

## **Postdoc Academic Chat #4**

### **How to Explore Different Types of Academic Institutions to Find the Best Fit for You**

Thursday, January 18, 2017

#### **Questions/Discussion Items to Consider**

- \* What specific pluses and minuses do you personally see to accepting an academic position on a Non-Research I university?**
- \* What specific steps can you take in the next 3-12 months to find out more about other types of institutions?**
- \* What modifications do you think you need to make in your written and oral presentations to appeal to other types of institutions?**

#### **Readings**

- #1 Applying for, and Succeeding in, Jobs at Small Liberal Arts Colleges**
- #2 The California State University System**
- #3 Career Opportunities for Ph.D.s and Postdocs at Community Colleges**

#### **#1 Applying for, and Succeeding in, Jobs at Small Liberal Arts Colleges**

Karl Johnson Pomona College  
Karl.johnson@pomona.edu  
Pomona College  
Department of Biology and Program in Neuroscience

#### **Talk Outline:**

1. Who am I and why am I here?
2. What is life like at a liberal arts college (LAC)?
3. Why would someone want a job at a LAC?
4. What does it take to get a job at a LAC?
5. How would someone succeed in a job at a LAC?

1. Who am I and why am I here?

Current Position: Associate Professor of Biology and Neuroscience Pomona College, Claremont CA

Previous Position: Helen Hay Whitney Postdoctoral Fellow Harvard Medical School – Van Vactor Laboratory

Graduate Degree: PhD in Anatomy/Neuroscience Cambridge University – Holt Laboratory

Undergraduate Degree: Biology with Honors Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA

## 2. What is life like at a liberal arts college (LAC)?

Balance between teaching and research  
50% teaching, 40% research (and 10% service)

Teaching:

Major focus of first years is developing pedagogical skills Generally spend 10-12 hours per week in front of class/laboratory Preparation time is substantial, lab preparation can be onerous. Major consideration for promotion and advancement.

Research:

First few years – spent setting up lab, writing grants, training students. Expectations are that you apply for grants and publish in first three years. Subsequently, one paper every 1-2 years is expected.

Generally similar to expectations at a major research institute, but: Research is conducted at slower pace (no grad students, postdocs or techs) Time dedicated to teaching/mentoring/supervising/advising is much higher.

## 3. Why would someone want a job at a LAC?

It's not a universally appealing job! You must be PASSIONATE about teaching to enjoy this job (> 50% of your time)

Why I sought a job teaching at a small liberal arts college:

1. I love working at the bench, supervising students and teaching.
2. Working with motivated, intelligent people is very important to me.
3. I enjoy the collegial and cooperative undergraduate atmosphere.
4. It's important to me that I'm contributing to society in a tangible way.
5. I do not want to spend a substantial part of my day in an office writing grants.
6. Balancing family and work life is very important to me.
7. I value (and received) an education in the liberal arts.
8. The students are exceptional. My lab: 50% MD, 40% PhD, 10% other.

## 4. What does it take to get a job at a LAC?

A. Identify Liberal Arts Colleges that are hiring:

Search in Science Jobs issue – most LACs advertise here.

Search in “Academic Jobs Online” (academicjobsonline.org)

Make a list of your top choices, and look at the college’s website. Human resources, Dean’s office, or departmental websites list job offers.

Note: applications are generally due in October/November, Interviews in December/January, Job offers are made in January/February (for a position starting in July)

#### 4. What does it take to get a job at a LAC?

The ten most important qualities in getting a teaching job:

1. Strong publications from graduate and postdoctoral work.
2. Experience TA-ing and supervising rotation or undergraduate projects.
3. A track record of successful grant writing (graduate and/or postdoctoral).
4. Four outstanding letters of recommendation. (It’s incredibly important to be able to get along with your peers.)
5. A research proposal that can be successful in the undergraduate context Identify your niche, have summer-student sized projects.
6. Knowledge of what the job is like, and why you want to do it.
7. A lab budget that is reasonable – startup packages rarely exceed \$100K.
8. A good “fit” in the department - areas of research interest and teaching interest. (No major overlap with existing faculty ability to fill “gaps” in expertise)
9. Ability to communicate effectively with students and faculty.
10. A model organism that is suitable for a LAC environment. (No primates!)

