## Audience

11th – 12th grade students

## Time

30+ minutes

## Materials needed

* Paper and pen/pencil
* Computer with internet access
* Campus Culture Detective Worksheet *(p. 5)* for each participant
* College viewbooks or brochures

## Purpose

Students reflect on how a college’s programs and culture fit their needs and identities, focusing on the direct and indirect messages that a college reveals during a campus tour or part of their printed or online materials.

The facilitator script is below. Helpful suggestions and hints will be in *italics*.

# 1. Consider identity.

To find the best college for you, you’ll be considering things like what academic programs or majors are available, location, cost, etc. It’s also important to consider the campus culture, and how you’ll feel among your classmates and peers. Some students are most comfortable in a college community that actively honors and supports their identities.

Everyone has many aspects to their identity that make them unique. What are some identity categories that might be important in the college choice process? *The following list includes common identity categories; your students might have others. Write their answers on a white board or chart pack paper.*

*Ability/disability*

*Race/ethnicity*

*Religion/spiritual belief*

*Socioeconomic status*

*Language*

*Education level of family*

*Age*

*Gender*

*Sexual orientation*

*Discuss as a class why these might matter:*

* What does it mean to be comfortable in an environment?
* How is your learning affected if you aren’t comfortable?
* What are some differences between high school and college that might make students more or less likely to need or care about a supportive campus culture? *Consider things like residential communities, being away from home, choice of courses, etc.*

Choose one or more identity categories that are relevant or important to you.

# 2. Ask the right questions.

Now, it’s time to think like a detective. Develop a list of 5-7 questions or things to look for related to your chosen identity category. *Share a couple of the following examples based on your students’ list of categories:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Identity category | Sample question or things to look for |
| *General* | What types of events or activities are featured on posters around campus?  What are the current issues that students are discussing with each other?  What are the traditions that students are most proud of? |
| *Ability/disability* | What services are available to help students who have a learning disability?  Are disability services in the same place as tutoring or academic advising?  Are placards identifying accessible entrances prominently displayed? |
| *Race/ethnicity* | Do I see people (on campus or in photos) that look like me?  Are there student organizations for students of a specific race/ethnicity? |
| *Religion/spiritual belief* | Do I need to leave campus to attend a church service?  Are students, faculty, or staff required to sign a statement of faith or lifestyle agreement? What does it say? |
| *Sexual orientation* | What is the name of the student organization for LGBT students?  Are there “safe zone” images around campus? |
| *Socioeconomic status* | Is there a book lending program for students who can’t afford to purchase them?  Is there a food bank on campus? |
| *Language* | Can I hear any languages other than English being spoken on campus?  Does the website feature resources in languages other than English? |
| *Education level of family* | What percentage of students are the first in their family to attend college? |
| *Age* | What is the average age of students? |
| *Gender* | Are there gender neutral bathrooms around campus?  Does the campus non-discrimination policy include gender identity? |

# 3. Find your sources.

Now, consider where you might find the information or answers to these questions. For example, you may visit a campus, talk with students or staff members, read a brochure, view the college’s website or social media accounts or hear about a college in the media.

For each of these, you’ll receive both indirect and direct messages about the college’s culture. It’s important to be observant and read between the lines like a detective. *Encourage students to brainstorm some examples of direct or indirect messages or share some of the examples below.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Source | Direct messages | Indirect messages |
| **In Person**  campus tour, info session, college fair, conversation with staff member, student, or alum | What is being said to you?  What do you have to ask about? *You may get direct responses, but the need to ask may send an indirect message.* | What do you see (or not see)?  What do you feel? |
| **College Materials**  website, brochures | What is the college’s mission statement? What data or information is easily accessible? | What do you see? Does it match the words you’re reading? What are you left wondering about? |
| **College Social Media**  YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Discord, etc. | What are they highlighting? Who is the audience *(current or prospective students, alumni)*? | Who controls the social media account? What is the tone? |
| **In the News**  Google news search, campus newspaper | What is the topic? How did students and administrators respond? | What is the source? Who wrote it? What could have been their motivation to write it? |

# 4. Be a detective.

Choose a college or university that you plan to visit, see at a college fair or want to know more about.

Search for answers to the questions you have written whether it is in person, in printed materials or online. Write down the answers and how you found the information; make note of whether you got the answer directly, indirectly, or both. If you find contradictory answers, make note of that too.

If you can’t find the answer, write down the steps you took to look for them and how you feel about not being able to find the answer.

# Extension: Reflect and write.

Write a reflective essay describing what a student who shares your identity might find at the college – are there services they might use? Will they find others like them?

# Campus Culture Detective Worksheet

When considering where to apply to and attend college, it’s important to consider the campus culture, and how you’ll feel among your classmates and peers. Some students are most comfortable in a college community that actively honors and supports their identities.

## Instructions

* **Consider identity**. Choose one or more identity categories that are relevant or important to you.
* **Ask the right questions.** Develop a list of 5-7 questions or information to look for related to your chosen identity category.
* **Find your sources.** Consider where you might find the information or answers to these questions.
* **Be a detective.** Choose a college that you plan to visit, see at a college fair or want to know more about. Search for answers to the questions you have written whether it is in person, in printed materials or online.
  + - Write down the answers and circle the source where you found the information; check whether you got the answer directly, indirectly, or both.
    - If you find contradictory answers, make note of that too. If you can’t find the answer, write down the steps you took to look for them and how you feel about not being able to find the answer.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Identity category | | College | |
| *Race/ethnicity* | | *Sample College* | |
|  | |  | |
| Questions or information to look for | Source(s) | Answers | Message |
| *Are there students of my same race/ethnicity?* | *Campus visit*  *Viewbook* | *12% of students are my same race* | **R** Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |
|  |  |  | o Direct  o Indirect |