

LESSON 11

HOW TO TALK ABOUT COLLEGE AND PARTYING

That weekend, I drove down to San Diego with Janet, who wanted to check out a college there. She'd pretty much already been accepted – big surprise – and they were hinting that she was going to get some heavy science scholarship. I was tired of my dad being on my case all the time, so I tagged along. He was happy I was at least showing some vague interest in a school, so it created some peace in the house.

We had a good time driving down in Janet's mom's old minivan, with the windows down and Janis Joplin playing really loudly on the stereo. We drank Capri-Suns, and Janet tried to rewrite all the lyrics to "Bobby McGee" to be about Rex and me. By the time we got there, I was in a much better mood.

The campus was gorgeous, in that way that only California colleges can be. Tall trees, beautiful Spanish-style buildings, and kids playing Frisbee even though it was almost winter. Janet took one look at it and was obviously head over heels. I was happy to see her so excited, but when I looked around, it didn't do much for me. I wasn't sure why, but I didn't want to spend the next four years of my life stuck at school. Again. And frat parties? I'll pass, thanks. Janet had heard about one going on that night, though, and she begged me to come with her, so I suppose I can say I've been to *one* in my life.

Janet had a meeting with the head of the chem department, so I told her I'd wander around and meet up with her later. I walked past the big, fancy buildings and around the wide green courtyards until I came to the English department. Well, I thought. Might as well look around.

The place was pretty quiet when I walked in, but one office had its door wide open. I thought I heard . . . wait, no, it couldn't be. Was that the Roots I heard blasting out the doorway? Curious, I walked down the hallway. A woman in her thirties was sitting in the office, banging on her desk in time with the music. She saw me and smiled. "Sorry, was I being too loud? I can turn it down."

"No, no," I said. "I was just visiting the campus, and was wondering what kind of English professor listens to loud hip-hop."

She laughed. "This one does." She introduced herself as Professor Wexler and invited me in. I ended up spending an hour with her in the office. We started talking about music and poetry, and the conversation just flowed from there. She was awesome. Eventually I felt comfortable enough admitting that I wasn't really feeling the college vibe at the moment.

She put her arms behind her head. "So don't go right away," she said. "I didn't."

"Really? Then what did you do?" I asked.

She laughed loudly and said, "Drove around in a van with my boyfriend for a few months. He was a band photographer. But eventually I realized he was nothing but bad news, so I ditched him and went to Kenya for a year." A light bulb went off in my head at that point. A year abroad . . . I wanted to stay and talk to Professor Wexler some more, but I had to go meet Janet to (ugh) get ready for this party. But she gave me her email address, and as I left her office, my brain was already leafing through imaginary travel brochures.

WORDS ABOUT COLLEGE

The library looked like an old Gothic church on the outside. It really felt like a hallowed place.

hallowed (adj): holy, blessed

The book stacks, however, had all been **desecrated** by graffiti.

desecrate (v): to ruin something sacred

All the buildings on campus were referred to by their **abbreviated** names; John M. Carver Hall became JMC.

abbreviate (v): to shorten

The old oaks in the courtyard represented the college's longevity.

longevity (n): length of life

The English department was the home of many **venerable** professors.

venerable (adj): respectable, usually because of age

Venerability made a lot of them rather **pompous**; none of them had time to talk to a lowly prospective student.

pompous (adj): conceited, self-important

The **stodgy** old professors turned me off, but I suppose they'd worked hard to earn being antisocial.

stodgy (adj): old-fashioned, stuffy, plodding

The tour guide kept telling us that only a **rarefied** group of students gets the chance to attend this university.

rarefied or **rarefied** (adj): only the best, separated from what is coarse or ordinary

They used test scores, grades, and letters of recommendation to **cull** the group they wanted.

cull (v): to separate the desirable from the undesirable

The tour guide tried to be as **restrained** as possible, as if to suggest this was a dignified, serious place for mature students.

restrained (adj): controlled, not showing too much emotion

Last year, because of a large grant, the college was able to replace their **obsolete** computers with brand-new ones.

obsolete (adj): old-fashioned, replaced by something newer

The grant had been made by a group of recent **alumni** who had formed a successful software company.

alumni (n): graduates of a particular school. The feminine single form is alumna; the masculine single form is alumnus.

