Community colleges across the United States are experiencing an extraordinarily high demand for new instructors. Institutions must make sound, long-term decisions by selecting candidates who honor the community college’s past while heralding its future.

Now Hiring: The Faculty of the Future

Donald W. Green, Kathleen Ciez-Volz

On the first day of the semester, twenty-five students eagerly await their freshman composition instructor’s arrival. A glance around the classroom reveals a wide array of differences among the students. Blacks, whites, Latinas/os, and Asians all populate the classroom. A dually enrolled high school student chats with a grandmother in her fifties. Some students busily text and tweet their friends; others have never sent an e-mail. At least two students speak English as a second or other language, and one individual has a documented learning disability. Some students have arrived academically prepared for college-level writing, yet many have only recently completed developmental course work designed to prepare them for the rigor of the general education curriculum. Still others will require long hours of tutoring, mentoring, and student-teacher conferences to learn to write proficiently.

Such diversity is the norm at America’s community colleges, which, as open-door institutions, serve the most widely varied group of students in higher education. The community college teacher who enters that freshman composition class must know more than her discipline; she must possess the ability to engage and encourage, motivate and inspire, teach and learn from her diverse students. To educate learners with vastly different backgrounds, abilities, and levels of academic preparedness, community colleges need the best teachers available in the academic labor market. Hiring exemplary instructors is at once an educational and an economic imperative, for the typical “community college spends over $3 million on the career of one faculty member” (Flannigan, Jones, and Moore, 2004,
Because nearly three-fourths (72 percent) of community colleges offer tenure (Twombly and Townsend, 2008), hiring one faculty member, who could hold her position for thirty years or more, is a long-term institutional commitment.

In the current social milieu, parents, legislators, policymakers, members of business and industry, and other institutional stakeholders demand accountability for student learning. Community colleges must therefore ensure that newly hired faculty members are both “a good fit” and a “valuable long-term investment” for the institution (Flannigan, Jones, and Moore, 2004, p. 827). Who are the community college teachers of the future? What qualities must they possess? How can academic administrators attract and retain them? “How,” Flannigan, Jones, and Moore query, “will community college hiring practices ensure that new faculty members are able to appreciate the culture of the past while at the same time embrace the vision of the future?” (p. 824). By exploring the answers to these questions, stakeholders will gain insights into hiring the community college faculty of the future.

The Demand for Community College Faculty

Community college faculty members play a significant role among the professoriate in U.S. higher education (Twombly, 2005). Citing the Chronicle of Higher Education’s 2005 Almanac, Twombly and Townsend (2008) report that as of the fall 2003 semester, community college professors were 43 percent of all the full- and part-time faculty members in public, nonprofit postsecondary institutions. The nearly 112,000 full-time faculty members employed by community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2007) represent one-fifth of all faculty members in U.S. higher educational institutions (Twombly, 2005). Community college instructors, moreover, teach approximately 37 percent of undergraduates—a figure that includes nearly 50 percent of all freshmen and sophomores (Twombly and Townsend, 2008). Given their impact on higher education, community colleges and their faculty certainly merit scholarly attention (Twombly and Townsend, 2008).

Throughout its history, the community college has based its mission on providing educational access and opportunity to all interested citizens. Unlike the mission of traditional colleges and universities, that of the community college concerns not the generation but rather the transmission of knowledge (Twombly and Townsend, 2008). Through university transfer and workforce development programs, the community college enables individuals to expand their personal and professional lives.

Since its inception, the community college has focused on teaching and learning as opposed to research. Characterizing “teaching” as the “hallmark” of community colleges, Cohen and Brawer (2003) remark that faculty members’ “primary responsibility is to teach”; “rarely” do they
“conduct research or scholarly inquiry” (pp. 76, 97). Because of the vast number of retirements now and for the foreseeable future at community colleges, a pressing demand for new faculty now exists. As Murray (1999) predicted, the first decade of the twenty-first century has provided exciting and challenging opportunities for community college leaders to “influence their institutions’ futures by hiring the largest cohort of faculty employed at one time since the 1960s.” Hired in the 1960s and 1970s, many community college faculty members have recently retired or are planning to do so in the near future. Indeed, the community college professoriate has long been graying, as illustrated by statistics from the U.S. Department of Education (2005): approximately 36 percent of faculty members are younger than forty-four years of age; 32 percent are between forty-five and fifty-four years old; 22 percent are between fifty-five and sixty-four years old; and 8 percent are sixty-five or older (cited in T wombly and Townsend, 2008). McCormack (2008) notes that community colleges employ a larger percentage of professors between forty-five and sixty-four years of age than does any other type of postsecondary institution. By 2003, this figure included nearly two-thirds of the community college professoriate, revealing the critical need to attract new instructors.

