

ALPHA SIGMA ALPHA ALUMNAE BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
NOVEMBER 2020 – “BECOMING” BY MICHELLE OBAMA

1. What was your favorite moment or message during “Becoming” and why?
2. How much did you know about Michelle Obama’s history before reading her memoir? What details surprised you? Why do you think she chose to name her memoir “Becoming”? What does the idea of “becoming” mean to you?
3. In “Becoming”, we get to know the constellation of Mrs. Obama’s family through her eyes. Her grandfather, Southside filled his house with music and makeshift speakers and merriment. Years later, Mrs. Obama would fill the White House with music and culture through live performances and several programs aimed at children. How do those kinds of early memories leave an imprint on us as we grow older? What were the sights and smells that you remember from visiting parents, grandparents or other elders, and how have they left a mark on you?
4. In high school Mrs. Obama said she felt like she was representing her neighborhood. At Princeton, faced with questions of whether she was the product of Affirmative Action programs, she felt like she was representing her race. Was that more than a feeling? Was she actually representing her communities in those settings? Have you had moments in life where you feel as though you are representing one of your communities?
5. In discussing her neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, Mrs. Obama writes, “Failure is a feeling long before it becomes an actual result. It’s vulnerability that breeds with self-doubt and then is escalated, often deliberately, by fear.” How did this insight shape Mrs. Obama’s work and mission as First Lady? What can we all do—as individuals, parents, and community members—to help break this cycle?
6. As a young professional, Mrs. Obama seemingly had it all—a great job, a great wardrobe, and a clear path to great things in a top-notch Chicago law firm. But she writes, “In my blinding drive to excel, in my need to do things perfectly, I’d missed the signs and taken the wrong road.” She decides to change careers to focus on public service—a move that surprises some who were close to her. What is the value of listening to that little voice that suggests you might be on the wrong path even though the world thinks you are doing exactly the right thing? How do you support someone who decides to follow their own path or create a new one?
7. In describing her relationship with her husband, Mrs. Obama writes, “Coexisting with Barack’s strong sense of purpose—sleeping in the same bed with it, sitting at the breakfast table with it—was something to which I had to adjust, not because he flaunted it, exactly, but because it was so alive.” How did this sense of purpose affect their life as a married couple? Do you have someone in your life who supports or shares your own sense of purpose?
8. In Chapter 15, Mrs. Obama explains why she chose to support her husband’s run for the presidency despite her misgivings about politics. What made her change her mind?

Would you have made the same choice? How do you balance the competing worlds of family life and work in your life?

9. Life on the campaign trail was a constant education for Mrs. Obama. Among the lessons was the power in people coming together to see her and to see each other eye to eye. "I've learned that it's harder to hate up close." How do we create spaces where people can come together to talk, listen, and share stories and ideals to build stronger communities, even when people might not agree or share the same history or perspective? How do we as a nation push back against cynicism and the "us vs. them" battles that so often divide us?
10. As Mrs. Obama notes, First Lady is a role without a job description. How did Mrs. Obama choose to approach the role? If you were in charge of writing the job description for the First Lady, what would you include and exclude?
11. Mrs. Obama has surrounded herself with a strong and supportive circle of friends from an early age. In some cases the circle was within reach; as she got older and busier, she had to work harder to create and maintain her circle of support. She writes "Friendships between women, as any woman will tell you, are built of a thousand small kindnesses . . . swapped back and forth and over again." How did she create the building blocks of strong friendships in her life? What is the value in creating and maintaining a circle of strength?
12. Malia and Sasha Obama were young children when their father was elected president. How did the Obamas balance the need to protect their daughters' safety with the desire to allow them to grow and become independent? How do you handle the pressures of the outside world with the children in your life?
13. In the epilogue, Mrs. Obama writes, "I've never been a fan of politics, and my experience over the last ten years has done little to change that." Did you find her statement surprising? Do you think politics is an effective way to make social change?