



Growing Pains: Latinx and Multicultural Greeks at HBCUs

History and Homecoming: that is a typical response one will probably receive if you ask those who are familiar with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), to describe their cultural significance. Black College Bands, Black College Football, and Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs), are products and expressions of how profound this cultural significance is. They are some of many examples of how HBCUs, for decades, have shown the impact and influence of their institutional culture on sports, music and fraternities and sororities.

This culture significance, however, supplements a much deeper HBCU educational legacy. An educational legacy that since their inception, has graduated, some of the most influential people in the world. Dr. Martin Luther King, Toni Morrison, Thurgood Marshall, and Oprah Winfrey pioneered many aspects of civil rights, education, law, and entertainment. They barely, however, scratch the surface of the wide range of graduates that HBCUs continue to produce. For example, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) states “Though HBCUs make up only three percent of the country's colleges and universities, they enroll 10 percent of all African American students and produce almost 20 percent of all African American graduates.”¹

As HBCUs continue to serve their original purpose, they also show potential to have a much broader impact. A more far reaching influence that blends both its rich cultural significance and deep educational legacy to support a broader range of students of color.

Latinx students: Diversity at HBCUs

As the percentages of Latinx students in higher education continues to increase considerably year-by-year (3.3 million as of 2019)² they have also show significant increases in the enrollment at HBCUs. The Latinx student population grew over 120% percent over the last 30 years on these campuses and currently comprise approximately 5% of the total HBCU enrollment nationwide.³ This is especially pronounced in states like Texas, where the Latinx population will soon be the majority⁴. For example, St. Phillip’s University, in San Antonio, currently boasts a 56% Latinx student enrollment. This demographic data makes it the only college in the United States to be federally designated as both an HBCU and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).⁵

¹ <https://uncf.org/the-latest/african-americans-and-college-education-by-the-numbers>

² [NCES, 2019- https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp; <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/nation/2020/01/06/more-hispanic-students-than-ever-go-college-but-cost-high/2520646001/>],

³ https://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/cmsi/Changing_Face_HBCUs.pdf; <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/28/a-look-at-historically-black-colleges-and-universities-as-howard-turns-150/>

⁴ <https://www.texastribune.org/2019/06/20/texas-hispanic-population-pace-surpass-white-residents/>

⁵ [<https://hbculifestyle.com/hispanic-students-attending-hbcus/>;
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/a-historically-black-college-in-maryland-is-growing-by-enrolling-hispanic-white-and-international-students/2019/10/09/64185318-def3-11e9-be96-6adb81821e90_story.html].



Latinx growth at HBCUs is primarily attributed to two reasons. First, there is the HBCU orientation towards a more student centered focus. This approach, which consists of faculty and staff who are relatively more culturally aware and willing to meet students where they are, provides a family-oriented, and inclusive environment for Latinx students.⁶ Second, this environment becomes more salient as the country continues to deal with a polarizing political climate and an alarming rate of hate crimes and other negative racial incidents that students of color are facing at Predominately White Institutions.⁷

In addition to the Latinx student need, HBCUs have a need of their own. As they continue to struggle with enrollment numbers that existed prior to the global Covid-19 pandemic, they turn to alternative solutions to meet this need. Accordingly, they have targeted efforts to recruit more diverse student populations (mostly Latino, Asian, and international students).⁸ Consequently, these factors have influenced HBCU staff and executives to consider best practices to support Latinx students (as well as these other groups) once they arrive on campus. Dr. Emmanuel Lalande, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Services at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, and member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. stated, “I believe it is imperative that HBCUs continue to attract Latinx students to their campuses. At Benedict, my first initiative was increasing our Latinx student population. One of my first hires was a Latinx diversity recruiter, who was instrumental in increasing this demographic by 2%.” In addition to diversifying campus based professionals, HBCUs can similarly position themselves to achieve not only an increase in numbers but also retention of Latinx students by hosting Culturally-based fraternal organizations (CBFOs) on campus.⁹

CBFOs are “fraternities and sororities that were founded for the primary purpose of advancing a marginalized community. In the fraternal world, these marginalized communities are often associated with supporting underrepresented populations who formed organizations to address the many challenges that their members faced on a college or university campus.”¹⁰ On an HBCU campus, institutions originally developed

