Muslims, Middle Easterners, and Stereotypes about Sorority Life at the University of Illinois

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Introduction
There are many Universities across the United States that are ranked high in academics, have a Greek system, and are home to thousands of young college students. This sounds like the typical American College that most students experience, yet not many can say that they attended the number 9th ranked public University in the country according to U.S. and World Report, that has the largest Greek system in the entire world and is home to 43,000 students; this is the unique and diverse University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The University of Illinois is a different place than most colleges, and one of the main differences is the Greek system. The University of Illinois has the largest Greek system, not only in the country, but in the entire world. The Greek life is comprised of the Black Greek Council, Interfraternity Council, Pan-Hellenic Council, and United Greek Council. The Black Greek Council makes up 12 predominantly African American Sororities and Fraternities, the Interfraternity Council has 47 fraternities, the Pan-Hellenic Council has 25 different sororities, and there are 14 Sororities and Fraternities in the United Greek System.

Greek Life Now For Everyone
Many believed that having a Sorority for Muslims could never be done, yet the first ever Islam based sorority was founded in April 2006, in North Carolina, Imani Abdul-Haqq was an active member in her University's Muslim Student Association on campus and she decided that she did not have to entirely give up on sororities, rather she became the new founder of the first Muslim sorority. With the help of her mom, who used to be the president of Bennett College and who was also a member of the sorority Delta Sigma Theta, they formed Gamma Gamma Chi.

Gamma Gamma Chi is solely based on the faith of Islam, yet non-Muslims are allowed to join as practicing. Muslims are. Some of the things that the girls do in Gamma Gamma Chi are pray together daily, fast together during Ramadan, and enjoy themselves with being active members in their student body. One is not required to wear the Hijab, but one is always welcome to. "Striving for the pleasure of Allah through sisterhood, scholarship, leadership, and community service" is Gamma Gamma Chi's motto.

Their organization raises money like other sororities do across the country for charities. Gamma Gamma Chi also plans social events, but without alcohol and the attendance of men, and they also hosts discussions about their faith and Islam. This sorority did such a great job with forming its first chapter, that by the end of 2008, they had a total of six new chapters! The cities and states include: National Grand Chapter - Alexandria, Virginia; Alpha Chapter - Atlanta, Georgia; Beta Chapter - DC Metro Area, Delta Chapter - Chicago, Illinois; Epsilon Chapter - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Gamma Chapter - Greensboro, North Carolina.

Since there were Christian faith-based sororities, the University decided that this was a great step in the path towards bringing more diversity to the Greek Life in general. I believe that if the Students at the University of Illinois wanted to have a Muslim Sorority, the Gamma Gamma Chi chapter would bring a division to the largest Greek Life school. This means that the University would have many more students involved with campus life. Those who believed that they would not fit in with Greek Life because of religious obligations, can now turn that into a reality and be able to while still staying strong with their beliefs.

Therefore, Greek is not set for any one ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or religion; it is for all. It involves integrity, trust, and diversity because there is no set type of person that fits Greek Life. It can fit any person, and any religious affiliation. I truly hope that the University of Illinois will be able to add a chapter of Gamma Gamma Chi so they could be the first religious affiliated Sorority on our University’s campus.

Interviews and Quotations
For my research, I conducted interviews with a Middle Eastern girl who is contemplating whether or not to join the Greek system, a Middle Easterner who has been in a Sorority since her freshmen year of college, a Muslim who did not join the Greek system, a Bahia who is interested in joining a sorority next year as well as the Personal Relations for the largest sorority council and the University, the Pan-Hellenic Council. They all had very similar thoughts pertaining to the topic of Greek Life.

Question: "Did you ever feel like you were judged during recruitment because of your ethnicity?"
Answer: "No. Because I think a lot of houses looked at it as a positive thing to have girls that bring diversity to their house."

Question: "Do you feel as it a Muslim or Middle Eastern girl could join a sorority?"
Answer: "My sister is Muslim and she was in one, and I feel like they could, but it really just depends on the individual."

Question: "Do you feel as if a Muslim girl in a Hijab (a Muslim head scarf) would be treated fairly, with respect, as well as have the same opportunity as being picked for a house as a white girl who has blue eyes and blonde hair?"
Answer: "Every sorority on campus is diverse and has women of all ethnicities and I do not think that a Muslim woman wearing a Hijab would be viewed or treated any differently. Since one of our main values is diversity, we often stress the importance of excepting people of all religions, races, sexual orientations, etc."

Question: "Do you think that one’s religious beliefs can affect whether or not they will enjoy being in a sorority and be able to come together and have a good time?"
Answer: "In a way, yes, it does affect it because of my religion. I can’t drink, I don’t think it affects the ability to be friends with someone. I don’t drink, and I still feel like I am sociable. I like getting dressed up and meeting new people."

Question: "How do you feel about sorority on campus? Do you feel that they are only subjective to white girls and no other ethnicities or races?"
Answer: "Actually, on the contrary. I think they try to get girls from other their races because they want to have more diversity within a Sorority. I feel like there is a wide mix of girls and ethnicities."

For further information
If you would like more information on The University of Illinois’ Greek system and related subjects you can visit www.illinigreeks.com, where there is information about the Greek chapters. Special Acknowledgment to Colin Farrington for the Powerpoint template she works at the Department of Biology at Swarthmore College located in Swarthmore, PA.

Statistics about Greek Life
There are a total of 34 sororities on campus that are comprised from the councils at UIUC
UIUC’s Greek system is the largest in the country
Sororities are involved with Philanthropy, Community Service, Leadership, Scholarship, and Diversity

Over 800 campuses in the United States and Canada participate in Greek Life
There are over 2,000,000 Greek members nationally
63% of the U.S. President’s cabinet since 1950 have been Greek
85% of the Fortune 500 executives belong to a fraternity
76% of all Congressmen and Senators belong to a fraternity
40 of 47 U.S. Supreme Court Justices since 1910 were fraternity men
Over 87 million is raised each year by Greeks nationally

850,000 hours of service are volunteered by Greeks annually
45% of Greek students say they are more accepting of individual differences since joining a fraternity or sorority
A U.S. Government study shows that over 70% of all those who join a fraternity/sorority graduate, while under 50% of all non-fraternity/sorority persons graduate

Works Cited
Rankings and News: http://studentorgs.gwu.edu/greekspeak/extras/nationalstatistics/
Illinois Greek system: http://www.illinigreeks.com
Gamma Gamma Chi Sorority: http://gammagammachi.org/splash/