



## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS**

### **THE LETTER OF APPLICATION**

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When writing your letter of application, it's important point to remember that the college search committee and the internal and external constituents have developed the position profile with a specific purpose in mind, to help them select their new administrator that meets the needs and culture of their organization.

If the profile states, "Applicants should state in their letters of application how they would address the issues identified," your letter of application should do that. The committee wants to know what you have accomplished and how they relate to their position. Most letters are five pages or less, unless otherwise specified in the profile.

Use bullets and address the points in the order they appear. Be brief and refer the reader to the resume where detailed information is highlighted. Demonstrate in your cover letter that you are qualified, so that they can easily determine how your experience matches their needs.

Although some committee members will read a narrative letter of application and "check off" the statements that seem to relate to the profile, most prefer a candidate's letter to list the items and the candidate's response, in order. The committee is reading a lot of material, one of your goals in to make yours as easy as possible for them to read and analyze.

The profile has described the tasks the successful candidate will do on the job, and you should portray your accomplishments in terms of the tasks identified. In many searches, the committee and constituency groups put a lot of effort into writing the profile and they are most interested in the candidates who directly respond to the profile.

Always check over your letter of application to assure that you haven't overlooked spelling, typographical or grammatical errors or inadvertently included the name of the previous institution to which you last applied. Candidates are regularly eliminated because of such slip-ups.

**The committee will be reading many, many letters of application and your primary purpose to get an interview with this committee.**

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS: PREPARING FOR THE SHARK TANK**

### **THE RESUME**

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The details regarding your specific responsibilities and accomplishments should be in the resume. The letter of application describes how you meet the profile characteristics and can be done in two or three sentences for each item in the profile. The resume documents specifically what you have accomplished.

- Put your name and page number on the top of each page, using a plain, white background in 12 point, black, Cambria or Times New Roman font. In most cases electronic submission is preferred, but double check the profile for the committee's preference.
- If a hard copy of your materials is requested, use plain white 24# paper. In addition, do not staple or bind your resume and cover letter. It creates additional work for the college staff who will be duplicating and organizing your materials.
- Never use your college letterhead stationery.
- Aim for a crisp, clean, professional look. Avoid adding graphics and colors to your materials.

The following is most effective for a senior administrator's resume (see Sample Resume):

Section 1: Name, including maiden name, Home and Work Address, Home and Work Telephone Numbers, including office extension numbers.

Section 2: Professional Experience in reverse chronological order, with your current position listed first.

Provide basic information about your current and two or three most recent college employers. Include total headcount and FTE, total budget, number of faculty (both full time and part time), geographical area/population served, etc.

For your position, include the total budget for which you are responsible, number of staff supervised, etc. You want the search committee to understand your institution and to see it as comparable to their institution. You also want them to know how your position fits into your institution as a whole.

In addition to "Responsibilities," create an "Accomplishments" section for each of your three most recent positions and list activities that can be credited to you and your team under your leadership. It's all right to give yourself credit where it is due. Be brief and highlight significant accomplishments.

Section 3: Formal Education

Section 4: Faculty or Teaching Experience

Section 5: Community Activities

Section 6: Awards

Section 7: Grants or Proposals Funded

Section 8: Professional Activities

Section 9: College Committees, etc.

Section 10: Consultancies, Workshop Presentations, etc.

Section 11: Publications

Section 12: References

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS: PREPARING FOR THE SHARK TANK**

### **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

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It is often stated that in positions of academic leadership, “Getting the job is more difficult than doing the job!” Particularly in the interview phase of the process, knowing who you are and what strengths you possess is critical to your success.

The interview process, both as a semifinal candidate and as one of the final candidates for the position, is key to selection. The four essential factors for predicting success on-the-job and, therefore, where you have to “shine” to get the job, are;

- (1) Intellectual capacity,
- (2) Interpersonal skills,
- (3) Personal motivation, and
- (4) The ability to motivate others.

These four factors need to be conveyed during the interviewing process.

Prepare, prepare, prepare, and then prepare a little more!

Semifinal candidates typically receive the following information. Review the materials sent by the college. In addition, review the profile to identify what their key issues are and be prepared to answer questions about these issues.

