Teaching Opportunities and Careers in a Community College Setting
Summary of a panel discussion in December 2010

Can you tell us a little about the student population and classes at City College of San Francisco (CCSF)?
Students are very interested and engaged during class and often ask lots of questions. Many times, students are older than traditional undergraduate age and did not have the opportunity to go to college at age 18. Half of the students in the Biotechnology program at CCSF already have a four-year undergraduate degree but are taking classes to be more competitive in the job market. (The Biotechnology program is designed to launch students directly into biotech jobs, and has been very successful in doing so.)

Classes in CCSF’s Biotechnology Program are lab based and generally have around 16 students per class. For this reason, instructors can get to know individual students. Classes feel personal, supportive, and collaborative. Other types of community college courses also tend to be small, and may have more emphasis on lecture (but with active learning to keep student of all learning styles engaged). Some courses, such as introductory biology courses, can have up to 200 students in them.

What is a full-time teaching workload?
4-5 classes or 15 units is considered a full-time instruction load. This translates to 15 hours of lecture per week (more hours if you teach lab). In addition, instructors are required to hold weekly office hours. Instructors receive vacation on government holidays and generally receive a break from teaching over the summer. There are opportunities to use the summertime to do research internships.

Do instructors prepare their own course materials?
Yes, instructors are responsible for preparing their courses. However, new faculty are paired with a senior faculty mentor who typically provides sample material.

What can I do to prepare for a career teaching in a community college?
Teaching experience is essential. Paid positions, as well volunteer opportunities like Science Education Exchange (SEE), will provide you with experience and allow you time to decide if teaching is really what you want to do. During your teaching experiences, take the time to think about your teaching philosophy, the student population you will be working with at a community college, and how you wish to adapt your teaching to best serve these students. Spending time thinking about these things will serve you well when you have to generate written teaching philosophies and diversity statements to include in your faculty application packages.

Do you have any recommendations for getting a position at a community college?
Large community colleges like CCSF often have a pool of part-time instructors who they contact when they need additional instructors at the start of the semester. This is a great way to get your foot in the door. Once you have experience teaching at the community college, you will be a stronger candidate for a full-time position. Smaller community colleges like Skyline do not have part-time pools. Instead, it is a good idea to set up informational interviews with faculty, chairs, or even deans, so that they can keep you in mind when they have hiring needs.

What are informational interviews and why are they important?
An informational interview is a structured conversation with a faculty member, chair, or dean in which you ask questions in order to learn more about teaching at their institution. There may be several candidates in the part- time pool. Your chances of being chosen are higher if the hiring person already has a sense that you would be an effective teacher.

While “getting hired” may be your own personal goal for an informational interview, don’t say so in the initial email. Instead, send an email to the Chair with content such as, “I am a [student/postdoc] at UCSF, and am very interested in pursuing a teaching career in the community college setting. Is there a time when I could meet with you for ~30 minutes, to learn more about teaching at ____ college?” It may be better not attach a CV at that time. In this initial email, don’t
say you are looking for a job. If they don’t currently have jobs available, then it will be easy for them to simply turn you down. Once you are meeting in person, this topic will likely come up naturally. Remember: your goal is to meet the person, so they remember your face/name and hopefully be impressed enough from your well-structured conversation to consider you for a future opportunity. Bring a CV with you to the meeting, so that if the faculty/chair/dean says “Do you have a CV?”, then you can pull it out and give it to them. After the meeting, send a thank you note by email, specifically referencing helpful information you learned during the discussion.

One of the panelists did these types of informational meetings at several community colleges. This helped her string together a series of part-time positions, which ultimately led to a full-time position.

**What are some mistakes to avoid when applying?**
The diversity statement is very important. It should be an essay (not just a few sentences!). A diversity statement that speaks only about ethnic diversity is too narrowly written; when considering diversity, you should think about age, gender, learning styles, socioeconomic background, etc. As described above, start thinking NOW about how you adjust your teaching to be inclusive of and take advantage of the diversity in your classroom. The statement should give examples from your own experience, so it is important to have thought about these issues while you are teaching—well before the application process.

Be very familiar with the institution and department you are applying to. About half of faculty candidates make the big mistake during their interview of clearly not being familiar with the types of courses taught in the department. Take the time to read a community college’s online course catalog so that you are prepared. (example: www.ccsf.edu/biotech) You can learn more about specific content by finding copies of PowerPoint slides on individual faculty’s websites. When you list or discuss courses you could teach, only include courses that you could truly teach. It is a red flag to include all courses offered; but at the same time do be broad enough.

**Panelists:**
- **Dr. Edie Kaeuper**, Coordinator of the Bio-manufacturing Certificate and Bridge to Biotech Certificates, City College of San Francisco (CCSF)
- **Dr. Carin Zimmerman**, Coordinator of the Stem Cell and Genomics Certificates, CCSF
- **Dr. Elaine Johnson**, Director of Bio-Link (NSF-funded national biotechnology program); and CCSF
- **Emily Fox**, UCSF graduate student and co-founder of Science Education Exchange (SEE)

**Moderator:**
- **Dr. Cynthia Fuhrmann**, Program Director, Office of Career and Professional Development (2006-2012)