Not since their heydays in the 1960s and 1970s have community colleges experienced such a demand for faculty. To meet the “changing needs of the community college system” while undergoing a “significant hiring wave,” institutions must develop “new perspectives on hiring practices” (Flannigan, Jones, and Moore, 2004, p. 835). As community college faculty retire in droves, leaders are tasked with recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers who feel passionately committed to the community college mission of providing access and promoting success, embrace change, and enjoy teaching and learning in a multicultural environment. The faculty hired today will influence the direction of community colleges for generations to come; thus, community colleges must approach the hiring process with foresight and vision. Faced with increasing demands for accountability and shrinking budgets, these institutions must continue to perform some of the most complex tasks in higher education—tasks that range from remediating academically underprepared students to offering baccalaureate degrees in high-demand areas such as emergency nursing and early childhood education. Without doubt, community colleges need teachers equal to the challenges that lie ahead.

The Academic Labor Market

Central to the topic of hiring faculty is the concept of academic labor markets, which consist of “a supply of potential faculty members, colleges and universities that employ them, and various practices that govern the allocation of faculty to jobs.” For “academic labor markets to function effectively and efficiently,” both community colleges and prospective faculty members...
should understand an institution’s definition of “quality faculty” as well as its hiring processes (Twombly, 2005, p. 424). Obtaining a community college faculty position is not usually high on the list of desired jobs, perhaps because two-year institutions enjoy significantly less positive press and prestige than do their four-year counterparts. Rarely does one hear a child exclaim, “I want to be a professor [let alone a community college professor] when I grow up!” Often instructors begin teaching at a community college by happenstance or even serendipity, as we did. Such a career path is not atypical. As Evelyn (2001) remarks, many individuals in the academic labor market “stumble upon the route” of teaching at a community college rather than steer their careers toward it.

Prior to teaching in community colleges, numerous instructors have held positions in other arenas, such as business and industry, K-12 schools, and four-year colleges and universities (Twombly and Townsend, 2008). Twombly (2005) views the community college labor market as “the center of a web of markets that has links to 4-year markets as well as to public schools and to various occupational markets” (p. 445). Woven from many professional threads, community colleges—now more than ever before—must attract exemplary faculty members. In the words of Twombly and Townsend, “There is no question that, to produce good learning outcomes, community colleges must employ effective faculty members” (p. 20). Efforts at hiring and retaining candidates should focus on their “expertise, talent, [and] skills,” as well as “institutional and departmental requirements” (Smith and Moreno, 2006). Selection committees must ask and answer pivotal questions before initiating the screening process:

- What qualities comprise excellence in teaching?
- What are the most important qualities of faculty members at this institution?
- How do we identify these qualities in candidates?

To make effective and efficient hiring decisions, search committees must reach consensus about the qualities that teachers at their institutions should have. Flannigan, Jones, and Moore (2004), however, contend that too many hiring committees neither fully understand nor clearly define the “important qualities that faculty must possess” (p. 826). Without a set of mutually agreed-on criteria, committee members may struggle to select the ideal candidate.

The Qualities of Exemplary Teachers

We compiled the following list, which is not exhaustive, of qualities of exemplary teachers and teaching from some of the literature (Polk, 2006; Stemler, Elliott, Grigorenko, and Sternberg, 2006; Helterbran, 2008; Walls, Nardi, von Minden, and Hoffman, 2002):
• Intelligent and knowledgeable about the discipline
• Distinguished by strong social and interpersonal skills
• Ability to communicate knowledge in “a meaningful, engaging manner” (Helterbran, 2006, p. 130)
• “Organized, prepared, and clear” (Walls, Nardi, von Minden, and Hoffman, 2002, p. 45)
• Enthusiastic about teaching
• Respectful and welcoming of diverse peoples and views
• Warm, open, and accessible to students
• Committed to lifelong learning
• Creative
• Flexible
• Caring and empathetic
• Humorous
• Skilled at creating an emotional environment in which students feel comfortable taking intellectual risks
• Cooperative and collegial
• Encouraging and motivational

