

American Universities and Greek Life

Fraternalities and sororities constitute a university experience that is singularly American. I am often asked about my involvement in Greek life by my European counterparts, so here is the low-down:

Fraternalities, all-male organizations, and sororities, all-female organizations, are named using Greek letters. They vary in size based on the size of the university; I went to school at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, where each organization had around 100 members. The largest organizations are national, meaning that there are chapters of the same organization at universities throughout the country. My sorority, Gamma Phi Beta ($\Gamma\Phi\beta$), was founded at Syracuse University in 1874 and has since chartered 178 collegiate chapters throughout the United States and Canada.



Fraternalities and sororities are much like societies at universities in the UK, except that Greek members often live together in a house dedicated to their organization. Each organization chooses a national philanthropy to support with donations from annual fundraisers. My sorority puts on an annual campus-wide volleyball tournament to raise money for our philanthropy, Girls on the Run.

Sororities and fraternities have secret initiation rituals, oaths, and handshakes. Each organization also has representative crests, colors, and symbols. My sorority's colors are brown and pink, and our symbol is a crescent moon. Membership is taken very seriously, and members can be involved for life! There are alumni chapters for most Greek organizations, and Greek affiliation is a valuable networking tool.