

THE NATIONAL BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION (NBGSA) CONFERENCE



4/10/2012

March 14-17, 2012, King of Prussia, PA

This report summarizes key activities and connections made at the 24th Annual National Black Graduate Student Association Conference. Final recommendations are provided.

Prepared by Conference Attendees: Tandra Hilliard and Jason Mose

The National Black Graduate Student Association (NBGSA) Conference

FINAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to summarize key activities and connections made at the 24th Annual National Black Graduate Student Association Conference, held at the Radisson Valley Forge Hotel in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania from March 14-17th, 2012. At the last Department of Health Policy and Management (HPM) Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (CoDI) meeting, CoDI and NBGSA member Jason Mose enthusiastically suggested this conference as a great opportunity to advance the Committee's primary goal of increasing diversity in HPM programs, particularly the PhD program, as this conference would enable the Department and School to make connections with minority graduate students from across the nation. This venture garnered support from the entire Committee. As a result, Drs. Laurel Files and Peggye Dilworth-Anderson, and Ms. Danielle Remmy subsequently met with current PhD students, Jason Mose and Tandra Hilliard, to discuss participation objectives, create a budget, and develop a plan for acquiring funding for these two students to attend. Funding was successfully secured from the Gillings School of Global Public Health and the Department of Health Policy and Management.



ABOUT NBGSA

The National Black Graduate Student Association, Inc. (NBGSA) is a non-profit, interdisciplinary, and student-run organization dedicated to improving the status of Blacks in higher education by systematically identifying and addressing their needs and concerns.

NBGSA is recognized as the primary student organization addressing the needs of Black graduate students. NBGSA offers its members leadership training, professional development, mentoring opportunities, career placement services and more!

NBGSA is governed by an executive board of graduate students and is operated by a professional staff at the national office located on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C.

The National Black Graduate Student Association supports a variety of objectives through its annual conference and initiatives throughout the year, including:

1. Increasing the number of graduate and professional students of African descent by encouraging undergraduates to pursue graduate and professional degrees.
2. Providing resources that will enhance the likelihood of academic and career success of current graduate and professional students.
3. Developing a network of emerging scholars of African descent who are dedicated and sensitive to the needs and concerns of an increasingly diverse academic community.

NBGSA membership is open to graduate and undergraduate students, academicians, institutions, corporations and other groups and/or individuals who are interested in supporting students of African descent in the pursuit of graduate and professional educational excellence. The NBGSA does not discriminate or limit its membership to any individual or group based on race, creed, color, nationality, ability or sexual preference.

Source: National Black Graduate Student Association. Retrieved from:
<http://www.nbgsa.org/index.php/about/overview-mission-objectives>.

ABOUT THE NBGSA CONFERENCE

The 24th Annual National Black Graduate Student Conference (NBGSC) was held on March 14-17, 2012 under the theme “Claiming Your Place in Uncommon Spaces.” Each year, graduate and undergraduate students from around the country are in attendance.

NBGSC is a scholarly conference where networking and academic, professional and social opportunities occur. The gathering creates for planning, fact-finding and/or problem solving in face-to-face groups with high participation. Conferees come from universities around the nation to present their work in roundtable discussions and poster sessions. Many conferees also enjoy interacting in general sessions, seminars, and workshops facilitated by nationally, regionally, and locally recognized presenters. The NBGSA also holds its general assembly and annual business meetings at the NBGSC.

Source: <http://www.nbgsc.org/nbgsc2012/component/content/article/1600-about-the-conference>

CONFERENCE AGENDA AT-A-GLANCE

Agenda at-a-glance - March 14-18, 2012

Wednesday, March 14, 2012 - Registration day and evening reception

Thursday, March 15, 2012 - General Session I and II, Roundtables, Research Presentations, Panel Discussions and Caucus Meetings

Friday, March 16, 2012 - General Session III and IV, Roundtables, Research Presentations, Panel Discussions, Scholar's Day, Graduate and Career Fair, General Body Meeting, Candidate Speeches, Ice Nightclub Social

Saturday, March 17, 2012 - General Session V, Roundtables, Research Presentations, Panel Discussions, Caucus meetings, Regional Meetings, Voting, Closing Ceremony

Sunday, March 18, 2012 - Transition meeting for 2012-2013 Executive Council



National Black Graduate Student Conference *March 14 - March 17, 2012*

24th Annual National Conference

**Radisson Valley Forge Hotel
Valley Forge / Philadelphia, PA**



The logo is circular with a yellow border. Inside, it says "NATIONAL BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION" around the perimeter. In the center, there is a blue circle containing the acronym "NBGSA" in yellow, with a graduation cap and a rolled diploma below it.



KEY ACTIVITIES AND CONNECTIONS

❖ “Our Place in Advancing Health Services Research” Presentation

We presented on the aforementioned topic emphasizing the need for and identifying opportunities in health services research for minority students and faculty. We had participation from a diverse group of graduate students. The feedback we received at the end of the presentation and interaction with attendees thereafter was positive, with some indicating that they will seriously consider health services research and applying to our program in the near future.