The learner-centered teachers whose qualities are depicted on this list celebrate the mission of serving diverse students. Before reviewing applications, the committee should define these qualities and discuss their significance to the selection process. The committee must also clarify how it will identify these qualities in the candidates—for example, through the curriculum vita, an interview, a teaching demonstration, a teaching portfolio, reference checks, and the like. By agreeing on the qualities that it values in prospective faculty and the methods for assessing these qualities, the committee will increase its chances of making a positive hiring decision.

Through their seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, Chickering and Gamson (1987) provide additional insights into effective instruction, which encompasses student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction, the use of active learning techniques, and prompt feedback in response to questions, assignments, and assessments. Emphasizing time on task, successful teachers communicate high expectations for their students, whose diverse talents and learning styles they respect. Murray (1999) notes that Chickering and Gamson do not address content mastery or organizational abilities, perhaps because an instructor’s expertise in these areas is assumed. Certainly command over one’s subject matter is essential to sound instruction, yet a teacher’s ability to communicate such knowledge through a variety of pedagogical approaches may be even more critical.

A capable teacher knows more than her discipline. She knows how to build relationships with students as she mentors and motivates, guides and inspires them. As Evelyn (2001) remarks, “simply lecturing” will not suffice in the community college classroom, where teachers must be able to
apply their understanding of learning and motivation theory. Dedicated to lifelong learning, an excellent teacher remains open to exploring new pedagogies to reach students who differ in race/ethnicity, age, and levels of academic preparedness. Sensitive to her students’ diverse learning styles, she varies her teaching approaches, experimenting with visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading and writing activities. Such teachers exist, but a persistent question remains: Where and how can community college leaders find them?

The Hiring Process for Community College Faculty

The process for recruiting and selecting effective community college faculty members remains a relatively neglected area of scholarly inquiry (Twombly and Townsend, 2008). Having surveyed the literature, Flannigan, Jones, and Moore (2004) conclude that little has been written about the hiring of community college faculty over the past fifty years. Similarly, Twombly (2005) remarks that a gap in the research exists about “how and where community colleges recruit faculty or what values and practices influence the hiring process” (p. 426). Conspicuously absent in the literature is information about how community colleges search for and select faculty members. That Flannigan, Jones, and Moore feel both “concerned and intrigued” by the paucity of scholarly books and articles compels other researchers and practitioners to explore the topic further (2004, p. 826). To address this concern, Twombly (2005) conducted a case study in which she investigated the values, policies, and practices that govern the faculty hiring process at various community colleges. Her definitions of these terms provide a useful framework for examining the selection process:

- Values—important principles in defining “quality faculty”
- Policies—written guidelines that shape the hiring process
- Practice—a regularly instituted activity, such as a required teaching presentation

Only by agreeing on core values, reviewing policies, and implementing standardized practices can committees conduct effective searches.

Just as recruiting skilled athletes represents the “single most essential ingredient” in a successful college athletics program, so also does recruiting talented faculty form the foundation for a “first-rate academic department” (Olson, 2007, online only). The search process, remarks Olson, is an institution’s “one opportunity to assemble the ideal team.” To achieve academic excellence, Olson says, institutions must recruit, hire, and retain excellent faculty; the search process therefore represents one of the “most consequential tasks” performed on campus. Hiring exemplary faculty members entails the following steps:
Now Hiring

Establishing the hiring committee
Writing job descriptions and requirements
Specifying qualifications
Advertising the position
Selecting individuals from the candidate pool
Prescreening the semifinalists
Interviewing the finalists
Conducting reference checks (Murray, 1999).

Similarly, Flannigan, Jones, and Moore (2004) summarize the faculty hiring process in terms of an announcement of a position, a review of the applications, an interview protocol, and a selection of the leading candidate. Like Murray, Olson (2007) maintains that a successful hiring process begins with a selection committee that clearly understands its role: finding and choosing the best candidate after having determined the guiding values, policies, and practices. Once established, the committee must compose an advertisement that will attract applicants. As the institution’s first communication with prospective instructors, the advertisement should clarify the college’s mission and values while setting the stage for the ensuing process.

