



PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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November 9, 2015

Ms. Stephanie LaFlam  
Director of Human Resources  
Bethany College  
31 East Campus Drive #3  
Bethany, WV 26032

Dear Ms. LaFlam and the Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of English Education and Composition at Bethany College. The job listing indicates that you are looking for a professor to teach courses in English composition and pedagogy. I am eager as well as uniquely qualified to take on both of these responsibilities. I have ten years of experience teaching literature and composition at the high school and college levels and five years of experience training teachers of English Language Arts in public and charter secondary schools. I am currently an advanced doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Texas at Austin with specializations in transnationalism, gender, and race in United States and Latin American literature. I will defend my dissertation on May 2, 2016.

One of the convictions underlying my instruction is that I must respect all of my students as individuals who are intelligent and well-intentioned no matter how their experiences and values may differ from my own. I make it a point to learn my students' goals for their lives outside of my classroom and to connect the activities that we complete in class with these goals. I empower my students to take charge of their own learning by establishing structures like the class blog that allow them room for innovation and offering frequent opportunities for students to practice reading and writing in real-world contexts. For example, in the "Rhetoric of Country Music" course that I am teaching, my students are publishing research articles on *Buzzfeed* and mounting online campaigns to induct new musicians to the Country Music Hall of Fame. My work as a teacher has been generously recognized by several organizations. Both La Joya (TX) High School and the La Joya Independent School District named me their Teacher of the Year in 2009. During my time at UT I have been named one of the Center for Teaching and Learning's Graduate Teaching Scholars, and I have won the Department of English's Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award as well as the Department of Rhetoric and Writing's Hairston Prize for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching.

Before enrolling in graduate school, I taught high school English in a small, predominantly Mexican American town in southern Texas. Many of my students were English Language Learners, had learning disabilities, or lagged several years in reading comprehension. Nearly all of them lived in poverty. I convinced my students to struggle through the rigorous processes of reading and writing by integrating into my curriculum texts that validated their experiences as multilingual citizens of the borderlands. The interest I developed in literature that straddles national and linguistic borders led me to pursue an advanced degree in Comparative Literature, and I remain committed to ensuring that students in low-income areas have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

As a graduate student, I have worked with students and teachers in Texas's impoverished communities as an Assistant Instructor in the University of Texas's SPURS (Students Partnering for Undergraduate Rhetoric Success) dual credit program and as a Secondary Literacy Specialist and School Director at the Teach For America Institute for new teachers. In my capacity as a Literacy

Specialist, I taught more than 300 teachers how to use text annotation as a strategy for close reading, how to write assessments that track students' growth toward standards, and other skills necessary for effective literacy instruction. As a School Director, I led roughly 20 veteran teachers and 150 student teachers to deliver top-rate instruction to 800 students. Collaborating with the communities around these schools, we held weekend tutoring sessions in local libraries, raised money to take students on a tour of the University of Houston, and organized other activities that aimed at committing students to becoming life-long learners and using their learning to make meaningful contributions to their communities. Over the course of four Institutes, I clocked hundreds of hours observing instructors with a wide range of styles and strengths. I also reviewed student work, teacher surveys, and qualitative data in order to assess the program's effectiveness. My vision for Bethany's courses on teaching methods includes leading students to write unit plans that utilize best teaching practices and can be implemented during the students' first years as teachers of record in secondary schools.

I have additional expertise in US and Latin American literature and am open to teaching in these areas as well. My doctoral project explores the abundance of novels that authors in the United States, Mexico, and Cuba have written retelling the story of Spain's subjugation of the Aztec Empire. Though these novels were popular in their own day, in ours they are dismissed by literary scholars as poor imitations of Sir Walter Scott's historical novels and outliers in their respective national traditions. By placing texts such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Cuauhtémoc, the Last Emperor of the Aztecs* (1846) and Lew Wallace's *The Fair God or, The Last of the Tzins* (1873) side by side, I reveal that these novels engage in a debate about what distinguishes the New World from the Old World that transcends the borders that scholars tend to erect between nations, languages, and genres. I remain interested in exploring how images of Mexico have figured into the cultural imaginary of the United States, and the new project that I am undertaking delves into how Mexico was represented at the 1893 World's Fair (Columbian Exhibition) in Chicago. I am preparing a presentation on this topic for the 2016 Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists Conference (C19) in Philadelphia.

Lastly, I would like to share two additional reasons that I am interested in an academic post at Bethany. The first is the number of opportunities the college offers for students and teachers to share their expertise with the world outside the campus. I look forward to advising capstone projects and teaching courses such as ENGL 212, "Writing for College and Community," that encourage students to employ their writing skills in the service of something bigger than themselves. In my composition courses at the University of Texas, I have increasingly offered students the chance to develop arguments using digital platforms like a blog, *Buzzfeed*, Storify, and YouTube, and I have a particular interest in working with students to utilize these kinds of tools for the benefit of their communities. The second reason is more personal: I was raised in a Disciples of Christ church and welcome the opportunity to teach at an institution that places an importance on faith.

Thank you for your time considering my application. In January, I will be attending the MLA Convention in Austin, and if you or any of your colleagues are also planning to attend, I would be delighted to meet you. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Dustin Hixenbaugh, PhD Candidate  
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The University of Texas at Austin

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