- List of members of the search committee and their position titles
- Organizational chart;
- Current catalog,
- Student and faculty handbooks;
- Strategic plan;
- Collective bargaining agreement(s);
- Summary report of last self-study;
- Current budget;
- Maps of area and college;

- Student newspapers and local news articles about college;
- Annual Report and/or alumni magazine;

Review your application letter, identify any criteria items that are particularly strong accomplishments and speak about them if you are not asked a question that elicits them. However, do not attempt to weave your accomplishments into a question to which it does not pertain. You will be seen as trying to control the interview. Furthermore, you will not be responding to the question. “She/he didn’t answer my question,” is one of the most common complaints voiced by committee members.

Answer the questions asked. At the close of the interview, if there is time, remind the committee of additional accomplishments or qualities which they did not inquire about and which are important to their criteria.

Be prepared to enjoy the interview. If you don’t relax, the interview committee won’t either. They are judging you as a potential leader and co-worker. The committee members are asking themselves, “How would it be to work for this candidate?” Have a positive attitude, one of anticipation that you are meeting new people, learning about them, and telling them about yourself.

### **Dressing for the Interview**

Dress the part of the senior college administrator. If you wear eye makeup, beware to the effect of eyeliner underneath your eyes. Particularly from a distance this “raccoon effect” can be most distracting to the interview committee.

For men, white, long sleeved shirts are the norm; no short sleeved shirts, even in the summer. Ties should reach the top or middle of the belt buckle, with no shirt showing. It is not possible to be too conservative.

Beware of perfume and after shave. Many people are allergic and all are offended by too strong a scent.

Watch out for defeating personal habits. For example, some women and men have a habit of pushing their hair back or playing with their hair. When observed by a committee, it serves as a beacon that says: “This candidate is more concerned with his/her appearance than the question I’ve asked or what I’m saying.”

Your goal is to have people identify you as a positive candidate as you walk through a group. Women, in particular, need to present a strong ‘presence’ and strong does not mean loud or boring. Also, conservative does not mean that you have to wear a black suit. For women, red, bright blue and navy, even deep pink, are also appropriate. If you are tall and/or large, take advantage of your size and don’t try to disguise your weight or height. A large woman who

dresses in a distinctive color rather than trying to disguise herself by wearing black, and who carries herself elegantly and professionally, will be much more effective in the interviews.

The first 90 seconds: You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Walk around the room, look at each person, shake hands, and say hello. It is not necessary to repeat your name, they know who you are. Repeat the committee member's names. "Hello, Bill, I'm delighted to meet you." You're beginning to build a relationship with each person.

The hand shake is also important. Your hand shake should be firm, using your whole hand, not just three fingers.

At your chair, sit down comfortably, and look at the committee chair. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, slightly to the front of the chair. Aim to be relaxed, alert, and attentive. Do not slouch or lean on the table with your elbows. Show the group that you're ready.

Have a colleague or two "interview you" using standard candidate interview questions. How do you look, are there any mannerisms that you can learn to control, i.e. what do you do with your hands, do you have a nervous giggle? How does your voice project? Envision yourself projecting as a college administrator giving the opening convocation of the school year.

Focus on the person asking the question, but do not ignore the others. Look at the individual asking the questions as you begin to speak. Then slowly move your eye contact to others in the group.

Watch the time. Typically each person in the room will ask a question and possibly a follow-up. Be sure your answers are succinct, clear and short. Learn to make mental checklists and tick off each item as you discuss/report it. If you have a question as to whether you understood the meaning of the question, check back with the questioner to see if you've answered the question fully. Give specific examples of activities to respond to the questions, and avoid philosophy. As much as possible, use concrete examples from your career to demonstrate your suitability for the position you are seeking, not the position you currently hold.

Don't be afraid to ask for a question, or a subpart of a question, to be repeated. If you're comfortable jotting down some key words as soon as the interviewer is finished asking the question, do so. It will help keep you focused and remind you of points you want to make. Don't, however, read your answers or your notes to the committee.

At the close of the interview, there will usually be time for questions that you may have of the committee. Salary and benefit questions should not be asked at this time. Ask about something you really care about learning and ask a question that relates to the position you are seeking, rather than the position you currently hold.

