

Qualities and Abilities Our

Psychology Department Seeks in Outstanding Job Candidates

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When a full-time position in psychology opens at our institution, we use several important criteria to identify the most competitive candidates. This chapter describes and explains these criteria from my perspective as the Psychology Department's senior member. I have served on numerous hiring committees for a variety of academic disciplines. Most recently I chaired the hiring committee for a tenure track psychologist at Irvine Valley College, the college at which I have done the majority of my 25 years of teaching.

Irvine Valley is a public community college founded in 1985 and serving over 13,000 students. The median student age is 25. Fifty-three percent of the students are from minority populations (mostly Asian and Hispanic). The college employs 111 full-time and 270 part-time instructors.

We use eight criteria to evaluate psychology applicants seeking a full-time, tenure track position at Irvine Valley. These criteria begin with the candidates' academic preparation. Those seeking an adjunct position usually must meet only the first criterion, but meeting some or all of the remaining seven criteria would certainly improve an applicant's chances of landing a part-time teaching position.

Academic Preparation

No doubt, the candidate's academic preparation is the most fundamental requirement. Nearly every state, including California, requires a MA in psychology or a closely related field (e.g., counseling or educational psychology) as the minimum academic background. Although the application process allows candidates not meeting this criterion to argue for their "equivalency" by describing a combination of coursework and experience thought to

constitute an equivalent background, most hiring committees would not seriously consider interviewing such a candidate. A growing number of applicants hold a PhD in psychology, but the minimum academic preparation continues to be the master's degree.

Successful Teaching Experience

The qualified candidate must provide evidence of teaching experience, especially successful teaching experience at the post-secondary level. The hiring committee will examine the breadth of courses taught, the number of years the candidate has been teaching, and the type of institution at which the candidate has taught. Some colleges will be looking for generalists capable of teaching any of the courses offered by the department, while others may be looking for specialists in statistics and research methods, biopsychology, or some other area of psychology. It seems likely that when an opening occurs, most colleges would seek those who can teach any courses the department offers. Applicants with limited formal teaching experience may be able to strengthen their application by summarizing their experiences working with students (e.g., graduate student teaching, guest speaking presentations, or service as a teaching assistant).

How does a candidate provide evidence of "successful" teaching? I recommend preparation of a professional development portfolio. Include in the portfolio documentation of teaching evaluations performed by department chairs, deans, peers, or students. If you currently teach at a college that doesn't often evaluate instructors, then request such an evaluation. Another strategy is to create and regularly administer your own student feedback form. However, do not load the portfolio with reams of raw data; instead provide statistical summaries and representative comments about your teaching gathered from former students and administrators.

Philosophy of Teaching

Somewhere within the application and interview process, candidates will be asked to reveal their philosophy of teaching. Good candidates will provide examples of teaching methods sensitive to the diverse learning styles among students, use of instructional designs

that emphasize active rather than passive learning, the preference for learner-centered over teacher-centered instructional strategies, and the application of instructional principles derived from the science of learning (Halpern & Hakel, 2002, 2003). Applicants who are invited to give a teaching demonstration should present one that reflects their philosophy of teaching.

Regional accreditation agencies now expect disciplinary faculty to work together to identify learning outcomes encompassing essential knowledge and skills that students should gain as a result of their courses and programs. Moreover, faculty must develop and implement ways to assess student learning, review data generated from the assessments, and document how such data have been used to improve teaching and learning. Because of their academic background and training, all psychologists are well prepared for this type of work. The candidate should be fully committed to helping colleagues develop and assess course and department-level learning outcomes. In this regard, the informed candidate should be well aware of the learning outcomes for the undergraduate degree in psychology, a comprehensive set of outcomes recently prepared by an American Psychological Association task force <<http://www.apa.org/ed/pcue/taskforcereport2.pdf>>.

A Personal Commitment to Ongoing Professional Development

Exceptional candidates can readily list strategies that employ to stay current not just on recent developments in psychology, but also on effective teaching strategies. Candidates should provide, in chronological order, an annotated listing of workshops, conferences, and presentations attended. Another section of the professional portfolio should provide examples of relevant books and journals read in order to stay current in psychology and the teaching of psychology. The superior candidate can list professional organizations in which he or she is a member (e.g., TOPSS, Psi Beta, Psi Chi, PT@CC, and any county, state, regional, national, or international organizations in psychology such as APA and APS). Candidates should take time to describe all instances of active participation in such organizations and describe personal links and connections within psychology's network of professional organizations. The point here is to convince the hiring committee that as a future colleague, you will take

primary responsibility for your professional development as both a psychologist and a teacher. Individuals serving on a hiring committee never want to be accused of having had a hand in hiring an instructor who subsequently earns a reputation of being "dead wood."

Show Knowledge of Community Colleges' Unique Role in Higher Education

The unique charge of the community college is to maintain academic standards equivalent to those in place at the 4-year colleges and universities, while serving a highly diverse group of students, many of whom are literally learning to be students. Community colleges embrace the ideal of open access to students. Effective instructors acknowledge and accept the responsibilities associated with serving the highly diverse student body derived from an open access policy. Faculty need to embrace this challenge by focusing on student potential. Besides teaching course content, they must recognize the importance of helping students become competent learners. Psychologists are uniquely prepared to help students develop effective learning skills, a fact the candidate should express during the hiring process. (Some of my colleagues resent the developmental nature of some community college students; these instructors tend to blame the students for what is generally, in fact, ineffective teaching.)

