

Direct Quotes from the Field: Scholars from across the US in Teaching Focused Positions on Tips for Applying to a Small Liberal Arts College (SLAC)

- “I addressed my lack of personal SLAC experience (as student or faculty) in my cover letter but mentioned things I know about them and why I value those things. Most surprising to me was the involvement of undergraduates in choosing who would get the job. (Humanities field) I think it's important also to note that many many SLACs are in small towns and can be feel isolated.”
- “In SC, social sciences: passion for teaching but still interested in research, service-oriented person who wishes to contribute to the growth of the university as a whole. Campus interview: teaching demo needs to be hands-on and engaging, not a lecture, research presentation needs to tie back to teaching in some way. Mention interest in undergraduate mentoring and research, or at least knowledge of such efforts on campus.”
- “The short answer is that we look for people who have done their research and want to be here. For me, at least, the most common pitfall is submitting a really generic application. The long answer: We're teaching focused and just reviewed 60+ apps. For us (psychology), it's really important that applicants address the specifics of our posting. We're a diverse institution with a somewhat unique student body. If they don't address their experience or desire to work in such an institution, it doesn't make a good impression. It's viewed as too general/generic. If they spend tons of time discussing their research and little discussing their teaching, that doesn't work either. Sometimes someone's research isn't feasible (or doesn't seem so), given our resources. For example, we don't have a neuroimaging lab. If that's a candidate's area of scholarship, they must explicitly address how they would carry out their research on our campus. Perhaps they have access to data from another institution or are working on a grant that would fund the equipment, etc.”
- “Convince us that you want and can do your research at a small place with only undergrads. Demonstrate teaching ability and interest. show us that you've done your research on what the SLAC is that you're applying to, what they offer, etc. don't spend all your time talking as if all the students will go on to grad school in your field because they won't. if we mention something in the job posting, you'd better take the time to address it in your application (this goes for all jobs!). tell us what kinds of courses you're prepared to teach, and make sure you've got lower level 'gen ed' type courses and upper level courses, but remember, we're a SLAC, so don't assume our majors will have taken multivariate calculus, etc. don't assume that we're not interested in your research, or that we don't care about your publication record, etc -- faculty at SLACs (this depends on the school of course) still do high profile work!... if you need a fancy tool and the SLAC doesn't have it, explicitly address this. It's NOT a deal breaker, but show us that you've thought about other options, collaborations, etc...some people assume all our students are "high achieving" -- our students are all awesome in their own ways but some need more support, all need personal attention”
- “We have a large population of first generation students, and a very diverse student body, so my top concern for candidates is a clear commitment to supporting students, and a

demonstration that the candidate supports all kinds of students not just those students who are already good at "doing school" ...I am fond of asking about the candidates experiences with students, stories about challenges with students, and successes. Something like "Tell a particular story about a (strong and/or a challenging) student you have worked with over the last year..."

- “Biology faculty at a teaching-focused metro U: recognize that several other applicants will have lecture experience, so don't write about mentoring research students only and assume that's enough. If you are going into teaching you need to show you can teach. I taught for Kaplan during my Ph.D. along with TAing labs, but I really became competitive only after my teaching postdoc where I ran my own lecture courses...startup expectations - I'm in a subfield where hundreds of thousands or more is normal, and I got about 10k (which was OK because we already had the equipment I needed).”
- “red flags include: 1. candidate has no idea what the liberal arts are or how to teach them (perhaps uses buzz words or uses "liberal" as in political ideology to get at this point, which is just not accurate. this elision indicates that not only do they not know but they didn't do their homework either). 2. candidate doesn't have a robust research agenda. although teaching is really important at SLAC and teaching-focused institutions, I would still argue that the majority of what we are evaluated on is our research, publications, grants, etc. (one candidate actually told me, "I don't like research so this job is perfect for me" ok... research isn't my favorite thing either, but it's still a MAJOR part of our job).”
- “A candidate who specifically addresses all the criteria in the job ad, and has done their research about why they want to join our faculty and what they can contribute, is much more likely to get consideration. We are looking for people to fill critical roles among the faculty we already have, and the ads are written with all of that in mind. At many SLACs nowadays, we rarely to get to make new hires, so it's a big deal when we do. At a SLAC, you have to be able to wear lots of hats--excellence in teaching a variety of students is a must (a well-composed teaching portfolio is a crucial part of the application package), but we also seek evidence that someone will be a good, active community member (on and off campus), and can continue a productive research program at our institution and ideally bring new opportunities (funding, research for students, etc.). It's important to demonstrate that your research is amenable to including undergraduates, and that you are keen to mentor undergrad students in and out of the classroom, students who may have widely varying abilities.”
- “We look for teaching experience, and barring that, evidence that they are prepared to hit the ground running when it comes to teaching, especially managing a full teaching load and tenure-track requirements (which are relatively low in research, high in service). Some of my colleagues are interested in things like thoughtful assessment and structuring classes (one of our common questions is how would one differentiate between a lower level class and an upper division elective, or a general ed class versus a majors class, etc). I'm interested in how candidates address diversity - what that means to them, how to create an inclusive and accommodating classroom, etc. We want to see the courses listed in the job ad addressed directly in the teaching statement, and if we don't ask for one (each search is different!) then it is a must in the cover letter. Research is secondary to

teaching, but it is still there - show us how you can handle that! Time management is key, incorporating research into teaching, etc.