#### 4. What does it take to get a job at a LAC?

What are some misconceptions about applying for these jobs?

Myth: You need Cell, Science or Nature papers to get a job at a “good school”.

Reality: A steady publication record is crucial, as is a history of grantsmanship.

Personally: I had 2 papers from my postdoc (+5 from grad school) when I applied.

Myth: You have to have taught your own course/courses to get a tenure-track job.

Reality: Very few people have done this, but it would certainly help.

Personally: TA-ing and supervising rotation/undergraduate students can be enough.

Myth: A teaching job is for someone who can’t get a research job.

Reality: They’re very different jobs and require different skills

Personally: Our last three searches have had >200 applicants each.

Myth: A job at a liberal arts college is committing “scientific suicide”

Reality: The pace of research is MUCH slower, but you will still (need to) publish!  
Personally: My lab of 3-8 undergraduates publishes about 1 paper per year.

Parts of the application:

Cover letter: you, educational history, why teaching, why their college, why you?

CV: tailored to small undergraduate college (focus on teaching) educational history, teaching experience, research experience honors and awards, fellowships, publications, presentations, references

Statement of research interests: Start with big picture – few people will be in your field. Outline proposals, and describe the suitability to undergraduate work. Two pages.

Teaching philosophy: This is the hardest part because it's so ill-defined. Why do you want to teach? What made you decide? Why do you want to teach at this specific college? What existing courses can you teach? What new courses can you develop? Know if you're a replacement or a new hire, and propose courses accordingly.

Interviewing on campus at a small liberal arts college:

The on-campus interview:

It's generally a two-day process (sometimes three) Don't overdress.

Day 1: Meet with faculty, give research talk, dinner with faculty.

Day 2: Meet with more faculty, the president, the dean, simulated lecture, dinner with students.

Ask questions! For example. . .

What do the faculty like and not like about the college?

How heavy are the teaching loads, research funding, sabbatical schedule?

What are the available grants, collaborations, facilities?

What's the city like, how expensive is housing, where do faculty live?

Is there shared common equipment? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department/college?

How many people get tenure? (the vast majority of people do!)

The on-campus interview: 3 Key parts

1. Research talk - starts with an introduction by the chair  
PITCH - most important part of interview accessible to 2nd years, but directed to faculty.  
Lots of background information and describe the relevance of your work.  
Cover what you have done and what your lab will do if you get the job.  
50 minutes with questions DON'T GO OVER!!!
2. Simulated lecture (provide audience with a summary handout)  
Put your lecture in the context of course (syllabus outline). again, PITCH is key -

make it understandable to everyone. 50 minutes – show how you like to teach – use your own style.

ENGAGE students – initiate discussion - ask them questions.

Prepare for questions from faculty.

3. Individual meetings – students and faculty  
PREPARATION! Know EVERYONE's work.  
HAVE QUESTIONS.  
Read abstracts from their publications and have questions.  
Also meet with dean, president.  
Communicate relevance!

Succeeding at a Liberal Arts college:

Good books on this subject:

Tomorrow's Professor. Richard M. Reis

How to Succeed in Academics. Linda and Edward McCabe

Good Start. Gerald Gibson

Another great reference:

How to get a teaching job at a primarily undergraduate institution

A. Malcolm Campbell, Biology Department, Davidson College

## **#2 The California State University System**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The California State University (CSU) is a public university system in the U.S. state of California. It is one of three public higher education systems in the state, the other two being the University of California system and the California Community College system. It is incorporated as The Trustees of the California State University. The California State University system headquarters are at 401 Golden Shore in downtown Long Beach.[1] The CSU system is composed of 23 campuses and has over 400,000 students supported by 47,000 faculty members and staff.[2] It is the largest senior system of higher education in the United States.[3]

CSU prepares about 60% of the teachers in the state, 40% of the engineering graduates, and more graduates in business, agriculture, communications, health, education and public administration than all other California universities and colleges combined. Altogether, about half the bachelor's degrees and a third of the master's degrees awarded annually in California are from the CSU.

