Getting Your Foot In The Door--
A View Into the World of Part-Time Teaching

Alumni Student Career Forum
U.C. Berkeley Earth and Planetary Science
March 23, 2012
By: Russell McArthur
My goal is to shed light on what—in my experience—part-time teaching is like:

• to help you decide whether or not this is a career path you would like to take.

• to help with understanding whether timing may be right if you are interested in teaching.

• if you chose this path you would have a better idea of what to expect.

This may also provide a first hand account of the priorities of schools and society in general from the viewpoint of a part-time teacher.
College Teaching Requirements

• Masters degree in the field.

• A combination of a Bachelors and Masters degrees in the discipline and a closely related field (Geography, Geophysics, etc...).

• Each school may have slightly different requirements for any given subject. There is a standard but the wording on the degrees vary by institution so approval by a committee may/may not be necessary to teach certain classes. Schools vary in there modus operandi.
A little about myself:

• B.A. Geology 2009
• M.A. Earth and Planetary Science 2010
• I worked as a tutor and lab aide for seven semesters in the Earth Science Dept. at CCSF.
• I worked for Prof. Brimhall on a resource exploration project in Montana and twice as the reader for EPS-101.
• Prior to college, I had almost 20 years of work experience in a variety of fields (construction, military, wildland firefighting, cook, delivery truck driver, bus driver, EMT, retail management, drilling).

My favorite aspects of jobs have often been the interaction with people. My plan upon getting a degree was to eventually become an Earth Science teacher at a community college.
I enjoy Earth Science and I enjoy sharing that experience with others.

Myself helping the San Bruno Cub Scouts earn their Geology Badge 2011
My Teaching Experience

12 classes, 5 semesters, ~700 students

Spring 2012:
San Francisco State University, Our Dynamic Earth (Geol-104).
Sonoma State University, Natural Disasters, (Geol-110).
Napa Valley College, Geology Lecture (Geol-110) and Geology Lab (Geol-111).

Fall 2011:
Sonoma State University, Natural Disasters (Geol-110).
Napa Valley College, Geology Lecture (Geol-110) and Geology Lab (Geol-111).

Summer 2011:
City College of San Francisco, Intro to Geology (Geo-10).

Spring 2011:
Napa Valley College, Geology Lecture (Geol-110) and Geology Lab (Geol-111).

Fall 2010:
Natural Disasters (Geol-110).
SFSU/UCB Geomorphology at the Richmond Field Station
(continuing experience, field work, lab work, supplemental income)
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Schools I’m teaching at this semester.

Schools in which I am also employed.
Teaching Opportunities

Potential Colleges
1. Santa Rosa JC
2. College of Marin
3. Contra Costa College
4. Berkeley City College
5. Merritt College
6. USF
7. Skyline College
8. San Mateo CC
9. Cal State Hayward
10. Canada College
11. College of Notre Dame
12. Stanford
13. Foothill
14. San Jose State Univ.

Current Colleges
1. Sonoma State
2. Napa Valley College
3. U.C. Berkeley
4. Diablo Valley College
5. City College of San Francisco
6. San Francisco State University
What is it like?

• It is extremely rewarding to see people learning and growing!
• It can be like parenting at times or in some ways.
• You have to deal with the wide spectrum of issues that students can present.
• Sometimes one must be a counselor for a range of issues.
• There is uncertainty involving future work.
• You have to be adaptable and willing to take on subject in a moments notice.
My First Semester Teaching

• Initially hired to teach Introductory Geology lecture and lab.

• One week before the start of the semester, I was switched to Natural Disasters due to an internal staffing conflict.

• They gave me a tour of the building and the keys.

• I created the my 1st class 100% from scratch.

• A real wake up call about people and the state of education in this country (the level of reading and writing skills, interests and attitudes).
The good things:

• It is extremely rewarding to see success in helping people to learn or to help students through counseling and by setting an example.
• There are students that really appreciate what you do.
• One continues to learn more and more about the subject or even new subjects.
• One gets to work with many different people and meet new people all the time.
• Get to be employed at many different locations and locations can change every semester (interesting and you get to know the area better).
• Subjects and schedules can change every semester (Interesting/Exciting?).
• Pay is not bad (especially if you take on a several classes).
• It is an opportunity to help better peoples lives and make an impact in the world. It is an opportunity to bring some very important issues to the awareness of many people.
• Only doing a good thing---never have to possibly sell out my principles to keep my job (money comes with the mission, but the mission is not money).
The not so good things:

• Lack of Job Security: last minute contracts and starting over every four months.
• Only paid for classroom time (incentive to minimize workload).
• Health Benefits—only if you get enough classes at one school.
• The need to work for multiple schools (long commutes, multiple bureaucracies, a very heavy key chain: ).
• There is a tendency to teach survey/GE courses which have many non-majors trying to fill a science requirement and who could not care less about the subject---this can be frustrating and challenging but is also a great opportunity.
• The rare occasion of having to dealing with a not so delightful/problematic student (and giving students D’s and F’s is no fun).
• The pay is not steady and it could be better and you may or may not get unemployment during semester breaks.
• Competition can be fierce and seniority plays a huge role in who survives.
Is life/work experience important for college teaching?

One can certainly go straight into teaching immediately after graduating with a degree but prior work experience:

- can give you a larger toolbox with which you can operate from.
- can give you more in depth knowledge of a subject (the realities not necessarily seen in a book).
- will probably make you more comfortable in dealing with the diverse student population and all the issues that can arise while teaching a class.
Is Teaching Right for You?

• Are you interested in employment related to your field of study?

• Do you want to help people (help people to help themselves)?

• One must be or become comfortable working with many people (diverse groups, new faces all the time)?

• One will be faced with students having difficult personal issues.

• One will commonly having to fail students (rate varies by school and class).

• Do you like to continue to learn more about your field of study?

• One must be or become comfortable speaking to a group.

• One must be or become comfortable taking a leadership position.

• Do you want to change the world?
Recommendations if you are interested in teaching:

• Be a good student and try to get the most out of a class that you can (you may be teaching it someday!).
• Get work experience!
• Try to make yourself comfortable speaking to a group—view your class presentations as an opportunity to teach.
• Make learning a hobby!
• Keep your eyes open and your ears to the ground for an opportunity to get your foot in the door.
• Make contacts—talk to your teachers, keep in touch with past teachers.