We are also interested in how people plan to help recruit students into our major. How do you get students jazzed about sociology (my field)? What student development are you interested in doing?

We have a strong union and a degree of faculty governance, what service to the university will you give?

And finally, we're not in our own little silos. How will you make a good colleague?

Honestly, candidates from really prestigious schools will have to work a little to convince us that they really want to be at a teaching-oriented school. Show us a passion for undergraduate education! Why do you want to help the fine high-B-range students of Minnesota obtain a bachelors degree? How do you see the role of public higher education going forward? How will you contribute to our mission? We've tossed out applications that virtually ignore teaching or whose teaching statements are boilerplate or clearly show a lack of understanding of what teaching, and teaching here, is all about."

- "I'm currently on a search committee for a TT position at the SLAC where I teach. We've asked candidate questions about mentoring for undergraduate research, as well as comfort being generally available/present for students. We are also seeking someone who can wear "multiple hats" in the department and is flexible in terms of teaching assignments. We are also looking for someone who may be open to interdisciplinary partnerships and experiential educational opportunities. That said, they do need a research agenda but also realize that we may not have the institutional resources to fund/support large-scale empirical studies."
- "Get teaching experience as in adjunct. We like someone who has been instructor in record. This also gives you points to talk about on your interview. We ask about a time when you had a conflict with a student. We don't want to hear about in the lab, we want a story about in the classroom. Also think about how you are going to provide service to the institution. Here service is more than just sitting on a couple of committees. Think about things you are passionate about and how you can bring that to the students or community. We also want to know that you are invested in didn't success. That goes with being available and mentoring as well as in the classroom. We often look for the passion even if the teaching is not excellent. We can work on teaching strategies but passion for this type of institution and job is something that has to be a part of the candidate. If the passion is there than also you typically want to do better and are open for help etc."
- "Interdisciplinary is very desirable. It's good to see you can reach out and work with other departments. But still make it clear that you fit the expected home department."

- “1) Tailor your cover letter to the school you are applying for; demonstrate that you have looked at the college and the department. NO FORM LETTERS! There are many cases where people with form cover letters immediately ended up at the bottom of the pile.
- 2) Only apply if you teach at least some of what they are looking for. In other words, if the ad says they are looking for a person to teach Russian politics and you teach American politics do not apply.
- 3) In your letter and interviews talk about why you are interested in liberal arts vs. larger universities. Specifically reference elements more unique to liberal arts institutions (small class size, interactions with students, etc.).
- 4) Make sure you discuss your teaching first in your cover letter and research second. Also list your teaching experience first and your research/publications second on your cv.
- 5) If you have done service for your institution (graduate school council, etc.) make sure to reference that as demonstrations that you will be a good “community member.”
- 6) If they did not attend a liberal arts college for undergrad strongly recommend that you talk to people working at those institutions to make sure it is a life you want.
- 7) When you discuss your research it is helpful to make connections between your research and teaching.
- 8) If asked to write a statement of teaching philosophy make sure to engage with some of the literature on pedagogy and mention if you have received any training related to teaching.
- 9) Discuss your research in a way that non-experts in your field will understand. They should realize that it is very likely that members of the search committee are from outside their field.
- 10) In regards to interviewing, think seriously about what courses you can/are able to teach. Also, if this is an expansion hire, research the website to see what the current department faculty teach and propose to teach courses that do not overlap with what the current members of the department teach.
- 11) Only the provost negotiates salary, so do not ask the search committee about that (especially not in the first skype interview!).”
 - “In the teaching demo and in any other informal opportunities with students’ present, engage students directly, with sincerity and interest. You’ll learn a bit about the college and demonstrate for possible colleagues watching—with good questions, exchanges, or observations—strong interest in working with students effectively.”
 - “I’ll begin by noting 1) that Theatre is a tiny bit unique in that we (as a faculty) have to work together, in front of students, every time we put on a show. Our scholarship is constantly on display for them. They learn as much, if not more, from us outside the classroom, as in. This does apply across the board, though, within departments and on college committees, etc. - be a team player. Enjoy your colleagues, and be engaging. At the same time, be able to express your true opinions with ease, conviction, and without fear. In our candidate searches, it was important that we sensed a strong artistic conviction. 2) Have a sense of humor 3) Do not express political or religious viewpoints, even when drunk (don’t be drunk) at the casual dinner -- be vague if cornered 4) **Most importantly**, engage with the students - the students **MUST** be your primary focus. If the teaching demonstration is not the best, all other attributes, no matter how positive, do not matter. Have a very smart, astounding, and exciting teaching moment prepared for the students. If the students are excited about you, the department will be excited about you. We found the candidate’s time with the students to be the most important aspect of the interview process.”