

Career Connections

College Teaching

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

College teaching is a challenging, satisfying career. It requires passion for ideas and the search for knowledge, commitment to and skill in teaching, and the capacity to live and work effectively in an academic community. To be a successful college teacher, you need to be master of and passionate about what you teach. Intellectual curiosity and a love of learning lie at the heart of this profession. The traditional route to acquiring and demonstrating this mastery is a graduate or professional degree. Thus, one part of preparing for a career in college teaching is preparing for graduate or professional school.

College teaching is one form of post-secondary teaching. Post-secondary education takes place in a wide variety of institutions. Some, like Hanover College, serve undergraduate students. Research universities offer a mix of undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, and their faculty members typically teach both graduate and undergraduate students. Community colleges typically provide the first two years of post-secondary education, sometimes as preparation for transfer to a baccalaureate program and sometimes as vocational preparation (e.g. licensed practical nursing).

The work of college teachers typically includes a mix of teaching, research, and service. Teaching includes classroom teaching, advising, and working with students individually. Research (or creative work, depending on the discipline) involves original contributions to the discipline, whether by conducting geological research or writing a play. Service includes the ways that faculty members contribute to the department, institution, and wider community. For example, faculty members represent the department at admissions events and organize programs for majors. They serve on committees and in roles such as faculty representative to the athletic conference. They extend the resources of the institution to the wider community through consulting and service. The distribution of time among teaching, research, and service depends on the institution.

Success as a college teacher requires skills beyond the academic credentials earned in graduate school. Institutions of higher education have specific missions that determine programs and priorities. For example, a college serving under-prepared students needs faculty to teach, advise, and design programs that ensure success for its students. A research university needs faculty to attract grant support for cutting-edge research. Thus, college teachers must be willing to understand and embrace the mission of their institution and align their work with that mission. Teaching requires the ability to explain material clearly, design courses to facilitate learning, and evaluate student work. College teaching involves significant autonomy and responsibility; there is considerable latitude in designing courses and in selecting research projects. Thus, self-direction, self-discipline, and self-reflection are essential. College teaching requires strong interpersonal skills in order to work successfully with students and colleagues.

The goals of the College Teaching Career Connections program are 1) to provide you with an understanding of the world of post-secondary teaching, including the requirements, expectations, ethics and values, and work of this profession, 2) to help you explore how well this field fits your interests, values, and aspirations, and 3) to provide suggestions on preparing for graduate school and a subsequent career as a teacher at the post-secondary level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Exploring Options

An important indicator of aptitude for college teaching is your academic record: your major and overall GPA and your overall academic record (the number of withdrawals, underloads, etc). If you are not only doing well

academically but are thriving on the challenge of pushing yourself intellectually and academically, then college teaching is a possibility for you.

You can explore the world of college teaching by talking with Hanover College faculty members. They can provide insights into the world of graduate school, the work of college teaching, and how to evaluate your interest in and aptitude for the field. The Career Center has many resources for you. You can browse resources about academic careers. Robert L. Peters' book, *Getting What You Came For*, is an especially useful guide about graduate school and academic careers. The Career Center maintains a binder of resources that will be helpful in your exploration, including names of alumni who teach in different kinds of institutions. Duggan Library has a collection of books on teaching. You can also browse the major newspaper covering the field, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. It includes informative articles as well as job ads, which can help you learn about the range of openings in the field and the qualifications required.

Since college teaching typically requires graduate education, the other important area to explore is your interest in and aptitude for graduate study. Faculty members in your major are an important resource about graduate school. The Career Center provides good materials, workshops, and individual guidance about graduate school. Most graduate schools require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and the Career Center has resources on how to prepare for the GRE, as well as resources listing every accredited graduate or professional program in North America. As you evaluate graduate schools, explore what resources they offer to prepare college teachers, such as seminars on teaching or opportunities to be a teaching assistant (TA) or instructor. The Career Center hosts a graduate school fair every fall that will help you frame questions and focus your efforts, even if the schools you are targeting aren't represented.

Two useful websites to explore are www.gre.org, which offers free timed GRE practice tests as well as information about the test itself, and www.petersons.com, which offers online sorting of graduate programs by various categories.

Academics

The academic program will be the center of your preparation for a career in college teaching. Many people choose to teach college students because they love their discipline and being a part of an academic community. College teaching allows them to continue to do what they love for their life's work.

Choosing Your Major

Often, a person earns undergraduate and graduate degrees in the same field, so the major you choose is probably the field you plan to teach. However, graduate schools often consider well-qualified applicants who have sufficient coursework in required areas even if they don't have a major in that area. Choose a major that excites you and challenges you intellectually and academically.

Courses Required for Admission to Graduate and Professional Schools

Whatever major you choose, you will want to select courses carefully in conversation with your academic advisor. Often, graduate schools require particular courses, beyond those required for the major. Most graduate schools require a strong understanding of the methods and theories that undergird the discipline. You will also want to be sure to acquire any technological skills expected by your field, such as use of lab equipment, computer software, or research databases. Conducting original research for your Independent Study is an important way to demonstrate your intellectual capacity and skill in these areas. No later than your junior year, you should be investigating the requirements for admission to particular graduate programs that interest you so that you can arrange to take the required courses.

Most college teachers develop expertise in a particular sub-field within the discipline, such as cellular biology. As you pursue your major, you will want to gain a broad understanding of the discipline as well as begin to focus on the areas to which you are most strongly attracted. Your advisor can suggest how to balance these somewhat competing goals.