Since 1961 nearly 2.5 million alumni have received a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from the university system. CSU offers more than 1,800 degree programs in some 240 subject areas.

## Differences between the CSU and UC systems

Both university systems are California publicly funded higher education institutions. Despite having fewer students, some individual UC campuses, as a result of their research emphasis and medical centers, have larger budgets than the entire CSU system. CSU's Chancellor, Dr Charles B Reed, pointed out when delivering his Pullias Lecture at USC, that California was big enough to afford two world-class systems of public higher education, one that supports research (UC) and one that supports teaching (CSU). However, student per capita spending is stretched far thinner at the CSU, and the lack of a research mission or independent doctoral programs under the California Master Plan leads to a perceived lack of prestige among some academics.[4][5] For many of the CSU system's early formative years, the more powerful UC system was able to delay or prevent the CSU campuses from gaining the right to grant bachelor's degrees, then later master's degrees and now doctorates in most fields. Thus while similar campuses in other states (e.g., Arizona State University) eventually grew from normal schools into research-oriented state universities, the UC system's powerful research university monopoly has successfully prevented the CSU from experiencing a similar development. Librarian Emeritus Kevin Starr has described the CSU as "in so many ways the Rodney Dangerfield of public higher education." [6]

According to the California Master Plan for Higher Education (1960), both university systems may confer Bachelors or Master's degrees as well as professional certifications, however only the University of California has the authority to issue Ph.D degrees (Doctor of Philosophy) and professional degrees in the fields of law, medicine, veterinary, and dentistry. As a result of recent legislation (SB 724 and AB 2382), the California State University may now offer the Ed.D (also known as the Doctor of Education or "education doctorate degree") and DPT (Doctor of Physical Therapy) degrees to its graduate students. Additionally, the California State University (CSU) offers Ph.D degrees and some professional doctorates (for instance, audiology, Au.D) as a "joint degree" in combination with other institutions of higher education, including "joint degrees" with the University of California (UC) and accredited private universities. This is why, for instance, San Diego State can qualify as a "Research University with high research activity" [7] by offering 16 doctoral degrees.

There are 23 CSU campuses and 10 UC campuses representing 460,000 and 238,700 students respectively. The cost of CSU tuition is approximately half that of UC. Thus, the CSU system has been referred to by former California State University authorities as "The People's University." [8]

CSU and UC use the terms "president" and "chancellor" internally in exactly opposite ways: At CSU, the campuses are headed by "presidents" who report to a systemwide "chancellor"; but at UC, they are headed by "chancellors" who report to a systemwide "president".

CSU has traditionally been more accommodating to the older student than UC, by offering more degree programs in the evenings and, more recently, online. In addition, CSU schools, especially in more urban areas, have traditionally catered to the commuter, enrolling most of its students from the surrounding area. This has changed as CSU schools increase enrollment and some of the more prestigious urban campuses attract a wider demographic.[9] [edit]Admission standards

Historically the requirements for admission to the CSU have been less stringent than the UC system. The CSU attempts to accept applicants from the top one-third (1/3) of California high school graduates. In contrast, the UC attempts to accept the top one-eighth (1/8). In an effort to maintain a 60/40 ratio of upper division students to lower division students and to encourage students to attend a California community college first, both university systems give priority to California community college transfer students.