The interview traditionally represents the crux of this process. Flannigan, Jones, and Moore (2004), however, observe that both search committees and scholars have commented on the ineffectiveness of the interview model, which often fails to provide the depth necessary to determine the fit between the interviewee and the institution. Flannigan, Jones, and Moore further note that although the time-honored approach of crafting job descriptions and conducting interviews may lead to the hiring of a faculty member who is competent in her discipline, such an approach does not ensure that the new hire “possesses the ingenuity and passion needed to transcend traditional modes of instruction and provide new avenues for engaging community college students in the learning process” (pp. 824–825). Perhaps a deeper exploration of the hiring process will help committees evaluate a candidate’s fit within the institution more effectively.

Several researchers have commented on the significance of fit—a term that merits closer examination. According to Murray (1999), the word fit implies that the candidate is well suited to both the position and the institution. Credentials alone rarely reveal an individual’s abilities or indicate the fit between a prospective faculty member and the hiring institution (Flannigan, Jones, and Moore, 2004). Flannigan, Jones, and Moore maintain that a screening committee can assess fit by examining the compatibility of an applicant’s values with those of the institution. Therefore, the committee must communicate the college’s mission and values, as well as obtain information about the candidate’s values. Twombly (2005) explains that fit refers to a candidate’s sharing of the community college mission,
knowledge of the service area, collegiality, and willingness to fulfill one’s job responsibilities.

To determine fit more effectively, screening committees might develop an interview protocol with questions intended to elicit behavioral responses in terms of the candidate’s previous experiences (Murray, 1999). Unfortunately, though, most selection committees do not undergo training regarding the use of interview questions to obtain the information necessary for making the best faculty selections (Flannigan, Jones, and Moore, 2004). Rather than present exclusively hypothetical scenarios about what a candidate might do if, say, a student could not attend class because of a conflict with work or child care, the committee might question the candidate about what she has previously done in such a circumstance. Interviewers will acquire a richer understanding of the candidate by posing behavioral questions, such as, “What did you do?” instead of, “What would you do?” These questions allow interviewers to gauge “how the candidate learns from mistakes, resolves conflicts, and solves problems” (Murray, 1999, p. 45).

Like the interview, a required teaching demonstration can play a pivotal role in the faculty hiring process. While admittedly a somewhat contrived process in which the candidate teaches before a jury of peers as opposed to a group of students in a real classroom setting, this exercise enables the committee to gain deeper insights into the candidate’s teaching philosophy, persona, and practices. To assess the candidate’s performance, the committee might consider using a rubric (an example is in the chapter appendix). This tool is admittedly limited in its usefulness because of the committee’s brief observational period, yet it may provide a helpful approach for measuring the interviewee’s teaching performance. Based on Chickering and Gamson’s research (1987), this rubric focuses on teaching behaviors. While completing the rubric, the committee might raise questions whose answers it deems important indicators of effective practice—for example:

- Does the candidate exemplify qualities desired by the committee?
- Which of the seven practices emphasized by Chickering and Gamson does she apply?
- Do those practices support the college’s mission? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
- Does the candidate appear to fit into the department and institution? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

Certainly a candidate’s fit cannot be measured with an instrument alone but must also be determined intuitively—viscerally even. Perhaps, though, the approach outlined here will prove helpful during the hiring process.

To learn more about a candidate’s teaching skills, committees might consider requiring a “first-day essay,” like that to which Twombly (2005)
refers. In such an essay, candidates explain the activities that they would conduct on the first day of class—arguably the most important day of the term. This essay could shed new light on an applicant’s teaching philosophies and practices. Hiring committees might also ask finalists to share a teaching portfolio consisting of a syllabus, lessons, activities, assignments, and assessments, as Twombly observed at one college during her case study. A portfolio, whether in a printed or digital format, provides a more in-depth exploration of a candidate’s approach to curriculum development, instructional design, and assessment, thus enabling the committee to assess fit more effectively. Such practices, when combined with the traditional interview, might facilitate the decision-making process for hiring committees.

