Level a research shrank your options from thousands of universities hopefully to dozens. And now that you have a more manageable number of schools, it's time to move from broad research to something more specific. All of the websites we have discussed so far provide information about schools, but they're not the actual school. There is no better way to research than going directly to the source of information. And Level 2 research is school-specific research, and it's also the next step in finding the right schools for you. Let's take your school list and start researching the information directly from the source. Now, be prepared. School websites can sometimes be confusing to navigate and intimidating because of how much information is on them. When you first go to a university website, you're going to want to look for admission information. Sometimes this is clearly listed as admission, but sometimes it's listed as prospective students or future students or applicants or apply here or any number of other names. So even at the beginning, remember that you're going to have to be flexible about what you're looking for. Now, most universities will divide their admission information between undergraduate and graduate. You are an undergraduate, which means that you are pursuing a bachelor's degree. You might one day become a graduate student if you choose to pursue a master's or a doctoral degree in the future. From here, you'll probably see several different options. Some might be freshmen or transfer, international students, or even others. Now, if you're applying directly out of high school or secondary school, you will be a freshman applicant. If you have attended a college or university after finishing high school, you will have to apply as a transfer student. There is sometimes confusion among international students that you can choose whether you are a freshman or a transfer, or students might say, well, I attended a university back home, but I want to start over as a freshman. Please understand, freshman or transfer is not a choice, it's a fact. If you have attended a college or university after finishing secondary school, then you must apply as a transfer student. You can still potentially start over when you attend the university, but your application has to be submitted as a transfer. If a school has a page specifically for international applicants, this is the first place to go for information. Read this information carefully and include important information on your school list. Information that you should pay particularly close attention to includes application requirements and pieces. Which documents are you required to submit? How can these documents be submitted, from your school, from you, online? Does the school require you to take the SAT or the ACT? Which English language proficiency tests will the school accept? Are there specific admission requirements for your major? What about other requirements that are unique to you as an international student or even requirements that are unique to you according to the country that you are from. You can find information about deadlines, about how the university evaluates applications, and you may even find what's called a class profile, which shows you who are the students who were accepted to last year's class, their statistics and demographic information, their test scores and GPAs, the majors that they're going to study, where they're from. All of this information is in a class profile, and a class profile can be found on the admissions section of a school website. Now, it's really important to pay attention to those requirements, because I regularly hear stories about students who were not accepted simply because their applications were incomplete. Why were they incomplete? Usually because students did not carefully follow the instructions or they missed a requirement or a document. A great example of this is financial documents. As an international student, you will have to submit financial documents in order to get a student visa to study in the United States. At some schools
they require the financial document before they evaluate you for admission. At other schools they require the financial documentation after you have been accepted. If you're applying to a school that requires the financial documents before they evaluate you for admission, you won't receive a decision until you send those documents in. Unfortunately, students often miss that requirement and they never hear from a school. As you carefully review the admission requirements and process, write down the important information on your school list. Then make sure that you explore other parts of a university website. All universities will have a link titled academics, schools, majors, or something similar. This link will lead you to information about the academics at that school. Explore the information about the program that you're planning to join. If you're undecided about your major or if you don't know what you want to study, explore multiple programs to make sure that you will be happy no matter what you decide on later. Investigate the curriculum for your major. Curriculum means the actual classes that you're going to take to get your degree. When you're looking at these classes, ask yourself some questions. Do the classes sound interesting? Will you be studying what you want to study? How strict or flexible is the curriculum? That last question is especially important if you want to explore areas beyond your major or even if you're considering doing a double major. You would only be able to do that in a flexible curriculum. Now, classes are a big part of academics, but academics also includes learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Internships are one of those opportunities. An internship is a program where you will actually learn by working at a company or in the industry that's related to what you're studying. Internships often replace one of the classes that you would take. Another way to learn by doing is through what's called a cooperative education program, which most schools just shorten to co-op. Now, a co-op is a much bigger work experience. You usually get paid for doing a co-op, and when you do a co-op, you don't take any other classes. You work full time during that whole academic session.

Research can be a big part of your academics. When you're looking at schools, find out what are they researching in your area of study. Is that research something that you want to be a part of? Is that research something that interests you, and can you get involved with that research? Along those lines, think about collaborating with faculty members. What are those faculty members doing? What are their specializations and their passions? And how closely are you able to work with them? Even clubs and organizations at universities can be related to your studies. We used robotics as an example of a major earlier. Some schools may have a robotics major, but many many more schools will have a robotics club. Explore the clubs and activities that are related to your studies to see what kind of options you have outside of the classroom. Now, the biggest part of your university experience is going to be academic, so it is important that you research what this experience is actually going to be like. And, again, make sure that you keep track of the important information on your school list. Academics are going to be a big part of your experience but not the only part of your experience. Universities will also have a link for student life or campus life or life at blank. This is where you're going to learn about everything outside of the classroom, including the fun parts of a university experience. Some of the information to look for in this part of the website includes the activities, clubs, and organizations that a school offers. You can look for things that you're already involved with or maybe see what kind of new options there are to explore. You'll see information about special events that take place on campus. Do those special events interest you? You're going to find information about the type of support that you're going to receive. This could include religious support or support for a specific cultural group. You're also going to find information about things to do in the area. You'll see things to do on campus, but what about off
campus in the same area? What kind of things are there for you to do? Now, every university offers support for international students, but there are big differences in how much support is offered and how good that support is. This information is sometimes, usually located on this student life part of the website. But no matter where it's located, it's information that you should look into. Again, it can be tricky to find, as universities can name things differently. Some schools will name the office International Student Support. Others will call it International Scholar and Student Support. Other schools will name it something completely differently. So make sure you take the time to explore. Remember, this is important, you're going into a brand-new environment and leaving behind the support network that you have gotten used to. You're going to want to investigate what your new support network is going to look like. Another great way to get to know a school is to read the school newspaper or explore the campus media. It's usually very easy to find a link to the newspaper or the other media outlets and access the articles online. Reading the paper can give you a great idea about what is important on campus. What interests the students enough that they're writing articles about it? What are the students complaining about? What are they proud of and talking about, you know, and reflecting on in these articles? By looking at the campus media, you can learn a lot about the personality of a school and a lot about the personality of the students who attend that school. Yes, this is a lot of research and a lot of work. But, remember, you're going to spend hours getting to know the schools that interest you. You're not going to do this level of research for all universities, just the universities that you're really interested in. As you get to know these schools, again, you're going to find that some universities will rise to the top of your list, and some universities will sink to the bottom of your list, and some universities might be removed from your list altogether. At this point your school list should really be filling up with information. Between Level 1 and Level 2 research, you should have answers to most of your questions, and your list of schools should be even smaller than it was before, which leaves only one more level of research to go.