❖ Graduate and Career Fair Booth:

There were a good number of universities represented in the career fair, including Harvard, Howard, University of Michigan, UC-Santa Barbara and over 15 others. Some colleges and universities, like Mariopa Community College from Arizona and Abu Dhabi University from United Arab Emirates, were there to recruit new faculty members.



We spoke with a variety of students, faculty, and staff members from various universities and requested that they provide their contact information at the table. We also learned what other universities are doing to recruit into their programs. For example, many have built a pipeline with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), where they participate in career fairs and other career-focused programs. We also noted that some of the most visible universities had tall banners and additional advertisement materials (e.g., freebies) that drew attention to their tables. Many attendees collected materials for relatives and friends to consider, even if they were not specifically interested in the program themselves. Overall, it was definitely worth the effort, cost, and time to have a table at the career fair. It provided the visibility that we were seeking.

❖ Networking

Throughout our time at the conference, we made extra efforts to network and get to know conference attendees. The welcome reception on the opening night provided an excellent

opportunity for us to make our introductions. We used this opportunity to promote and advertise our presentation by passing out mini-flyers. Overall, it was inspiring to talk to people from different backgrounds, listen to people present their research, and have casual, yet informative, conversations.

We exchanged contact information with many attendees in the hopes of establishing new relationships that we hope will be quite fruitful in the future. Some students mentioned how inspiring it was to hear from someone in our school and research field; many expressed interest in finding people to collaborate on health services research projects with. For example, an engineering graduate student working in the manufacture of hip replacement devices said he was inspired to seriously seek a way to incorporate his knowledge of the disparity of care into his research. He mentioned over dinner that he would love to study the outcomes of hip replacement among minorities, given that they might not have resources for post-surgery care.



Although attendance was lower at this year's conference, as noted by conference organizers, there were plenty of outstanding people to get to know. We also made it a priority to meet all of the Officers and Board members. Ms. Anta Sane [pictured left], the 2012-2013 NBGSA President-Elect was extremely excited about us being a part of the conference and strongly encouraged our continued involvement.

❖ Conference Workshops and Presentations

A wide range of interesting topics were presented over the three days of the conference. We had the pleasure of attending many intriguing and uplifting talks and presentations by faculty and students. Dr. James Peterson from LeHigh University [pictured below] spoke of his experiences in academia and encouraged minority students to pursue their dreams in spite of any obstacles that may come. Most of the presentations were on research conducted



by doctoral candidates. Much of the work affected African Americans in general, but there were some specific projects that focused on the experiences of minority graduate students. Some of the presentation topics were: Claiming Your Place in Uncommon Spaces: Motherhood and the PhD; Freedom Writers—Their Words, Their Stories: The Experiences of Black Males in Higher Education; From the Capitol to Your Campus: Student

Leadership and Advocacy in the 21st Century; among many others. Some were more scientific and the primary purpose of the presentation was to receive critical feedback on their research. For example a PhD candidate from University of South Carolina's department of Pharmaceutical and Biomedical sciences presented and sought feedback on his dissertation entitled, "Could small conductance calcium-activated potassium channels represent novel targets in the battle against overactive bladder?" All were quite interesting and unique.

❖ **Town Hall Meeting with Special Guests Congressman Chaka Fattah (D-PA) and Dr. Greg Carr, Howard University**

Congressman Fattah presented on the need for higher education among minority students and challenged the graduate students in attendance not to shy away from issues that affect them. Dr. Greg Carr lit the fire by challenging the attendees to think outside of the box and to not be satisfied with the status quo. While the discussion was civil, he stated his intent of provoking the thoughts of the attendees to go back to their "academies" and be the change they desire to see. Students and other members attending narrated their experiences, both positive and negative (some were even overtly racist), and shared how they responded and learned to handle such incidents. The attendees were encouraged to look out for one other and give back to their communities. The panelists spoke of the need for greater unity within not just the African American community, but the academic community as well. Differences in experiences should be embraced, as we all can learn from one another.



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Tandrea Hilliard:

Attending the National Black Graduate Student Association Conference was an enlightening and rewarding experience. Of course, our mission and primary purpose for attending was to promote our PhD program and School. I believe that we were successful in doing this. However, I gained so much more than potential recruits from this trip. I gained a renewed sense of purpose as a black, female graduate student. Further, I left the conference with an even stronger commitment to increasing diversity in our PhD program. There are well-qualified and highly capable minority students out there and it is up to us to do our part in making the necessary connections to get these students interested in our School. We have to begin to make some serious investments in diversity; this may include offering a financial incentive to minority students or creating formal processes for attracting minority students to HPM. It should be noted, however, that our journey does not end at the recruitment step. We have to ensure that the necessary resources and relationships are in place to retain those students in our program and make their experience just as rewarding as that of others. All students, including minority students, should feel comfortable and well-supported in this program.

