

6 College/University life

Attending college/university is the first real taste of freedom and adulthood for most students. When home students go off to college for the first time, their minds are full of all the possible exciting adventures and things they can do without Mom and Dad looking over their shoulder. Of course, they have to think about studying as well. But for most students, college is much more than just studying. It's also a time to make lifelong friendships, date, and have fun.

In general, you'll find most of the students in Western cultures to be very active and busy. They're usually encouraged to pursue "extracurricular" activities (those activities that don't involve studying) throughout their early and high-school education. By the time they get to college/university, they're usually very excited to get involved in whatever club or group of friends they can to enjoy the arts, outdoor activities, and general socializing.

The social scene

For most local students, their time at college or university is about much more than just getting that diploma or degree and sticking it on the wall. It's about discovering who they really are, and what they want out of life. In addition to managing their studies, many students work part time, belong to clubs or organizations, go out drinking regularly, do sport, and date.

This is because most native-speaker students believe in having a "well-rounded life." This means having a good work-life balance between studies, socializing, and extracurricular activities. We often use the word "extracurricular" to

describe organized activities that are not based on academic work or study.

Extracurricular activities are a great way to enjoy all parts of the college/university experience in English-speaking countries. They're also useful when looking for a job after you finish your course, and should be included on your CV. Employers in English-speaking countries don't just look at graduates' grades, they usually want to know what sort of person you are. Your extracurricular activities help to show them this. For example, a student who directed a successful play at college/university shows that they've already had experience with managing a group of people.

extracurricular (adj): Extracurricular activities are activities for students that are not part of their course.

What do students do when they're not studying?

Work

Okay, it's not usually fun, but many students spend some of their time out of class working. Many international students are surprised to see how many students work part- or even full-time while pursuing a degree. This is especially true in the US, where there's a long history of students starting part-time work while in high school, and working full time during the summer months. In the UK this is also very common. Typical jobs during college/university include being a waiter/waitress in a restaurant, working as a bartender, working as a sales clerk/sales assistant in a store/shop, or taking a student job on the college/university campus.

These jobs also show the high level of work ethic that still exists in many students in English-speaking countries. Working hard and making your own money is a point of

pride for many. The sad truth is also that, as the cost of college/university has been increasing dramatically all over the English-speaking world, many students need to work to pay for tuition or their bills.

Hanging out at the dorm/halls of residence

“Dorms” are also called “student halls of residence.” For many freshmen and sophomores (1st and 2nd year students), the dorm is not just a place to sleep. It’s also a place to (try to) study, and hang out with friends. Unplanned parties often have a way of starting in people’s rooms. Loud music can often be heard throughout the hallways. In the common rooms, students will often hang out, watch TV, listen to music, or play video games. At the dorm, there is almost always someone to talk to. If you’re eager to join in the fun, make sure you leave your door open regularly. People will often pop by, and you’re likely to get invited to do some fun activity or another. Obviously, if you don’t want to be disturbed while you’re studying, it’s best to leave the door closed. Most people, however, don’t spend most of their time studying at the dorm. It’s often too noisy to get much work done! Lots of students end up using the library to study.

You may have to share your room at the dorm (with a roommate). This means you have less privacy, but it’s also a great opportunity to meet native-speaker students and learn about the culture.

hang out (verb): If you hang out in a particular place, you spend a lot of time there.

House parties

At many colleges/universities, there are residential houses near the campus, often rented by students. Students who live in these houses will often throw big house parties. These parties can be a lot of fun. These parties do get stopped by the police from time-to-time, however. So be careful if

you're there. If you're drinking, and in the US, for example, make sure you're 21!

Drinking

Drinking is one of the most popular pastimes of students from Western culture. This is true in many other parts of the world. However, if you come from a culture where you don't drink, it can be difficult to understand the behavior of college/university students who do drink.

The legal drinking ages vary, but are mostly 18 years of age everywhere, except for the US, where it is 21. This is important to keep in mind. You'll notice that some college students in the US who are under 21 will get fake IDs, such as a driver's license. This is never a good idea, and can get you into lots of trouble with the law.

Where does drinking take place?

There are many places that students drink:

- at home (but not usually in the dorms)
- at parties
- at bars and pubs
- at the student union
- at nightclubs and concerts

It's important to note, however, that in the US, you cannot drink outside. Many Australian cities also have "dry zones," where you're not allowed to drink outside. In the UK, there are Controlled Drinking Zones, where the police may ask you to stop drinking.

