

Unit 11

Landing a Teaching Job

Objectives

- State your immediate teaching career goal.
- Know what should be done when preparing for a job search.
- Know how to write a cover letter and present other materials for an initial contact.
- Develop a plan for making a visit to a prospective employer and for follow up.

If you have completed the first ten units in this program, you must be seriously considering a career in teaching. A career in teaching could mean either full- or part-time teaching. There are various ways that teaching becomes part of one's professional life, including:

- teaching full-time at a community college or college where teaching is the institution's primary mission,
- teaching courses at a research-oriented University,
- teaching courses for an online institution,
- teaching part-time while working in a different professional field, or
- providing training and continuing education workshops for other professionals. .

All these kinds of teaching require the skills and knowledge included in the units you have just completed. Your task now is deciding what type teaching you would like to do, discovering what opportunities are available, and presenting yourself in a way that will allow you to compete successfully for the type teaching position you would like to obtain.

Activity:

- What is your teaching career goal?
 - If you now are in graduate school, think about the position you want after you complete your degree. What kind of teaching position will you be seeking and why have you chosen that kind of teaching position? Write this as a goal and keep it in mind as you work through this Unit.
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Getting Started

The primary audience for this unit is graduate students. However, faculty and other professionals wanting advice in the job market should also find this material of value. While we can provide help with planning your search and organizing materials, acquiring the experiences that will attract employers is up to you. Ideally, you will have had a series of teaching experiences with increasing responsibility for developing and teaching your own course. The best experience would be to have taught a course that most colleges offer, such as the introductory course in your field, in addition to a core course in your specialty area. If you have not have the opportunity to teach such courses, hopefully by completing the previous units you will have a plan for teaching them.

Knowledge of typical requirements of academic life and being able to discuss important issues in higher education also will serve you well in your job search. Academic life typically includes responsibilities such as serving on committees and academic advising of students. Some departments use “collegiality” as a criterion in hiring decisions; that is, will you get along well with your colleagues and be willing to do a fair share of service activities? Our colleagues call these sorts of behaviors associated with being an academician, “being a good departmental citizen.”

Being able to speak about general issues in higher education in an interview will demonstrate to members of the hiring department and academic Deans that you are knowledgeable on current issues that affect academics today. For example, knowing the importance of emphasizing cultural diversity initiatives in each class you teach or being able to speak about the challenges associated with facilitating critical thinking and active learning in students may serve you well. This knowledge shows an appreciation for the interrelatedness of

societal, institutional, and personal factors in teaching college students today. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is an excellent resource for learning more about these issues. Another resource you may find helpful in obtaining information on responsibilities and challenges of being an academic is the book, *Life on the Tenure Track* (Lang, 2005) in which the author discusses the many responsibilities, issues and challenges encountered in the first year of a teaching career.

The following sections are organized using the fishing metaphor, “hook, line, and sinker,” developed by Jane Halonen (1994) to describe the academic job search process. The hook, with bait, is what you need to attract interest; the line is what you play out when you get the interview opportunity; and the sinker refers to what happens when you land your desired job.

You can prepare for the job search process in several ways, including:

- Discuss strategies used with individuals who have successfully completed job searches as well as talk with individuals who have not been successful about what they learned from the process and perhaps would do differently.
- Attend professional meetings where you can meet and talk with faculty who do hiring.
- Read the job ads in the professional journals in your area and in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

The first step in your fishing trip is to prepare your equipment. You will need your vita, portable and electronic versions of your teaching portfolio, statements of your teaching and research interests, and a cover letter.

You have been writing and modifying your teaching philosophy throughout the earlier units of this e-book and have used it as a basis for making decisions about several aspects of teaching. It is not unusual for a department interested in your teaching to request your philosophy statement as part of the application. As you have learned from the earlier exercises, your

teaching philosophy is not the same as stating your teaching interests, which refers to the courses you are prepared or hope to teach.

Your cover letter should include a brief statement of your interest in the job, including why you think you are a good match for the position. It will also include a list of the items you are enclosing in your application packet. Writing a cover letter is discussed in greater detail later in this unit. You will want to be sure to include your vita in the application materials. Unit 10 contained information on writing a vita.

Networking

Networking is a buzzword used quite often in job searches. In its best sense it means that you can learn helpful things from other people who might also provide you assistance in achieving your goals. Learning from others, working with them in the job search, and making personal connections are certainly part of an effective and ethical search strategy. We strongly recommend joining your local and national professional associations and graduate student organizations. Actively participate in these organizations by attending regional meetings and teaching conferences where you can interact with and learn from experienced professionals who may be able to provide you with information on potential future available positions. Networking is not a short-term activity that you do the year you go on the market. You should begin to develop your networks early in your graduate career and continue the process beyond the job search.

