

Department of Journalism and Digital Communication
Special Faculty Meeting Re: Assistant Instructor Search

Casey Frechette
Casey Peterson
Deni Elliott
Monica Ancu
Mark Walters
Tony Silvia

DE: If the assistant prof job is posted April 1, and we begin reviewing applications in early May, we don't have much time to hire for fall. So I think we should have a 30 day window for best consideration. We can always accept someone who comes in under the university wire, but if we are planning on hiring for fall we don't have much time.

CF: Let's jump right in to job description 2. The number 1 consideration on this position will be bringing someone on board who is a great researcher/scholar given how we are covering some of our other needs.

MW: Yes, this is the first big move we are making toward setting up what we've been talking about for decades and I think it'll be judged primarily on scholarship and research.

MA: I agree. To get T&P, they need to have a proved track of research. Hiring someone without would be putting both them and us in danger. Of all the hires we have made over the last 10 years, only me and Frechette have gotten tenure.

DE: Mark was promoted to full...

MA: I'm talking strictly about assistant professor positions. Doing searches for assistant professors every 3-5 years isn't a good situation.

DE: As the description is now in terms of the science connection, we need to search for someone with a background in science or environmental reporting to support us as a STEM department. This hire should be a narrow one.

MW: On the minimum qualifications, it says a phd in journalism mass comm or related field. Should we say "relevant" instead?

TS: Yes good idea. You might include medical fields.

CF: It says "health."

TS: Mark, playing devil's advocate: When I got here 15 years ago we had a good component of science writing. Why haven't we taught that much since? Bad numbers? What will make it work now if we have had failed attempts in the past?

MW: The only way we have taught it is as a focus of feature writing. A few things are different now: First, we will be collaborating with Marine Science. We are also looking toward creating a graduate certificate toward this to increase our profile. And, the climate has literally changed and global climate change is giving us a real point of entry. We also want to overlap with NNB to discuss how these issues affect disadvantaged communities around Tampa Bay.

TS: Do we have some sort of empirical research that shows this is an area journalists want to enter into?

MW: No, much of that is anecdotal. Other universities have increased focus, too.

MA: MIT started a school of science journalism recently. Their faculty is mostly professionals. There's definitely interest – as a STEM department we should guide our students that way.

TS: I agree. Exposing students to other areas can make a difference. We could grow that interest.

MA: If we start slowly with science in a holistic view (social sciences, mass comm research, media literacy, dealing with numbers, etc.), we have a chance of growing that student interest.

TS: Good overlap with data viz, virtual storytelling, AI, animation and all the rest. Someone like a Sanjay Gupta who is a brain surgeon and knows how to communicate about science.

MA: I met someone over the weekend with a phd in swine nutrition from University of Kansas who does training and mentoring and science communication.

TS: Maybe it's a pipe dream, but I refuse to believe people like that aren't out there.

MW: I also see this as a potential to raise some grant money. The whole area of science communication has become so important it gives us leverage in terms of scholarship and development of programs.

TS: Word of caution on this. Be sure you get someone who isn't a one trick pony and can only do what they say they can do – sometimes not very well. If we keep science/medical/environmental as a primary focus, we need to be prepared for the “what if” if that doesn't work out.

CF: This is where the secondary focus on data viz becomes important. Some cursory research we've done found about a dozen grad certificates on science communication and writing, but most of them are heavily focused on the latter. As we wade into these waters, we can do visual communication in a way to balance out the writing. If we find someone who brings the visual chops in addition to scientific writing, I can think of a few classes they could teach in addition to the environmental.

MA: I was wondering if we can add to the description a focus on technology and digital studies. Maybe someone with a computer background would be a good fit? Also wondering if we can put into the description that we are teaching a STEM degree.

MW: Data viz is important, but so also is Big Data. If we get some data analyst might be a better way to frame this.

CF: All good tweaks to include these keywords to attract a wide range of potential applicants. I can see a couple of different ways a person could plug into this role.

MA: Casting a wider net for this position (as opposed to the specific instructor position) is a good idea to get lots of different candidates.

CF: One possibility is to cast a wide net and find a couple of really good candidates. Maybe we could bring on one in the fall and one in the spring or next fall. Not a guarantee, but it's in the realm of possibility.

TS: Nothing wrong with keeping a bench. I've found over the years is to keep people in your rolodex should an opportunity arise.

MA: For minimum qualifications, I'd like to see someone with the skills to develop external collaborations and pursue funding. This person will have to work with other departments on campus, too. The classes in the certificate will be targeted to students in other majors.

DE: Something like "demonstrated ability to collaborate across disciplines and seek funding?"

MA: Yes, that's my recommendation.

TS: Good addition. One reason journalism departments have to run on enrollment is that institutionally they don't raise money. Someone who is a grant getter can help a department gain eminence on campus and in the consolidated university as a whole.

CF: Another technicality: We specifically mention a phd. Do we want to include other terminal degrees?

DE: I'd say "terminal degree in relevant area of expertise" or something like that.

CF: About a month ago, Mizzou posted a tenure track position specializing in science communication. I'm excited to enter the fray.

MA: UF has a science communication certificate.

MW: A big advantage is that we will be trans disciplinary.

TS: One thing I've always asked myself is "Why study journalism here?" We're different here, and that difference is important.

DE: We aren't trying to be everyone's journalism department. We do boutique programs.

DE: I assumed we are doing everything on zoom? Everything remote?

CF: Yes, all remote.

MA: Will the person still have to teach a class / participate in an online teaching presentation? Will we mimic the on campus interview?

CF: To the greatest extent we can, we should try to do that. Let's think about classes we are teaching this semester that lend themselves to drop-in presentations. We can also organize online research presentations.

DE: We will run into a timing problem. If we get a job posting up April 1, the semester will be over by the time we get candidates.

MA: VIC 3001 may work?

CP: All our summer classes are asynchronous.

MA: I wonder if we can get a group of students to volunteer for such a presentation? Offer extra credit?

CF: Also running Telling Stories with Data in summer B.

MA: When we mention medical experience, should we say "healthcare" instead?

MW: "Health-related" is a bit broader.

MA: "Health, technology and science communication?"

DE: Expertise in one or more of the following...

CF: Anything else?

MA: "The Department's focus on Science Communication and STEM"

DE: Is the fact that our undergrad degree is a STEM degree stronger than a desired interest in STEM...

MW: I hope to hear back from the college of marine science for someone to serve on the committee; that might affect timing.

MA: Are we officially starting a certificate in science communication with marine science?

CF: Not officially, but there is interest in doing it and support for doing it from the upper administration.

MW: With the hope that it becomes a degree program in the future.

CF: I sent a document Friday that is a description of the department. At the end of the description is a running list of entities including marine science that we hope to create and maintain relationships with.

DE: Wondering if there's a way we can say we expect them to be an interdisciplinary type of person – courtesy appointment in another department or college?

TS: Yes, and the tentacles go both ways with courtesy appointments.

MW: Should we put that in the description?

DE: I think we can say “courtesy position in another college possible?”

MW: I think the danger there is that this is more out of candidate's controls.

TS: Probably better suited for an issue to raise during the interview phase. It's not a guarantee but worth a mention. That is a Pandora's box we probably don't want to include in the job description.

CF: I'll send out a fresh copy of the description and send it along for CAS approval and we will get these searches up and running.

CF: Next faculty meeting is April 30, but we may need to reconvene between now and then.

DE: At least for the instructor position, I am planning on the 10-noon slot on some Friday. Which Friday, I don't know. Please keep that time slot open on Fridays.

CF: Thanks, everyone!