

Observation List for College Visits

Print out a copy of this document for each college you visit. Don't wait to record your impressions. You'll forget. Do it during and immediately after your visit. The main question to ask yourself: Do I feel like I fit in here?

Although this list is not exhaustive, learn as much as you can about all of the criteria on it and be prepared to disregard some of these criteria when you find the school of your dreams.

Note: Be sure to sign in—legibly—at the admissions office to let the college know you visited. If you don't sign in, they won't have a record of your visit. Once you contact the school, they will create a file for you and all your future correspondence will be kept there.

1. Academic

- How big are classes? Who teaches the courses (professors or teaching assistants)?
- Do students generally get into the courses they'd like (or have) to take?
- Do most students graduate in four years?
- What are the most popular majors? When do you have to declare?
- Was this school your tour guide's first choice? Where else did he/she apply? Where else did he/she get in?
- Do students generally use the library? Do they find it conducive to studying?
- Do you need math or a foreign language to graduate? Is there a core curriculum?

2. Social

- When students go out at night, where do they go? Is driving involved?
- How big are the fraternities/sororities? How popular? Are there other social options?
- Are the parties generally open to anyone or limited to guest lists?

- If the campus is near a city, do students go to clubs and restaurants there?
- Do students live on campus? If so, do you have some choice about where you live?
- Is the student population homogeneous or does there appear to be a diverse mix of people?
- Do students appear happy or stressed out?
- Do a percentage of students leave on the weekend (that is, is it a suitcase school)?

3. Extracurricular

- Are students active outside of classes? Do you see evidence of clubs and activities that interest you?
- Do students appear to have a lot of school spirit? Is attendance at school sports events high?
- Is there a student center? Is the campus in good repair? Do the classroom buildings and dorms look comfortable?
- What do the gym/health club facilities look like? Are there running routes and courts you can use?
- What is the general feel of the campus? Energetic or mellow? Liberal or conservative?

4. Technological

- How available is the wireless network? Are students expected to arrive with computers? Are you required to purchase a certain type of computer or are there minimum requirements for student-owned computers? Is free printing available?
- Is there a tech help desk with daily support for students? 24-hour support?
- Can you search the library online?
- Do computer clusters appear to be filled with the latest equipment? Are there a lot of available computers?

5. Dining, Dorms, and Off-Campus Housing

- Are there many dining and living options? Do most dining halls and dorms appear clean and convenient?

- Are the dining halls open during convenient hours?
- Is there a supermarket nearby?
- Do most students dine on or off campus?
- Are there healthy/vegetarian/gluten-free/kosher/etc. options to meet your needs? If you have special nutritional needs (for example, celiac disease/diabetes diet), can they be met?
- Is on-campus housing offered for one year? What about years two through four?
- What is the cost and availability of off-campus housing?
- Are there co-ed bathrooms? Are there private bathrooms?
- Are there single rooms? If not, how many students are expected to share bedrooms? Does this number lessen each year? Can you request a quiet room?
- Are the dorms wired?

6. Career

- Is there an office of career services that helps with summer and post-college recruiting?
- What companies recruit on campus?
- Where are current students interning over the summer?
- What percentage of students seeking employment find it?
- How strong is the alumni network? Is it stronger in certain geographical areas or professions?

Don't Forget to...

- Talk to as many students as possible, including those who are not guides.
- Talk to the admissions office and ask them what they look for in applicants.
- Take the student tour. Don't miss the dorms, library, and cafeteria.
- Take pictures of buildings so you remember the campus.
- Read the bulletin boards throughout the campus and in dorms to see what's going on.
- Stop by the career office. How successful have they been in helping students get internships and graduates get jobs?