

CTEN Panel: Finding a Job in Academia-Undergraduate Institutions
9/17/2014
Education Building Room 166

Attendance: Roughly 50

Panelists and one tip for the job search process:

- Dr. Sara Mordan-McCombs: Assistant Professor of Biology at Franklin College
 - May have had an atypical experience. Untenured but currently chair. Only applied to one place
 - It's extremely important to have everything in on time. That sounds silly, but applications won't get reviewed if they aren't complete. That even includes letters of Rec, so make sure your recommenders have adequate time.
- Dr. Glen Livesay-Professor of Biology and Biomedical Engineering at Rose-Hulman
 - When people are looking at applications: It's really important to let that statement of teaching sell you. Let your passion become part of it.
- Dr. Paul Johnson-Assistant Professor of Modern Languages at DePauw
 - Just went through whole process of job search and being a grad student.
 - Really know the institution that you are applying to. Really tailor that cover letter to the type of institution *and* the specific institution itself, you'll be that much better off.

What are one or two things that will quickly get a candidate's application thrown out?

- Typos: spelling errors, school name is wrong. Have one application out at a time on the table when you are preparing packets or it will happen.
- Making it clear that it's not a generic cover letter
- Make sure you're applying to the position that they're hiring for, not something else.
- If you're applying to a Liberal Arts College and lead with talking about your scholarship and only get to teaching at the end, that'll make it an easy decision.

What makes an application package stick out for good reasons?

- Want to hear about *why* they teach. Teaching is not the way to go if you just want to make money, so why are you doing it? I'm looking for passion. Show me that.
- Talk directly about what you are going to contribute. Sell yourself about what you can bring, a sort of targeted contribution that you'll make to the specific institution.
- Consider courses you could teach that fit with their needs *and* what they might need later.
- Avoid "think" and "believe" in your writing. It should feel a bit over the top for you. Be confident.
- The more experience you have, the better.

Did you also think about applying to different types of schools or was your primary focus an R3?

- Some people looked at all ranges of institutions (having to cast a wide net). BUT you can't use the same letter for both types. Do that search but tailor.
- Others looked for a place where you could do research and not be penalized for teaching. A lot of places will say it's both, but sometimes it's pretty clear that they're not about both.
- Others applied only to small liberal arts colleges, having had no interest in research.

- Traditional distinctions between R1 and R3/SLAC have started to shift a bit. A lot of R1s now want you to be able to articulate a teaching philosophy while some SLACs want you to show that you're considering research as well.

Important to note that small and liberal arts are not necessarily always the same. There are big schools that are liberal arts and small colleges that aren't necessarily liberal arts.

How best to get that info most easily?

- Should be able to find it in College Website. Check Department missions (if they have one), look at faculty bios and CVs (if you get an interview, especially).
- If departments are hiring "Professor of Practice," that indicates that they are probably shunting teaching loads onto them (and that might be something to avoid)

How much is online teaching valued?

- Depends on the institution. Franklin, for example, doesn't do any of that at all.
- Online experience can be helpful in framing, say if colleges are looking to do flipped classroom.

What about PostDoc research when applying for positions?

- For the humanities, Postdocs are so rare that it reflects really well on you since you've won out over lots of other people.
- In the sciences, it doesn't necessarily hurt or help. A lot of it comes to how you frame it. It won't make or break you.

What if there are schools that also offer a few MA degrees. Does that mean that they don't really value teaching?

- It depends on the program. At Rose-Hulman, all the research happens in the summer and faculty work directly with students.
- At Franklin, they're adding an MA in Exercise Science but it's all teaching based.
- At Depauw, there's a big emphasis on faculty-student research (even though no grad degrees are offered).
- Thus, you can use research, do research, and utilize research even at schools that primarily emphasize teaching.

In a field where you don't have overlap with your colleagues, how do you manage networking?

- Be as active as possible in attending conferences, publishing, etc. However, be careful that when you do...your things are ready and you don't do more harm than good in putting yourself out there.
- Some recommend having business cards made, even if they aren't provided by your school.
- Work to establish a social media presence, e.g. Academia.edu and other sites where you can host your CV and contact info.
- Attend talks and conferences (and consider asking questions or just saying hi).

- A lot of professional societies have undergraduate teaching groups or affiliates. Consider going to those if that's what you want to do. The usual suspects will be there each year, and they can help connect you.
- If the very idea of networking sounds horrifying, then practice. Develop a few set lines. Just try asking them a question and letting them talk.
- Consider what relationships you have from undergrad.

Say you went to a research based undergrad and then did R1 grad school and want to move into liberal arts, how can you find out if it might be for you or get that experience?

