

## **Ithaca College: Balancing Teaching and Scholarship**

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Ithaca College is a private, residential, comprehensive college with approximately 6,100 undergraduate and 220 graduate students. The college has a Carnegie classification of Master's College and University I (McCormick, 2001). The college is located in a small city in upstate New York, and most of the undergraduates are of traditional age and attend full-time. Ithaca College began as a music conservatory, and its mission to blend theory and performance reflects this legacy (Ithaca College, 2001). Successful faculty members at Ithaca College are both excellent teachers and productive scholars.

The Psychology Department is the fourth largest on campus with 13 tenured or tenure-eligible faculty and approximately 300 majors. Although the department does not offer a graduate degree, it has an unusually strong research orientation for an undergraduate program. Psychology BA majors are required to take a three semester Research Team course in which they learn to conduct programmatic research under the guidance of a faculty member. The project always involves original research. The college supports high quality scholarship by providing laboratory space and extensive computing equipment. In addition, faculty have an 18 credit a year (3/3) teaching load, partially to provide time for scholarly activities. However, the primary responsibility of faculty members is to be engaging and dedicated teachers. Thus, a successful candidate for a tenure-eligible position in the Psychology Department must demonstrate a commitment to and evidence of excellent undergraduate teaching and the ability and skills to produce high quality scholarship in a small college environment.

One of the challenges in successfully applying for a position in an undergraduate program is that the culture and expectations for faculty are different from those that produce and socialize PhDs. In many graduate programs, teaching is an afterthought and research productivity is the measure of success. However, Ithaca College faculty revel in their

identities as teachers, and excellent teaching is the key to success. An applicant with a strong publication record is not sufficient to get the attention of the Ithaca College faculty. The applicant must also provide evidence of quality college-level teaching experience.

Teaching and research are initially evaluated in the file submitted by the applicant. Files should contain a cover letter, curriculum vita, evidence of successful teaching, and evidence of productive research. The cover letter should describe the applicant's career goals and fit with the position and the department. An effective cover letter should also reflect the applicant's understanding that commitment to teaching is necessary to obtain the position. Thus a summary of teaching experience and philosophy should precede and be longer than the section on research.

Applicants who have limited teaching experience should acknowledge that fact. A lengthy and complex philosophy of teaching does not substitute for actual experience. Similarly, in the research summary, applicants should summarize research experience and plans for scholarly activities at Ithaca College. Research that is of interest to undergraduates and can involve undergraduates as research assistants is highly valued. Applicants should realize that although Ithaca College has outstanding laboratory space, it has a limited subject pool, is in a small city, and has limited research funding. Applicants should provide some indication of how they would conduct research under these conditions. For example, applicants should indicate plans to apply for grants to obtain specialized equipment and materials if these are needed for the proposed research program.

The purpose of the vita is to summarize educational attainments and relevant teaching and research experience. Applicants should indicate when, where, and how many times they have been the instructor of record and mention any professional development activities, awards, or memberships related to teaching. Research that has been accepted for publication or presentation should be clearly differentiated from research that is in preparation. Applicants should also distinguish between scholarship that was peer-reviewed as a condition of acceptance, and scholarship that was not peer-reviewed. As with the cover letter, padding the

vita is transparent to most faculty, and does not advance the applicant's case. If the applicant has no record of published or in press scholarship, a long list of work "in preparation" looks more like a wish list than actual productivity. The department recognizes that conducting and submitting research for publication is easier in graduate school than during the first few years at a teaching intensive institution such as Ithaca College. Consequently, applicants who were not productive scholars in graduate school will be evaluated as less likely to be productive under the added stress of a new tenure track position.

The applicant's file should contain evidence to support the cover letter and vita, but applicants should be selective in the materials they include. Because most positions generate at least 100 applications, faculty appreciate a concise file. With regard to teaching, the applicant should include representative syllabi, teaching materials, and all quantitative and qualitative teaching evaluations. Applicants who submit selected teaching evaluations are suspected of covering negative information and are evaluated less favorably. Although uniformly high evaluations are desirable, they are not necessary. The department recognizes that low evaluations may occur, but that dedicated teachers work to improve their teaching skills over time. If the file contains evidence of improvement and a discussion of how this change was achieved, the department will appreciate that commitment to teaching. Finally, reprints of published or preprints of in-press scholarship should also be included in the file. Any letters of recommendation from co-authors should mention the role of the applicant in the work.

Applicants with relevant and high quality teaching experience and evidence supporting the potential to have a productive research career at Ithaca College may be invited to campus for an interview and to make a presentation to the department. The campus experience is an opportunity for the department to evaluate personality, social skills, and teaching ability and is the candidates' opportunity to determine realistically if this position is consistent with their career goals. During individual meetings with faculty, the best candidates are animated and ask questions that indicate they have researched the department, college, and

faculty. In addition, they communicate a strong commitment to undergraduate education, caring and concern for undergraduate students, and an interest in engaging in scholarly activities. It is important that candidates appear to understand that teaching and mentoring students will be their primary responsibility.

The presentation to the department is a crucial part of the department's evaluation of the applicant as a teacher. Whereas in institutions offering doctoral degrees this talk is expected to include significant methodological and conceptual detail oriented toward specialists, candidates for positions at Ithaca College are most favorably evaluated when they give talks geared toward well-educated generalists. A successful strategy is to structure the talk as a graduate course lecture, highlighting the role of the applicant's work in the context of the larger field of research. The faculty will listen critically regarding methodology but will be less interested in picking apart the methodological or conceptual details of the research and more interested in evaluating the candidate's ability to engage and educate a non specialist audience—in other words, to teach.

In summary, applying for a position at Ithaca College should not be made as a fallback or “safety” application. Successful applicants must make a strong case both in the file and in person that they can be successful and happy in an environment that expects and rewards excellent teaching and that they have the skills to become scholars of at least regional stature.

#### References

- Ithaca College (2001). *Ithaca College institutional plan*. Ithaca, NY: Author.
- McCormick, A. C. (Ed.) (2001). *The Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education*. Menlo Park, CA: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.