⁶ [<https://www.apmreports.org/story/2020/03/05/hbcu-enrollment-latino-international-students/>]; [<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/hbcus-more-latino-students/407953/>],

⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/08/16/colleges-universities-can-do-more-protect-students-faculty-against-hate-crimes-here-are-some-ideas/>

⁸ [<https://hechingerreport.org/hbcus-open-their-doors-wider-to-international-students/>]; <https://www.ewa.org/blog-latino-ed-beat/h-hispanic-many-hbcus/>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/hbcus-more-latino-students/407953/>; <https://hbculifestyle.com/hispanic-students-attending-hbcus/>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/a-historically-black-college-in-maryland-is-growing-by-enrolling-hispanic-white-and-international-students/2019/10/09/64185318-def3-11e9-be96-6adb81821e90_story.html; <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Wave-of-Hispanic-Students/230157/>]

⁹ <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Wave-of-Hispanic-Students/230157/>

¹⁰ Cromwell, R.A., Pulawan E. (2018) *The Harbor Institute’s Guide to Culturally-based Fraternal Organizations*. Washington, D.C. The Harbor Institute Press.



and designed to serve the Black community CBFOs took the form of BGLOs, with five of the nine National-Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations being founded on an HBCU campus.¹¹ The other four NPHC BGLOs, along with all of the Latino Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs), were founded, on Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), with LGLOs focusing on serving Latinx students and their respective communities.¹² Some LGLOs were founded before BGLOs and both groups of organizations later served as inspiration for the founding of Multicultural Greeks,¹³ which predominately started in the 1990s. Multicultural Greeks and LGLOs share similarities but were “...founded by members from different populations with the primary purpose of starting an organization that consisted of a variety of races and ethnicities.” Accordingly, multicultural Greeks formed a special council called the National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC) that supports organizations who serve this need.”¹⁴ It is well documented that these CBFOs(Black, Latinx and Multicultural) increase the retention and success of students of color in higher education.¹⁵ To continue this success, it is important for both HBCUs, as well as Latinx and Multicultural organizations to explore best practices that enable these CBFOs to succeed on these unique campuses.¹⁶

Texas: A Lone Star for Latinx Greeks at HBCUs

11% of HBCUs currently have at least one LGLOs or NMGC chapters.¹⁷ Currently Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina has chapters of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. and Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc. on campus but both currently are inactive with no members on campus. Similarly, Florida Memorial University in Miami Gardens has Mu Sigma Upsilon Sorority, Inc., an NMGC organization, and Lambda Sigma Upsilon Fraternity, Inc. who also have no active members on campus. While other HBCUs such as Morgan State University (Baltimore, Maryland) and North Carolina Central University (Durham) have active Latinx CBFOs Texas is the state with the most HBCUs with active chapters that represent these

¹¹ Kimbrough, W. (2003). *Black Greek 101: The culture, customs, and challenges of black fraternities and sororities*. Madison/Florham Park, NJ. Fairleigh Dickinson, University Press.,

<https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>,

¹² <https://nalfo.org/member-organizations/>

¹³ The authors recognize a trend to utilize fraternity and sorority life as opposed to “Greek” to describe these organizations. Through our extensive experiences working with these organizations on HBCU campuses we also recognize their institutional culture and customs related to the use of this word. Since HBCUs are a central focus of the article we have adopted the “local customs” and have chosen to use it in this context.

¹⁴ Cromwell, R.A. (2018). *Unity, not Uniformity. Multiculturalism in Greek life*. Retrieved from <http://aflvconnections.org/unity-not-uniformity-multiculturalism-in-greek-life>.

¹⁵ (Simeon, 2016); Atkinson, Dean, & Espino, 2010; Evans & Guardia, 2008; Harper, 2012; Harper, 2010; Harper & Quay, 2007; Kimborough & Hutcheson, 1998; McClure, 2006; Munoz & Guardia, 2009; Orta, Murguía, & Cruz, 2019; Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011; Quay & Harper, 2014

¹⁶ While Asian-Interest organizations, represented by the **National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Panhellenic Association (NAPA)** are outside of the scope of this article, it is worth noting that there are currently no HBCU campuses with a NAPA chapter. This is an area of interest that needs more exploration and research.

