

Getting Past the Gatekeepers 5 02 08

Tips for Your Cover Letter, CV, and Interview

*A Workshop for Faculty Interns – Current, Recent, and Prospective*

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For over a decade, Peralta’s Faculty Diversity Internship Program has been providing prospective faculty with opportunities to get hands-on teaching experience with the guidance of a Faculty Mentor. As you begin to expand your horizons to apply for adjunct or full-time positions, we would like to share our collective experiences to assist you with your job search.

Before you get started on your application, you might go on the website of the college you are applying for. Become familiar with their demographics, trends, challenges, leadership structure, and programs. Review the class schedule to see what specific classes are being offered, particularly in your field. If you have an opportunity for a site visit, include the bookstore so you can find out what textbooks and materials are being used for course in your discipline.

As you apply for positions, start to maintain a professional file. For each job that you apply for, you want to include the job description, a copy of your application, the resume you customized for that particular job, and any pertinent information you want to maintain at your fingertips – in case you get that call for an interview. For these specific files, you might also jot down anticipated questions based on what you know of the job description and the research you have done from the website.

Additionally, you might also want to keep a general file for references and their latest contact information. If your references have provided a copy of their letter to you, keep it in this file. As you go through the adventure of getting out multiple applications and taking several interviews, you may also want to make notations of which references you used for particular jobs. Some letters show character; others show skills sets.

Many of you will focus on developing professionally in the classroom to address the needs of diverse student learners. Also, consider participating in shared governance. Find a standing committee or an ad hoc committee to participate in. As you assume leadership roles, you are learning to navigate the system, sharing your ideas, and contributing to the college.

**Tips for Your Application**

* Follow instructions.
* Make a checklist and check off all activities.
* Answer questions directly.
* Type.
* Proofread.
* Double check the due date and address where applications are to be sent.
* Get the application and all supplemental material in at one time and on time.
* Call HR back or get a receipt for submission of your application.

**Writing Sample**

More and more institutions are asking applicants to submit very detailed essays that reflect your values about education. It will be helpful to go ahead and to discuss these now and prepare some of these in advance rather than to try and produce these at the final moment when you are stressed out trying to complete your application packet under a deadline. Many of these questions may also appear in a teaching interview.

* Describe your philosophy of teaching.
* Describe your philosophy of grading.
* Describe your understanding or the mission of a community college.
* Describe how you maintain currency in your field.
* Describe your experience working with diverse student populations.
* Given the majority of the classes [use for any discipline that has sequential classes] are below our university-transferable classes, we recognize that many students have probably taken but have not learned the material you are teaching. What strategies do you use to make sure students are successful and prepared for the next class?
* What do you do to build a good learning environment in the classroom when students are academically and demographically diverse?
* Describe your knowledge and/or experienced with technology in the classroom, including software and distance education.
* Describe how you would facilitate effective learning in the classroom. Include any experience you have in using a variety of modes of instruction (tutoring, small groups, individualized instruction, service learning, learning lab/computer assisted instruction, team teaching, interdisciplinary shared assignments, learning community, to name a few).
* Describe the experiences with defining student learning outcomes and assessing them.
* Describe how your personal teaching style has been, or might be, modified to reflect student feedback, personal insight, evaluations, and/or current research.
* Describe effective teaching practices in your field, and explain why they make sense pedagogically.
* Describe a recent team project where you had a leadership role or were a significant contributor. Analyze your performance on this project an describe how your leadership skills might benefit the department or the college.
* What contributions can you make – in the classroom and/or within the college – to support student success.

**Tips for Your Curriculum Vitae (CV)**

* Make sure your basic information (your contact information; your degrees, licenses, certifications; your discipline; your teaching experience, including academic fellowships or internships; and published works) are visually clear and easy to find.
* Double check your contact information for accuracy and clarity.
* Read through the application for both minimum qualifications generally and desirable qualifications specifically. Be sure to set up each CV independently to highlight qualifications that are specific to the job you are applying for.
* Highlight parallel skills. If you don’t have direct academic experience in an area the job description is asking for, think of past employment or volunteer work experiences outside of academia. List experiences that will show similar abilities or skills.
* Show leadership, versatility, and team work in as many ways as you can.
* Educational institutions are always looking for additional funding. If you have any grant writing or fundraising experiences, highlight them.
* List community and volunteer work when it demonstrates mastery of a skill or subject area.

\*Participate in staff development at your college and make presentations at academic conference to build your grant, presentations, and writing sections.

