

Cover Letters for Academic Positions

The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself and to demonstrate the fit between your background and the advertised position.

THE BASICS

A cover letter must accompany and be tailored to any application you submit. STEM letters should not exceed one page. Humanities and social sciences letters may extend up to two pages. Check with faculty in your department.

- Address to the individual named in the job posting, or with “Dear Members of the Search Committee.”
- The cover letter is a writing sample. It must be good.
- Proofread and spell check!

TIPS

- Articulate your fit and focus on potential contributions to this institution—not why you need or want the job.
- Show enthusiasm for the position.
- Imagine yourself on the search committee—what would you be looking for?
- Answer any questions they might have. For most graduate students and postdocs, important questions include: “When will you complete your degree?” or “When are you available?”

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

Opening Paragraph

Introduce yourself to the search committee.

- Refer to the specific position for which you are applying and how you learned about the position or institution.
- Briefly, but specifically, explain why you are interested in the job and institution, beyond regurgitating the mission statement).
- Include a thesis statement outlining the reasons why you are applying for this job and what makes you an excellent candidate.



WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT (CONTINUED)

Body Paragraphs

Describe your achievements and qualifications. Use this opportunity to paint a picture of yourself in this job.

- Address requirements and desired skills outlined in the job posting.
- Provide brief, specific examples to demonstrate your skills and experience—do not to simply repeat your CV.
- For major research institutions: Stress interest in conducting research and elaborate on current research topics. What will you do for them? This is an opportunity to mention potential collaborations.
- For liberal arts/teaching colleges: Emphasize interest, commitment, and experience in teaching and in undergraduate education.

Conclusion

Reinforce your interest and enthusiasm.

- Indicate what you would like to see as next steps. For example, state that you look forward to speaking with the search committee.
- Thank them for their time and consideration.
- End with a professional closing such as “Kind Regards” or “Sincerely,” and your full name.

502 W. Main Street #221
Urbana, IL 61801

November 30, 20XX

Dr. John Matthews
Civil Engineering
University of Texas at Austin
Box 19308
Austin, TX 76019-0308

Dear Dr. Matthews,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in Structural Engineering beginning Fall 2014, as advertised on your department website. I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and fully expect to complete my PhD degree requirements by May 2014. I am extremely interested in obtaining a faculty position at the University of Texas, where I can contribute to its focus on engineering education, continue my research on concrete structures, and lead campus and professional service activities.

My academic training and six years of experience working as a structural engineer prepare me to be an effective researcher and instructor in your department. My doctoral dissertation was conducted in consultation with Prof. John Smith, and examines the use of a relatively new methodology for the design of joints, walls, footings, and other portions of reinforced or prestressed concrete structures. In my research, I developed an integrated design and analysis environment for this methodology in which both strength and serviceability requirements are explicitly satisfied. This was delivered in a computer-based program that is freely available to the community and has been downloaded by more than 2500 people. I am excited to share and continue to explore this methodology and collaborate with your department faculty to expand its potential.

In addition to my dissertation research, other areas that interest me for my future research stem from my goal of developing improved analytical models and methods for design, evaluation, and upgrade of concrete structures subjected to monotonic and reversed loading and structures equipped with passive systems. One of the studies that I have started is the development of a performance-based seismic design method for ductile reinforced concrete wall structures based on yield displacement. I have also worked on evaluation and improvement of accuracy of nonlinear static analysis for seismic design under the auspices of a project from the Applied Technology Committee, a national organization. These are just a couple of projects I plan to continue and grow with the support of the University of Texas.

During my graduate training, I was also fortunate enough to have served as a teaching assistant and occasionally substitute lecturer for an intermediate level course on reinforced concrete design. I found that my professional experience as an engineer provided me with a broad view that is useful in assisting students with projects and assignments. These experiences have built my confidence and an interest in teaching and I look forward to the opportunity to not only teach existing courses, but also work to develop new ones.

I would enjoy discussing this position with you in the weeks to come. In the meantime, I am enclosing my curriculum vitae and statements of teaching and research interests. Letters of recommendation will arrive under separate cover. If you require any additional materials or information, I am happy to supply it. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Carol Alexander

RACHEL GREEN

210 W. MAIN ST. #104 • URBANA, IL 61801
PHONE (217) 555-1234 • E-MAIL RSTUDENT@ILLINOIS.EDU

October 23, 20XX

Coe College
Office of Human Resources
1220 First Avenue NE
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the Assistant Professorship position in Peninsular Spanish culture and literature at Coe College announced in the MLA Job Information List. I am currently completing a PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a specialization in modern and contemporary Spanish literature, and I am on schedule to defend and deposit for May 20XX graduation. I am extremely interested in this position at Coe College as my commitment to undergraduate education, interest and experience with study abroad programs, and interdisciplinary research background make me a terrific fit.

