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In the world of Harry Potter, there are famously wizards and non-wizards, or so-called muggles. Muggles are regular people, unaware or unable to participate in the world of magic.

At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, there are people who participate in Greek life in sororities and fraternities, and those who don't, otherwise known as *geeds*.

The sisters of SDT live in a spacious abode perched in the southeast corner of the UMass campus. Currently housing a smaller crew of 75 women, the house consists mainly of double rooms and one presidential suite. Outside of the residential sectors, the hallway cascades from one room to the other: the den, dining room, craft room, yoga room—the list goes on.

Every Wednesday at 5pm, Ava Peterson soaks up fleeting time with her sisters and roommates before venturing to class. Sporting a pair of light-wash PacSun jeans and a gray sweater, while weaving around the Sigma Delta Tau sorority house before dinner, a question was posed.

Why are you part of a sorority?

Then aptly spun into a quick retort.

Why are people not?

Ava, like many others who go through recruitment, got back houses that weren't in her top three. She fell into the allure of a top house: Kappa Kappa Gamma. When she got called back to the SDT and AXO houses, she wasn't ecstatic. Nevertheless, she wanted more than the humble life of a geed, and the promise of sisterhood prevailed.

According to the Urban Dictionary, geed describes "individualistic students that operate away from Greek life and its lifestyle." Also known as a derivative of GDI: "God Damn Independent". When looking for geeds, know they "can be characterized by social awkwardness, non-fratty apparel, and unquestioned love of the pseudo-sport ultimate frisbee."

While sitting at one of two long black plastic tables, Ava's steel blue eyes narrowed as she listened to her sisters at dinner. The occasional ripping of Mediterranean pita pockets reverberated around the dining room. Long wavy mahogany hair framed her heart-shaped face, adorned with a soft smile as she nodded along.

For Ava, a member of the Fall 2024 pledge class, that means she lives in a dorm with a curated group of sorority sisters who all pay \$8,000 and have a private chef, who maintains a strategically mapped out social calendar.

Ava lives in a double with junior Amalia Cherba. The cherub faced, fiery red-head has a blue and white themed side of the room, while Ava opted for white and pink. Together, they created an pleasing ambiance, one that would either be considered akin to cotton candy or gender-reveal.

Outside of the room lay a common area between them and another double. Two thick, brown leather couches took the majority of the area. Purple LED lights were strategically placed on the utmost expanse of the walls. Carefully leading you to a private 20 foot balcony overlooking the campus lights.

Life in the SDT house comes with many different characters. There are three chefs: Ashley, Sean, and “house dad” Morgan. From Monday through Thursday, there is made-to-order brunch and a set dinner: butter chicken with naan and veggies on Monday, followed by birria tacos on Tuesday.

“I am a very social person, and I enjoy being around people like all the time, especially fun stuff with mixers and philanthropy events,” said Amalia Cherba, a junior SDT member. “It gives me a sense of community.”

“Joining a sorority made me branch out and get more involved on campus. It gave me a direction in networking and making friends,” said Ava. “I didn’t think it was a big part of campus last year, but it’s completely different on the other side.”

These sisters don’t know why people wouldn’t want to be part of it.

During an impromptu Greek Week dance rehearsal, one of the many common areas had “Shut Up and Drive” by Rihanna shaking the walls like an anthem. Mull over a combination of “Maui Wowie” by Kid Cudi and “My Way” by Frank Sinatra.

Think lo-fi beat meets big-band swing. It brings a level of warmth like the soft glow of fire as it softly crackles. The songs escape into self-expression and authentic living—accurately reflecting SDT’s chill, confident values. “My Way” by Frank Sinatra started as a chapter-wide inside joke, but quickly unraveled into a pride-inducing anthem.

“We like to have fun, but we do it our way,” said Ava. “No matter what, we’ll be together and out-there. That’s sisterhood.”

There are approximately 750,000 undergrad members, and 10% of the undergraduate students are active in Greek life across 800 U.S. colleges and universities. There are 26 sororities in the National Panhellenic Conference and 57 fraternities in the North American Interfraternity Conference.

Fraternities hold tremendous power among our society. The network that connects you to others range from everyday men among you to 18 of 45 presidents, 85% of the Fortune 500 executives, 40 of 47 U.S. Supreme Court Justices since 1910, and 76% of Congressmen and Senators.

Institutions such as the College of William and Mary were early trailblazers of establishing secret societies; engaging in academic discourse and debate-ridden discussions outside of academic settings. Their creation of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776, a secret literary and philosophical society, was the foundation of future Greek life.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Greek and Latin were the languages of higher education and learning. Through this time, many fraternities and sororities were founded, and the organizations adopted Greek letters. Some skepticize that the use of a foreign language was to emphasize the nature of its participants: well-educated and elite.

The Adelphean Society, founded on May 15, 1851 at Wesleyan College, is recognized widely as the first sorority. Wesleyan College was the first college that could grant degrees to women in the world, and it is the oldest secret society for college women in the world. The organization became known as Alpha Delta Pi. The society was founded by six Wesleyan students with the goal of creating a space for self-improvement.

