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# Helpful Hints for Advising NPHC (Black Greek) Organizations

**John Leonard Harris**
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**"As Black Greek-letter organizations have grown to more than one million and a half members across the world, so too has the challenge of remaining true to their original principles and purposes."**

The history of Black Greek-letter organizations (Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho Sororities; Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma and Iota Phi Theta Fraternities) has exemplified dedication to their founding principles of: community service, brotherhood and sisterhood and scholarship. Over the years, these organizations have grown to be among the strongest political, social and cultural forces in the Black community.

The members of these organizations have included some of the best and the brightest students on their respective college and university campuses. Many from these great organizations have gone on to become renown political leaders (A. Philip Randolph, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Andrew Young, Shirley Chisolm, Barbara Jordan); governors and mayors (Douglas Wilder, Tom Bradley, Harold Washington); college presidents (Dr. Jobnetta Cole [Spelman College], Dr. Henry Ponder [Fisk University]; scientists and scholars (George Washington Carver, Alain Leroy Locke); celebrated entertainers (Lena Horne, Bill Cosby) and superstar athletes (Oscar Robertson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Michael Jordan, Emmitt Smith, Jerry Rice, Shaquille O'Neal), just to name a few.

Since the inception of Black Greek-letter organizations in the early 1900s, the condition of the Black community has been one of the primary concerns. During the post-emancipation period of segregation, Black Greek-letter organizations became "survival networks." These organizations would work together to develop literacy programs, establish scholarships and coordinate voter registration drives, in an effort to combat racism and discriminatory practices across the country. Clearly, Black Greek-letter organizations have been a significant part of Black culture in this country and their contributions have helped shape the Black experience.

For many years, Black Greek-letter organizations have needed to raise and address some crucial issues. Many of these issues revolve around the increased number of cases involving physical and mental abuse of prospective collegiate members during the pre-initiation activities (hazing) and the cost of the lawsuits brought about because of these cases. The accounts of many of these cases have been shocking. Further, the severity of many of these cases has caused a great deal of negative publicity for all Black Greek-letter organizations, while placing some of the organizations and their futures, in jeopardy financially.

As Black Greek-letter organizations have grown to more than one million and a half members across the world, so too has the challenge of remaining true to their original principles and purposes. More than ever, Black Greek-letter organizations seem to have strayed away from the storied path that made them so vital to the Black experience at the turn of the twentieth century, especially on the collegiate level. The continued reports of problems relating to poor academics, "street gang-like" infighting and hazing have given critics of these organizations plenty of ammunition with which to challenge their existence and viability. Add to these concerns the challenge of remaining viable on a predominantly White college or university campus where the administrators and student life professionals have little, if any, real information about who they are, what they do and how to help them. In this kind of relationship, serious problems are not only possible, they are imminent.

## PRESENTER

**John Leonard Harris,** is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He attended the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts with an emphasis in Radio-TV-Film Production. He currently serves as Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and also is pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Sociology.

Mr. Harris is an active and financial member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated (Eta Gamma Chapter, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1981) and is one of the founding members of the Black Greek Federation of Lincoln. He has held several positions of leadership for his fraternity (Past President, Omaha Alumni Chapter, Nebraska Area Director, Southwestern Regional Secretary) and for the National Pan-Hellenic Council (Past President, Omaha Alumni Chapter, Nebraska State Representative). Mr. Harris was also an original steering committee member of the Black Greek Federation of Lincoln.

Mr. Harris is a talented speaker and workshop facilitator who regularly speaks on topics relative to the Black experience. He has authored several important papers including: "The Lasting Effects of Slavery," "Black Women and the Continuing Struggle Against Racism and Sexism," "The Right to be Nasty: Examining the 2 Live Crew Controversy" and "The Search for Self." In 1993, Mr. Harris was honored by the National Association of Human Rights Workers with their first ever, Article of the Year award for his paper, "The Portrayal of the Black Family on Prime-Time Network Television: A Look at Stereotypic Images and Disorganization of Family Structure." His paper was published in the Spring 1993 issue of the Journal of Intragroup Relations.