

Summer PROfessional Development

Session 7: Adjuncting and Part-time Lecturing Opportunities

Friday, August 14, 2015

This week's session focused on adjunct/lecturer teaching jobs as a way to gain experience in running your own classroom. We first discussed information that Colleen compiled about the different types of adjunct/lecturer type positions at local institutions (Cornell, Ithaca College, SUNY Cortland, and TC3), as well as general resources available for finding and understanding ads and openings for these types of positions. We then spent most of the meeting hearing from our panel, Vered Tzin, Shoshanna Cole, Meghnaa Tallapragada, and Julie Nevins. Some points they discussed are listed below:

Vered (post doc in plant science at BTI, taught Bio 101 for TC3 as an adjunct, a two semester commitment taught in the evenings):

- She emphasized that this was a good opportunity for an international postdoc, as the program was run through BTI so she didn't have to jump through hoops with her visa.
- She spent about 10 hours per week on this course, which was co-taught with another adjunct, and that it was a challenge to balance teaching with research and personal time.
- Most students in this course had little biology experience, so it was a good teaching challenge to figure out how to distill information in a way they would understand.

Shoshanna (recent PhD grad from Cornell in space sciences, taught as an adjunct in the dept. of physics and astronomy at IC):

- She co-taught with a tenured professor for two semesters (negotiated with her advisor!); the first semester they split lectures and grading while she learned the ropes, the second semester she was the professor of record, teaching the lectures while the other professor handled the grading.
- She made an effort to become part of the community in her department at IC and found the other faculty there to be very welcoming; they were also willing to help a great deal when she began preparing job applications; she feels that making an effort to be part of the department while she was an adjunct contributed directly to her hiring for a full-time visiting position (in a small department, being liked and feeling like part of the group are important!).

-She made some recommendations about the best timing to pursue this type of experience as a grad student: NOT while taking courses of your own, not during your final semester when you are trying to write, but it's never too early to join the "pool of lecturers" at an institution, just to be on their radar should a position open. She also emphasized that you need to be aware of your advisor's expectations for your research progress.

Meghnaa (current PhD student at Cornell in communications, served as a visiting lecturer in communications at Cornell):

-She had TAed communications courses on oral presentation several times but wanted a more challenging teaching experience.

-Her advisor made a course available to all grad students as teachers but ultimately chose her as the instructor; she had two grad student TAs, so she focused on teaching not grading.

-She worked with/convincing her advisor to allow her to restructure the course with her CTE training in mind.

-Because she is an international student on a student visa, she had to negotiate how to be a visiting lecturer (officially it became a sort of internship).

-Teaching the course got a bunch of undergrads interested in her research, so she now has 9 undergraduate research assistants for the fall -- an unexpected benefit.

Julie (recent PhD grad from Cornell in nutrition, interviewed to teach biology labs at SUNY Cortland):

-She found the position by contacting the biology department chair directly (there were no postings on the website) -- turned out they needed to fill a position that fell through, so the process was very rapid (she applied for the position in June to start teaching this fall)

-At Cortland, only tenure track faculty teach lecture courses (reflects variability of organization at different institutions)

-Her public service announcement: she was complimented on her cover letter and asked to know what in particular was good about it. She was told that the fact that she had clearly looked at the department's website, read their mission statement, and chosen and mentioned specific courses she was willing and qualified to teach set her letter apart.

Catch-all points from discussion:

-For grad students, the type of appointment you have can limit the number of hours you are allowed to be paid to work as a teacher (see:

<http://gradschool.cornell.edu/requirements/academic-requirements/employment-limits>); both grad students and postdocs may

need to negotiate with their advisors to create time/avoid funding conflicts.

- The time frame for hiring at state funded institutions can be unexpectedly late in the year, since state budget decisions are made in April. It's never too late to contact a department about potential openings for adjuncts or lecturers, even if they have nothing posted online.

- It was emphasized that these positions are almost always underpaid, and therefore should be sought as an opportunity to bolster your teaching portfolio and develop teaching skills rather than as a way to make a living (depending on the position and institution, other benefits like healthcare or retirement contributions may be a perk).

- Other local institutions that are worth checking out: Elmira College (contrary to what's posted on their website, you do NOT need a nursing degree to teach there), Corning Community College, SUNY Binghamton

- The Graduate School really wants to help you succeed, so reach out to them for help!