The society was founded to improve the mental, moral, social, and domestic lives of its members. Specifically, foster sisterhood, academic excellence, philanthropy, and social engagement. It wasn't created to combat fraternities, instead it was inspired by its ability to promote togetherness.

The word "sorority" wasn't used until the creation of Gamma Phi Beta in 1882 at Syracuse University. They were the first organization to deem themselves a "sorority," and differentiate from fraternities.

Sororities were created to bring together women in higher education. It allowed for a social life, academic discussions, and intercommunication that may have been socially improper at the time.

The biggest sorority to date is Chi Omega with approximately 345,000 members, 180 collegiate chapters, and 243 alumnae chapters. Chi Omega is also believed to be the largest sorority at UMass with over 100 members.

Each sorority has its own distinct reputation. For example, the Phi Mu chapter at University of Alabama is known for having the best sorority house: a \$13 million house with marble flooring and chandeliers for 68 of their members. With the motto, “Do Good,” Delta Gamma is known for being the most philanthropic sorority, and Kappa Kappa Gamma is known for its cultivation of female empowerment and leadership.

As Greek life evolved from secret societies, the history, social activities, rituals, and initiation remain at the core of the organization. In order to be in fraternities and sororities, you have to learn the Greek alphabet, specific fraternity or sorority history, values, traditions, etc.

At UMass 8% of the undergraduate student body is involved in Greek life. With 43 total Sororities and Fraternities, there are 20 Fraternities, 16 Sororities, and 7 Honors societies and service organizations.

“No Hands” by Waka Flocka blasts across the expanse of the dirty basement, nearly bursting everyone’s eardrums. Your voice, already hoarse from yelling to friends over the blaring music. Somehow the novice DJ mixes it with Wildest Dreams (remix) in a somewhat satisfying manner.

Kappa Sig is known for its glorious basement, chalk full of shades of greige. There are varying levels of platforms, strategically placed for brothers to watch over crowds or for some slinky dancing. Pi Kappa is a hotspot for its close proximity to Southwest housing. Their basement is covered in varying forms of damage, writing, and occasional walls of red paint. Both fraternities are similar in ambiance, quality, and merely above average brothers.

A common thing to consider when rushing a sorority or fraternity is their social status. Sites such as “greekrank” are one of the many forums that reflect on Greek life and organizations in general. The common sentiment among non-Greek life participants is that it’s a small part of life at UMass.

The current “top” sorority is Kappa Kappa Gamma. There are eight main sororities at UMass. The loose and unofficial social rankings are: KKG, SK and AEPhi (tied), XO, AXO, SDT, Tri Sig, IGU.

Fraternity hierarchy is often decided from their house location and size, as well as if they host good parties. Pi Kappa and Kappa Sig have been the top tier fraternities this past year because they have remained active, avoided trouble, and have the ability to host great indoor parties.

Fraternities such as Phi Sig, Theta Chi, and Alpha Sig have been in trouble with the school, cops, or banned which has hurt their previously high social standing.

The infamous fraternity Pike, banned for around eight years because of hazing, is officially back. With over 120 founding members, Pike is quickly becoming involved in the Greek sphere once again.

Pi Kappa Alpha (Pike) is slowly crawling back from their lengthy fall from grace. Pike was suspended in 2017 for fraternity members procuring alcohol for a minor, leading to their hospitalization for alcohol poisoning. They were reinstated in December, after an eight year suspension.

Other notable frats are ATG, Sig Chi, TKE, DBT, ZBT, and DCHI. All of which are social and occasionally involved, just less prominent to the general population. Other fraternities—such as SigEp, Delta Sig, and Phi Delt—are virtually nonexistent to the general campus population and stick to their own crowd.

The organizations have different pledge class sizes, which vary each year. Some fraternities are known for taking almost everyone, such as Alpha Sig because of high drop rates. This is also common because you often can only rush for one fraternity, not multiple.

KKG is the most “exclusive” sorority when it comes to pledging, while SDT, SK, and XO pledge classes generally are larger and have more bids.

Top sororities mix with top fraternities and vice versa. Mixers happen 2-3 times a week with various fraternities; the event needs numbers, so the most recent two pledge classes are heavily encouraged to attend (and required if you want to do anything else). The mixers are often on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. Some sororities mix more than others.

“If you’re going out, you need to go to the mixer for at least an hour and fifteen, or else you get a strike. But it’s not that deep,” Ava remarked.

There are also so-called study hours. Many opt to use their “study” time to chat with the organization they’re with, some attempting to find a date for formal or partner. SDT doesn’t have regular study hours, sometimes a mere three times a semester. Other sororities such as Alpha Chi

Omega do study hours much more often; studying for 1-2 hours with another Greek organization everyday or every other at a minimum.

UMass first-year Shannon McGrann is part of Delta Sigma Pi, a professional business fraternity. The fraternity lacks numerous social gatherings and commitments, instead serving as a tool for professional development and community service.

“If you want to join Greek life you can, but if you don’t want to you don’t have to,” said Shannon. “If Greek life isn’t your thing and you’re looking for a way to get involved in campus, there’s so many different organizations and clubs that you can get involved with. There’s really something for everyone here. If you want to make a big school seem small. There are plenty of opportunities to join things.”

