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Reflections on 20 Years with Eta Sigma Gamma

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Twenty Years with Eta Sigma Gamma

Beverly Saxton Mahoney

When I was asked to contribute my thoughts for this 40th Anniversary issue, I initially thought of my time with ESG as just a small fraction of the organization's longevity, but that turns out to be a misinterpretation on my part. I've actually been a member for 20 years as of the Fall of 2007, half of the time ESG has been available to students and professionals. Wow! It's often difficult to quantify experiences we have in life, but I can vouch for my time with Eta Sigma Gamma.

As we know with research, however, often the quantitative information we acquire is greatly enhanced by adding qualitative information. That's what I'd like to share with you here, from the perspective of one Gamman, and a late-comer at that. I first heard about Eta Sigma Gamma when I started graduate work in Health Education at Penn State, in 1987, and I joined the Honorary that Fall. It is not an overstatement to tell you that my life was forever changed as a result. Honoraries, as we were called back then, are numerous. Student honoraries or societies are often characterized by members who belong for two or three years, but then leave the ranks as soon as they graduate. Not so, with Eta Sigma Gamma. ESG can provide you not only with great opportunities to move forward as students, but also with great professional connections for the rest of your career. I am sure that many of my colleagues would echo, from their own experiences, what I share with you today.

I first became active in my chapter, and then, when I graduated and became a faculty member, I volunteered to be the Faculty Sponsor for Penn State's Alpha Xi Chapter. As a faculty sponsor, I began to network with others around the country, to learn what they were doing, what projects they had accomplished, what they hoped to do. My interest grew and, when a person was needed to fill out a term for someone who had to leave the national executive committee, I was fortunate enough to have that opportunity. I subsequently ran and was elected to the presidential rotation, serving two years each as vice president, president, and past president. During those years I met and worked with many of our profession's brightest and most dedicated members. We developed new projects, modified existing projects, worked diligently to establish a new, user-friendly strategic plan, and a host of other activities.

I also was very fortunate to be able to communicate with members through a column in the *Vision*, which was in its infancy at the time. My most valued experiences, however,

were the many opportunities I had to travel to various campuses around the nation to install new collegiate chapters of Eta Sigma Gamma. During those visits, I met faculty and students who had determined they also wanted the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from Eta Sigma Gamma. I always came away from those times wishing I could just work with all our students, across the country. I met young people who were truly on fire for our profession, who were willing to accept positions of responsibility in their local chapters, and as a result, to benefit their university and larger community through service, research, and teaching.

Many of those students are now professionals, and whenever I see them at conferences, they remind me of their installation/initiation ceremony.

As a member of Eta Sigma Gamma, you have been handed a legacy unlike any other in our profession. Through the dedication of countless health educators, across four decades, ESG has been molded and developed to

provide you with a unique opportunity for professional growth, learning how to conduct yourselves as professionals, and preparing yourselves for your new careers. I see our organization continuing to grow and blossom as new students and professionals bring their enthusiasm, dedication, and talents to ESG. It's a winning combination that is only going to get better; thanks to so many Gammans I've seen over the years, working tirelessly for you, the Gammans around the nation. ESG can do much for you, and the reverse is true as well. For me, it led to innumerable lifetime professional contacts and friendships, as well as great opportunities for scholarship, teaching, and research. Wear that green and gold pin with pride, and if I haven't yet met you, I hope to do so before another 20 years go by!

...I joined the Honorary that Fall...my life was forever changed as a result.



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