- Often, schools are looking for one-semester sabbatical replacements or really temporary positions. That might be a good way to find out.
- Community colleges are also a bit more one on one that can help you try things out.
- There are often summer classes offered at other schools where you can both get your foot in the door professionally *and* find out whether you really want that experience.
- Consider just asking people who teach there

What specific do you have to suggest for being a strong applicant? What's hot right now? What experiences should we seek out?

- Know the ins and outs of your particular field about topics or approaches that are growing or really going to be important.
- Read the Chronicle on a regular basis.
- A few that are big: Flipped classroom, student-faculty research, and the digital humanities.
- Consider having a few sample syllabi available for courses that you may want to teach but haven't had a chance to yet. Try putting them together and having them available.
- Things that don't happen in the classroom (mentoring through research, study abroad mentoring, internships, etc.) are important. Try getting connected there or demonstrating an ability to work with/assist with those sorts of programs.
- POGIL (Google it) is a big one right now.

Is it worth seeking out other teaching experiences such as a High School or Community College?

- Absolutely. At a lot of SLACs, this sort of experience will reflect well.

When prepping courses, how many new ones should you have ready?

- FIRST, address the courses they say they need. If you don't have the ones they say they need, then it doesn't matter how many brilliant new courses you can suggest.
- Not all jobs will list these.
- Do be judicious and careful, especially when phrasing "new classes" that you could teach. Try and find a balance between "I will fix your old broken curriculum" and "I will do everything you need and nothing more."
- Often the interview questions you get will help give you an idea of whether or not the department is amenable to change/looking to make some updates.

Job Ads:

- Check *both* the Chronicle and the college website. Often, schools will post a short version in the Chronicle and then have a larger ad on their website.

What is a process of getting into administration, such as a Dean position?

- Often people are drawn to this by the opportunity to work on systems at a larger scale.
- Often, great teachers or professors will also be tapped/chosen for administration.

Even at SLAC's, research is required. What kind of small research projects often happen at a teaching institution? What sorts of things in research statements do you look for?

- In Bio and Chem at Franklin, profs have more or less given up scholarship for the sake of scholarship. All the lab work is in the context of teaching undergrads what it means to run a lab and do the research process. Thus, a research statement here might sometimes emphasize how research fits into teaching undergrads.
- Even though schools want research, there's rarely money to go there. Thus, look at what you're interested in and try to find out what's most accessible both to students and to your research.
- Sometimes there will be opportunities for research with support, but don't always depend on it being there.
- Take advantage of summers and holidays to advance an article or two.
- Think carefully about how your research informs your teaching.
- Scholarship is not just research in your field. Doing pedagogical development and scholarship still counts as scholarship for some schools.

Where does the funding come from for research at these schools?

- Sometimes generous alumni or small grants (very small, we're talking \$3,000 can help defray costs).
- Departmental funds may exist, but are also subject to being cut.
- At smaller schools with lower overhead rates, grant money will often go a bit farther.

What do your summers look like?

- Some choose to teach summer school. At Franklin, the contract is only for 9 months so summer is technically free...technically. Lots of school-related things happen in the summer
- We're not paid in Summer, but we're often still there doing research.

Do Sabbaticals exist?

- They do!
- It depends on the institution as for the timing (some places can give pre-tenure sabbatical)
- Institutions want the sabbatical to be meaningful, and often get half a year off at full pay (or a full year at half-pay) so you can either take a year off on the cheap or do the year and maybe do some other teaching or research. Find something that will help you grow intellectually.

Are there opportunities to teach in multiple departments?

- It depends. Often it comes down to whether the department is amenable and both departments get along.

- Interdisciplinary is a big thing, so it can't really hurt.
- You might even address this in your teaching philosophy that you as a person with a diverse background can bring.
- Some institutions are just all about it and will be happy to have you teach broadly.
- In terms of research, this is often important as well.

Quality of life:

- Depends on your definition of life, quality, and working.
- Your quality of life is what you force it to be. Life considerations, e.g. children, relationships, etc. will influence the conditions of possibility for work-life balance.
- Don't expect a work-life balance...forge a work-life balance.
- Learn how to say no. It's a shock to go from Grad school to full-time teaching. Try practicing quality of life as a grad student (which is, of course, hard). Know what the requirements are for tenure. You won't get fired for passing up a single lonely service opportunity.
- You can work all day. It's easy to allow that happen. Most new faculty pour time (more than is needed). You can get a class you're teaching to a 90% good class but it takes another 90% effort to get to a 99% good class. We all want to do a fantastic job, so we throw ourselves into that. Teaching is a giant timesink.

