

COVER LETTERS

Cover Letter Template

Compelling cover letters for academic positions reflect the priorities of the institutions and positions to which you are applying. The academic cover letter—which is one to two pages—is where you make a persuasive case that you are an excellent fit for that particular position. Cover letters link your CV to the job description; they are a bridge.

Tailor each letter to the specific job description. You may have a basic letter for each kind of institution (i.e., research-focused letter for a research university) that you customize for each application. Sometimes a “letter of application” or “statement of purpose” are requested. These are a longer form of cover letters which include paragraphs on institutional fit, research accomplishments and plans, and teaching experience and plans.

BEAM has a packet of examples of cover letters from successful candidates in a range of fields and different types of institutions.

Departmental letterhead, which can be downloaded.

Date

Name of Recipient
 Recipient's Title
 Name of Department
 Name of University
 Address
 City, State 12345

Dear Dr. Recipient (or Dear Hiring/Search Committee, or Dear Professor Recipient):

Who you are and what you are applying for? In the first paragraph, you formally apply for and express interest in the position. Introduce yourself and that you are completing your PhD/postdoctoral fellowship in your particular discipline at Stanford University. Introduce your specialty or area of focus. Begin personalizing your letter to this department and institution.

Why are you a good candidate? The body of the letter is 3-6 paragraphs showing how you meet the expectations outlined in the job description. In the first paragraph, you can choose whether you would like to focus on your research or your teaching. In either case, be clear and descriptive.

When describing your dissertation and your research, provide sufficient context to help the reader understand why your work is interesting, new, and compelling. Describe planned or in-preparation publications from your research. If a research statement has also been requested, try to maintain consistency between the two descriptions without sounding repetitive. In addition to your past research, your future research ideas show your trajectory as a future scholar. For a research university you can write 2-3 paragraphs about research. Future research plans at a teaching-focused school should be feasible with their resources and students. You might describe how your research and teaching inform each other. In this case, the research paragraph might follow the teaching section.

When you write about your teaching experience, tailor to the department's curriculum and programs. Consider the students and courses you are likely to teach. Describe your preparation and experience, and illustrate your claims with examples. What existing courses could you teach; which new courses would you like to develop? Make sure that this section complements, but does not regurgitate your teaching statement.

You also have the opportunity to address other relevant accomplishments including contributions to diversity, service to your university or your field, or interdisciplinary collaborations. If the culture of the department or institution is particularly unique or appealing to you, consider addressing that here as well.

Summary and next steps. In your concluding paragraph, it is appropriate to reiterate your interest in the position and summarize why you are a good fit for the position. You may list the other materials you have submitted. End by offering thanks for the committee's consideration and letting them know that you look forward to hearing from them.

Sincerely,

Your Name

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #1

STANFORD CANCER INSTITUTE
Address, Palo Alto, CA 94304

Dr. Maurice Brown
UCLA Department of Oncology
770 DeWitt Building, #D106
Los Angeles, CA 90095

Dear Dr. Brown,

Recently I met with Dr. Elaine Smith at the National Oncology Conference and she shared with me some of the novel approaches to research that your department is undertaking. We had an enjoyable discussion and she recommended that I contact you regarding the possibility of a postdoctoral appointment in your lab. It appears that we have mutual interests within the field of oncology; my graduate work in mouse models and therapies in the cure of cancer compliments the focus of your research on significant biomarkers in breast cancer. Currently I am a graduate student in Muiel Matthew-Slack's lab at Stanford University's Department of Cancer Biology and expect to complete my PhD at the end of summer quarter, 2015.

As an independent researcher for the past four years, much of my focus has been on developing a therapy to attack the Pro-8 biomarker. The challenge has been to develop a therapy that targets only the diseased cells. Recently my results have indicated a significant decrease in the size of the Pro-8 biomarker after treatment and I have achieved those results by running a second course of treatment 10 days following the initial treatment. Since your research leads the field in breast cancer biomarker identification I know my background and skills will address the challenges of targeted therapeutics and will help move the field closer to amazing scientific breakthroughs in drug development.