If you do not have a question or have something to discuss with the committee, it is more effective to ask if you may make a statement to summarize your interests in, and qualifications

for, the position. Most effective of all is to tell the committee, why you want to be their leader not just a leader.

During your interview with the decision making body, you may be asked, “Would you accept the position?” Think about the questions you need to ask and ask them, unless they are salary and benefit issues, which you should already know as a finalist. You may also wish to say “I’m very interested in the position and after our conversation today, I am quite certain that I could provide the leadership required. Yes, I am most definitely interested in continuing our discussions.”

In fact, what the committee most wants to hear at this time is: “Yes, I would be delighted to join your administrative team and work with all of you.” If you hesitate too much, they may decide you’re not really interested and, consciously or unconsciously, discount you as a candidate.

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### **THE REFERENCE PROCESS**

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Identify people who will be candid and positive about both your strengths and weaknesses. You should have a minimum of six individuals on your reference list who know you well enough to give specific answers to questions and who can be contacted regularly without implying that “She’s been hunting for a job for years.” You should include superiors, professional and clerical subordinates, including support staff, community members, and faculty members at both your current and most recent institution.

It is acceptable to have more individuals in each category if you wish, however, never, ever use people because they are big names unless they know you very well. A nationally known figure may look impressive on your resume. But, if they can’t be reached for comment or do not know you well enough to answer the committee’s questions, they can negatively impact your candidacy.

Also, effective references will share what they believe to be your areas of strength as well as needed growth. Therefore, a good, sound communicator, who knows your work well, is an excellent reference.

If there are issues or positions in your past which might prove to be a problem, for example, you were relieved of a position, had a faculty vote of no confidence, received a less than glowing performance evaluation, or you’re concerned that you may not get a fair review from a necessary reference, please alert the search consultant or committee chair if a consultant is not involved.

Think about what your worst enemy might leak to the press the morning after your selection is announced. If it’s relevant-or if it can be used against you, let the search consultant know about your concerns. He or she can help you to defuse the issue, confidentially, with the college leadership, if necessary, or by contacting additional references to refute the negative impression.

If the issue is one of potential embarrassment to the prospective new employer, the search committee, if informed appropriately, will be able to affirm that they were aware of the issue, had researched it extensively, and determined that you have grown and learned new skills.

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### **MANAGING TECHNOLOGY DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

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The age of technology is here and, with greater regularity, it is being used in the interview process for community college administrators. While many can and do argue about the validity and impact of technology on the hiring process, nonetheless, it is likely here to stay. Therefore, it is best to prepare for the methods of conveying information to the search committee.

#### **Videotaped Interviews**

Videotaped preliminary or semi-final interviews are common. While on-campus interviews provide the most complete review of each candidate, candidate videotape interviews are an attractive alternative for colleges with tight travel budgets. Typically, videotaped interviews are conducted using a standard set of questions, and are generally 30 to 45 minutes in length. The videotapes generally become the property of the college.

#### **Interactive Videoconference and Skype Interviews**

Using the campus telecommunications network and external telecommunication sites, committees can communicate real time with candidates without the expense of candidate travel. This method of interview has long been used in the business sector, as the cost savings and reliability of the process have been demonstrated.

The mixing of on-campus, videotaped, or videoconference interviews of semi-final candidates is highly prejudicial and strongly discouraged.

#### **Maximizing your Onscreen Presentation**

- Speak at a normal volume. Talking too loudly will give feedback on the committee's end.
- Gesture naturally, but be careful not to wave your hands around too much. A lot of movement will appear as a blur on the screen. If you really need to get the viewer's attention, consider making an "X" with your arms above your head.
- Blouses and shirts that are light pastels, muted colors, and have simple patterns or stripes come across best on camera. If you're wearing a scarf or tie with your outfit, a contrasting color looks terrific with a light colored blouse or shirt. Very bright colors and all light or all dark clothing don't pick up well on camera. Stay away from busy patterns on a tie or scarf.
- Avoid wearing excessive jewelry and having a lot of paper near the microphone. For example, bracelets and cuff links can clink on the desk near the microphones. Likewise, shuffling paper near the microphones is distracting.