

# THE CHRONICLE

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## Advice

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### **How You Might Get the Job**

*By Rob Jenkins*

Last month, I wrote about the reasons that you might have been [unsuccessful this year in your search](#) for a full-time teaching position at a community college. In this column, let's talk about ways that you can improve your chances during the next hiring cycle.

I'll warn you in advance that you might not like some of my suggestions. Perhaps I should also point out—although it hardly seems necessary these days—that, even if you do everything I suggest, there are no guarantees. I'm just trying to help you put yourself in the best possible position as a candidate.

The essential question is, if you're planning to resume your search this fall for a full-time, tenure-track job at a community college, what should you be doing between now and then to make yourself a more attractive candidate?

**Teach as much as you can.** One important difference between community colleges and research institutions is that the latter frequently hires people fresh out of graduate school, with very little teaching experience beyond their time as TA's. Community colleges rarely do that. We like people who have a few years of classroom experience under their belts, preferably at a two-year college.

Depending on the college, that experience doesn't necessarily have to be full time. Some two-year institutions, like mine, count a certain number of courses taught on an adjunct basis as a year of experience. So if you're applying for full-time positions and you're not already teaching part time at a community college, you need to see if you can pick up a course or two this fall.

The good news is that, no matter where you live, there's probably a community college within easy driving distance. And assuming you teach in a field for which there is at least moderate demand, and you meet the minimum qualifications, picking up a few courses shouldn't be too difficult. Perhaps the only advantage of what is

sometimes referred to as the "adjunctification" of the professoriate is that part-time positions are plentiful nationwide, especially true two-year colleges, where enrollments continue to grow despite (or perhaps because of) the recession.

**Learn to speak community-college lingo.** Teaching experience at a two-year college is important because search committees are looking for people who are familiar with our colleges and understand what we're about. When you teach on a community-college campus, even as an adjunct, you begin to absorb the culture and learn to speak our language.

That language is focused on teaching and learning, not on research, and may be considerably different from the dialect you spoke as a graduate student. We talk about learning styles, classroom technology, developmental studies, assessment, advising, and student success. You can pick up the lingo pretty quickly by listening to your full-time colleagues, participating in hallway conversations, and attending department meetings. And your ability to speak and understand the lingo will serve you well during your next interview for a full-time position.

**Make yourself indispensable.** Mark Twain supposedly once said that, if you want to be a writer, you should be willing to do it for free for two years. After that, if no one offers to pay you to write, you should probably choose a different profession.

The same basic principle holds true for other professions, as well, including teaching. If you want to succeed in the long run, whether you're an adjunct hoping to get a full-time gig or you're brand new to the tenure track, you may have to do a lot of things that, while outside the scope of your formal duties, will catch the attention of those you hope to impress. In the past I've offended people by saying that—"You just want me to work for free," they snarl—but I believe it's true.

If you're an adjunct, the two-year college where you already work might offer your best chance of full-time employment. So my advice is to do everything in your power to make yourself indispensable on the campus. Spend all of the extra time you can afford hanging around in your office (if you have one), in the adjunct "bullpen," or in the faculty lounge. Volunteer to serve on committees, sponsor student organizations, grade departmental exams—whatever. In short, behave as if you already work there full time. Then maybe,

when your name comes up during the next search, some committee members will be surprised to learn that you're not already on the tenure track and will want to rectify that situation.

Even if you're applying for full-time positions at other colleges, all of those things you did "for free" will provide excellent résumé fodder. It might very well set you apart from others in the pool who, like you, have only part-time teaching experience but haven't been as active.

**Be willing to move.** Your current college may offer your best chance of landing a full-time position, but it's not your only chance. In fact, statistically, you're probably more likely to be hired at one of the nation's 1,200 or so other community colleges. You just have to be willing to move near one of them.

I understand that many adjuncts, perhaps most, have family or other ties to the area where they live. If that describes you, your only realistic option is to follow the advice above: Get as much experience as you can and make yourself as indispensable as possible, in the hope that you'll eventually land a tenure-track job without having to move.

If, however, you're in a position to relocate, then obviously that increases your odds mathematically. And if you're willing to go just about anywhere, then you stand a very good chance of getting hired—someplace. Even in this wasteland of an economy, there are still scores of community-college jobs advertised each fall, representing almost every major discipline.

**Improve your application.** Spend some time working on your job materials, both by improving the way you present yourself on paper and adding to the activities you can include.

First, consult different sources to make sure your cover letter, CV, résumé, teaching statement—and whatever else you might send—are as complete, well-written, and effective as possible and follow standard formats. *The Chronicle* archives contain a wealth of information on this topic.

Next, cultivate experiences worth mentioning. You already have your academic degrees and whatever teaching experience you've managed to acquire. Continue adding to that teaching experience—you can't have too much—while accumulating the types of voluntary service activities outlined above.

One thing I haven't mentioned yet is professional development. While it isn't vital for you to have publications, it certainly doesn't hurt, especially if you can take things you've already written (like your dissertation, for example, or other graduate-school papers) and turn them into publishable articles. Otherwise, remain active in your discipline by reading to stay current and by attending conferences whenever possible. Giving a few conference talks would also help a great deal because presentations are to community-college faculty members (most of whom publish little, if at all) what publications are to research faculty members.

All of those activities will help to enrich your professional life and provide compelling reasons for search committees to take your application seriously. And they're all things you can do, or at least get started on, over the summer. It's time to get busy. The first applications are usually due in November.

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