

GRADUATION CEREMONIES: A SPECIAL MOMENT OR A FORMALITY?

Feature article, written by Matilde Alves and Laurie Hamon – October 24th, 2019

Student life is an important part of most people's life. This is the moment when we become adults, when we decide how our future will look like. College represents the transition between our student life and our professional life. And in order to make this transition more solemn, American Universities traditionally organize graduation ceremonies.

Gabrielle, who is studying English and technical writing at Penn State University, already had the chance to attend a graduation ceremony at high school. She described us how are graduation ceremonies in the United States:



"Graduation ceremonies usually start with one or two speakers who are distinguished alumni of the school. Then, the class president and class valedictorian give speeches. Finally, they call everyone's names individually and we walk across the stage to receive our diploma. Everyone wears a gown. Girls typically wear white dresses underneath and guys wear suits or just nice pants and a nice shirt. We also wear caps on our heads."

Gabrielle Logsdon (on the right)

For most French students, graduation ceremonies are part of our American Dream. These ceremonies represent everything we have been seeing on television while watching American movies and tv shows.

The procedures and traditions around graduation ceremonies differ around the world. In France, most universities don't even have a graduation ceremony. But why are graduation ceremonies not so developed in France? Well, the first reason is that French universities have to deal with a tiny budget since they work with public money.

But we can notice that some French private Business Schools have started to introduce graduation ceremonies over the past few years and our master's is following this path.

In the United States, the average student has no part in planning graduation ceremonies. While in the master's M2i, we have to organize the whole event for last year's promotion. It is a one semester organization project and all the students of the second year have to work on this. Since the budget is quite restricted, everyone has to get their hands dirty to make all of this possible, and it is a real challenge for us.

On the other hand, it seems that some American students are not so excited for their graduation ceremony. Even if Gabrielle's high school graduation ceremony was one of her best memory from High School, she is not feeling that her upcoming ceremony will be memorable: "My college graduation however, I am not looking forward too. I feel like it's not as special because you don't really know the people you're graduation with. It's also insanely long because there are so many people and each and everyone gets their name called."

But what was so special about her high school graduation ceremony? She felt that this ceremony was more intimate: "We were a tiny class and it was really special to have a ceremony with the classmates I'd known since grade school. We all cheered together on stage, [...] it was like coming together for one last thing".

Victoria is studying Corporate Communications at Penn State University and she is passionate about e-sports. She has never attended a graduation ceremony. But from what she has heard, people feel very different about it: "Graduation is a big deal for most people, but I do know some people who choose not to attend graduation for various reasons." From her perspective, graduation ceremonies are particularly important for students who grow up in families who place a lot of value in school.

Victoria is not particularly looking forward to her graduation ceremony that will take place next fall, after she completed her credits. She believes it is just a formal event where "All the students sit in the audience in alphabetical order and then go up by rows to walk across the stage".

However, she underlined that her most exciting experience at college would probably have been attending her first Penn State football game: "The atmosphere at the game was something that I will never forget."

Victoria Mcguire, Penn State University