In addition to a background in research I have also sought out teaching experience. For the past two years I have advised three undergraduates through their honors thesis projects and have appreciated my role both as mentor and collaborator. By understanding how to clearly explain complex scientific techniques and how to teach to differing learning styles, I have developed my own a strong mentoring approach which will serve well in a postdoctoral appointment with mentoring responsibilities.

By bringing together my accomplished scientific background in mouse modeling and therapeutics along with my mentoring experience, I believe that I am particularly well qualified for your position and would like to have the opportunity to meet with you to explore how I may be of value to your team.

Sincerely,

Frasier Connor, PhD

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #2

Amherst College
Amherst College, AC# 2244
Department of Physics and Astronomy
Amherst, MA 01002-5000

October 31, 20XX

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. I am currently a postdoctoral scholar at Stanford University's Kavli Institute of Particle Astrophysics and Cosmology, where I work on the Gemini Planet Imager Exoplanet Survey (GPIES) team. I received my PhD from the University of Arizona in 20XX, where I completed projects in both astrophysics and science education research. I believe that my work in the well-funded field of extrasolar planets and my extensive experience teaching at the high school and college levels would make me a valuable asset to the Amherst College Physics and Astronomy department, and to the broader Five Colleges Astronomy Department as well.

My experiences as an undergraduate physics major conducting research at a liberal arts college are what drove me to become a scientist, and I am excited to teach and mentor undergraduate physics majors in turn. I have benefitted significantly in both my career and my personal life from the broad education that I received at Middlebury College, and am eager to work at an institution that embraces the principles of a liberal education. My goal since beginning graduate school, therefore, has been to pursue a professorship at a liberal arts institution where I can both teach and mentor undergraduates in astrophysical research.

I am passionate about teaching and about learner-centered teaching techniques in particular. I have more than ten years of experience teaching physics and astronomy, and have developed full courses in both areas, including designing and teaching six semesters of introductory astronomy at Pima Community College. I would be thrilled to teach across the physics and astronomy curricula at Amherst.

My science research takes place at the intersection of observational astrophysics, planetary formation theory and instrument development; it is focused on the detection and characterization of planets around other stars (exoplanets) and the disks of gas and dust from which they form (circumstellar disks). For example, I recently isolated direct visible light (hydrogen-alpha) emission from the forming proto-planet LkCa15 b using a very new and technologically-challenging exoplanet imaging method developed as part of my graduate dissertation. To increase the science impact of this very exciting result, I joined my work with a colleague's near-simultaneous detection of the same object at a different wavelength, and our joint paper was recently accepted to Nature (Sallum, Follette et al. 2015). Just last month, my colleagues and I announced the first detection of an extrasolar planet with the Gemini Planet Imager (51 Eridani b) with a paper published in Science. The high profile nature of these publications highlights the interest in the field of exoplanet science among both the scientific research community and the public.

Since I use publicly-accessible telescopes in my work and am a member of several large international collaborations, I am confident that I can continue to contribute to the broader exoplanet research community from Amherst, and greatly look forward to involving undergraduates in the exciting field of exoplanet science. The observing resources of the Five College Astronomy Department provide an excellent platform to expand my research to include photometric monitoring of young stars and to involve undergraduates in observing projects using on-campus facilities.

Enclosed with this application, please find my curriculum vitae and a letter describing my research and teaching plans. If desired, I would be happy to provide student course evaluations and/or my full teaching portfolio. Please feel free to contact me or my references with any questions about my skills or ability to excel in this position, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Katherine B. Follette

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #3

1234 My Road, Postbox #, Stanford, CA 94305
Cell Phone: (123) 456-7890, Lab Phone: (123) 456-7890
E-Mail: myname@stanford.edu

Biology Faculty Search Committee
Williams College, Department of Molecular Biology Williamstown, MA 01267

September 12, 20xx

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Molecular Biology at Williams College. I received my PhD in Immunology from Stanford University. I am currently a postdoctoral fellow in the NIH Institutional Research and Career Development Award (IRACDA) joint program between San José State University (SJSU) and Stanford University. The IRACDA program combines a traditional postdoctoral research experience at research-intensive universities, like Stanford, with mentored teaching experiences at minority-serving institutions, like SJSU. Having personally benefitted from the liberal arts education, close faculty interactions, and undergraduate research programs at Oberlin College, I am excited about the opportunity to return to an institution, like Williams College, where both teaching and research are greatly valued.

