

## HONORS IN ACTION PROJECT PLANNING AND REFLECTION MODEL

*This worksheet is designed to complement an Honors in Action Journal (see page 5 of the 2010/2011 Honors Program Guide) and to prepare the chapter to submit Hallmark Awards entries.*



**The Phi Theta Kappa Experience:  
Honoring Scholars,  
Building Servant Leaders**

### **SAMPLE MODEL**

#### **ISSUE**

**What issue and/or study question of the current Honors Study Topic did you select?**

*The issue our chapter selected was Issue 4: How do language and communication shape information and vice versa?*

**Why did you select this issue?**

*As our chapter reviewed the Honors Program guide we came across issue 4: Language and Communication and the sample projects “It’s All Greek To Me” and “Generations.” Both of these projects intrigued chapter members. Quickly, the chapter began to realize the unique position our location afforded us; an opportunity to help in preserving a rare part of Americana. Our school is located in the coastal communities of Horry and Georgetown counties in South Carolina. Our proximity to a favored tourist destination, Myrtle Beach, has allowed our school and the adjacent Coastal Carolina University to be enriched with students from across the country and world; however our location has also made us privy to a distinctive history and culture known as Gullah/Geechee. Unfortunately this culture, centered on the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, is dying before our very eyes. According to Maureen Hoffman,*

*There are many reasons why a language might become endangered or even extinct. The physical loss of speakers (due to genocide, natural disasters, or similar causes), the disintegration of the language community (due to displacement, assimilation into the dominant population, or economic concerns), the homogenizing effects of mainstream media (in the form of dominant language television, radio, and print media), and the forced abandonment of the language (through overt suppression, often accompanied by the institution of dominant-language schools).*

*This is happening to Gullah communities throughout South Carolina due to the encroachment of “mainstream” America. Mass development of traditional Gullah communities result in resorts and beach homes built by and for outsiders. This causes property values to rise; which in turn causes a rise in property taxes, forcing many Gullah out of their family homes. Furthermore Gullah children are assimilated into the 21<sup>st</sup> century through school and mass media. Their native tongue, considered a mix of English and African dialects, is often interpreted as inferior*

English. Children are taught to speak “proper” English and to adhere to “American” ways. This negative attitude toward their language and culture causes many to separate from tradition as they struggle to fit into modern society. This is a rapid process as evidenced by census statistics. In 1979, 100,000 South Carolinians listed Gullah as the language spoken in their home; however by 1990 only 180 claimed it as their primary language. The process quickened as bridges were built during the 1970s and 1980s connecting the barrier islands to the mainland. In one decade the language and culture almost disappeared and we decided to do something about this fading local culture.

## RESEARCH SOURCES

**What academic publications and experts will you consult? (A minimum of 8 is recommended.)  
Write a brief description of each source in your journal.**

1. *Black and White Speaking in the Rural South: Difference in the Pronominal System*, Patricia C. Nichols
2. *Down by the Riverside : a South Carolina slave community*, Charles Joyner
3. *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* Charles Joyner
4. *Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement*, National Park Service
5. *Sandy Island “Nothing Is The Same,”* Veenie Moore
6. *Endangered Languages, Linguistics, and Culture: Researching and Reviving the Unami Language of the Lenape*, Maureen Hoffman
7. *South Carolina’s Gullah Preserve Unique Culture*, USA Today
8. *Gullah’s Radiant Light*, Coastal Heritage,  
[http://www.scseagrant.org/oldsite/pdf\\_files/ch\\_winter\\_04.pdf](http://www.scseagrant.org/oldsite/pdf_files/ch_winter_04.pdf)
9. *Gullah: A Vanishing Culture*, <http://faculty.ed.umuc.edu/~jmatthew/articles/gullah.html>
10. *Coming Through: Voices of a South Carolina Gullah Community from WPA Oral Histories*
11. *Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor*, NHA,  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkID=423&projectId=24119>
12. *LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES: Cultures of Electronic Mediation and the Refiguring of Communities*, Patrick Eisenlohr
13. *The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection*  
<http://www.yale.edu/glc/gullah/index.htm>
14. *Gullah History Along the Carolina Lowcountry*, Thomas Pyatt
15. *CULTURAL STUDIES, MULTICULTURALISM, AND MEDIA CULTURE* Douglas Kellner, <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/SAGEcs.htm>

**What needs did you discover through your research? How did your investigation lead to ideas for an Honors in Action Project?**

*Our research revealed a culture and language unique to our coastal area which is on the brink of extinction. However we also discovered the commitment by members of the Gullah community, scholars, and the federal government to prevent this devastating death of a people. The ferocity with which the Gullah communities fight for survival inspired our chapter to become advocates for their cause and to become active participants in preserving one of the oldest and*

