

For Immediate Release
Feb. 25, 2021

Media Contact
Jonathan Coffin
VOX Global
317-983-1419
jcoffin@voxglobal.com

Piazza Center Partnering With National Panhellenic Conference on Research to Evaluate Cultural Competency, Identify Best Practices Within Sorority Community

Research Aims to Identify Tools for Strengthening Cultural Competency Among Sorority Women Nationwide

UNIVERSITY PARK – The Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform and the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) today announced the launch of two companion research studies that will evaluate cultural competency and diversity, equity and inclusion within NPC-affiliated sorority chapters. The two studies will measure the level of cultural competency among sorority women at both minority-serving institutions and at predominately white institutions. Researchers will also identify best practices for strengthening competency and enhancing inclusion within sorority chapters and communities.

“This wonderful partnership is evidence of the fundamental purpose that compelled us to create the Piazza Center,” said Damon Sims, vice president for Student Affairs at Penn State. “Combining research and practice to better understand how best to achieve successful, safe, and sustainable experiences in these organizations is critically important to our university and many others, too.”

The pair of studies reflect shared commitment from the Piazza Center and NPC to foster more inclusive sorority communities. Piazza Center researchers will partner with Dr. Georgianna Martin, associate professor in the Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia. Officials at the National Panhellenic Conference will facilitate engagement with participating sorority chapters.

“The sorority community is increasingly diverse, and we know that individual chapters on specific campuses have excelled not only in enhancing the diversity of their membership, but in fostering greater cultural competency and awareness,” said Stevan Veldkamp, director of the Piazza Center and special assistant to the vice president for Student Affairs at Penn State. “We want to understand what about those chapters created an environment that led to a more inclusive chapter climate and that could provide key learnings for other chapters on campuses nationwide.”

The studies will build an understanding of how groups influence, affect and create cultural competency as well as a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion among members, alumnae, councils and campuses through focus groups and interviews of current student members, staff and administrators at campuses and headquarters. The studies will also look at chapter websites, social media and other archival material.

“As our member organizations continue to expand their programming and establish new protocols and practices with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, we identified the need for further research and to identify best practices that will equip our community to drive change and foster greater cultural understanding within the NPC community,” said Dani Weatherford, chief executive officer of the National Panhellenic Conference. “We are pleased to have found a partner in the Piazza Center to lead this research.”

“From chapter advisors to program development staff and volunteers within inter/national organizations, we will be looking to this research to help evaluate existing initiatives and develop new ones,” added Weatherford.

In the past six months, NPC has announced the formation of an Access and Equity Advisory Committee and launched an initiative designed to address financial barriers to membership, with both efforts aimed at creating more inclusive sorority communities. NPC is one of the largest organizations advocating for women and the umbrella group for 26 national and international sororities. NPC sororities are located on more than 670 campuses with more than 375,000 undergraduate members in more than 3,350 chapters. Alumnae are represented in nearly 3,500 associations throughout the world. The NPC Foundation, a companion to NPC, invests in educational initiatives and training – including supporting the work of the Piazza Center.

Penn State launched the Piazza Center in January 2019, in an effort to become the nation’s principal home for identifying sound professional practice in fraternity and sorority advising. The center produces actionable data to give practitioners the evidence needed to enact significant change on their campuses and within their organizations. Since its inception, the Piazza Center has worked to empower higher education to make the fraternity and sorority experience safer and more meaningful based on comprehensive research.

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs), which include historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), and tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) serve at least one-third of all African American, Hispanic and American Indian students enrolled in higher education in the United States today according to The Alliance for Equity in Higher Education [New Directions for Community Colleges](#). Predominantly white institution (PWI), as defined in *Encyclopedia of African American Education*, is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment.

###