#### References

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5. Jaschik, Scott (October 18, 2007). "Mississippi State in the Silicon Valley". Inside Higher Education. Retrieved 2007-11-16.
6. Kevin Starr, *Coast of Dreams: California on the Edge, 1990-2003* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 583.
7. (Carnegie Foundation link)
8. Reed, Ann (Spring, 2003). "Donald R. Gerth to leave the Sac State presidency after nearly two decades". Capital University Journal. Retrieved 2008-01-02.
- 9 Saavedra, Sherry (September 23, 2007). "As SDSU evolves, demand for housing grows; University was built as commuter campus". San Diego Union Tribune. Retrieved 2008-01-18.

### **#3 Career Opportunities for Ph.D.s and Postdocs at Community Colleges**

#### *Richard Reis*

Traditionally Ph.D.s and postdocs have not considered community college positions because of the perceived lower prestige, little or no research opportunities, higher teaching commitments, less selective students, and so on. However, for some Ph.D.s and postdocs, teaching at a community college may just be the right ticket to a satisfying and rewarding faculty career. We will look at why this might be so in a minute but first let's consider some relevant facts and statistics.

In the United States, 22 percent of all higher education faculty and 21 percent of all higher education students are at two-year community colleges. There are 1,123 such

institutions, including branch campuses. Most faculty at community colleges have master's degrees; however, 13 percent have Ph.D.s and that percentage is increasing. [1]. Between 1990 and 2010 student enrollment in community colleges increased by 65 percent and degrees and certificates awarded increased by 127 percent. [2]. Twenty eight percent of faculty are in the humanities, 25% in the social sciences and education, 22% in the natural sciences and engineering, 10% in business/law/communications, 7% in health sciences, and 8% in other fields. [3].

As of Fall 2013, there were 12.4 million community college students. They represent 46% of all undergraduate and 41% of first time freshman. 61% of all Native American college students are enrolled in community colleges, as are 57% of all Hispanic students, 52% of African American students and 43% of Asian and Pacific Islander students. [4]

While faculty increases have not kept up with enrollment increases (due to budget constraints that many new community college positions are part-time) total faculty at two-year institutions is projected to increase significantly in the next 10 years.

The traditional mission of community colleges has been to offer lower division courses leading to an associate in arts (AA) or associate in science (AS) degree followed by transfer to a four-year institution, and to prepare for vocational careers that are not part of a 4-year institution. Offering lower division courses is still the primary role of such colleges, and indeed, as costs at four-year institutions continue to rise significantly, more students who could qualify for admissions to such places right out of high school are choosing to live at home and attend a much less expensive two-year institution nearby. Community colleges also offer training and certificates in occupational fields such as nursing, electronics, office administration, emergency medical technician, and so on. Many of these courses are offered at night or on weekends for adults working full-time or changing careers. Increasingly, many community colleges are finding that they need to also provide remedial courses for a significant number of students who are not yet qualified to take college-level classes. In short, community college students widely range in age, life experiences and varying degree of academic preparation.

Given the difficult job market for Ph.D.s and postdocs at four-year institutions, a number of universities are responding by offering special training and even certificates for their graduate students who want to consider community college faculty positions. (Some are even doing so for those interested in teaching at private high schools.) These graduate institutions are realizing that the preparation required to be competitive within a community college application is quite different than what is required at a research or even four-year liberal arts institution. [5]

Temple University has a Teaching in Higher Education Certificate Program where graduate students "can earn the certificate to enhance their knowledge of how people learn, develop best teaching practices and improve their career prospects". [6]

What are some of the motivations behind Ph.D.s and postdocs who teach at a community college? Dave Marasco, a materials science Ph.D. from Northwestern University, teaches



physics at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, California. He notes that as a Ph.D. student he basically did experimental work 24 hours per day, seven days per week, which he loved although he wasn't sure how long he could keep up that pace. However, he noticed that after his advisor got tenure, the advisor spent less and less time in the laboratory and more and more time raising money. This didn't appeal at all to Marasco. As he put it, "I was looking for the magic window between being in the laboratory but having to worry about tenure and not being in the lab and having to raise money." He didn't see much of a window and since he really enjoyed teaching, he looked for a way to make a living doing just that and a community college provided the opportunity.

