



Putting together a successful faculty job application, including tips on writing research, teaching, and diversity statements

Ideas and advice from a Rising Star Webinar on 7/22/20

Applying for a faculty position is daunting. You need to grab the search committee's attention in a cover letter, and wow them with teaching and research statements. An expert panel gave us tips from what to put in your cover letter to crafting compelling research and teaching statements. Lastly, we discussed what a diversity statement is, and what to include and not include in it. We also discussed questions from our Rising Stars!

Panelists

- **Avery August**, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, HHMI Professor, and Professor of Immunology in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology
- **Américo Lopez-Yglesias**, former Cornell Rising Star and Assistant Professor of Microbiology and Immunology, Indiana University
- **Colin Parrish**, Professor of Virology in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, former Director of the Baker Institute for Animal Health
- **Praveen Sethupathy**, Director of the Center for Vertebrate Genomics, Associate Professor in the Department of Biomedical Sciences
- **Chelsea Specht**, Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Barbara McClintock Professor of Plant Biology in the School of Integrative Plant Sciences
- **Marjolein van der Meulen**, James M. and Marsha McCormick Director and Swanson Professor of Biomedical Engineering, and Co-PI and co-founder of the former NSF-funded CU-ADVANCE Center

Pearls of wisdom

Take the time to look into the department and university where you are applying, to determine their approach (for example to diversity) when crafting statements. —*Avery August*

Invest time in writing cover letters. Make sure you take the time needed to research each department and tailor your letter to make sure it is clear how you fit. —*Americo Lopez-Yglesias*

Having funding is not critical, but can be helpful. Know what the department is looking for. —*Colin Parrish*

Think about added value you bring to the department and emphasize it. Explain what sets you apart from the other applicants. —*Praveen Sethupathy*

Don't discount applying for very specific calls that don't perfectly fit what you do. Think about how you could expand the horizons of that department, or any department you apply to.—*Chelsea Specht*

When writing your research statement, think about your short and long game research plan. Balance risky and safe projects. Clearly demonstrate your vision/passion. Differentiate yourself from your postdoctoral mentor.—*Marjolein van der Meulen*

Q&A:

How critical is it to have funding at the time of submitting applications?

That depends on where you apply. Some places expect it. For others such as some teaching positions it isn't necessary, and may even hurt. Clinical departments tend to more highly value already being funded.

What format should I put my CV in? Is the format important? What needs to be in the CV?

Organize it well to make sure it is **free of typos**. Highlight your accomplishments, and don't devalue important awards by padding your CV with "fluffy stuff." Put the most important information up front. Don't highlight things you don't have; for example, don't put an Awards section if you don't have any. Don't point out deficiencies, committees will find them. However, you can explain/spin gaps or challenges in your statements/letters from references/cover letter to explain without drawing out negatives.

What do search committees look for? What counts the most? What should I make sure that I include in the cover letter? How long should it be?

Make your cover letter short and to the point. Search committees have hundreds of applications to read, so make it easy for them. Target about 5 paragraphs or one to 1-1/2 pages. Make it pop at the beginning or they may not make it past the first paragraph. Highlight big achievements and how you fit with department priorities, ongoing research, and mission. Describe potential collaborations that you can envision. You may want to think outside the department where you are applying as well to show cross-disciplinary potential, but don't make it seem that you can't collaborate with anyone inside the department either. Do not simply repeat your CV.

Regarding the research statement, how "big" should we go with our proposed projects? I would like to show vision without proposing something that the committee will view as too far-fetched, so how can I strike that balance? How many years ahead should I think of for my statement? How much of my research statement should be on what I have done versus my short term 5-year (first R01) plan? Should the plan be a Specific Aims page, like for an NIH R01?

Balance is key. Discuss long and short-term goals, as well as risky and safe projects. Don't give them "just" an R01, but put it in context and make it clear you are thinking of the long game. Thus, you can show big picture, some details for the short-term plan, and still provide overall vision and "big picture." Ask for help. Have people read it. Don't undersell your accomplishments!

What is a diversity statement? How much should be about my story versus my philosophy?

Your views on diversity and blending that with the mission of the department and university are key, but if your story helped shape your views then that may be important to talk about. Highlight anything you have specifically done to promote diversity including training individuals of diverse backgrounds. Check out Cornell's site for more information: <https://facultydevelopment.cornell.edu/department-resources/recruitment/contribution-to-diversity/>

How do I navigate/tailor faculty applications during the COVID pandemic?

Do not be afraid to explain how this has impacted you, but don't use it as an excuse. Clearly explain the timing related to your research training and the impact the pandemic has had. Most importantly, highlight how you have adapted. Show them you know how to face and tackle adversity. Use this as an opportunity to showcase your creativity and perseverance. Everyone is affected, so you are not alone. There is a hiring freeze in many places, which means there will be a glut of applicants. Take the time to make yourself really stand out.

What if I don't have classroom teaching experience? How do I write a teaching statement? What goes in a teaching statement? Should I propose a new course? What is a teaching philosophy?

Think about translatable skills and highlight evidence that shows that people you have trained were successful. Explain what "successful" looks like and detail what role you played in getting those trainees there. Explain how you have adapted to evaluations or feedback. If you do have classroom experience, highlight it. If not, talk about preparation workshops or training that you have done, and mention things you have done that were similar to teaching (e.g. putting together and delivering seminars). Look carefully at the job description and know the expectations. You can tailor your statement to the courses/teaching load of the institution you are applying to. You may want to pitch a course, or you may want to indicate core or especially courses you are prepared to teach.

How do I decide who to choose as references?

Think about who will support you and write very strong letters. You may use these letters to address shortcomings in your application so you don't need to highlight them yourself. Be sure to discuss this with letter writers with whom you are very comfortable and you know will be supportive. Discuss with them how you are "selling" yourself and what you want them to emphasize. Sending a 1-page statement of the things you would like highlighted or explained to these references is often very helpful for them. Also provide all your materials (CV, statements). If a reference suggests a position is less good of a fit than you believe, consider replacing with a different letter writer. Their heart may not be in the game to be fully supportive. Don't let them discourage you from applying and don't let them bring your application down!

Are there resources with more information on what constitutes a good faculty position application?

Here are a few resources with more information.

<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2014/08/writing-winning-cover-letter>

<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2001/05/transition-academia-ii-teaching-portfolio>

<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2006/04/writing-teaching-statement>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/06/10/how-write-effective-diversity-statement-essay>