Many rich alumni choose to **bequeath** things to the school.

bequeath (v): to leave something to a person or institution after death

One **philanthropist** donated enough money for the school to build a state-of-the-art, high-powered telescope.

philanthropist (n): someone dedicated to charitable works

College doesn't have the same **hierarchy** that high school has. Here, it's okay for freshmen and seniors to hang out together.

hierarchy (n): a system that ranks people

The president of the college **abdicated** after a particularly messy scandal.

abdicate (v): to formally give something up (usually a high office or position)

My host student was really **accommodating** - she let me sleep in her bed while she took the futon.

accommodating (adj): willing to adjust one's actions in order to help someone else

The dorms had plenty of **amenities**, like a full gym and dining hall in each building.

amenities (n): features that make a place attractive to guests or customer

The college was **aggrandizing** the size of its freshman class this year.

aggrandize (v): to increase the size of something

When I looked at the tuition fees for a single term, I was sure someone was getting **bilked** out of something.

bilk (v): to cheat

I thought you'd have to have a fancy **pedigree** to go here, but my host student is the daughter of dairy farmer from North Dakota.

pedigree (n): lineage

The daily happenings on campus are **chronicled** in the student newspaper.

chronicle (v): to record (It can also be a noun, meaning "a record.")

WORDS ABOUT A COOL PROFESSOR

Professor Wexler was considered quite a **precocious** talent; she breezed through her PhD and was made professor at a really young age.

precocious (adj): being smarter or more developed than is expected at a certain age

Landing a professor position at such a young age was considered quite a **coup**.

coup (n): an unexpected and skillful success

The younger students treated her with total **reverence**.

reverence (n): extreme respect

Professor Wexler wrote an **acclaimed** book on hip-hop culture that

managed to become a popular best-seller, as well.

acclaimed (adj): having been praised greatly in public

People took her book as a **bellwether** that popular music was going to be an important field of study in coming years.

bellwether (n): someone or something that indicates future trends

She's also an **accomplished** violinist.

accomplished (adj): very skilled, talented

And she's an **avid** soccer player.

avid (adj): eager, enthusiastic

Professor Wexler had the **acumen** to help navigate the tricky world of university politics.

acumen (n): quick, accurate insight

Professor Wexler always has a lot of **obsequious** students hanging around her, offering to do her photocopying or get her coffee.

obsequious (adj): excessively eager to please

She's so popular with her students and colleagues that her few enemies find her **unassailable**.

unassailable (adj): so well-established that it cannot be challenged or beaten

And despite all this, I found her very **accessible**.

accessible (adj): easy to approach, easy to enter

RELATED WORDS

She was **affable** and laughed easily. We spent a very **amicable** hour together.

affable (adj): friendly, easy to talk to

amicable (adj): friendly

I felt an **affinity** for Professor Wexler. We even liked the same bands!

affinity (n): a natural liking for someone or something

She showed me it was possible to be **cerebral** and fun at the same time.

cerebral (adj): intellectual

WORDS ABOUT PARTYING

College is so full of **hedonists**, I'm amazed any work gets done.

hedonist (n): one who is devoted to pleasure and happiness

They seem to have an **insatiable** appetite for partying.

insatiable (adj): impossible to satisfy

Alcohol was handed out at the party I went to, in **flagrant** disobedience of the state liquor laws.

flagrant (adj): very obvious

I saw a girl fall asleep with her head in a toilet, and I prayed I would never reach such a state of **debasement**.

debasement (n): reduction in value, quality, or significance

It wasn't total **anarchy**, though; they knew well enough to keep the partying inside and off the streets.

anarchy (n): complete lack of rules

At some colleges, a particular amount of money is **allocated** to students for throwing parties.

allocate (v): to divide and hand out

College students are **incorrigible** – you'll never get them to stop, no matter how many rules you pass.

incorrigible (ad): unable to be reformed

Some people think the college way of life is **reprehensible**, but I think most people realize it's just part of being young and stupid.

reprehensible (adj): highly unacceptable

I **abstained** from smoking or drinking while I was there.

abstain (v): to choose not to do something

The **profligate** party throwers had blown a ton of money on ice sculptures, piñatas, and belly dancers.

profligate (ad): extravagant, wasteful

Janet and I passed a drunk guy on the street who yelled some really **profane** things at us, but we ignored him and kept walking.

profane (adj): vulgar, disrespectful (usually toward something holy or sacred)

The next morning, I saw more than one person who must have been **inebriated** the day before.

inebriated (adj): drunk

After a week of studying hard, haven't students earned the right to **carouse** a bit?

carouse (v): to drink and be merry

I liked watching happy people **cavort** in the street.

cavort (v): to behave in a playful, physically lively way

Back home, my friends all wanted stories of the **turpitude** I had seen at the big college party.

turpitude (n): wickedness, immorality