Sarah Parikh is also at Foothill College where she teaches physics and engineering courses. She has a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from nearby Stanford University. As Parikh puts it, "I was always taking notes in class on how I would teach the subject to kindergartners or to explain complicated material in a way that others could understand." This led her to consider a liberal arts or community college where teaching was key. As she further noted, "I realized that at institutions where research exists, it usually becomes dominant and teaching is always secondary and I didn't want that for myself."

It is important to keep in mind, however, as Michaelleen Lee, a chemistry professor at Bucks County Community College in Newtown, Pennsylvania, notes "Teaching at a community college is not lecturing; it's more hands-on, more office hours, more individual tutoring. You have to do a lot more work as a teacher, because students are not nearly as prepared." [7]

Indeed, understanding the many realities of academic life at a two-year college with teaching commitments of five courses a semester, no research assistants, little administrative support, no teaching assistants, and minuscule travel budgets, is important. Furthermore, most community college departments have a limited set of offerings since they are small and only cover lower division courses. This means that in your career you may end up teaching the same course over and over for many years, say, introductory mechanics 50 or more times. Some people run into "burnout" in such circumstances while others seem to find a way to modify, if not the course material itself, the way to present it. Of course conducting scholarship in teaching and learning is an exciting and never-ending challenge in itself.

At community colleges all the grading and evaluation is done by the professors themselves. As Marasco notes, "It isn't just about delivering the content, all of the work of evaluation also falls upon our shoulders as well." Also, particularly in small community colleges, administrative responsibilities and expectations around service can be relatively large compared to other types of institutions.

There is also a distinction to be made between tenure track faculty and adjuncts who teach part-time, sometimes indefinitely. These part-time positions can be fine if they are a supplement to another full-time activity such as being a graduate student or postdoc or working full-time in government or industry, but it can be quite taxing if it is your only source of income. Most adjuncts get paid by the classroom contact hour and in order to accumulate an acceptable salary such "road scholars" often have to travel to two or

more community colleges teaching part-time in each one.

The main thing to keep in mind is that the sole focus at community colleges is in teaching and learning and in this sense it is different from liberal arts schools and state colleges where some kind of research/scholarship is expected. Certainly there is a role for the "scholarship of teaching and learning" in community colleges but if you do such work it will almost certainly have to be based on what takes place in your classroom.

What do you need to do and know before applying for community college positions?

Above all you need to be able to show that you have investigated community colleges prior to applying for a position and that your decision to apply is a high priority. The competition is such that you will have no chance if you give the impression that teaching at a two-year college is a "plan B" priority for you. You can start by visiting local community colleges and talking with deans, department chairs, and other faculty and with other students as well. Ask if you can visit a class or two as an observer. You have to convince the hiring committee that you are someone they want to see in front of a classroom.

To help make this case, Parikh, of Foothill College took education classes at Stanford while a graduate student and made it a point to serve as a teaching assistant lower-division classes not just upper division or graduate courses.

Next, consider a part-time adjunct position for 1-2 semesters to see if this is something you would really like and want to do. If you are willing to teach a class early in the morning, in the evening, or on Saturdays, your chances of getting the opportunity will go up. Having such experience of course greatly improves your application for a full-time position (see below).

It is important to check on community college credential requirements as they vary among schools. Your Ph.D. will be more than enough to qualify you as a subject matter expert but there may be other things such as state and district credential requirements that you need to meet. Also, keep an eye out for community college job fairs where you can get much of this information in one place at one time.

Another step is for you to learn a lot about distance learning and online teaching as these approaches are a big component of instruction at many community colleges. Indeed, as noted earlier, much of the pioneering work in distance education has come from two-year institutions that saw early its economic potential.