My commitment to teaching is evidenced by the diverse teaching experiences I have pursued during my graduate and postdoctoral training. These experiences range from teaching a primary literature-based discussion section of 20 students in an upper-division immunology course to a lecture section of over 100 students in an introductory biology course. As an IRACDA fellow I have capitalized on opportunities to teach courses outside of my expertise in immunology. For example, in an introductory biology course for both majors and non-majors at SJSU, I taught units on gene expression and enzymes. I also used beer brewing to provide an enjoyable context for a new cellular energetics activity I designed for this course. I have also planned course content for a unit on recombination in an upper division molecular genetics course that begins this November at SJSU. In all of my teaching activities, I incorporate techniques, like problem solving exercises and case studies, to increase student interaction and to promote active learning. My favorite part of teaching is interacting with students outside the classroom and finding ways to adjust my approach to address individual student's needs. At Williams College I am excited about the opportunity for increased student interaction the block plan provides. I am interested in teaching courses like Introduction to Molecular and Cellular Biology, Genetics, Cells and Genes, and Immunology. I would also like to develop new courses. These include courses on cancer biology and on signal transduction. I discuss my ideas further in my Teaching Philosophy.

As undergraduate research experiences were critical in developing my love of science, I look forward to supervising students in independent research projects. I have mentored several undergraduates, graduate students and high school students at Stanford University. I also have co-authored a paper with one of these undergraduate students. Broadly, my research interests pertain to immunology and cancer biology, complementing your faculty's expertise in molecular microbiology, genetics, and developmental biology. Specifically, my research interests center on Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV) and understanding how this virus manipulates its hosts cell biology to evade detection from the immune system and to transform normal cells into cancerous cells. In my graduate work I characterized a signal transduction pathway used by EBV to promote survival of infected cells and examined the potential of targeting this pathway for the treatment of EBV-related malignancies. I am currently finishing up projects that examine the natural killer cell and T cell responses to EBV and elucidate how the virus manipulates host cell microRNA. At Williams College I plan to expand on the results from my graduate and postdoctoral work using an in vitro system that models two of the main signaling proteins of EBV. This program provides projects that teach a wide-range of technical skills from immunology to cellular and molecular biology. As a previous student researcher at a liberal arts university, I intentionally designed this program be amenable for the interests, schedules and abilities of undergraduate researchers and the resources of a similar institution.

I believe a critical benefit of a liberal arts education is that it allows students to explore their interests outside the classroom. I have been involved in science outreach programs like the Oberlin Institute for Girls in Science and the Stanford Institutes of Medicine Summer Research Program. These programs are aimed at giving middle and high school students experience in science research. I developed and taught a one-week course on knitting and crocheting for Girl's Middle School in Palo Alto, California. I also served on the leadership committee for InterVarsity Graduate Christian Fellowship (IVGCF) at Stanford. During my tenure as an IVGCF leader, we were able to bring current NIH director Francis Collins to campus to discuss matters of faith and science. After his lecture I led discussions about his lecture and his book, "The Language of God", that were open to anyone interested. I am committed to working within the department, campus, and community to provide similar opportunities for exploration and outreach.

My liberal arts background, enthusiasm for science education and undergraduate research, and commitment to campus service are all strengths I would bring to the Department of Molecular Biology and Williams College. I would like to thank you for considering my application. I have enclosed my curriculum vitae, statements of teaching philosophy and research interests, a teaching portfolio, and have provided contact information for my recommenders Drs. Lydia Chavez, Kathryn Boroughs, Sharin Evans. Please feel free to contact me by email (mbayesp@stanford.edu) or phone (614-735-6671) if you have any questions or require any additional materials. I look forward to hearing from the committee and wish you the best of luck in finding the ideal candidate.

Sincerely,

Martina Bayes-Price, PhD