How can teachers help students develop learning skills? Here are a few examples. The instructor can refer needy students to the tutoring center and encourage more accomplished students to become tutors. One colleague administers a self-scoring study strategies inventory to all students in her fall introductory classes. Students scoring below the norm for time-management, concentration, or study strategies are given a handout listing workshops, classes, and resources available to help them improve in these areas. Instructors also can develop scoring rubrics for grading various assignments and share these rubrics with the students to clarify their expectations for acceptable work. Having students use the rubrics to judge their own work can promote metacognition.

Be Eager to Mentor Students

Effective community college teachers enjoy helping students become effective learners. Mentoring students involves formalizing a commitment to student development. Effective mentoring may take many forms. Many psychology students thrive on co-curricular activities designed to enrich their knowledge of and involvement in psychology. Many community colleges have established Psi Beta chapters. Psi Beta is a national honor society in psychology for students attending a 2-year college. Psi Beta, which grew out of Psi Chi, provides students with many benefits: a forum to meet and develop friendships with others who share their interests in psychology, a place to learn leadership skills by serving as chapter officers, and the opportunity to hear speakers on a variety of topics in psychology. Many Psi Beta chapters provide students with the opportunity to present their research at poster sessions during regional and national psychology conferences. Besides advising a Psi Beta chapter, mentors may arrange service-learning opportunities in the community so students can apply what they are learning in class, or arranging field trips to the local university's "Psychology Day" program.

The hiring committee will look for clues of the candidate's potential for becoming a strong student mentor. Did the candidate participate in Psi Beta or Psi Chi as an undergraduate? Has the applicant been involved with any type of mentoring activities initiated during former or present teaching employment? Does this applicant have knowledge of the mentoring activities the department already has in place? Would this candidate become an active participant in our co-curricular activities or avoid them? Worse yet, would this person refuse or neglect requests to announce Psi Beta and other enrichment opportunities to students? These are critically important questions for the hiring committee.

Psychologists teaching at the community college should actively encourage students to take advantage of the enrichment derived from co-curricular opportunities available on the campus. Psychology faculty must not only encourage students to become involved, but they must help provide meaningful co-curricular opportunities. They, too, should participate in

these outside-the-classroom activities, thereby serving as a positive role model for students. New instructors should resist becoming the "commuter teacher" whose time on campus is restricted to the classroom and the required minimum number of office hours.

Show Promise of Being Good "Campus Citizen"

Most community colleges require full-time instructors to serve on at least one standing committee. Instructors must provide reliable service on their committees by arriving for the meeting on time, prepared to engage in the committee's business. Good colleagues also accept their portions of shared-governance work on temporary committees such as task forces, ad hoc committees, and hiring committees. The good applicant will show a willingness to fulfill the obligation and responsibility for committee work. Hiring committees will examine the applicant's history of committee work for supportive evidence.

Related to fulfilling committee work, it is necessary that teachers enjoy positive, respectful interactions with teaching colleagues, including of course, adjunct faculty, both within and outside their teaching discipline. The expectation for positive working relationships extends to interactions with all support staff. Members of the support staff provide essential services for developing and maintaining a positive learning environment; these individuals must be treated with the respect and appreciation they deserve. Often it is difficult for the hiring committee to evaluate candidates' tendencies in this area, but the candidate sometimes provides clues by the way he or she interacts with the staff who arrange for the interview. Post-interview reference checks may also provide some insight in this area.

Information and Technological Literacy

The candidate should meet the APA guidelines for information and technological literacy desired for the BA in psychology. The candidate should demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for teaching purposes. For example, applicants can list software programs for which they have reached mastery, such as spreadsheet generation for maintaining grades or presentation software for class use. This criterion also includes the ethical and responsible use of information in academic work.

Closing Tips

Community colleges are primarily teaching institutions; conducting and publishing research is not part of the community college mission. Doing research is not usually supported or even acknowledged by the college. On the other hand, psychologists at the 2-year college are not discouraged from conducting and publishing their research, and some do because they enjoy active involvement in the psychology's scientific community.

College teaching positions are highly competitive, even positions that open at 2-year colleges. Be prepared. Expect a very thorough hiring procedure. A committee will meet to review the criteria for screening the applications, and will develop a set of questions to ask those invited for interviews. Take care in preparing the application form. Candidates get off to a poor start when they submit a sloppy application form (e.g., handwritten responses); a copy of the completed application is the first thing members of the hiring committee will examine. Second, if the interview requires a teaching demonstration, take time to prepare a good demonstration; the demonstration carries a good deal of weight. Finally, don't lose heart. Hiring committees don't always make the correct decision. Be aware that being invited to an interview indicates that you definitely have job-landing potential in this highly competitive market. Learn from interview experience. After the interview, write down as many questions as you can recall. Think about how you could have given better answers, and how you could have made an even better presentation of what you can offer the college.

It is typical for the interview process, as conducted by a group, to identify several candidates whose names are then forwarded to the college president for final interviews. Some presidents require a minimum number (e.g., three) of names be forwarded for consideration to be invited to this interview. The president, perhaps with the help of another administrator and the committee chair, then makes the final determination about whom, from those names forwarded, to offer the position. The final interviews are usually less structured, and more casual than the group interviews. Don't allow this moment to become little more than a pleasant chat. Instead, prepare for the final interview by having a list, in your mind, of

the unique strengths you will bring to the department and the college. The list should describe how you meet the important criteria set forth in this chapter.

References

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