As Marasco points out: "Not only should candidates get as much classroom experience as possible while graduate students and postdocs, but they should try out innovative pedagogy. One of the things that will be asked at your interview is if your teaching has involved anything beyond the typical lecture. If the answer is yes, then I'll want to know what you found that worked, and what didn't work, and why. We want to hire people who are thinking about how to be the best teacher they can be."

Fé Brittain at Pima County Community College in Arizona suggests that you consider taking courses in "second language acquisition and in course assessment and teaching methodology to prepare yourself for teaching, not just for lecturing." [8]

It is important to recognize that student diversity is a big component of most community colleges and that you need to understand why this is important. It is not just a matter of having students of different races and ethnicities, economic status, or the first in their family to go to college. It is about the fact that many of your students have been told they don't belong in college and that you are aware of this and that you can find ways to encourage and support them.

What does it take to get the job offer you will want and accept?

Keep in mind that there are several steps when you apply for any job, and that the purpose of each step except the last is to get you to the next step, not the job itself. In each step you need to provide certain concentrated amounts of information, but not everything needed for a final decision. For example, your cover letter and CV are designed to get you a first interview that more often than not will be by telephone or video via Skype. (See section 5 above for do's and don'ts of tele-interviews.) The Skype interview is designed to lead to a campus visit invitation. The campus visit is designed to get you an offer but usually not until after you follow up the visit with further information such as thank you notes, specific material requested, and the like. Once you have an offer then it is a matter of negotiation to get to the "win-win." All of the above points have been covered earlier in this book in Chapter 9, but now we want to focus on the uniqueness of a community college application.

Teaching experience needs to be the first thing on your CV where you describe what you taught, to whom, and how. Enthusiasm is really important in a community college faculty applicant; the search committee needs to see that you are excited about teaching. You need to be prepared to be asked to teach a class or a section of a class.

Some schools may even ask you to give a short demonstration, for example, explaining how a particular device such as a toy or a plastic model of a heart works. The key here is to think of the committee as your students and to not spend the time saying what you would do if you had more time, but rather making your explanation complete in and of itself.

Rob Jenkins, an associate professor of English and director of the Writers Institute at Georgia Perimeter College, advises not to talk too much during your interview, i.e., remember where you are and don't talk very much about your dissertation research, don't patronize your interviewers, and don't drop names of prominent people in your field whom you've met at conferences. He goes on to say, "Don't ramble on about all the millions of dollars your university invests in your discipline. Resist the urge to make lofty pronouncements about your specialty, assuming that because committee members are just community-college professors, they don't know as much about the field as you do. (Hint: Many of them do.)" [9]

Finally, there are two great ways to keep up with the issues facing community colleges as well as all of higher education. The first is through a free subscription to the *Inside Higher Ed* daily posting to which you can subscribe at: <http://www.insidehighered.com/>. The second approach is to subscribe to the daily online postings from *the Chronicle of Higher Education* that also contains a community college section. You can try a six-month digital paid subscription by going to: <https://www.pubservice.com/Subnew1page.aspx?PC=HE&PK=MHEWH1>.

Helpful links

\* **A Community College Teaching Career**

[http://www.mla.org/commcollege\\_teachcar](http://www.mla.org/commcollege_teachcar)

\* **Can I Teach at a Community College?**

<http://chronicle.com/article/Can-I-Teach-at-a-Community/124528/>

\* **Interviewing at a Two-year College**

<http://chronicle.com/article/Interviewing-at-a-Two-Year-/44744/>

\* **Two-Year College Interview Questions**

<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/careerprep/jobsearch/2YC-InterviewQuestions.html>

\* **The Hiring Process for Community College Faculty**

<http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/cgi-bin/tomprof/posting.php?ID=1118>

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[3] National Center for Educational Statistics <https://nces.ed.gov>

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