Attending this conference prompted Jason and me to have some very open conversations about things that we have experienced while matriculating in the PhD program here. There were many similarities and we appreciated the opportunity to be able to discuss these issues with one another. Our revelations helped to identify specific areas of need in our department (e.g., faculty-student relations, cultural competence, and inclusion) that should remain a priority for development. As Dr. Dilworth-Anderson has said, "One can be present, but not counted," and I personally can attest to having felt this way at times. As discussed at the conference, this is something that many minority students experience in higher education. Similar to the conference theme, we often have to claim our place in uncommon spaces. This is not always easy, but it is necessary. I am very grateful to be a part of a departmental committee that acknowledges the experiences of students and that has made a strong commitment to embracing diversity and inclusion in our program and school.

Our school is a great place to learn and grow. I think we have made some significant steps towards fulfilling our goals of creating a culture of diversity and inclusion. However, I do feel that more work should be done. Sponsoring our attendance to the

NBGSAs Conference was yet another step towards improvement and I feel that the benefits are tangible—an expanded academic network, enhanced visibility, and empowered student ambassadors. We are trendsetters in many areas and I believe that this is one of them.

Jason Mose:

We had a great time connecting with others and promoting our program. To me it became more personal especially given that I have always shared my experiences with my friends and family, yet it was not intentional.

Before attending the conference, I didn't realize how my experience was similar with other students. During the conference I was inspired to do more to help those like me that may be facing challenges in achieving their dreams. I realized that I am at UNC not just for myself but for generations that will come after me. So I realized that if there is something that is wrong, then I have an obligation, a duty to do something about it, of course with tact and respect.

Listening to the speakers and talking to other attendees I realized how lucky I am in attending a school that encourages and is consciously cultivating diversity. I was surprised to hear that even minority faculty have faced some challenges; however I was glad to learn how they dealt with the situations and was encouraged that they don't regret in pursuing careers in places that minorities were rare.

I am more determined than ever to make our campus a better place not only for minorities but finding a way to make my voice count for every student that will come after me.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- NBGSA is an organization that all minority students in graduate programs at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health should become an engaged member of.
- The School and Department should continue to support NBGSA activities, including the annual Conference, as this is an effective means of staying connected to black graduate students who may have an interest in health services research.
- Minority students in graduate programs at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health should become members of the UNC Chapter BGSA and participate in sponsored activities.
- The Department should pursue involvement in similar activities held in various locations locally and across the nation to become more visible to minority students who are considering pursuing higher education in graduate programs.
- The School and Department should continue to prioritize diversity and inclusion of minority students in its programs.
- The HPM PhD program should recognize the need for more work in this area and actively respond to it by engaging current students and faculty in recruitment and retention efforts. A culture of diversity and inclusion is critical to the continued growth and success of this program.
- The HPM PhD program should further engage and train its faculty and staff on cultural competence and student relations.

LINKS

- National Black Graduate Student Association: <http://www.nbgsa.org/>
- National Black Graduate Student Association Conference: <http://nbgsa.org/nbgsc2012/>
- UNC Chapel Hill Black Graduate and Professional Student Association:
<http://www.unc.edu/bgpsa/home.html>



**THINGS TO REMEMBER AS A
BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT:**

The journey is not just about the degree. The goal is to learn. Learn about your topic and who you are. The degree is not about you. *You owe your degree to your ancestors.* Find a way to give back. Give back to your community and elevate the consciousness of people not like you.

- Know your “why”—know your purpose for pursuing a graduate degree.
- What would the world look like if your project goes through? Or your idea came to fruition? Think about the bigger picture, rather than just the short-term goals.
- Consider the various layers of oppression that have existed and continue to exist.
- What I allow today is what I am going to continue to have to allow. I am not a troublemaker or fire starter, but I am not satisfied with what has been happening. Here is the evidence. Be comfortable with who you are. If you have insecurities, then you won't have the confidence to stand up for yourself. Come to terms with what's inside of you.
- Know your stuff. Keep track of everything. Take control of your career.
- Don't be apologetic to anyone. Don't feed into the stereotypes.
- Be aware that there are people who don't have your best interest at heart. Be aware of your surroundings. Get to know more about the department, environment, dynamics, etc.
- People are resistant to acknowledging the presence or power of their privilege; when approaching individuals about this, ground it in sincerity and theory.
- Your purpose is not to gain anyone's approval.
- Make a connection to your divine purpose.
- There are some places that will allow you to be mediocre. Challenge yourself to be better than the expectations of you.
- Don't allow other people's expectations of you to set the limitations of what you are.
- Do the best that you can. Do more than the expectations.
- Don't be angry because people don't know how to treat you. They have never met someone like you. Educate them by doing what you're supposed to do on time, ahead of schedule, every time.
- We haven't learned how to make graduate education less Eurocentric.
- As an academic, people will put on you as much as you allow them to put on you. Be able to say no.
- Be an extroverted scholar; you have the capacity to shape young minds—do community service.
- Pursuing a PhD is one of the most solitary things that you will do in your life.

**Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world.
Nelson Mandela**