Types of alcoholic drinks:

Beer

The most common drink of choice for the average college student is beer. Students will often drink the cheapest beer, or beer with the highest alcohol content, depending on what

their goal is. It's drunk in bottles, on draft, or from kegs, which are draft kegs brought to homes for parties. It's filling and has a lower alcohol content than most other alcohol.

Wine

Some students may drink wine. It has a much higher alcohol content, usually about 14% abv (alcohol by volume), so you need to be more careful with it.

Hard liquor/Spirits

This is the term given to the drinks such as whiskey, vodka, gin, etc. These are very high in alcohol content (around 40% abv on average for whiskey and vodka), and need to be drunk in small amounts.

Cocktails

These are very popular in North America especially. These drinks mix hard liquor, or spirits, with other flavored liquors and soft drinks such as colas or juices. They can be very strong and must be ordered with care. If you're out for an evening with friends, make sure to ask what the contents of the cocktails are.

Cider

Cider is an alcoholic drink made from fruit juice, usually apple juice.

Wine coolers/Hard lemonade/Alcopops

These are drinks that mix wine or other alcohol with sparkling water or lemonade. All tend to be quite sweet and they can be quite dangerous as they do not necessarily taste strongly of alcohol so you might get drunk more quickly than you expect.

Drinking style

Some students don't drink alcohol at all. But this is not that common. Most students enjoy it on some level. Sometimes

students have one or two drinks to relax, or have one with a meal. Some students take it much too far and they drink a lot in a short period to get very drunk. This is called binge drinking, and we discuss this and ways to drink responsibly in Chapter 7.

Drinking games

You'll often see students playing drinking games. These can be very basic or very complex. Be careful when playing these games because most will get people drunk very quickly.

The pub crawl

This is a common event where students will slowly, over the course of an evening, go to several different pubs and bars. In the US, some students will even have T-shirts made to remember the experience.

Drunkenness

During pub crawls, students can get very, very drunk. They'll often stay out until closing time. By that time, if you're in an area where there are many bars and pubs, you're likely to see students behaving in a drunken way. They'll often be very loud. Some will have problems walking. Some will be passed out, unconscious, on the sidewalk/pavement. Some will be vomiting as they leave the bar, or on the street. Some will be generally aggressive (especially men) and want to start fights. Some will sing. And some will go home quietly, hoping they don't feel terrible the next day. If you're out at the end of the night when the bars close, you may well see these things.

The hangover

You'll hear students talking about this a lot. It's the feeling you have after a big night of drinking, or drinking too much for your body. It's the headache, nausea, and general awful feeling that makes you say, "never again!" Students will often use the excuse of a hangover for why they look terrible or

are moving slowly. You'll also see them wearing sunglasses at times, because the hangover can cause a headache.

Marijuana

The laws on marijuana (or cannabis) use are relaxing a bit in some parts of the English-speaking world. However, this drug is still officially illegal in most areas. You should make sure you're absolutely clear on the laws of the country you're in before taking drugs. It's important to know that some students take marijuana as you may witness this while you're studying abroad.

Although it's usually smoked or consumed (in foods such as brownies or in tea) at people's homes, you can see (and smell) people smoking it at events such as rock concerts, in nightclubs, or even on the street. You might see "head shops" near college/university campuses where people can buy all the equipment for taking marijuana.

Slang for marijuana:

- pot
- weed
- dope
- skunk
- hashish
- grass
- Are you high? Are you stoned? Are you baked? Fried?
(These all mean: have you been taking marijuana?)

Dancing

All around the world, just as most students like to drink, they also love to dance. Nightclubs are still popular with college/university students. You'll find many types of nightclubs all over the Western world, especially in larger cities. If you're studying in New York, LA, London, or an Australian capital city, you'll find a huge number of small to massive clubs to

choose from. But even smaller cities usually have them if there's a college campus. Nightclubs are usually based on types of music, like hip hop, heavy metal, salsa, or dubstep. Some places have a different kind of music each night. Dancing is a great way for students to release stress after lots of studying.

Raves

A rave is a large, hours-long dance party, usually playing electronic dance music. They were at their most popular in the 90s, but they still happen in most English-speaking countries. Students often love these events because they can dance for hours and see lots of weird and wonderful people on display. Sometimes they're led by very famous DJs. The rave is often known for the use of the drug Ecstasy, so be careful not to take any pills anyone gives you.

Music festivals

There are music festivals all over the world. Some festivals last for a few days, and include dozens of bands. Some are out in fields, such as the famous Glastonbury Festival in England, and some take over huge areas of cities, like Lollapalooza in Chicago, Illinois. They're usually full of college/university students catching their favorite bands live. Even if you're not a huge music fan, many people go for the experience.