*most influential cultures in American history. In January as a precursor to Black History Month, our chapter will hold a movie night. We will present the film “Daughters of the Dust.” In February to celebrate Black history Month, we will create a display highlighting the Gullah culture. We will also present a colloquium series to share with the community the influence the Gullah culture has had upon our region, state and country. For instance a colloquial is “tote,” “I will tote the book to the car.” For many new to the area this seems an incorrect usage of the word “tote” since it normally constitutes a heavy load; they believe the word “carry” should be used instead. However this usage of “tote” was given to locals by the Gullah community and actually comes from the African language of Kongo and means “to carry.” The series will culminate with a Gullah art/craft exhibition. To ensure the history of this culture is preserved we will work on a local museum’s documentation project. The museum will develop a travelling exhibit titled “The Gullah of South Carolina.” An important aspect of the project is a book, with the same title, to be published by the museum. Our chapter will help with this part of the project by travelling to Sandy Island, SC where we will meet the members of this Gullah community and record their stories. We will interview the community by individual families, electronically capturing their past, present, and hopes for the future.*

## **THE BASICS**

**Project Title?** *“Gullah Geechee Then and Now”*

**Where and when will the project take place?**

*The colloquium series will take place in the auditorium of the Conway campus on Thursday evenings in February. The movie night will be held in January in the Conference Center of the Grand Strand campus.*

**Who is your targeted audience?**

*Our intended audience is the student body and the community at large. We intend to present speakers who will appeal to people of all ages, and who will present different perspectives on the importance and influence of the Gullah culture.*

**With whom will you collaborate?**

*We will work with the Student Affairs department and history, communication, sociology, and anthropology professors on staff at the school. We will extend our collaboration to include Coastal Carolina University faculty and Brookgreen Gardens. Student organizations we will seek to work with are the Human Services, Digital Arts, and International Students Clubs. We will work with the local museum and the Gullah community of Sandy Island, South Carolina.*

**Will you form committees? If so, describe them.**

1) research- will investigate our topic to present to the chapter in order to assist in implementing an Honors In Action project that is interesting and impactful; members of this committee will also interview and document members of the Gullah community of Sandy Island;

2) PR/communications- will determine methods to publicize our project and will be the primary contact for collaborations 3) volunteers- will coordinate volunteers to ensure the smooth running of the colloquium series 4) planning- will plan the series including the potential speakers and topics 5) fundraising- will develop fundraising strategies to offset the cost of the project 6) refreshments-members will be responsible for providing/serving refreshments during the lecture and movie nights 7) project executive- each committee will elect a chairperson and together the chairpersons will form an executive committee to oversee the entire project. We will ask Veronica Davis Gerald, Gullah Geechee Heritage Commissioner, to join this committee to ensure the integrity of our project.

**Have appropriate permissions been attained? Yes**

**Describe the leadership roles and actions this project will require.**

This project will require chapter members to work with faculty, staff and administrators on campus. Members will work closely with community member, businesses, and organizations. They will need to approach potential speakers, museum personnel, and Sandy Island residents. Members will assume chairperson positions and be held accountable for their specific committee.

**What specifically will you do to develop the leadership skills and capacity of chapter members and others?**

We will present a workshop directed by the communications department that will provide our members (and the members of other students groups) with instruction on speaking in public and in approaching professionals in the community. The communication department will also address the issue of respectfully interacting with different cultures. In addition, we will provide teambuilding, time management, and leadership lessons provided by our advisor who is a certified instructor of the Phi Theta Kappa Leadership Development program.

**What is the action (Service) component of this project? (Action can also include advocacy.)**

Our chapter will organize a Colloquium series on the Gullah Language and Culture and we will work with a local organization to interview and document the Gullah community of Sandy Island, South Carolina to be included in displays of local museums. We will also work with the school libraries to set up an exhibit focusing on the Gullah of our region to be displayed during February as part of their Black History displays. We will also coordinate an art show on campus for the final night of our series which will showcase the work of local Gullah artisans. In January we will hold a movie night where we will show the award winning film "The Daughters

*of the Dust”- which portrays the struggle of a Gullah family through three generations of its women. Both the book and the film will be included in our library displays.*

### **How will the chapter publicize the project?**

*The chapter will seek free advertising from local news media, will post announcements on the school website and bulletin boards, will provide local schools with information for inclusion in their announcements, will contact faculty and ask that they share the opportunity with their students. We will send a PR release (through the school) to local media outlets in an attempt to interest them in a public interest story.*

## **RESOURCES**

**Estimated funds required for the completion of this project: \$600-800**

### **Itemized Budget:**

*PR-\$100- for posters/fliers*

*Refreshments-\$500-700-based upon estimates of expected participants and serving authentic Gullah food and drinks as well as coffee and pastries*

*Use of the Conference Center, Auditorium, and AV equipment will be donated by the school*