**Tips for Your Cover Letter**

* Make sure your contact information is clear. Include address, cell/phone number, and e-mail address.
* Clarify any information pertinent to your degree and place it early in your letter.
* List your teaching experience and courses you could immediately teach. Think of the institutional needs of the college you are applying to. For community college you probably want to highlight some of the survey classes; for four-year schools you may want to show ability to teach upper division classes as well.
* Describe the diversity of the students you have been working with; include age, gender, race and culture, disability (including learning disabilities), sexual orientation, students needed developmental skills or ESL support.
* Demonstrate you have a commitment to the mission of the college and to high academic years. Describe your working relationship with the Basic Skills Initiative.
* Indicate that you are willing to be a team player and demonstrate that you are willing to participate in committee work, shared governance
* Summarize why they should hire you.

Do all of the above in no more than two pages. If you want to include information about your teaching philosophy, grading, and/or teaching techniques, add it as an attachment. Some institutions welcome supplemental materials that tell them more about you.

You can also include publications. However, remember if you are expressing controversial opinions, there may be committee members who don’t agree with your views.

**Tips for Interviewing (Adjunct or Full-time)**

* Dress appropriately, and be neatly groomed.
* Arrive 10-15 minutes early unless instructed otherwise. Bring a pen or pencil in case you need to write.
* Conduct yourself professionally. Be courteous to the administrative staff.
* Introduce yourself with a firm handshake and a warm smil.e
* Keep track of time. Be aware of time limits. Be direct, honest, succinct, and appropriately energetic.
* Understand what is being asked or ask for clarification.
* Maintain eye contact and provide nonverbal feedback.
* Discuss past experience where appropriate.
* If at all possible, do some research about the institution – check out their websites, college catalog, class schedule, and publications – so you mention this in your interview.
* At the end, ask a question that expresses interest in the subject or the college, not about the salary and the benefits.
* If you ask an open ended question at the end, just listen to the panel’s response and do not argue with the viewpoints expressed.
* Thank the interviews at the end, and follow up with a thank you note.

You may be asked to conduct a student conference, commenting on an assignment to help a student know what to revise or improve.

* Listen and investigate the issues.
* Suggest retention strategies.
* Don’t promise what you can’t follow up on.
* Hold on to your policies.

**Interview Questions to Consider**

You might practice answering these orally and in writing. Try taping your responses – with a tape recorder or videotape – so that you can review them and make improvements in your presentation. You might also try answering with time limits.

*Open ended questions*

* What makes you a good candidate for this position
* What do you like best about teaching? The least?
* If you had all the money in the world to create an ideal department for your subject matter, what key features would it have?

*Direct*

* Describe how you support the mission of the college.
* What do you see as the most pressing need in this college? What experience do you have to address that problem?
* Describe a project that you have worked on that had multiple challenges. What did you learn from it?
* Your involvement in committee work is part of professional responsibilities. What area do you think you can contribute to? (check website for possibilities)
* How do you integrate technology into your classroom
* What is your greatest challenging in teaching.
* Describe a successful class session.
* Describe how student learning outcomes have helped you become a more effective classroom instructor.

*Reflective*

* How would your references describe you?
* What have the challenges in the classroom taught you?
* Of what importance to you is professional development and currency in the discipline?
* What can you bring to contribute to this college?
* What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to adapt and change your teaching style?
* What have you done to become more effective in the classroom?

Situational

* What if your students are talking when you are talking?
* What if students have plagiarized assignments?
* What happens with your time when you have two priorities that need to be met?
* What if you are on a committee and a colleague does not agree with you?
* What if you were slated to use a computer to make a presentation in the classroom, and your laptop would not function.
* What if your department has a 25% windfall, what would you do with those funds?
* What if your department had to reduce its budget by 25%, what would you cut?
* What if one of your students repeatedly told you he did not understand your teaching point?

When you take a final interview (often the second interview for a job), review and update your list of references, and double check the contact information. Bring in this new update to your interview so that they benefit from your most current information. Sometimes months pass between the time you applied and the time you take a final interview.

After you take a final interview your references will get a call if you are among the finalists. Sometime before your interview or immediately afterwards, call your references to let them know that they might expect a call. You might also send your most current resume so that they can refresh their memory and speak specifically about how you would be an asset to their educational institution.

Also, recognize that most people do not get the first job they apply for. Do not give up. Take time to reflect on your paperwork and your presentations, and the breadth and depth of your answers. Work on ways that you can improve, and keep trying.

Good luck!

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