



# 美成教育 U.S.A.

MASON'S Education Jul. 2021 七月號

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## 研究數位世界的大學

# RESEARCHING COLLEGES IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

BY ROBERT A.G. LEVINE

“We’re quarantined! I can’t visit colleges! I can’t research the schools!”

Yes, you can.

Even if you cannot tour a campus, you can research colleges effectively. In fact, because of the recent changes caused by Covid-19, you now have more information than before.

Taking an official tour or attending an information session should never be your primary method of investigating colleges. Those events are marketing efforts by the colleges, generic presentations that are designed to communicate what they want you to know. They have some value, but you should never select a college based upon just a few hours on campus. Lots of influences – caliber of speakers and tour guides, number of other (annoying) people attending, travel logistics, and the weather – could unfairly influence your experience.

Instead, look online. But do not give significant weight to college rankings. In our industry, rankings are notorious for being inconsistent, inaccurate and incredibly money-driven. Each is created based upon its own algorithm, which has little correlation to student performance. Want to understand how ridiculous these can be? Check out the University of Washington-Seattle on two rankings created by the same company. In the U.S. News national ranking, “U Dub” is ranked as the 58th best college in America. However, in the U.S. News global ranking, the same school is ranked the 8th best school in the world!

Rely on more intelligent research. Start at each school’s admissions websites. Your first effort should be to understand the curriculum. The

greatest strength of America's schools is the diversity in the ways they present education. On the "academics" tab of the website, look into the structure of the education. When must you declare a major? How many courses are required on top of those in the major (general education, core curriculum, open curriculum)? What courses are, and are not, required within a major? What is the academic calendar they use (semesters, quarters, block plan)?

Now, go back to the first page of the admissions website and search for what they are stressing. What is the first thing presented at the top of the page? What is second? What is repeated, and what is not mentioned at all? The websites are designed with purpose and reason. Deconstruct them to see what they are trying to emphasize.

Learn more about a major by searching for department websites and newsletters, which are designed for internal purposes, not for admissions or marketing. Review the schools' posts on Facebook and other social media: the school page, the admissions page, and especially the school newspaper, which has a primary audience of students and alumni.

Because of the quarantine, colleges have increased their online presentations enormously. Watch them! It's amazing how much valuable information is available in these sessions, which are longer than the traveling shows that used to be the foundation of the colleges' outreach. To find virtual sessions, visit a college's admissions website (which will list dates and times), but also get on their "mailing lists" by signing up on the Contact Us page, by opening a Common Application account and inserting the names of 20 schools, and indicating certain colleges in your SAT and ACT registrations.

You'll get a lot of outreach from colleges if you show a little interest in them. Read the emails. These are designed to communicate information, and they are also used by many schools for data mining your demonstrated interest.

Want to know more about campus culture? Research the school's traditions to find out about life on campus.

Then ... call the school! On the admissions webpage, there is a telephone number listed. Admissions people want you to call them, and the information you get from each person you speak with will provide context and color to everything you have learned. It's amazing how many students and families feel they cannot call the admissions office. Do it!

Also speak with other students and alumni. Hear what they have to say, and ask questions. Things will really start to make sense.

After all this, it is safe to look at blogs, community discussion boards, and online student reviews. If you do this too early, you'll get confused because you don't know the context of the writer's opinions. However, after doing your own research, the opinions have added value.

Finally, if you wish to take a tour but cannot yet travel, look for online virtual tours, not only the official ones, but also the videos created by "regular folks." And check out the drone and aerial videos too!

Remember, you should have a chance to visit a campus later, and things look much different after you have been offered admission.