

Academic Jobs at Liberal Arts Colleges

Meredith L. Greer
Bates College, Lewiston, Maine,
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Link to Slides: <https://tinyurl.com/LiberalArtsAtECW>





Why talk about Liberal Arts Colleges?

- We are often hiring!
 - ... especially in math biology, applied math, stats, and similar fields
- We are different from research universities
 - This talk will describe some differences, and I am here to answer questions
- People coming from large universities may not know as much about us





Features of liberal arts colleges

- Typically for undergraduates only
- Broad curricula include many disciplines
 - Usually, students also have a major
 - Students may not declare their major till late sophomore year
- Often, all or most students live on campus
- Faculty-student interactions tend to be prized



Faculty focus at liberal arts colleges

- Some campuses prioritize teaching, with little to no research expectation
- Other campuses place strong expectations on both research and teaching
 - These campuses may have lighter teaching obligations
- Faculty may be expected to advise undergraduate research projects via summer research, thesis projects, course-based research projects, or other approaches
- Faculty may also serve as academic advisers, helping students select courses and plan summer or postgraduate work





What does “liberal arts” mean?

- The word “liberal” does not relate to political meanings of “liberal”
- Wikipedia and Encyclopedia Britannica: "college or university curriculum aimed at imparting general knowledge and developing general intellectual capacities, in contrast to a professional, vocational, or technical curriculum"
- Ancient Greek meanings:
 - “Quadrivium”: astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, music
 - “Trivium”: rhetoric, grammar, dialectic/logic





More about teaching at a liberal arts college

- Classes are typically small (< 30 students, maybe notably less)
- There is significant emphasis on
 - faculty connection with students
 - continual building of skill in teaching
 - ongoing development of course material
- Students are often very enthusiastic about course work
 - ... but not every student, and not in every course
- My newer colleagues emphasize the time spent working with students: a 25-person class at a liberal arts college feels different to a professor than a 25-person class at many universities





More about research at a liberal arts college

- Research expectations vary widely
 - They depend on the college, and on the department
- Types of research expectations to ask about
 - Faculty research with students, and faculty research without students
 - Community engagement
 - Grants: necessary? appreciated but not necessary? campus support for applying?
 - Conference attendance and presentations
- Time management, and protecting research time, is crucial
 - ... especially balancing research with teaching, advising, and LIFE





Fun stuff to mention

- Committee work shows you how things work around campus
- At a small college, you are likely to make friends with folks who do a wide variety of things
 - This can lead to new and exciting research ideas
 - On a personal level - this can be wonderful, especially if you are moving somewhere new
- You may want to get involved with campus sports, arts, administration, or other activities - and small campuses often provide these opportunities





If you are applying

- Pay attention to materials requested: they may differ from other jobs
- Cover letters should show your understanding of liberal arts expectations
 - Emphasize work with undergraduates
 - You may discuss interest in teaching many different courses, advising student activities, and more
- Teaching statements are very important
 - It is OK if you have not taught before: show how you have thought about teaching, or done things like tutoring or leading review sessions
 - Give specific examples wherever possible
- Research statements may be read by people in a variety of fields
 - Readers appreciate understanding the main ideas of your research





Thank You! And: Questions

- Thanks to Stacey Smith? for the invitation to speak
- Thanks to Stephanie Dodson at Colby College, and Laura Storch at Bates College, for sharing their observations about liberal arts college
- Thanks to all of you for participating
- What are your questions? 😊



