained from being a member in a HBGLO?

Have you or do you hold a leadership position?

- Please describe your responsibilities/ role in that position.
- In what ways has this/these leadership positions impacted your development?
- What lessons have you learned about yourself as a leader?

How has your membership in an HBGLO made your college experience different from your non- HBGLO peers?

What would you tell a potential Black student about this university?

How has membership in a HBGLO helped you connect to the institution?

How does membership in a HBGLO impact your relationship to the institution compared to your peers who are not a member of a HBGLO?

What was your experience like at the institution before you became a member of your organization? (How is it now that you are a member?)

What impact does becoming a member of a HBGLO have on a black student experience at a PWI?

What kind of student were you when you first came to college? How have you grown as a student?

What impact did your HBGLO have on your academic experience?

In what ways have you changed since coming to college?

What has impacted that/those changes the most?

Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Appendix B

Initial Email to Potential Participants

To: participant

Subject: Greek Leadership Study

Hello, my name is Sherry Gunn. I am a Graduate Student in the College Student Affairs Program here at Eastern Illinois University. I am contacting you because I am doing a study on leadership development in members of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations. I am contacting you because you are in a leadership position in your organization. I would truly appreciate your participation in my study. If you are interested in participated or have any questions please let me know. Also if you know any other individuals who you believe would be a good fit please feel free to give them my contact information. Thank you and have a great day.

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Personal Interview

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Students Perceptions of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations:

Are they Leaders?

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sherry Gunn (Dianne Timm), from the College Student Affairs Program at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are involved in a Black Greek Letter Organization. You hold a leadership position in the organization and have been a member of the organization for at least one year.

### \* PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to develop an understanding of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations and the leadership development of their members.

### \* PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to: Answer question regarding membership in your Historically Black Greek Letter Organization. The questioning will last in between 45 minutes to one hour. I will audiotape the interview and then transcribe your words. I will then analyze your statements in order to further understand the leadership development in Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations.

### \* POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

I do not foresee any risks or discomforts from participation in this study. There should be no psychological, social, legal, or financial risks or harms from participation in the research.

\* POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

You will not benefit directly from participation in this research.

\* CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of not displaying your organizations name in connection with you as well as providing you with a Pseudonym. Information will not be released to any other party. I will have access to the audiotape.

\* PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

\* IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Sherry Gunn/Dianne Timm

708-362-4248

slgunn@eiu.edu

\* RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217) 581-8576

E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date