Elective Courses

Choose rigorous electives that complement your major. For example, social science students may benefit from advanced statistics courses, while humanities students may benefit from additional language study. Since there is considerable competition to get into good graduate schools, transcripts are examined closely. Substantive, rigorous graded electives will demonstrate your intellectual capacity. If you plan to teach in a liberal arts college, a well-rounded liberal arts curriculum will be to your advantage.

Other Academic Experiences

Conducting and presenting original research or creative work is extremely beneficial in being admitted to graduate school. Aim to get involved in research as early as possible in your career at Hanover. Talk with your professors about the opportunities in your department. Volunteer your services for a faculty member's research project or ask upperclass students if there are ways to be involved in their research. Apply for research assistant positions in your field at Hanover or elsewhere.

In some disciplines there are summer programs for undergraduates to gain research experience. Ask your advisor or contact professional associations for ideas. A key opportunity for science students is the National Science Foundation's program, Research Experiences for Undergraduates; see <http://www.nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu/start.htm>.

Your Independent Study is an important research opportunity, and you will benefit by presenting or publishing it. You will probably want to begin the project during your junior year so there is time to develop and conduct the project, then submit a conference proposal. Many Hanover students have presented their research at the Butler Conference; your advisor can suggest other options in your field.

Throughout your academic experience, work to gain a firm understanding of the ethical principles that guide college teachers. Common examples include integrity in the use of sources, research ethics, fair and accurate evaluation (i.e., in grading students and evaluating peers), and relating professionally to students and peers.

Finally, drop by the Career Center to learn about writing curriculum vitae, an academic resume of your experiences, which will be part of your application to graduate school.

Co-Curricular Activities

Activities outside the academic realm can help you acquire a variety of skills and perspectives, such as public speaking and leadership, which will serve you as a college teacher. These activities can help you gain a better understanding of your own interests and aptitudes. They can help you develop vocational interests that provide balance in your life and nourish parts of you that aren't "fed" by your discipline. They might strengthen your graduate school application. Certainly they will help you understand students better. You will need to choose among the many options open to you at Hanover; you want these activities to support rather than detract from your academic commitments.

On-Campus Activities

Serving as a representative on a faculty committee or college-wide task force is one of the best ways to learn about the wider life of an institution. (Student Senate usually makes these nominations, so ask them to consider you.) You will learn about one area, such as the curriculum or faculty evaluation, as well as see the work that faculty do "behind the scenes" to make a college work. Get involved in a faculty search in the department. Attending the candidates' presentations and being part of the student group that meets candidates will help you see how to be effective in interviews. Participation in the activities of your discipline, such as *Kennings* or *The Hanover Historical Review*, will give you experience in the field and be helpful in gaining admission to graduate school. Get involved in departmental activities: offer to help hang shows in the art gallery, talk to prospective students, or organize a program for students interested in the major. Become active in student government. These activities will help you hone skills in collaboration and leadership that are essential to effective college teaching. You will

also be exposed to situations where the values and ethics that guide the academic environment are put into practice.

Off-Campus Activities

Becoming a student member of the professional organization in your field is a good way to become acquainted with the opportunities and expectations in the field. Student memberships and conference fees are reasonable, and most professional organizations offer programs and opportunities designed for undergraduates. Other off-campus activities, such as volunteering to lead nature hikes at a local park or serving as a museum guide, can give you good experience in your discipline.

Work Experiences

On-Campus Jobs

Tutoring experience, whether paid or volunteer, is valuable in testing your ability to explain material as well as your patience in working with someone who struggles with material that likely comes easily to you. Experience as a lab assistant, research assistant, or student worker for a professor can help you understand the work of college teachers and acquire useful skills and perspectives. Becoming a Peer Advisor or Resident Assistant will help you learn about working in the academic environment and give you experience in working with college students. Other jobs at Hanover, whether in admissions or the development office, can help you understand the workings of these vital support areas.

Related Summer Jobs

Summer jobs will grow most commonly out of your academic discipline. For example, you may find employment in a laboratory or work in a government office that compiles statistics. Some positions are available for tutors and resident hall counselors in programs for various student groups, such as science programs for high school students or residential camping programs based in the arts. Often, faculty members are aware of good opportunities in the discipline. Since graduate schools are very interested in what research and presentations you have done, it would benefit you to find ways to continue these activities throughout the summer, even if only on a limited basis. Also, you may wish to spend some time in the summer before your senior year preparing for the GRE.

Internships

As preparation for college teaching, your four years of experience as a student are like an internship. You are gaining experience in the work of your discipline. This experience, plus the other experiences recommended to you in the College Teaching Career Connections program and by your faculty members, should prepare you well for this field. The only situation that might warrant a more specialized internship would be if the graduate program you are seeking encourages internships. Faculty members can provide useful information about this.

Mentors

The word “mentor” comes from Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Odysseus entrusts the care and education of his son, Telemachus, to a loyal and wise advisor whose name is Mentor. In preparing for a career in college teaching, you might seek such an advisor, someone with whom you can talk frankly about your interests, ambitions, and concerns, and from whom you can accept advice, feedback, and direction. Faculty advisors can serve as mentors to students entering their field, and the Career Center can link students with alumni mentors. Mentors can be useful in your years at Hanover, but also as you begin the graduate school trek and the final job search for a position as a college teacher.

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