The Influence of Technology on the Student-Teacher Dynamic

No discussion about hiring future faculty can be complete without addressing the influence of technology on the student-teacher dynamic. A survey of the literature reveals that advances in technology, coupled with those in learning and motivation theory, have dramatically influenced the roles of faculty and students and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. For generations, the lecture has been the predominant form of instructional delivery on college campuses. Yet as Berge (2008) observes, “an educational system that has changed little for the past 150 years” often fails to engage digital natives—those individuals born after 1980—who are accustomed to multitasking, online social networking, gaming, and manipulating avatars in “metaverses” (p. 408). Able to access “multiple paths to content” through sundry electronic devices, today’s students expect learning to be “fast-paced,” “interactive,” and rich in the use of multimedia (p. 408). Indeed, students and teachers alike live in a knowledge-based society filled with readily available content. Never before have humans been able to retrieve so much information so readily, as a Google search of virtually any term will illustrate. Because the sociocultural context of higher education has significantly changed, so also must community college instruction. Unlike in days of yore, instructors are no longer the “sole or major information source”; rather, their role has evolved to that of “facilitator, coach, or mentor” responsible for providing “leadership and wisdom in guiding student learning” (Berge, 2008, pp. 408–409). By harnessing the power of technology, teachers must at once individualize the learning experience for their students and build the academic social networks so vital to success and retention.

In the 1990s, the major paradigmatic shift in higher education entailed the creation of interactive online courses and the concomitant transition from a teacher-centric to a learner-centric model of instruction. For the past several years, higher educational researchers and practitioners have investigated the value proposition of hybrid or blended courses, which combine
face-to-face and online instruction (El Mansour and Mupinga, 2007). As Berge (2008) reports, instructors have recently begun exploring the possibilities of three-dimensional “virtual worlds for at least some of their teaching and learning experiences,” thus affording students a “venue for social networking, collaboration, and learning” within multiuser virtual environments like Second Life (pp. 408–409).

Without doubt, the future will offer many other exciting, innovative educational technologies. Ultimately, though, it is not technology itself that forms the foundation for effective community college teaching but rather the commitment of faculty to remain lifelong learners who foster in their students a perpetual desire for knowledge and understanding. The faculty of the future, like the students they teach, must continuously adapt to and influence change (Ciez-Volz, 2009), paving ever new directions for community colleges.

**Conclusion**

The teacher who enters the first-year composition class—or any other class, for that matter—on the first day of the semester at a community college must be among the most capable instructors in higher education, for she must perform many complex tasks on a daily basis. Possessing a desire to teach and a love for students, the community college teacher of the future must know her content well. She must understand learning and motivation theories. She must be “committed to working with and empowering students with widely diverse backgrounds, motivations, work habits, and goals” (Murray, 1999, p. 46). She must be prepared to work within an educational environment in which institutions, states, regional accrediting agencies, and other stakeholders are calling for accountability in the form of common standards, measurements, and ongoing improvement processes. And to meet the demands of the many digital natives in her classroom, she must be—or be willing to become—technologically proficient. She must be a facilitator skilled at creating active, collaborative experiences that enable students to learn from one another and, in so doing, to learn about themselves. She must understand that the need to be “social” is “fundamental” to an understanding of “the human condition” (Gazzaniga, 2008, p. 112). Most of all, she must understand that as inherently social beings, people want and need to interact with other people, and she must apply this understanding by building cooperative, constructivist learning experiences that facilitate human interaction.

This teacher is likely to be employed in a tenure-track position for potentially up to thirty years. Thus, the hiring institution will be making a nearly $3 million investment in her. It is incumbent on the institution to make a sound, long-term decision by selecting a candidate who honors the community college’s past while heralding the future. As colleges continue to experience a flood of faculty retirements, they will need to hire a large
cadre of instructors. By clarifying their values, policies, and practices, as Twombly (2005) urges, institutions can design a process for making more effective and efficient hiring decisions—decisions about the community college faculty of the future.

Appendix: Effective Classroom Practices Based on Chickering and Gamson’s Research (1987)

Directions: For each indicator of effective teaching practice, please select a level that best reflects the candidate’s performance. Then tally the points for each level of achievement to obtain the subtotals. Finally, add the subtotals to determine the total score.

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<td>Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice</td>
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<td>The use of active learning techniques</td>
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<td>An emphasis of time on task</td>
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<td>The communication of high expectations</td>
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References


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