Concerts

Music concerts are popular with students. Colleges and universities will often have free or very inexpensive local concerts on offer. If you live in a big city, you'll see students attending shows of every kind of music.

Dating

The years spent at university and college are traditionally perfect for dating. Students are at a time in their lives when

they have free time and, usually, very few responsibilities (other than their studies, and possibly work). The world of dating in the English-speaking world is confusing to both native-speaker and international students alike. There are few rules, and everyone seems to think about it in different ways. We'll try, however, to explain some of the common basics.

The “rules” of dating

On a typical college campus, on any given night, students are going on dates. What does this mean? It's usually when one person “asks another person out.” Traditionally, a man would ask a woman, but this is not necessarily true now. “Asking somebody out” means inviting them to go for dinner, drinks or coffee, to go to a movie, etc. The pair will go out together. They may decide that it went well, they like each other, and see each other again, very soon. Or, they may have a bad experience and not like each other, in which case they won't go on another date. If they do like each other, and continue to see each other regularly, they go beyond the first date and are then “dating.” Other words that you might hear:

- “They're seeing each other.”
- “They're going out.”
- “He's/She's attached.”
- “He's/She's unavailable.”

How do you know when someone is interested in going out on a date with you?

This is the difficult part. Usually, when you're attracted to each other, the man or the woman will invite you somewhere. They may ask questions like, “are you seeing anyone?” or “is there a special someone in your life?” But in most cases, they'll just ask you to the movies or out to dinner.

When you go on a first date, meet the person in public as the person may be someone that you don't know that

well. If the date asks you to do something that doesn't feel comfortable, just say "no."

"We're just friends."

If you're interested in being friends, but not having a romantic relationship, you should say "I'd like to just be friends." Sometimes, the other person will accept this. Most of the time, they'll be hurt and you'll probably never see them again. You'll notice that there are many successful and happy "platonic" (non-sexual) relationships between men and women at colleges/universities in the Western world.

"I'm sure we'll get married soon."

Sometimes international students date someone at college and think "I've been dating this person for a long time now. I'm sure we'll get married." Hold on a minute! Not so fast. In English-speaking countries, few college/university students would have marriage on their mind. Some marriages do come out of a long-term dating relationship in college, but that's becoming less common. Most people who have been to college or university don't marry until they're over 25, or over 30. A small but growing number of people don't get married at all. There are no rules about how soon a dating couple should decide to "tie the knot." If you're unclear about those issues, talk with your boyfriend or girlfriend openly so there are no misunderstandings.

The hookup or "one-night stand"

This is a term that means, in short, casual sex (or at least lots of kissing). No dating, just meeting someone you're attracted to, and getting together to have sex or "fool around." This is increasing on college campuses, while the more traditional dating is declining. This can be a shock to many international students. Hookups often involve alcohol as well.

Avoiding dating altogether

Although dating is in decline, and casual sex is increasing for some students, many students choose to avoid dating

completely. These students choose to focus on platonic relationships with both sexes. For many students, this is a much simpler way of living.

Internet dating

Many students now meet each other for dates through Internet dating sites or dating apps. This can be a great way to meet someone. However, it can be dangerous as you know nothing about the person you're going to meet. Be careful, particularly if you're a woman. If you're going out on an Internet date, meet the person in a public place, tell a friend where you are beforehand and keep in touch with your friend so that they know you're safe.

The Greek system—sororities and fraternities

The Greek system is a big part of many students' social lives, mainly on major American and Canadian campuses. It has existed in North America since the late 1700s.

The Greek system is an organization for undergraduate students who are interested in living with and spending most of their free time with the same group of people. The Greek system is divided into sororities (for women) and fraternities (for men). They often have huge mansions or houses on or near the campus. These houses, "the house," are the center of all social activities and where many of the members live. Being a member can give many benefits, the biggest being a sense of belonging and lots of fun. It can also be very helpful to your future career, as you make great connections that spread across the United States and Canada.

Becoming a member

Sororities and fraternities recruit members, but those possible members must prove themselves. At the beginning of the school year, when students decide to try to become a member, they must go through a process called "rush." Becoming a member of a sorority or fraternity is a long process of going

to the houses you're interested in, going through interviews, attending parties, and participating in other, secretive rituals. Throughout the process, the "pledge," or possible new member, must impress the house and its members. The most important houses might ask very personal questions, and may care a lot about where you went to high school and what kinds of jobs your parents have. It can be a stressful couple of weeks which can involve lots of drinking.

recruit (verb): If you recruit people for an organization, you select them and persuade them to join it or work for it.