Greek life is one way to get involved, and the social hierarchy of organizations dictate how much of a commitment it really is.

There isn’t a distinct purpose for Greek life hierarchies; it merely exists for elevated status and social capital. The top sororities want to mix with the top fraternities. It is of much more importance at large southern universities, where your sorority defines who you can associate with. Many sororities intermix, however the hierarchy remains where there is a top, middle, and bottom.

Friday morning, the SDT sisters found themselves collaborating with the Best Buddies Foundation at UMass. The warm scent of vanilla and sugar wafted through the Sigma Delta Tau house as sunlight streamed in through the wide front windows.

Inside, the living room had been transformed into a festive, cookie-decorating wonderland. Folding tables lined with pastel tablecloths were covered in bowls of colorful frosting, trays of freshly baked sugar cookies, and a rainbow scatter of sprinkles, candies, and edible glitter.

Laughter echoed off the walls as SDT sisters moved between the tables, helping their Best Buddies partners pick out cookie shapes. Stars and flowers littered the kitchen counter in delectable cookie form. In the corner, one buddy proudly held up a cookie smothered in purple frosting and topped with tiny marshmallows. Nearby, another sister, Ava, sat shoulder to shoulder with her buddy, gently guiding her hand as they traced a smiley face in yellow icing.

Founded in 1917 at Cornell University, Sigma Delta Tau was born from both a desire for sisterhood and a need for space for Jewish women who were excluded from other Greek

organizations at the time. Over a century later, SDT's philanthropic efforts support Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA), Jewish Women International (JWI), the American Health Association, UMDA, and the SDT Foundation.

The big event for SDT is the French ToaSDT event, raising approximately \$800. Other philanthropic efforts are mainly volunteer participation, and don't include fundraising.

French ToaSDT event was to raise funds for Prevent Child Abuse America, and is one of their "13% events." Dubbed 13% because each Greek organization must have at least 13% of their members attend or they get fined by nationals.

A couple of their events have been the Hot Chocolate Walk/Run for Safe Passage to support survivors of domestic violence, annual French ToaSDT fundraiser, and cookie decorating with the Best Buddies club on campus.

"I'd say we volunteer a couple times a semester. It's hard with everyone's schedule so we try to do a lot locally," said Ava. "There's no strict requirement to participate in the volunteer stuff. The main commitment is to attend 13% events."

Philanthropy events are central to each sorority, however the main way sororities are able to pay for events and their social lives is from their own pocket. The top sorority, KKG, is one that pays the most, accumulating to over \$10,000 per person in rent and fees each year. SDT members pay closer to \$7,500. The numbers do not include additional expenses such as food, clothing, and drinks.

The SDT ladies were slowly setting up and crafting for their roaring 20s themed formal. A poster detailing a city sky-line and bright lights will be a fashionable background for its participants decked out in feathers, pearls, and blingy accessories.

Mainly filled with members of SDT and TKE, Union Station was filled to the brim. SDT and TKE have an established connection through a couple romantic relationships. This is a consistent pattern with other formals, e-board connections between organizations dictate who mixes with who.

As the yellow-orange glossy blend of a school bus jerks to the side of the road, the SDT ladies know there is something awry. The bus managed to run off the road into a ditch and lodge itself into a muddy pit. The immobile crew found the only solution was to trudge to their venue.

The finances of such an event remains ambiguous, however it is assumingly over \$1,000 with a bus and venue rental.

Each sister had paid around \$30 for a “ticket” and somewhat incomplete transportation service. Alternatively, SK went with a pricier formal, going all the way to Upstate New York with XO.

Walking in heels and flashy long sparkling dresses, the rain added a dramatic flair to the sisters’ cohesion.

Blisters and cuts were slowly brewing on their sore feet. Only half a mile to get to their fun-filled destination.

At least they’re “wizards.”

For formals, sororities pair with fraternities so alcohol can be involved. While fraternities can host parties at their houses and serve alcohol, sororities are prohibited by national regulations and university policies. As a result, if sorority members want to attend a party where alcohol is present, they often have to rely on fraternities to provide the space and the drinks.

The joint efforts for a formal accumulate to \$6,000 to \$10,000 for the bus, venue, DJ, etc. The average mixer might equate to a couple of hundred dollars depending on theme and attire required.

“We’re not allowed to stand on elevated surfaces, puke, leave, or do anything embarrassing before 12,” said Ava. “It’s kind of crazy that if you fall at 11:59 you can get sent to standards, but falling once the mixer ends at 12:01, you won’t get in trouble.”

Sororities are inherently held to higher behavioral standards, and yet are put in the position of having to depend on fraternities to access a typical college social life. The system creates a power imbalance: women are expected to “mix” with fraternities to gain access to parties, but in doing so, they give up control over the environment.

Sororities can set expectations for their members, but they have little influence over what happens at a frat house party once the doors close. Despite many efforts to foster safer, inclusive social spaces, the setup itself often reinforces outdated gender dynamics where fraternities host and control the party, and sororities are expected to show up, stay, and behave.