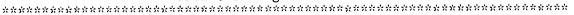ABSTRACT
        Application packets for a community college teaching
position should be simple, concise, and provide just enough
information about the applicant to interest the screening committee.
Since many colleges utilize an official application form, screening
committees and personnel officers will probably review these forms
for the candidate information. Although resumes are not always
reviewed, they should provide basic information on education,
teaching experience, other relevant experience, publications, awards,
and references. Letters of application or cover letters should
concentrate on what an applicant can do for the college by addressing
particular job requirements for the position and demonstrating
knowledge about the college. Applicants should also consider
describing their experience with culturally and demographically
diverse populations. Letters of reference can also be critical to the
application process; these should be written on letterhead, addressed
specifically for the position, and provide a way of contacting the
author. Since community colleges are teaching institutions,
applicants should submit their best student evaluation summary rather
than articles or research reports. A call to the screening committee
chair after submitting the material will sometimes highlight the
applicant's name. Finally, if asked for an interview, the applicant
should know the mission nd characteristics of community colleges and
prepare a teaching demonstration. (TGI)

# How to Apply for a Community College Teaching Position

Walter H. Nolte, Ph.D.
Flathead Valley Community College

# HOW TO APPLY FOR A COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHING POSITION

Walter N. Nolte, Ph.D.

Flathead Valley Community College
Kalispell, Montana

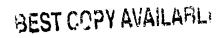I'm in the middle of the screening process for two full-time tenure track faculty positions--one in management, the other in computers. During the past month or so, I have reviewed the application packets of 140 or so candidates for the two positions. Over half of these packets were discarded for reasons that had very little to do with the actual qualifications of the candidate. I am amazed by the atrocious quality and volume of material people submit when applying for a teaching position--application forms, resumes, letters of application, letters of reference, transcripts, course outlines, syllabi, student evaluations, certificates from every .raining program attended, etc. Who has time to read all of this material, especially when a four or five member screening committee is involved? Let's start with the application forms.

Many colleges utilize an application form. Screening committees and personnel officers are used to looking for candidate information on their own customized application forms. They know exactly where to look for educational background, employment history, references, etc. I always look at the application form first when I open a candidate's application folder for review. I know exactly where to look to get a thumbnail sketch of the applicant, unlike a resume which can be set up in any number of formats. Application forms should be carefully filled out. Those that are typed immediately jump out. Those that are illegibly handwritten are almost always discarded immediately, despite the candidate's qualifications. Remember, I have 140 applications to read. I don't have time to decipher handwriting or look to a resume to fill in missing information. I am amazed that candidates for a teaching

position in management would submit a scrawled, marked out, penciled, lined, and arrowed application form. These people are going to teach our students management and organizational theory, yet many cannot organize their thoughts to fill out an application form. I could barely read an application form from a candidate for a management position with a Ph.D. and twenty years of teaching and industry experience. Just because information is on a resume, doesn't mean the screening committee members will ever read it. Often, because of quality of work, I never get past the application form.

I stop reading resumes after the third or fourth page. Remember, I have 140 applications to read. A nine page detailed resume that describes the exact job responsibilities, including the times taken for coffee breaks, leaves nothing for the imagination. I don't need to interview somebody who provides this amount of detail. Most screening committees are not interested in a listing of every staff development workshop attended by the candidate or the title of every presentation delivered to professional groups. Resumes should be short and concise and provide basic information on education, teaching experience, other relevant employment experience, publications, awards, and references. They should be chronologically easy to follow. Most screening committee members are interested in length of a particular employment experience. Gaps in employment history should be avoided. If you have gaps, do the best to explain in a cover letter or letter of application. Resumes should hint at what you can do for the college, not what you have done in the past. Leave your picture off the resume.