Once a student has been selected to be a member of a fraternity or sorority, their social lives are very much focused on the life of the house and the "brothers" or "sisters." It's a huge commitment. For students who want to have an instant social network, the Greek system can be wonderful. If you're a more independent type who doesn't like being with the same group of people and lots of rule-following, the Greek system might not be for you.

"Hazing" or "initiation rituals"

"Hazing" is a word that describes the darker rituals that some Greek houses make possible members go through. They're controversial because they often involve ridiculous amounts of drinking and other dangerous activities. Many colleges/universities now strictly ban extreme hazing. In the UK, there isn't the Greek system, but some student societies, usually those that are sports clubs, may have "initiation rituals" during the first week of the academic year. These are activities that you have to take part in before you become a member. Most of these involve getting drunk and having fun.

If you feel uncomfortable during any required activity for membership to a house or a club, you don't have to participate. In this case, you can find a different house or club that you're interested in.

Best ways in for an international student

The majority of students who join fraternities and sororities are home students, and are often Caucasian, as well as being from a middle- or upper-middle-class family. There are, of course, minorities and working class people in the Greek system. Especially on large campuses, many international and multicultural (non-white) students decide to “pledge,” or try to join, a house. There are Multicultural Greek Councils (MGCs) on the bigger college/university campuses. These councils focus on the “non-traditional” Greek houses based on ethnic background or area, and include groups such as Lamda Theta Phi, a Latino fraternity and the South Asian Interest Sorority, Sigma Sigma Rho. If you’re an Indian student, you don’t have to join the South Asian sorority, you can, of course, try to join others.

For more information on multicultural Greek houses, you can go to the National Multicultural Greek Council: www.nationalmgc.org/ for the United States.

For more information on American and Canadian fraternities, go to the website of the North-American Interfraternity Conference: www.nicindy.org

For sororities (and fraternities), go to the National Pan-Hellenic Council website at: www.nphchq.org/mission

Intramural sports

Students who love team sports, but aren’t good enough or interested enough to join an official college/university team often join intramural teams. The term “intramural” refers to the fact that these teams are usually set within a geographical area. This would be either a college/university and its campus, or a town or part of a large city. The teams usually compete within that system.

These teams can be found throughout the colleges/universities of English-speaking countries, but are especially popular on North American campuses, both big and small.

In the UK, “intramural” refers to teams that are made up of teams competing against different halls of residence, departments, societies, etc., all from the same university.

Students join intramural teams for every sport imaginable, including teams such as women’s rugby, mixed hockey, and netball. Whatever sport you’re into, and whether you’re a man or a woman, there’s always something of interest to join.

Exercise and working out

The gym is a major part of many students’ lives. Campuses in the English-speaking world usually have lots of gym space available with weights, machines, and classes of all kinds available. Many students work out at any time of the day. A surprising number will work out early in the morning before classes begin, or late at night, using special flashlights/torches on their heads or bikes to lead the way and stay safe if they are exercising outdoors. Also wearing fluorescent clothing is a good idea so that you can be seen. As with every other part of student life, both men and women exercise regularly.

Although the gym is very popular, other common forms of exercise students enjoy include:

- power walking (or just nice, leisurely walks);
- jogging;
- running;
- cycling;
- swimming.

Road trips

The road trip has a special place in the heart of students in English-speaking countries. As all of these countries are relatively safe to travel throughout, students often take advantage of long weekends and breaks such as Spring Break in the US to hit the open road. Some countries, such

as South Africa, might have extra security risks, so be careful to check with locals before you head out.

In the larger countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia, students think nothing of driving five hours each way for a short weekend getaway. It's a great way to see the countryside, and learn more about the towns around where you live. Students often go on these trips to attend rock concerts or festivals, or to get into the wilderness to hike or mountain bike.

In the UK, some students use the time off they get during the summer holidays to go traveling in Europe, if their visa permits or if they're European citizens.

Outdoor activities

The countries of the English-speaking world have an extreme variety of landscapes and opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors. Students often join clubs through their colleges/universities to enjoy:

- hiking;
- mountain biking;
- sailing;
- windsurfing;
- kitesurfing;
- scuba diving;
- snorkeling;
- swimming;
- running;
- marathon/triathlon;
- mountaineering;
- rock climbing;
- alpine and Nordic skiing;
- snowboarding;
- ice skating;

- paddle boarding;
- horseback riding;
- camping;
- surfing.

Outdoor education is a popular major in North America, particularly, so if you want to combine your love of the outdoors with your career, there are many great colleges/universities to go to.

There are a lot of different things to do at colleges/universities in English-speaking countries so relax, get involved, and enjoy yourself.