

From Programs & Probates to Conferences & Committees

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March 24, 2013: the day I was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of becoming a member of my now beloved sorority. Not only was this a dream of mine, but also my mother's, who is a Spring 1974 initiate of the sorority. Becoming a member of a Divine Nine organization comes with an understanding that you are committed for life. After being initiated as a senior, there was an expectation for me to matriculate into our sponsoring graduate chapter. Luckily, I still had one more semester of classes to fulfill my duties as chapter president and enjoy the undergraduate sorority experience before my transition.

This transition from undergraduate to graduate member was one of the most eye-opening experiences I have encountered as a sorority woman, complete with its own challenges. Reading about my experiences and challenges below can help you as you mentor and advise students who are preparing to make the same transition and fulfill their own lifelong commitment.

Once I became an undergraduate member, my life and schedule changed. From meeting with fraternity/sorority advisors, to completing community service, maintaining the highest NPHC GPA, collaborating with other councils, creating and implementing programs, and ultimately trying to "run the yard," my existence as an undergraduate student was turned upside down. However, it was flipped in the best way possible – I was doing something I loved while wearing letters that I love. But, as the semester progressed, and my time within my chapter came to a close, it was time for me to begin the process of transitioning to a graduate chapter.

While there are similarities, there are many differences in the focus of an undergraduate chapter compared to a graduate chapter. As an undergraduate member, my focus was to provide programming and events for the campus and surrounding community, based on where we saw a need and the current sorority administration's goals. When you join a graduate chapter, in addition to programming around the organization's specified targets, I quickly learned the business aspects of the organization show up higher on the chapter meeting agenda. I became more knowledgeable about the ins and outs of the business of my organization than I did as an undergraduate member. Not only did I learn this by observation, but I learned this by talking and spending time with members who have been dedicated to our mission for 50 years or more. The focus of these conversations were different. Instead of having dialogue about campus-level NPHC updates and the chapter week, we were discussing budget allocations and book drives. Needless to say, I started to really understand what my graduate advisor meant when she said, "Always know your organization documents." This caused me to level up and step up my game in understanding the business component of my organization.

By trying to dive into my new graduate chapter responsibilities, there were some challenges. As

one of the younger members within the chapter, it can be a challenge to find your place within the balance of tradition. As stated before, a lot of the current chapter members had been committed to the service of the organization for many years and had been doing things a certain way for a long time. This caused them to be hesitant to new and innovative ideas, causing younger members to feel silenced. It took some time and honesty to break these barriers of understanding, but in time, we came to common ground about the benefits of modern ideas while also never losing the tradition.

I encourage campus advisors to provide support to their students who are thinking about joining a graduate chapter right after graduation. One way to support their transition is by expressing the importance of doing their research and visiting all the local graduate chapters in the area to see which chapter best fits them. This chapter will potentially be the one that they are a part of for the rest of their life – it's important to make sure their choice and research are intentional.

Despite the difference in concentration between my undergraduate and graduate experience, one thing that never changed was the sisterhood. While it was tested, sisterhood events, holding each other accountable for our aspirations in addition to our mishaps, and bringing hidden figures of our society to light, the love and commitment to my sisters across the world never wavered. We may not always have the same views, but the motto forever stays the same: "By Culture and By Merit" - and furthermore, *by choice*.