

Tips for Applying for Tenure Track Positions at Prairie State College

Prairie State College is a comprehensive community college in Chicago Heights, Illinois, a suburb about twenty miles south of Chicago. We have a small but very diverse and dynamic faculty, with 85 tenured or tenure track faculty. The majority of our students are enrolled in college transfer programs (Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Fine Arts and Associate in Arts in Teaching), which are designed to replicate the first two years of a four-year baccalaureate degree. Many students are also enrolled in one of our degree or certificate career programs, ranging from health careers (e.g., nursing, dental hygiene, surgical technology) to Business and IT careers (e.g., webmaster, network specialist, accounting technician) and Industrial Technology programs (e.g., welding, HVAC, automotive, industrial electricity). These certificate and degree programs are designed to prepare students for immediate employment.

Our selection process has three stages:

1. A Search Committee, composed of 3-4 faculty members, reviews the applications and selects 8-10 candidates, who they feel are the best match for the position, to bring on campus for an interview. All of our interviews include a teaching sample. In some cases, the faculty on the Search Committee ask the candidates to prepare a teaching demonstration on a particular topic. In other cases, candidates are asked to give a more impromptu demonstration. At the conclusion of this first round of interviews, the Search Committee selects 3-5 candidates to forward to the appropriate dean and the Vice President of Academic Affairs.
2. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and the dean interview the finalists. If you are invited for a second interview, you will be asked to submit your official transcripts, to complete an official application form and to present an annotated list of 3-5 references. The Vice President and Dean call the references and select one candidate to recommend to the President and the Board for Trustees.
3. The President reviews the final candidates with the administration and makes a decision on his recommendation for appointment. That recommendation goes to the Board of Trustees, who have the authority to hire all full-time faculty and administrators at the College.

Following are the kinds of questions candidates frequently ask about applying for tenure track positions at PSC.

What are the minimum academic requirements?

All faculty who teach in the transfer programs and most who teach in the career programs must have a minimum of a master's degree in the field, including at least 18 graduate hours in the discipline. However, there are a few career programs (e.g., welding, surgical technology, IT) that only require a bachelor's degree, with work experience and appropriate certifications. The counselor positions require a master's degree in counseling. Degrees that are designed to prepare students for counseling positions in elementary and secondary schools are not appropriate for college counseling positions.

How important is teaching or counseling experience?

Teaching or counseling experience, especially at a community college, will strengthen your application. If you have previously taught college classes or served as a counselor, we are eager to learn about your effectiveness in the classroom or counseling office from your references and student evaluations. However, we have hired applicants who have just completed graduate school and who have little or no teaching or counseling experience. Our interview process is designed to learn about your potential as a professor or counselor and we don't discriminate against those who have just begun their careers. On the

contrary, we've hired a number of "diamonds in the rough" who have become highly successful professors or counselors at PSC.

I've heard that community colleges actually don't want professors or counselors who have Ph.D.'s. Is that true at Prairie State?

Absolutely not. We have hired a number of excellent faculty members who came to us with their Ph.D. completed or in progress. What matters most to us is a candidate's interest and abilities in teaching or counseling. Because we are a teaching college, we seek professors who share a passion for teaching and counselors who are committed to working with students. We've found a number of candidates with doctorates who love to teach or counsel and have chosen to build their career at a teaching institution.

I love to teach, but I would also like to continue to research and write. How is that viewed?

Very positively. A few of our faculty have taken that path. They typically do not choose to teach "overload" or to teach during the summer, freeing up time for their research and writing.

According to the ads and the website, I need to submit both a letter of application and my resume. How important is the letter? The resume?

Extremely important. Remember that the professors on the Search Committee select those candidates whom they are going to interview based on these documents. They look for candidates who write well and address their qualifications for the position in their letter. Thus, a generic letter that has been developed to send out to large numbers of institutions is quite unimpressive. Even worse is the letter that refers to the college by the wrong name! Candidates who are serious about teaching or counseling at PSC should submit a letter that indicates they have spent the time and effort to learn about the College, the position and the credentials and qualities the College is seeking. Needless to say, letters that are riddled with spelling, grammatical and/or typographical errors are never given serious consideration by the Committee.

As noted above, Prairie State is interested in candidates with doctorates that have already been earned or are in progress. However, candidates whose letter and resume focus only—or primarily—on their research interests are generally disqualified from further consideration by the Search Committee, because they fear that the candidate would not be a good match for a teaching institution.

I've changed jobs frequently. Should I write about that in my letter?

Yes. If there is anything on your resume that you think might raise questions, it is always best to address that issue in your letter. For example, if you've been employed for three-four years at a community college in rural Nebraska, you might want to indicate what sparked your interest in changing jobs (e.g., family in the Chicago area, recent marriage and spouse is employed in Chicago, desire to live in a more urban area).

I know a dean (or other administrator or faculty member) who works at the College. I realize how important networking is. Should I list them as a reference and ask them to speak to members of the Search Committee on my behalf?

No! Unlike the business arena, where this sort of networking is typically important, it can actually be viewed as a negative in our search process. The administration and faculty have a very close and positive working relationship at Prairie State but faculty serving on the Search Committee understandably want to conduct their part of the search process independent from what may be viewed as outside pressure. Thus it is important to invest your energy in presenting yourself well in the application materials rather than in networking.

Do I need to submit letters of reference with my application?

No. We understand that it is difficult for candidates to request personalized letters of recommendation for every position they seek. If you have generic letters of reference, they can, of course, be submitted with your application. However, we do not require references until you are being considered as a finalist for the position.

Can I fill out the application online?

No, but you are not asked to fill out this form unless you are selected for an interview.

I don't have an official copy of my graduate transcripts and I don't have my undergraduate transcripts at all. Is that a problem?

No. Because we realize how time-consuming and expensive it is to obtain official transcripts for every application, we only ask for **un**official transcripts when you initially apply. If you are invited for a second interview, you will be required to submit your official transcripts at that time. It is always a good idea to submit both your graduate and undergraduate transcripts. The latter are not **required** for application, but it does assist the Committee if they can also see your undergraduate coursework.

I live out of state and can't afford to come for the interview. Do you provide any assistance to offset my expenses?

Yes. We realize that interviewing can be expensive and we don't want to disqualify good candidates because of the high cost of travel. We reimburse candidates for up to \$500 (on rare occasions we approve a slightly higher amount) for those candidates who are coming from a distance and submit receipts of their expenses. We arrange one night at a local hotel for the interview; any additional nights and/or alternative hotels require advance approval for reimbursement. If you are flying into Chicago, we recommend arranging your flight to Midway Airport if possible, because it is a quicker and easier commute to campus than O'Hare. Within the limitations of the \$500 allotment, we permit candidates to rent a car for the day to provide transportation to and from the airport to campus and the hotel. If you are asked for an interview, call Rose King (708-709-3541), Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, to assist with your travel arrangements.

We do not provide any travel reimbursement for candidates who live in the Chicagoland area. Candidates who live within a few hours of campus (e.g., Milwaukee, Ann Arbor, Indianapolis, Iowa City) are asked to drive, and mileage and meals will be reimbursed.