

American universities

8

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1. Going to college

1. Look at the picture first, then use the vocabulary below to say when and where the scene takes place. Explain what the boy is doing and why. Imagine his feelings.

mortarboard ['mɔ:təbɔ:d] = a black tasselled à pompon academic cap with a flat square top – gown *toge* – graduation *remise des diplômes* day / ceremony – university degree *diplôme*

2. Read the text below and find the equivalents of these words (in the right order): *candidature* – *frais (de scolarité)* – *bourse* – *prêt* – *cours* – *chambre avec pension* – *étudiant en licence* – *troisième cycle*.



3. What main differences do you see between French and American universities?

Before leaving high school at age 18, pupils send applications to a few colleges*. They are admitted according to their marks (grades) in high school, and sometimes on their athletic abilities. In spite of the fees which are very high, more than 15 million students attend college through a system of scholarships and loans. However, since 5 students pay not only for tuition, but board and lodging, many of them must take a part-time job while studying.

Some students attend junior colleges for two years, but most universities offer a four-year course for undergraduates. First-year students are called “freshmen”, then “sophomores” (2nd year), “juniors” (3rd year) and “seniors” (4th year). Most students 10 live on the big campuses attached to the universities. After these four years they get a Bachelor’s Degree. Then they may take a job or apply for graduate studies.

* In the USA, an institution of higher education or part of a university.



2. The Ivy League

The name comes from a 19th-century university athletic association, known as the “Four League”. It was composed of Columbia (New York City), Harvard (Massachusetts), Princeton (New Jersey) and Yale (Connecticut). The Roman numeral “IV” (pronounced [aɪvɪ]) was often used instead of 5 the word “four” and the term “Ivy League” came into use. The IV League’s major sports rivals were the universities of Brown (Rhode Island) (*photo*), Cornell (New York), Dartmouth, (New Hampshire) and Pennsylvania, which 10 joined the league in the early 1900s.

Ivy League members are the oldest, most prestigious and most expensive of American universities. Many famous people (Nobel Prize winners, successful entrepreneurs, US presidents...) attended one of these colleges.

Other famous colleges: M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University (California), John Hopkins (Maryland), University of Chicago...

3. College and sports

1. What sports facilities (*installations*) can you see in the photo?
2. In your opinion, who owns these facilities?
3. What does this photo reveal about the role of sports at college?



Universities get their funds from the high fees paid by students (*see table below*), donations from rich citizens (private universities) or the state (public universities) and from the money collected at basketball, baseball or football matches. That explains why some students are admitted because of their athletic abilities.

4. The price of college

1. Look at the cartoon, then describe it.
2. Explain how the girl is feeling and why.
3. What is the cartoonist's goal?
4. Read the table below. How do you react to these figures?

Note: Prices include tuition fees, board and lodging, books, supplies (*fournitures*) and personal expenses.



Clay Bennett/2003 ©The Christian Science Monitor

Cost in US dollars for the 2003-2004 academic year		
Public Universities	In-state students*	Out-of-state students*
University of Texas, Austin (51,000)**	\$13,500	\$20,000
University of California, Berkeley (32,000)	\$17,700	\$30,000
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (38,000)	\$16,700	\$32,500
University of Vermont, Burlington (10,000)	\$17,100	\$30,100
Baruch College (15,700), the City University of New York***	\$9,400	\$12,300
Private Universities		
Columbia University, New York City (19,700)	\$39,500	
Harvard University (24,700)	\$38,720	
Yale University (11,150)	\$38,770	
M.I.T., Boston (10,100)	\$41,000	

* In public universities the students whose parents live in the state pay less than out-of-state students.
 ** In brackets: number of students
 *** Does not include housing

5. Panic in the class of economics



- Look at the picture and answer questions **a** et **b** before reading the text.
 - Which sport are these boys playing?
 - Are the players students or pros?
- Use the context to find the equivalents of the following words (in the right order): *remarquable* – *se maintenir* – *stupide* – *intelligent* – *mince* – *regarder fixement* – *vapeur* – *propulser* – *lancer un regard implorant* – *partager* – *énorme* – *se froter* – *voyager*
- Sum up the story.
- Why did all the students try to help Bolenciecwcz?
- Did Mr Bassum's explanations really help the footballer? Why or why not?
- Why was the professor so lenient?
- Would you say that James Thurber gives us a true account of university life in the USA?
- Do you think it is fair to give champions special treatment when at college?

At that time, Ohio State University had one of the best football teams in the country, and Bolenciecwcz was one of its outstanding stars. In order to be eligible to play it was necessary for him to keep up in his studies, a very difficult matter, for while he was not dumber than an ox¹, he was not any smarter. Most of his professors were lenient² and helped him along. None gave him more hints³ in answering questions or asked him simpler ones that the economics professor, a thin, timid man named Bassum. One day when we were on the subject of transportation and distribution, it came Bolenciecwcz's turn to answer a question. "Name one means of transportation," the professor said to him. No light came into the big tackle's⁴ eyes. "Just any means of transportation," said the professor. Bolenciecwcz sat staring at him. "That is," pursued the professor, "any medium, agency, or method of going from one place to another." Bolenciecwcz had the look of a man who is being led into a trap⁵. "You may choose among steam, horsedrawn, or electrical propelled vehicles," said the instructor. "I might suggest the one which we commonly take in making long journeys across land." There was a profound silence in which everybody stirred⁶ uneasily, including Bolenciecwcz and Mr. Bassum. Mr. Bassum abruptly broke this silence in an amazing manner. "Choo-choo-choo," he said, in a low voice, and turned instantly scarlet⁷. He glanced appealingly around the room. All of us, of course, shared Mr. Bassum's desire that Bolenciecwcz should stay abreast⁸ of the class in economics, for the Illinois game, one of the hardest and most important of the season, was only a week off. "Toot, toot, toot-toooooot!" some student with a deep voice moaned⁹, and we all looked encouragingly at Bolenciecwcz. Somebody else gave a fine imitation of a locomotive letting off steam. Mr. Bassum himself rounded off¹⁰ the little show. "Ding, dong, ding, dong," he said, hopefully. Bolenciecwcz was staring at the floor now, trying to think, his great brow¹¹ furrowed¹², his huge hands rubbing together, his face red.

"How did you come to college this year, Mr. Bolenciecwcz?" asked the professor. "*Chuffa chuffa, chuffa chuffa.*"

"M'father sent me," said the football player.

"What on?" asked Bassum.

"I git¹³ an 'lowance¹⁴," said the tackle, in a low, husky¹⁵ voice, obviously embarrassed.

"No, no," said Bassum. "Name a means of transportation. What did you ride here on?"

"Train," said Bolenciecwcz.

"Quite right," said the professor. "Now, Mr. Nugent, will you tell us..."

James THURBER, *University Days* (1945)

1. *bœuf* – 2. *indulgent* – 3. *indice* – 4. *plaqueur* (US football) – 5. *piège* – 6. *s'agiter* – 7. *écarlate* – 8. *au niveau* – 9. *gémir* – 10. *parachever* – 11. *front* – 12. *creusé* – 13. = get – 14. = allowance: *allocation* – 15. *rauque*

6. Talking point

Would you like to study at an American university? Why or why not?