¹⁷ Our research reveals that there are seven HBCUs of the approximately 77 that currently have Greeks on campus (at least one active fraternity or sorority chapter) have a LGLO or Multicultural Greek chapter on campus.



organizations¹⁸. The Lone Star state, not only proudly boasts at least three HBCUs with active LGLOs but also serves as the state where the first LGLO established at an HBCU, Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity, Inc. (SLB) was chartered at Prairie View A&M University in 1991¹⁹. As mentioned earlier in this article, this data, is consistent with both the demographics based on the United States Census Data representing the racial/ethnic population of the state as well as the student enrollment of Latinx students on HBCU campuses. While the data theoretically supports these CBFOs on HBCUs the practical implementation and sustainability of their existence can present some unique challenges and issues. We encourage both campus-based professionals and CBFO leadership to consider the following points as guidance in further exploring these possibilities.

Predominately, Not Exclusive – A CBFO Chapter Make Up

While Prairie View A&M University, outside of Houston, Texas saw an increase of 200% of Latinx enrollment at the time of SLB's founding, it currently has a 5% Latinx student enrollment on campus that is more consistent with the current data. Conversely, Huston-Tillotson, in Austin, Texas, has a higher population of Latinx student enrollment that at has reached almost 20%²⁰ These demographic variations serve as indicators as to possible motivators for seeking membership. For instance, a more diverse student population, at Huston-Tillotson, may seek membership to support their needs and interests of Latinx students. In this context, the membership motivations may yield a more traditional Latinx membership.

There is the possibility however, that a Latinx or multicultural organization chapters at HBCUs, have a predominately Black membership. In some instances, on an individual level, Black students may personally identify as bi-racial or multicultural and see these organizations as an extension of themselves. In this case, it would probably be in alignment with the more traditional rationale for membership. In other instances, however, there may be situations where black students don't identify with Latinx or multicultural organizations at all but still see LGLOs and NMGC as a viable option and better fit for them personally. This may especially be true on campuses where there is a smaller Latinx population or a limited choice of BGLO membership options. The same way black students choose to join predominately white fraternities and sororities at PWIs, as opposed to predominately black fraternities and sororities, is similar to the considerations they have with additional membership options at HBCUs. For example, the Southern regional director of Sigma Lambda Gamma National Sorority, Inc., Michelle Escalante, stated, "my PV (Prairie View A&M University) chapter is half Black and half Latina."

¹⁸ Huston- Tillotson University (Austin), Prairie View A&M University (outside of Houston) and Texas Southern University (Houston)

¹⁹ Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity, Inc. (SLB) defines itself as "a Latino based fraternity with a Multicultural membership." <http://sigmalambdabeta.com/>

²⁰ (<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/hbcus-more-latino-students/407953/>; <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Wave-of-Hispanic-Students/230157/>).



This means that CBFO leadership and campus-based professionals should be prepared to institute diversity and inclusion training for their fraternity and sorority life community. Diversity and inclusion among people of color is an often-overlooked area as it relates to this work with race and ethnicity, and specifically sensitive topics of intra-racial/ethnic relations.²¹ How will a Latinx organization or multicultural fraternity or sorority communicate its position on a “Black Lives Matter” incident to their chapters on an HBCU campus where some have predominately black memberships while others do not? These dynamics serve as an excellent opportunity to constructively address intra-organization “horizontal hostilities” that exist along with any collaterally related inter-organization and inter-council interpersonal communication challenges as well. Jessica Peñaranda, National President of NMGC stated, “Political education and learning the lessons of solidarity movements that centers around community building relationships across black, brown, indigenous, and other communities of color is one step towards bridging the gap that exists across our councils and our organizations.”

Additionally, educating the student body on not only the similarities and differences between BGLOs, LGLOs and multicultural Greeks but the nuances that exists in African and Latinx culture can increase this understanding and these connections. Intraculturally, both are far from monolithic and include a diverse representation within their respective diasporas. For example, the Latinx demographic in South Texas is predominately Mexican, while the Latinx population in South Florida is close to being predominately Cuban.²² How will this impact the same LGLO or NMGC organization who is marketed at Texas Southern University in Houston, as opposed to Florida Memorial University in Miami? These individual, organizational and institutional cultural dynamics should be considered when considered marketing, recruitment and retention for Latinx and multicultural organizations at HBCUs.

