

It's All Greek To Me

*Santa Barbara, CA
10.15.2024*



Photo by: Wan Lin Chan Zhou

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Many international students from the European Union, including myself, attend North American Universities expecting to encounter blonde girls who have mastered the art of socialization and athletic guys who are the personification of the adjective *cool*. Although Greek Life is an internationally known phenomena, it is only an inherent characteristic of college life in America. In the European Union, Greek life is practically nonexistent, and higher education institutions don't even seem to consider the idea.

This iconic feature of American college life does not go unnoticed by European students, who, though with differing opinions, observe this system of social organization, differing from anything they have seen before.

Why has the concept of Greek Life not crossed the pond and been adapted into European social life?

The reason this model of college lifestyle has not been applied on the other side of the Atlantic stems from a combination of factors, many of which ultimately lead back to the most popular argument today: money. Although the justification for this phenomenon cannot be reduced to a mere economic issue, it is certainly a major factor. According to [Eurydice](#), the European Commission's academic information network, during the academic year 2022-2023 the average tuition fee of a European public university was 981€ (about \$1000). Meanwhile, in the United States, the average cost of public higher education during the same academic year rises to \$9800. This financial difference, although not necessarily reflective of academic performance or quality, significantly affects university infrastructure and the extracurricular activities that revolve around it.

Likewise, the integration process of the average American student is very different from that of the European student. According to a study by the [Spanish BBVA foundation](#), only 30% of Spanish students do not live with their parents during their university studies. This indicates that 70% of students do not move away from their home to study. These percentages are similarly visible in countries like Croatia, Italy and Greece. According to the Spanish student Elene Ibarrondo: “Most of the people studying at university in Spain still live in their houses, so they don’t even have the need to look for accommodation.” Thus, the social circle surrounding these individuals barely undergoes changes during the transition from high school to university. Likewise, socialization within the university context becomes a complement to their education, not a necessity.

“Our college, our university doesn’t become our personality; you just go there, you have your classes there, and that’s it; in the States, you have a whole life inside of it,” said Raya Kandova, a 21-year-old Bulgarian student at UC Santa Barbara. Thus, the university system of the European Union does not encourage students as strongly to be part of extracurricular activities, making it difficult for social groups formed through university institutions to take shape.

Comparatively, in the U.S., 67% of young adults aged 18 to 29 do not live with their parents, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). “People in the US are used to moving and changing their environment when they go to university but in Spain, people maintain their lifestyle without making such big changes where they have to reinvent their circles,” says Cristina Gonzalez, a Spanish exchange student.

This lack of need for reinvention of social circles in Europe is also associated with the personal character of European students: “In Spain, we’re very natural people; we are very extroverted. I don’t see [Greek life] communities or groups existing in my country,” said Ibarrondo. Many international students confirm that it is the American students themselves who say that joining a

fraternity is paying for friendships. This situation is beyond the understanding of the social life present in Europe, where there is no need for a selection process to become part of one.

“Fraternities and Sororities definitely end up defining part of the personality of their members. They become an essential part of their [members’] identity,” said Zachary Staples, an undergraduate student from Washington D.C. This idea of “collective” identity generates some rejection among European students: “It can be good for meeting many people...However, they end up becoming part of a kind of flock of sheep where you will end up following the current leader,” says an anonymous European student of UCSB.

Globalization, inherent to the evolutionary nature of contemporary society, has reduced social differences and balanced the lifestyle between the European Union and the United States. Despite this, certain aspects of social organization, like Greek Life in American colleges, remain unique and impossible to replicate in Europe due to differing and unchangeable cultural factors.