

## Integrating Trans-Inclusive Chapters into Collegiate Panhellenic Councils

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For the past couple of years, Ball State University has been the home to four distinct governing councils, including the newest of the councils, the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC). This council was founded to house three organizations, including a chapter of Gamma Rho Lambda Sorority, which is an organization that provides a social support system for members that identify anywhere along the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender spectrum. While the chapter itself was finding success within the Ball State community, the MGC as a whole was struggling due to a variety of unforeseeable factors. In the spring of 2014, conversations regarding the viability of the council began to occur, and ultimately, it was decided that there just wasn't enough of a student population or interest to sustain an entire council for the member organizations. Following that decision, the biggest issue that arose was where these organizations would be housed, as they needed to have a place within a governing council.

The National Panhellenic Conference's (NPC) Manual of Information does allow for Associate Membership status within collegiate Panhellenic councils (CPCs) for organizations that are not one of the 26 nationally recognized organizations, so conversations regarding Gamma Rho Lambda becoming part of the Panhellenic Council began happening. After consulting with the NPC Area Advisor and the current Panhellenic President, associate membership status was proposed to the ten current Panhellenic chapters. Being the first time a change like this had been proposed, there were several issues and questions that arose which required attention before being able to move forward. The largest concern that was brought forth from the Panhellenic chapters was the fact that Gamma Rho Lambda allows for transgendered membership. Would having those members be a part of the Panhellenic Council hurt the chapters' statuses as single-sex organizations?

In order to address this concern, education was required on a number of levels. For example, the community needed to fully understand the purpose of Title IX and how this relates to membership. On another level, education needed to be facilitated around the difference between expectations for NPC member organizations and CPCs. Finally, education surrounding the history and purpose of Gamma Rho Lambda was a critical component. It was essential to have the Panhellenic women understand that should Gamma Rho Lambda become an associate member of the Panhellenic Council that did not automatically mean that they were held to the same expectations and standards as the 26 NPC affiliated organizations. They would have to uphold the standards and policies that were created by the CPC, but the chapter would not be bound to the Unanimous Agreements; therefore, certain standards such as policies regarding recruitment and maintaining a status as a single-sex organization, were not applicable to them. The difficult task was getting the Panhellenic women to understand that this would not hurt their statuses as single-sex organizations.

Another issue that came up was the hesitancy of the Gamma Rho Lambda chapter to become part of the Panhellenic Council due to fear of being judged and looked down upon because they were "different." Similar conversations regarding diversity and being accepting of others had to be held with the members as they were also making assumptions and judgments of the other chapters not based upon actual experiences.

After the initial conversations, the Panhellenic Council did vote to accept Gamma Rho Lambda as an associate member organization; however, moving forward with continuing education will be vital for this community. For many of them, this was their first time talking about issues such as Title IX and diversity.

Plans were put into place to ensure that opportunities to educate the community were a priority, for both the members of the current Panhellenic chapters as well as the members of Gamma Rho Lambda. For example, Gamma Rho Lambda made plans to come to a council meeting and educate the other chapters on the history of the organization, and on the flip side, members of Gamma Rho Lambda were invited to participate in the Panhellenic Council's philanthropic events so that they could learn more about the NPC organizations. While there are certain events that the Panhellenic Council will participate in that will not include Gamma Rho Lambda, such as formal membership recruitment, all other programming will provide excellent opportunities for further education and collaboration and chances to continue to evolve the way the chapters and councils work together as a community.

The biggest piece of advice for a campus that is looking to add a trans-inclusive organization into a community or governing council is to make every effort to ensure transparent and open communication. Having conversations with leadership from both the Panhellenic organizations and Gamma Rho Lambda prior to announcing it publicly was critical to identifying potential issues and gaining a better understanding of how to move forward in educating the community. Helping all of the members to understand the purpose of Title IX and how it affects their membership, diversity training regarding transgender members and conversations regarding sensitivity towards others are all things campuses will want to include and make sure they are addressing. Providing this type of education can help ensure a smooth and successful integration of chapters of all types.