The DNA of a CBFO

In addition to cultural dynamics relating to identity, operational dynamics are critical to understand how CBFOs function. For example, all NPHC BGLOs have formalized graduate chapters that are intricately involved in many of the day to day functions of their correlating undergrad chapters.²³ Everything ranging from programming to new member intake must be officially approved and “signed off” on before proceeding with these functions. Conversely, there are some Latinx and NMGC organizations that do not operate in this manner. While alumni/ae associations may exist in some of these CBFOs, their undergraduate chapters in that area can be more student driven, and not directed or coordinated through their respective alumni entities.

²¹ Sue, D. (2015). *Race Talk and The Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race*. Hoboken, NJ. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

²² <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/09/08/5-ranking-the-latino-population-in-metropolitan-areas/>

²³ National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) member fraternities and sororities are the organizations that are commonly referred to as BGLOs. Technically, BGLOs include organizations such as Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity Inc. and other local organizations which may not be as widely known. To make this distinction we refer to the organizations we are referring to as NPHC BGLOs and to make it more consistent with the other peer CBFO organizations.



HBCU campus based professionals and higher administration, who are often BGLO members themselves, may therefore utilize a BGLO operational lens and expect members of the city or regional alumni associations to respond to requests regarding Latinx or NMHC protocol, procedures, or paperwork.

HBCU campus based professionals may have concerns regarding undergraduates providing this information. Additionally, there are generational dynamics to consider regarding chapter operations. In some cases, CBFOs were founded years later, relative to BGLOs.²⁴ This can translate into chapter advisors, regional directors or National leadership that maybe younger than the HBCU campus-based professionals who are working with them. This generational difference can also influence and impact not only communication but the perception of legitimacy and validity of that respective Latinx or Multicultural organization²⁵. Education around the operations of these organizations is vital to the health and overall sustainability of these CBFOs at HBCUs. This background information still needs to be supplemented with more proactive strategies to bridge potential gaps in communication.

Bridging The Gap

Many Latinx students coming from geographic areas (both domestic and international) with a strong Latino cultural ethos (i.e. living in a new place, or new country in some instances) can be a culture shock in and of itself. The cultural challenges as well as first generation dynamics that sometimes come into play can also make it difficult for these students to succeed.²⁶ Adding a dynamic of being fully immersed into an environment that is dominated by African American culture, a huge part of the HBCU experience, adds a challenge that must be addressed. An initial culture shock, which even some black students fall victim to at HBCUs, depending on their personal experiences, can be addressed by administrators by making extra efforts to bridge these gaps.²⁷

One way to bridge this gap is by establishing a larger home for Latinx students on the campus for these students to feel a sense of community and support. Cultural affinity groups with a broader and less exclusive presence, such as Latinx Student Associations (LSAs) or Latinx Student Unions (LSUs) maybe an easier transition to later onboard more specific Latinx and Multicultural CBFOs. With a pre-existing, larger, more familiar familial system the cultural connections can also serve as supplemental pipelines for CBFOs to recruit new members who are already oriented to community service and ethnic heritage.

²⁴ Cromwell, R.A., Pulawan E. (2018) *The Harbor Institute's Guide to Culturally-based Fraternal Organizations*. Washington, D.C. The Harbor Institute Press.

²⁵ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-changing-culture/201705/the-real-truth-about-generational-differences>

²⁶ (Simeon, 2016)

²⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-hbcu-reader-experiences-20190422-story.html>



Utilizing this infrastructure also requires building rapport with CBFOs along with LSA, LSU and other cultural affinity groups. Connecting with them to ascertain what they need to feel engaged as part of the campus community, either through campus-wide surveys or direct contact and discussion are ways to build this rapport. A good next step is leading a campus-wide effort to honor Hispanic Heritage Month, starting in September 15th-October 15th, and charging all student organizations, not just fraternities and sororities, to collaborate and host relevant programming around this celebration. Another way is for administrators to encourage CBFO members to host a Latinx week where they strategically display flags representing their countries around campus. They can further share their personal stories with YouTube videos featuring their experiences as Latinx students to showcase the value of their personal experiences. An HBCU with an organized and targeted enrollment program focused on Latinx students is also key.

Growing pains can be uncomfortable at times but ultimately they are an intricate part of development and evolution. As HBCUs continue to grow, with Latinx collegiates and CBFOs, identity, support and communication are critical for student, organizational, institutional success.

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