### **What resources are needed? How will they be acquired?**

*We will need guest speakers for the Colloquium series; we will ask Professor Leila Rogers (Sociology), Professor Tracey Graham (anthropology), and Dr. Minda Chuska (head of the Humanities Department/Literature professor) to speak on the first night with an overview of how languages and cultures evolve and “die,” with an emphasis on technology and media. For the second night we will contact Ron Daise, Brookgreen Garden’s Vice President for Creative Education, to host “Gullah/Geechee-mania,”- an interactive presentation given as part of Brookgreen’s educational programming. The third night we will contact Veronica Davis Gerald, a professor of English at Coastal Carolina University, who is a Gullah Geechee Heritage Commissioner and author of The Ultimate Gullah Cookbook. Professor Gerald offers several presentations and we are interested in her “Hants, Hags and Plat-Eyes,”- a haunting blend of stories, supernatural lore and facts from the South Carolina Lowcountry. For the fourth night we would like a panel of local artisans to discuss what it means to them personally to be Gullah, why it is important to preserve their culture, and the unique art and crafts of the Gullah people, which would then lead into the art/craft show we will host in the adjacent café. The PR and planning committee members will be responsible for contacting persons to appear as speakers and panel members. The school will provide the use of the auditorium and café for our series. The school will provide the conference for our movie night, and the film is being provided by our chapter president. We will use books from the library for the library display. The refreshment committee will be responsible for acquiring all supplies to provide refreshments through both purchases and donations.*

## **GOALS**

**List the specific project goals.**

*We will:*

*1) Celebrate Black History month on campus 2) raise awareness of the influential and unique Gullah Geechee community and its peril of becoming a dead language and culture 3) document in writing, pictures, and electronic media the faces, stories and history of the isolated Sandy Island community and 4) create a lasting legacy through a museum exhibit.*

**How did you determine your goals?**

*After initial research the committee brainstormed ideas and presented them to the chapter for a vote. The chapter realized the significance of preserving a culture and language which is distinctive to our region, yet still has close ties to its African origins. We were amazed at the ability of this culture to hold onto their roots for the past 200 - 250 years despite internal and external pressures to change. We believe it to be disgraceful for it to be lost now because of modernization. Therefore, in an ironic twist, we will use some of the same technology and media that caused this unique culture down the path of destruction as an avenue for its preservation.*

**Which Five Star Chapter Development Plan requirements does this project satisfy?**

*Two Star # 7; Three Star # 1, 2, 3, 4; Four star # 3*

## **IMPACT**

**What specific quantitative and qualitative outcomes resulted from your work on this project?**

*We had approximately 500 in attendance during our colloquium series, and 75 for the movie night. We had 10 volunteers who documented the stories of 19 members of the Sandy Island community. An unexpected outcome is one of our chapter members discovered a kinship to one of the islanders. Three separate library displays were created by the chapter and we recognized the face of one of the authors (from the picture on the back cover) as an audience member during our series. Connections were made that were both personal and professional. Through the documentation of the stories we have helped to ensure the Gullah of Sandy Island are remembered, honored, and respected. We also helped to preserve a distinct and wonderful culture for others to experience in the future. We have become aware of negative aspects of modernization as we see the quick and devastating effects it has had on a culture. We have gained an appreciation for the slower pace of this culture noticing the health and longevity of its members.*

**What impact did the Honors in Action Project have on your ...**

**Chapter:**

*The chapter created connections with other student organizations and in the community which can be relied upon in the future. The chapter learned the strength of diversity, the importance of learning about a subject, and the significance of appreciating differences. We discovered a new respect for the elders of our community and the things they have endured. We have a deeper admiration for the Gullah culture and its unique contributions to our region. Chapter members*

*developed time management skills, teambuilding, strategies, and sensitivity training while working on this project that will be used in the future both personally and professionally.*

**College:**

*The college was the recipient of high praise by local media outlets for its support of the “Gullah fight for survival.” Due to our chapter’s efforts in assisting the local museum with their documentation program, our school and chapter will be published as part of the research team, for their publication The Gullah of South Carolina. For this reason our school will also receive a free copy of the book upon publication and will become an exhibitor of the traveling display. Faculty and administration networked with local activists who will present at our school again.*

**Community:**

*Through the awareness campaign the community gained a greater appreciation of the Gullah influence. The Gullah community was able to present their arts and crafts and during our show many pieces were sold. The community recognized a “national treasure” right in our midst and an active fight for the Gullah community has spread as locals petitioned against the development of a present Gullah community which is being pressured to sell their ocean front property.*

**Region and/or Beyond the Region:**

*The success and media attention surrounding our series gained the attention of our Regional Coordinator who invited the chapter to present our research and the resulting project during the region’s Honors Institute. Other chapters in the region joined the fight. Many chapters in our region are also part of the Gullah community, and we joined together to continue the documenting of Gullah stories throughout North and South Carolina.*

**FUTURE IMPLICATIONS**

**What is left undone? What opportunities remain for the future?**

*Opportunities which remain for the future are extending the reach of impact to include more children, and arranging a kid-specific awareness program which could be incorporated to address the “South Carolina Lowcountry” portion of social studies curriculums.*

**What recommendations do you have as a result of the lessons learned?**

*To remember that even an advocacy or awareness project can be impactful and fill a needed service to the community; sometimes educating someone is the best service you can provide for them. Also think big, but plan small. In other words, don’t sell your dreams or goals short, although they may not be fully attained right away; planning small steps can lead to a big result.*



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