My objective as a teacher is to motivate my students to develop their own learning interests and critical thinking—to establish a learner-centered environment in the classroom. In particular, teaching a wide range of courses—from first-year Spanish to advanced composition and culture courses—during my graduate career at the University of Illinois has made me aware of the needs and interests of a culturally and ethnically diverse student body. As a result, I prepare lesson plans always considering the interconnection between the student's own knowledge, culture and learning abilities, the subject matter discussed in class, and current debates on social issues. I choose content and activities that are both significant and challenging for the students so that they are stimulated to think “beyond” their comfort zone and feel involved in their own learning process. Similarly, the activities and class discussions I facilitate encourage students to make connections between my field of study and other disciplines. Collaborative learning is also central to my teaching philosophy in order to promote reflective thinking and improve the students' communicative and trans-cultural skills. The application of technology and computer-based material in the classroom such as Webboard, wikis and YouTube are helpful tools in the promotion of meaningful learning through collaborative work as well. My commitment and approach to teaching have been rewarded with the highest teaching evaluations an instructor can receive: in an institution particularly dedicated to outstanding teaching, I am consistently among the top 10% of all professors and teaching assistants.

I believe that clear, open communication with students is a key element in helping them learn. Looking back at my own learning experience as a student at a liberal arts college, I greatly value the supportive and caring environment that a college like Coe provides between professors and students. In my prospective career as a professor at this institution, I look forward to working in a collaborative learning and teaching environment with both faculty and students, where I can develop courses incorporating innovative teaching techniques and the most recent theories and research through an interdisciplinary approach. I am excited at the prospect of teaching Spanish 315 or Spanish 380 and I feel that I could contribute to a number of the other courses at both the introductory and intermediate level. I would also welcome the opportunity to develop new courses according to departmental needs.

In my opinion, out-of-the-classroom education is the perfect complement to classroom learning and a way to help students learn a foreign language and become better citizens of the world. Drawing from my own experience as a study abroad student, I would be very interested in creating new study abroad courses or

becoming involved in any of the existing programs in Spain, Dominican Republic, Mexico, etc. that the Foreign Languages Department offers at Coe. I would also enjoy participating in the service learning programs where students work with the Spanish speaking community of Linn County.

As a scholar in Peninsular Spanish literature and culture, I believe teaching and research should go hand in hand. When teaching literature and culture courses, I like to incorporate my own research on class and gender representation by providing additional materials that complement regular class content. Currently, my interdisciplinary research brings together historic, economic and geographic perspectives to explore the representation of female labor in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century novels, short novels and *zarzuelas*—Spanish operettas—in Spain. I propose that the narration of female work provides new insights into the ideological and material construction of the text itself. My project reveals that *Costumbrismo*, Realism, Modernism and Avant-Garde use class as the main social category to determine fictional urban working women’s gender and work identities and their (un)successful trajectory in the narrative. I contend that in these texts, class converges with gender in conflicting ways in the process of narrative signification, producing a multiplicity of contradictory meanings that expose turn-of-the-century bourgeois anxieties. I locate these rhetorical conceptualizations of urban female work as part of a historical moment in Spain when major social and economic transformations increased middle-class anxieties about national instability. I have already begun to publish findings from my dissertation. My article “Modern *Castiza* Landscapes: Working Women in *Zarzuela*” has been accepted for publication pending minor revisions by the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*. I will also present a paper on female cabaret singers’ sexuality in *zarzuelas* and short novels at the MLA convention this January.

After I finish my dissertation and publish it as a monograph, I plan to study the relationship between class, race and gender in current cultural manifestations in Spain. In this second project, I aim to explore how female peripheral characters—such as the prostitute, immigrant, or lesbian—negotiate and articulate notions of home and desire in the context of modern globalization in Spanish films and novels.

I am very excited about the opportunity of joining Coe College, and I am enclosing my curriculum vitae and a sample of scholarly work. Letters of reference will arrive under a separate cover for your consideration. I will gladly provide any other supporting materials upon request. I will be attending the MLA convention in Los Angeles this January, and would be glad to meet you there at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Rachel Green