Service: What indicates that new hires will be an active part of the new community

- Some committees flat out ask: "you will have an assignment, what would you be interested in?" Having some service experience as a grad student is helpful.
- There are different levels of committee responsibilities, e.g. Tenure and Promotion takes way more time than Visual and Performing Arts.
- Learn to protect your time and say no. It's scary to say no to someone when you're not tenured. Don't allow your health, quality of life, and teaching to suffer because you're on one too many committees.

In the research statement, how specific should you be (especially considering that people who are not experts in your field will likely have to read it)?

- Use detail specific to the field and make it understandable to people in your field.
- Think about giving context and why the research matters AND how undergraduates could get involved.
- Make sure, however, that it's also accessible to someone outside your immediate field. At least make it so they can recognize the importance of it.
- Be aware of what equipment you need. If it requires a \$500k machine that they don't have, it's not going to happen.

What about Ageism in the hiring process or in Academia?

- Haven't encountered it personally, but other people have run into this with age, gender, etc.
- A lot of our panel members are the youngest in their department.
- Be aware of your distance (or lack thereof) from your students. You can emphasize certain formalities that can help create that distance.
- Also, when interviewing, stop thinking of yourself as a grad student. these people are assessing if you can be a colleague.

What does the tenure process involve at such schools if scholarship isn't central?

- A lot of the tenure process at most SLACs involves teaching evaluation.
- If they ask you to send teaching applications, just send a few. Don't send a binder of them (as has happened).
- Save all teaching evaluations for all time ever!
- There's still an important context for tenure. It's ok if things go badly when they start. It happens to all of us. It's about being able to build on them. Pedagogical creativity is more important than doing the same thing over and over again to just get good evals. The first few years teaching will be rough. That's part of the process. You're only running into trouble if they aren't getting better after 3 or 4 years.
- Always know what the requirements are going to be to keep your job when you go in.
- In later evaluations (2 years, 4 years, etc), be able to show changes and improvement. doesn't have to be perfect right off the bat.
- Publications will sure help anywhere. At some places the lack of them won't hurt you.

How many TA positions should you hold if the department doesn't really have students teach a whole course?

- Not necessarily an ideal number. It's about having these experiences and don't downplay it if it's all you have.
- Especially if you're running breakout sessions, there are valuable skills there with planning activities and such.
- If the application lists a teaching portfolio and you are/were the instructor of record, you can list those activities.
- Consider reaching out to faculty and having them observe you teach so you can have a letter in your portfolio.

How many courses per term do people often teach?

- At Rose, usually 3 sections (2 of 1 and 1 of another). 2 different preps is enough. Try to avoid more.
- At Franklin, it's by credit hours.
- At Depaw, it's a 3-3 but there's discussion of going to a 3-2.
- Think about the courses you have and whether they are scalable.

Interviews at SLACs. What are they like?

- Often lead with phone interview, followed by National Association Conferences, on campus interviews (ranging from less than a day to two full days).
- A lot of places now do interviews by Skype. Practice doing those and think about where you're doing them (don't have cats crawling all over you in the background).
- They often involve having dinner with the department and meeting administrations.
- As well as a research talk, you're often asked to teach part of a class or assembled faculty. It's not usually a surprise, as you'll be told about it beforehand.
- Teaching demos were constant across the board in the humanities while research talks were common but not universal.
- Learn all you can about the class beforehand to prep.

- Be nice to all secretaries. Always! Be cordial and respectful to every single person you meet on your interview.
- Often students will have a meal with potential faculty as well (this is a good place to ask questions as students are often super honest and may have input in the committee).

Dos and Don'ts while interviewing:

- Remember to eat something. People often pass out in the afternoon. Ask whomever is organizing your schedule to give you a few tiny breaks (they can do that).
- Pack a granola bar or something.
- Never discuss in an interview: sex, religion, politics, body features. Also, never ask about salary until you get the offer. At small colleges, the negotiating room for salary is fairly small.
- Bring something with you to write on to absolutely every meeting. By the end of the day, you will barely remember who you are.
- Have questions ready for everyone you meet with. This is crucial. Have 2 or 3 *good* questions ready to ask at each of these places.
- Be yourself. Doesn't mean you have to explain why you love your hobbies during the job talk. Still, if you're a bit outgoing, be outgoing.
- Keep in mind that you're also interviewing the institution. Make sure it's somewhere you want to be. Trust your gut.

How can/can you tell if the department is actually collegial?

- You can't.
- At some places you can get a bit of a sense, (see trusting your gut above).
- Typically, really bad departments will have a reputation which advisors can tell you (just don't ask them/have the conversation over email).
- You'll probably be able to tell if there is tension, even if they try to hide it.