There are numerous differences between Chinese and American university education, and many of us may think the campus life of American college students is free and easy to deal with. But according to the experience of a lot of overseas students, the campus life there can be described briefly as “free but not easy”.

**Free Atmosphere**

The meaning of free is quite clear, and as we often see in American movies, college students there live a life almost independently. Many of them endeavor to make money to support their living expenses or even pay for their tuition, so we can often hear that they are busy doing part-time job, no matter what social status their families may have. That’s totally different from the situation in China, where most students who try to find a part-time job to earn money are those from poor families.

The independence is not only shown in this way. Other evidence is that no one will supervise their studies, and which way they choose to learn and which life style they choose to live just depends on themselves. They have academic advisors, who will give suggestions on curriculum choosing, requirements from each professor and so on. These people can also offer help about certain problems in life. But unlike us, they don’t have a “class” in which everyone has to take almost the same curriculum and always be together. In America, those who take the same course at the same time is called a “class”, as their classes are temporary, it’s impossible to assign a head teacher to a class, so it’s impossible to get someone to supervise students’ study. Furthermore, some students live in flat off campus from the second year of college, further expanding their freedom. All of these factors make up the free system of American campus life, a system in which the students are those who should take responsibility to take care of theirselves and catch up with their studies without deans or head teachers.

Under this system, it’s inevitable that some students’ lack of self-control may result in poor academic performance, but that's the result of competition, and to some extent, it helps the universities choose eligible students from the crowds.

The discussions in American universities are also free. Everyone can cast a doubt on the speech of the professors, and debating is not limited in the students. Students can refute the viewpoints of professors, and the professors can also challenge the authority of superior scholars.

This pattern of learning independently reflects the respect of freedom and independence of American people, and now it's attracting a large number of schoolers to America to study.

**Strict Requirement**

While there is lots of freedom, studying in an American university is anything but easy. The secret of keeping a healthy academic atmosphere in American universities is that the qualifications of graduation are very strict, and for those students whose academic performances are poor, it's very hard to get a diploma.

The teaching system of America universities and colleges is divided into two stages: general education courses and specialized courses. Each course has a number of credits given for completing it... Students can discuss their class scheduling plan with their advisors, and then the advisors will give a schedule that fits the students' conditions and demand.

Once admitted, students engage in undergraduate study, which consists of satisfying university and class requirements to achieve a bachelor's degree in a field of concentration known as a major. Students have to pass all the required courses to get enough credits if they want to get a bachelor's degree.

Almost every professor will give a long bibliography on the very first day of the class, and students need to try to get the books on the list and read some parts of them before or while taking the class. Because it's nearly impossible to get a satisfactory grade if you don't read those books recommended by the professors, even this is a serious task, and it can be really hard to finish so much reading. Students in America try their best to read the books and get the information the professors want them to obtain. While in China, most students will not do any additional reading because it will not affect the final exam grade. Take my friend Anne as an example: She is a sophomore in an American university. Each semester, they have to read a lot of books and write all kinds of essays,
but she seldom read the books recommended by the professors because she thought it was useless, and she thought that all she needed to do was to work harder when the final test period came. After one year of study, she failed three subjects. She has to go back school during the vacation to take the make-up examinations, and the examinations are very difficult. Now she is starting to become aware of the importance of additional reading, and realizes that those preview materials can not only help students comprehend the lectures, but also broaden the scope of knowledge.

It's easier to get a high grade in China as many teachers may emphasize the points which will be tested, and the knowledge involved in tests is usually within the textbooks. I think the ways that American professors use to encourage students to learn more by themselves ensures the positive study atmosphere and cultivates the students' self-learning ability.

Many Chinese students, through study abroad experiences, discover that the universities of America are really not suitable places to be lazy or just relax all the time. A huge number of projects, reading reports, and research are indispensable part of the campus life, and the tests always require not only careful review but also careful reading of books on the bibliography.

**Extracurricular Activities**

When we talk about campus life, extracurricular activity is a part we can't ignore. American people clearly know how to enjoy life and how to enrich their life, and so do their university students.

There are many kinds of student clubs in every university. Some of them are established for academic purpose, and others are merely for fun. They have academic clubs where students who are interested in a specific subject can join others to discuss and share their opinions, such as astronomy club, physics club, botanical club and so on. Other clubs are for entertainment purposes, like music club or movie clubs. Most students will take part in one or more clubs according to their interests, and that gives them opportunities to make friends who share the same interests and relax themselves.

Most American people care about their physical health, and most university students enjoy some kinds of sports. Every day after class, if the weather condition permits, the sports grounds are full of people. There are usually tennis courts, a swimming pool, and many other sport facilities on campus, and it's often accessible to every student. Sports are important to university students, and in American universities, of all the sports, like rugby, baseball and basketball are very popular. Every year in America, there will be national competitions of those sports and many schools will hold various kinds of matches.

When university students are trying to figure out how to spend their vacations, American students mainly choose three kinds of things to kill their time:

The first one is very universal, to earn some money by taking a part-time job. As many American students try to become independent after they become adults, the necessity of economic independence is highly respected. They won't waste this opportunity and will attempt to get enough money to support their next semester's living expense and tuition.

The second one is traveling, which is similar to Chinese students' passion. American students often travel alone or with friends—but rarely with a tour guide– and the expense in the journey comes from the money they earn by taking part-time jobs. They value traveling a lot as they think traveling can broaden their horizon and enrich the life experiences. They rarely travel to see scenery, however. They more often travel to see friends or family, or travel to a city with movies, food, and rich experiences.

Learning foreign languages during vacations is also popular among students. Nowadays, more and more students try to acquire one or two foreign languages. French, Spanish, German and Latin are among the most popular ones. Some students are able to speak more than three foreign languages, and the ability to speak foreign languages is becoming a symbol of status.

In conclusion, the campus life of America is quite different from ours. Many significant characteristics of American culture are reflected in its campus life. Independence is highly respected here, and the academic atmosphere is free, open and positive. These factors, along with the diversity of extracurricular activities make American university education one of the most successful in the world. That's why numerous students are always dreaming about studying in America, and a lot of scholars are attracted to the U.S every year.