

# Finding your place at a liberal arts college



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\*Thanks to Kathryn Nyman and Chad Topaz

# Life at a liberal art college

Teaching load often 2 to 3 (sometimes more!) courses/term.

- Class size ~ 10 to 30

Liberal arts colleges proudly boast accessible faculty (to students and parents)

- Students will expect and demand a lot of your time. (Open door policies)
- Faculty do the majority of their research on breaks.
- Be prepared to travel for collaborations or look for overlapping research interests.
- Helpful, now almost expected, to develop research projects for undergraduates.

# Applying: Cover Letter

- Make it clear that you know something about liberal arts colleges
  - Tell us why this school is the right “type” of school given your career goals and ambitions. Check out the mission of the school and department.
- Highlight any teaching awards or unusual experiences.
  - *Did I mention we value being accessible?*
- Mention any faculty whose research might align with yours and how you plan to continue your research agenda when there is no research group at the institution.
- **KEY POINT:** Address all requests/questions posed in the job announcement.

# Teaching Statement

We look for faculty who think/care deeply about teaching!

- Highlight innovative techniques you've tried (or things you would like to try) and how they went.
- Demonstrate how you solved a problem/overcame a difficulty in teaching.
- Address how you are engaging in further professional development to grow/improve in your teaching practice.
- Provide evidence that you are creating welcoming environments that value the diversity of your students.

# Research Statement

- Give a compelling introduction readable by non-experts.
  - High probability there will not be an expert in your field reading your statement.
  - Make it readable and detail **your** accomplishments and directions for future work.
  - If appropriate, mention entry points for student research.
- Since you might be isolated in your field, show that you have a plan for sustainable future work.
  - Mention nearby collaborators or ongoing projects or new directions you plan to pursue.

# Diversity Statement

- How might you contribute to the school's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion?
  - This requires knowing what the department is doing and how you would supplement or expand their work in DEI.
- Discuss concrete ways in which contribute to making your classroom/department/institution more inclusive.
- Have you been a part of any programs that broaden participation of underrepresented students?

# Organizations to support!

- Lathisms: Latinxs and Hispanics in the Mathematical Sciences: [lathisms.org](https://lathisms.org)
- The National Association of Mathematicians: [nam-math.org](https://nam-math.org)
- Mathematically Gifted & Black: [mathematicallygiftedandblack.com](https://mathematicallygiftedandblack.com)
- Indigenous Mathematicians: [indigenoumathematicians.org](https://indigenoumathematicians.org)
- Spectra: [lgbtmath.org](https://lgbtmath.org)

# Letters of Recommendation

You will need letters addressing your teaching and your research.

- Teaching:
  - Have more than one writer address teaching.
  - Have your letter-writers visit your class.
    - Ask for feedback afterward.
    - We'd like them to address your teaching with details and concrete examples.
- Research:
  - Have (at least) one writer address your research potential.
  - If appropriate have them mention how you might mentor student researchers.



# Other things we'd like to know about you:

- Have I mentioned that you should include information on how you might include undergraduates in your research?
  - We love that!
  - Tell us about your interest in or experience with undergraduate research & potential projects
- Do you have other interests or connections with other departments (double undergrad major, perhaps)?
  - Many schools have writing-across-the-curriculum courses.
  - Other schools value involvement with student organizations such as AWM chapters. If applicable, do mention your involvement with those organizations.

# The interview

- Make your job talk accessible!
  - All of it (if possible)
  - To undergraduates (and not just the seniors)
  - It need not contain all of your cutting-edge research, but it should state some of the work you have contributed to your field.
  - Highlight entry points for student research as appropriate/possible.
- You might also teach a class. It's **very** important.
  - Including something interactive or collaborative is a plus.
  - Be ready to have students be engaged and ask lots of questions.
- Every meeting is part of the interview, especially those meetings with students.
- Be ready to explain your research to people (including the president) outside of the math dept.

**Practice these talks ahead of time and multiple times!**

# Thank you!

Feel free to email me any questions you might have and good luck on your job search!

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## A Helpful Reference:

[Interested in Applying to a Liberal Arts Institution?: Perspectives from Reva Kasman, Julie Rana, and Chad Topaz](#)

*By Linda Chen, June/July 2019  
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