The Hook and Bait

Fishing experts know that different kinds of fish prefer certain types of bait, so you must know what you are fishing for. You are seeking a good match between your teaching goals and interests, and an available position.

Activity: Use a professional job listing such as those available through your professional organizations or publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to find positions for which you might be interested in applying. Be selective and consider such factors as size and type of school, and location. Often these listings include part-time positions. Remember to check websites for schools where you might be interested in teaching since many schools include job listings on their websites.

Cover Letter

Your goal at this stage is to make yourself stand out in a positive way from other applicants. The first thing a reader will see when your file is opened is your cover letter, and so it is important this letter be well crafted. The following suggestions are based on work by Halonen (1994), and Brems, Lampman, and Johnson (1995), and our own experiences.

1. *Do your homework.* Find the web site for each school to which you will apply and study it to gain an understanding and sense of what is important to the institution and the department. Mission and goals statements for the university and the department can tell you something about the values and priorities of your potential employer. There often are clear differences, for example, between a small liberal arts college, a regional state university, and a university sponsored by a religious denomination. Typically, you will

find a list of departmental faculty with their research and teaching interests as well as a listing of departmental course offerings. How would you fit in with the faculty and their interests? What might you contribute in terms of course offerings?

2. *Decide if you are a good match with the institution and its needs.* How will your interests complement those of the university? Are you prepared to teach the courses listed as needs in the job advertisement? Are there unique contributions that you can make? Do not apply if you have serious concerns about whether you will fit in at this institution or department.
3. *Draft your cover letter.* After you have done your homework on the institution and department and decided that you are a good match, you will be able to respond specifically to the job ad. You might consider an outline such as the following for your letter:
 - Introduce yourself briefly. The details are in your vita.
 - State why you are applying for this position, showing that you have done your homework and know something about the institution and department.
 - State your teaching interests and why you are qualified to teach the courses they need. Indicate additional ways you can contribute to their program.
 - State your research interests. Even if research is not expected, for example in a community college, you can still indicate that you are an active scholar and how this contributes to your teaching.
 - If you expect to continue clinical or other professional practice, state what you hope to do and how that will complement your teaching.

- Add other relevant academic information. Do not include personal information such as marital status, family, hobbies, or personal preferences.
- Do not simply copy your letter for each job for which you apply. Except for your personal introduction, each letter should be crafted to the potential employer's institution.

Proofread your letter carefully before mailing. Ask a colleague or mentor to proofread your letter as well. Sample cover letters can be obtained by visiting the website for the [University of Washington Career Center website](#) contains examples of sample academic careers cover letters.

Vita

The advertisement for the job will tell you what the department wants you to send, but it will always ask for a vita. Unit 10 contained information on writing a CV.

Other Material

While you will want to provide materials and information that make you stand out from other candidates, you do not want to overburden the search committee with stacks of paper that they may not have time to read. In most cases it is reasonable to include your teaching philosophy and a summary of the contents of your portfolio including a web address if your portfolio is available online, even if these items were not requested. Send reprints or preprints of publications only if these were requested. An exception might be a particularly unique, high quality paper that shows you are involved in the scholarship of teaching.

In general, search committees will contact you requesting additional materials if you are being considered for an interview.

Recommendation letters

Job ads often ask you to arrange to have a specified number of recommendations sent to the search committee even if you have included a list of references from whom you have obtained permission to include with contact information on your CV. It will help them write a good letter if you give each reference a copy of the job ad and your CV, and talk with them about the nature of the position for which you are applying and reasons why you are appropriate for the position

The Line and Sinker

Congratulations! You have been invited for an interview. Your goal in the interview is to provide first-hand evidence of your potential as a teacher, scholar, and an effective, thoughtful colleague.

Preparation

Do even *more homework* in preparation for your visit. Get a sense of the recent history of the University and the department. Find out if there are any significant issues under discussion, such as the need to develop an assessment plan, that you may have experience or expertise enabling you to make unique contributions. If the department is small, learn names of the faculty, and their interests and expertise if possible. Many web sites include faculty photos.

Be prepared to present yourself as a teacher. Consider bringing an electronic or other copy of a larger version of your teaching portfolio that includes a plan for the courses the department wants you to teach. In Unit 2 we suggested that you prepare a “sound bite” to use in response to questions about your teaching philosophy. When interviewing for a teaching position, most candidates are asked to teach a class. Find out about the intended audience, and if allowed to select the topic, choose a topic with which you are very knowledgeable and prepare a lesson that fits comfortably within the allotted time. Do not simply tell students about your research, unless you have been asked to do that. Instead, find out what the class has been studying and engage them in that topic. If you have been asked to teach a class as opposed to giving a public lecture, do not feel that you must only lecture. Rather use the opportunity to demonstrate not only your knowledge in the content area, but your skill in using different teaching strategies such as managing discussions or engaging students in active learning activities. Practice these “job talks” as often as possible in front of a live audience.

