

Interviewing and Observing

1. The goal is for each faculty and staff member to be engaged before the end of the visit on Wednesday morning. Class visits should be undertaken, but alone these provide an inadequate and sometimes inaccurate view of the academic program. Make sure you take time to have conversations with faculty, department chairs, division heads and program leaders.
2. Points to consider when talking with faculty or visiting classrooms:
 - Inter-departmental cooperation
 - Articulation – both vertical and horizontal—of academic vision
 - Classroom climate for teaching and learning
 - Time available for department and division heads to provide supervision
 - Use of library and other resource materials
 - The process by which curriculum development and revision take place
 - How well the teachers evaluate the outcomes as they relate to the school's statement of purposes
 - Professional learning and collaboration
 - Process & effectiveness of orientation of new staff/faculty.
3. When observing classes, the visit need only be for 10 minutes, but refrain from taking notes because this makes teachers nervous. If possible, find a quiet corner after the observation, and jot down notes. Pay attention to the following:
 - What are the students doing? What is their orientation to the work? How are they interacting with each other and their teacher?
 - What is the teacher doing? How is s/he interacting with students?
 - What are the curricular decision points?
 - What are the instructional decision points?
 - "Walk the walls"—what do you see?
 - Are there any safety and health issues?
4. Before setting up interviews, plan
 - Who to interview
 - What open-ended questions to ask
 - What specific information you need
 - What supplementary materials need to be previewed
5. When interviewing, try to put people at ease, and be a good listener. Give teachers and staff members an opportunity to discuss their objectives and methods. Taking notes in interviews is appropriate.
6. Refrain from giving advice and sharing how things are done at your own school.
7. To facilitate writing a subsection of the Visiting Committee report, after each interview consider:
 - What strengths do you perceive from the Internal Evaluation Report, and then after interviewing and observing?
 - What significant achievements emerge?
 - Are there follow up questions to explore?
 - What is to be commended?
 - What might be worthy of a recommendation?

Asking the Right Questions

- Ask questions that offer open-ended opportunities to talk honestly about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Avoid questions that presume a negative response or imply criticism.
- Listen carefully and refrain from offering advice or your own point of view.
- Relax and enjoy the conversation. Tone is more important than content – convey interest in the person as a professional with valuable thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

If you follow these few principles, the picture you will have of the school through interviews will be candid, for better and/or worse, and amazingly complete in a remarkably short time.

Open-ended questions include:

- Tell me about your position here.
- What are you most proud of?
- What keeps you awake at night?
- How would you approach that?

More specific questions about the report include:

- We understood from the Internal Report that...
- What factors contributed to these results?
- How did the school/group learn from...?
- Where can evidence be found that...?
- What evidence is there that students are able to...?

Examples of good questions:

- What do you consider to be the most important part of the school's mission and how is it reflected in the daily life of the school?
- Tell me about your biggest success in (some aspect of your position).
- What aspects of the division/department/ office/school would you hope would always be in place?
- Tell me about professional learning (professional development) you participated in this year.
- Describe what you do when you have a classroom management problem.
- Describe ways in which faculty/staff participate in decision-making or making suggestions for change.
- What are ways in which staff/faculty engage in the life of the school outside their own classrooms/offices?
- What would be your great hopes for the future of the school?