Letters of application or cover letters should flesh out your application form and resume. I stop reading these after two or three pages as well, so again careful attention to concise writing is a must. Even more than resumes, cover letters should concentrate on what you can do for the college, based on your past experiences. Here is your chance to address the particular job requirements for the position, to show how you meet the qualifications as

advertised, to explain employment gaps, to speak to professional development activities, and to demonstrate that you know something about the college, community colleges in general, or the college's geographical area (otherwise known as doing your homework-- more on this later). Express real interest in the position and the college. Explain why you would give up a lucrative private sector job to teach for lousy wages at a community college (often a question when hiring computer, math, engineering, and other highly technical positions). Unless you are applying at a school with "junior college" in the title, avoid this terminology. Many community college people view this as an antiquated term. Talk about your experience with culturally and demographically diverse populations. If you lack formal teaching experience, highlight any experience in company training efforts and responsibilities for training/orientation of small groups of employees. If the college does not provide an application form, use the cover letter to specifically address the responsibilities and qualifications of the job. It is best to do this in the order provided in the position announcement to help the reviewers to match your skills to the position specifications. Avoid using the letterhead from your current place of employment. Also, it is likely that your application material will be copied for the convenience of the screening committee and other decision-makers at the college. Avoid using colored paper.

Although I personally have doubts about the value of reference letters, they are often a critical part of the application process. I rarely read "To whom it may concern letters." I have reviewed application packets with up to a dozen of these type of letters. I don't read them. Remember, I have 140 applications to read. I pay more attention to letters written specifically for the position and sent to the college directly by the author. I pay little attention to letters that are not on some sort of letterhead, that don't provide a legible signature of the author, or don't provide some way of contacting the author (you would be amazed at the number submitted this way). Good screening committee members are going to contact your references and others who might assist in the decision-making process. The easier you make it for them, the more you will stand out in the process. Choose

references with care. Personal friends, pastors, or relatives will carry considerably less weight than professional contacts. Letters of only one paragraph that state what a great person you are and that they would recommend you for any position should be avoided. Screening committee members want to know why you are a great person and what you can contribute to the particular position. Send your references your resume and a description of the position. Give them some tools to do a good job for your quest to teach.

I have reviewed application packets that have contained over 100 pages of information. I don't read them. Remember, I have 140 applications to read. Most screening committees are not interested in reviewing the course outline or syllabus of every class you have taught. Most are not interested in reading articles or research reports that you have written (community colleges are teaching institutions, not research oriented). I will not read thank you notes from former supervisors on a well done project---tell us about it in the application letter (or the interview). I am not interested in copies of certificates of every staff development workshops attended, nor do I have the time to read pages of material regarding military jobs and training. Leave all this stuff out. If you are compelled to submit copies of past student evaluation summaries, send only one copy of the very best. Remember, many colleges copy the complete application packet for each member of the screening committee. Save some trees and the college's copying budget!

Application packets should be simple, concise, and provide just enough information about you to tweak the interest of the screening committee to want to learn more. Resumes, cover letters, and application forms should be typed, neat, grammatically correct, and without spelling or punctuation errors. They don't need to be flashy, just clean. More is not always better.

Some final thoughts on the application process. A call to the screening committee chair after submitting the material will sometimes highlight your name. Don't overdo this.

I wouldn't want 140 calls. If you are asked for an interview, do your homework. It is especially important to know about the mission and characteristics of community colleges. At least one candidate in every five interviews that I have been involved in over the past ten years thinks we are only the first two years of college for the high school graduate too stupid or too poor to go to a "real college." Ask for curriculum guides, college catalogs, schedules, etc. Screening committees are usually flattered by such interest in their college. If at all possible, visit the college prior to the interview and then casually mention this during the interview. Most screening committees will see this as a sign of real interest. Many colleges are asking candidates to prepare a teaching demonstration. This has become an important and instructive tool for selecting candidates. Prepare for this carefully. Use of overheads, handouts, computers, or other instructional aides will impress the screening committee. If you have never taught before, try to relax during this stage of the hiring process. The screening committee knows you have never taught, but something in your application has led them to believe that you can. They will make allowances for your lack of experience. Always ask questions during the interview, although you might want to avoid asking about salary and benefits at this time. Most screening committees will be impressed if you ask about organizational structure (although, since you have done your homework, you already know this), workload, non-teaching campus activities, etc. Most people like to talk about themselves or their work and will be flattered that you have expressed an interest. Ask about what kind of place the college is to work. Listen to the answers carefully. If there is obvious tension between the administrative and faculty members of the committee, you may want to try another college. As a last piece of advice, if you are positioning yourself to teach full-time in a community college, try to get some part-time teaching experience.