You should be given a schedule for your visit. Telephone the person in charge of the job search if you have questions about the schedule or any other arrangements.

The Visit

Conduct yourself as a professional. This includes how you dress. Even if most of the faculty members are very informal, others, including the administrators, tend to be more formal. Be on time for all appointments when punctuality is under your control. Conversations should be friendly but consider carefully any personal disclosures you will make. Be sensitive to boundary issues. For example, avoid student parties or barhopping with faculty. However, a quiet dinner with drinks, in moderation, is common and acceptable. Members of the host department want to see that you are a real person that they can get along with and enjoy.

You will be asked a lot of questions in your meetings with administrators, faculty, and students. Many of these questions can be anticipated:

- Why do you want to teach at our University?
- What type of student do you most like to work with?
- How do you deal with difficult students?
- Describe one of your successes as a teacher, and a failure.
- Where would you like to be in your career five or ten years from now?
- How would students describe a typical class that you teach?
- How do you envision yourself contributing to department and university service?
- What type of research projects will you be working on from day one at the learning institution? Can you involve students in your work? How might you do that?
- What does the term cultural diversity mean to you? How do you attempt to incorporate culture into your daily life as a teacher?

- What are your technology competencies and would you be prepared to teach on-line courses?

And you should have questions for those who interview you.

- You can ask a Dean about the strengths and prospects for the department, and its challenges (avoid use of the word weaknesses).
- If you have not been told the salary range, discuss this with the Dean.
- Be sure to clarify the teaching load and service responsibilities with the department chair.
- Inquire if mentoring is available for faculty new to the institution
- Ask students about department strengths and ways the department might be improved.
- Discuss the rank and tenure process and criteria. This would be the time to ask specific questions about types of work that increase your chances of achieving tenure and promotion.

Inquire as to whether faculty members tend to collaborate with one another on research initiatives both within and across departments at the particular college or university where you are applying. Ask about the timeframe for making hiring decisions.

Role Play Activity:

Find someone who can act as a College Dean or Department Chairperson and ask that person to prepare questions for you, including those listed above. Engage in this role play for about twenty minutes. Ask another person to be an observer to provide feedback on your performance.

Your visit typically will conclude with a meeting with the department chair, search committee chair, or both, and a ride to and from the airport. These are good opportunities for final questions. You may be asked to give your impressions of the department and how you might fit in. Do not ask about your chances for getting the job. If you have other prospects, you are not obligated to say where they are.

A few days after you return home you might make a follow-up call to the department to thank them for their hospitality (which you already have done in a thank you letter) and find out if they need any other information. You might also find out whether their time frame for a decision has changed.

The hiring decision now is in the hands of others, but there still are a few things you can do. Keep records listing positives and negatives factors about the job based on your interview visit. This will be helpful if you must decide between several job offers. If this is your only shot, be sure it is a position you really can fit. Pursue any unanswered questions that you feel are important before making a decision on accepting a job offer.

If you feel a tug on your line and get an offer, it's time to land your job. You should receive the offer both by telephone and in a formal letter. You should be given a reasonable number of days to respond and consider the offer before providing a response unless there is no doubt in your mind and you chose to make a verbal response when the offer arrives. Make sure that all your questions have been answered and that you are clear about the nature of the contract before making a commitment. You will want to negotiate any salary differences prior to accepting a position. Resources such as your professional organization's website or the annual salary comparisons compiled by the [American Association of University Professors](#) or [The](#)

[Chronicle of Higher Education](#) will enable you to learn in most cases typical salaries at the institution or at other institutions for similar positions.

There is one more comparison to make in our fishing metaphor. Many people who fish use the “catch-and-release” method. They just want to catch the fish for sport, but not eat it. In a job search, this practice is highly unethical. A University will have invested significant person hours and resources in their search and your visit. If you are not interested, they should know that immediately. Barring extenuating circumstances, when you accept an offer, you must take it.

There are several books that provide guidance once you have obtained your first teaching position. Four additional books besides the book by Lang (2004) mentioned earlier in this unit that you might find of value are *On course: A week by week guide to your first semester of college teaching* (Lang, 2010); *What the best college teachers do* (Bain, 2004); *The new faculty member* (Boice, 1992) and *Advice for new faculty members* (Boice, 2000). The sub-title of the second book is, *nihil nimus*, which loosely translated means everything in moderation or don't try to do too much. That's advice we strongly recommend.

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