WRITING A COMPELLING COVER LETTER
The Academic MFT: How to Get Hired, Survive & Thrive (Session 208)
Megan L. Dolbin-MacNab & Fred P. Piercy
Virginia Tech

Salutation
• Should be formal (e.g., Dear Dr. XXX or Dear Committee Members), even if you know the person well.

First Paragraph
• Explain your purpose for writing.
• Describe how you learned about the position.
• Mention the people you know there and your respect for their work (if sincere).
• Express excitement for the position and why you want the job.
• Provide a powerful statement of why you’d be great for the position.

Middle Paragraphs
• Organize this section to match the emphases of the position and institution. Consider sections on research, teaching, supervision/clinical experience, and service.
  o In each section, describe your accomplishments. Do not simply reiterate your CV. Provide an interesting narrative of your experience and notable achievements. Connect publications, presentations, awards, and grants to your line of research or scholarship.
  o As applicable discuss your future plans. For example, provide specific ideas for research projects and grant funding. Discussing future plans allows you to demonstrate your understanding of what will be expected of you in the position.
• Throughout these paragraphs, describe how you will contribute to the department, the institution, and the field.
• Relate what you say to the specifics of the position.

Final Paragraph
• Offer to send extra material or information.
• Indicate how they can reach you.
• Restate your interest in the position, and how you will contribute to the department.
• Thank them for considering your application.

Other Tips
• Never send a form letter. Be sure to tailor your letter to each position.
• Your letter should be interesting to read.
• Your letter should be well-written (e.g., spelling, grammar, active voice, etc.).
• Get feedback on your letter from several people before sending it. It is one of the most important letters you will ever send.
Curriculum Vitae
James P. Sullivan
725 N. Main Street
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540)555-1234

Education
Doctorate of Philosophy, Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, May 2007.
Dissertation: Translation and Validation of the Kansas Martial Satisfaction Scale with a Spanish Speaking Population.

Masters of Science, Marriage and Family Therapy, Vanderbilt University, May 2002.
Thesis: Understanding the cultural issues experienced by Hispanics in rural communities.

Bachelors of Science, Philosophy, Fort Hays State University, May 1999.
Senior Capstone: Couples communication and Negative Affectivity

Awards and Honors
Outstanding Student in Human Development- 2005-2006
Graduate Honors Society - Phi Upsilon Omicron 2005-2007
Student Member AAMFT- 2000-Present
Student Member NCFR- 2000-Present

Research Interests
Acculturation with Spanish Speaking Populations.
Marital Satisfaction
Couples Communication

Teaching Experience
FACS 2114- Advanced Helping Skills- Taught Fall 2001
HD 2336- Principles of Human Services II. Taught Fall 2006
HD 2335- Principles of Human Services I. Taught Summer 2005
HD 2115- Family Interventions and Helping Skills. Taught Fall 2004
HD 3159- Family Relationships. Taught Spring 2003

Related Work Experience
• Graduate Instructor- 2004-2007- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Taught undergraduate courses in the Human Development Department. See above for courses taught.
• Student Therapist- 2004-2007. Worked as a student therapist at the Family Therapy Center at Virginia Tech. Counseled individuals, couples, and families dealing with various problems. Helped teach coping skills and effective communication. Also helped in supervision of first year students.

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• **Group Facilitator**- 2006-2007. Virginia Tech Adult Day Care Center. Helped lead a group for individuals whose spouse/partner was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease.

• **Assistant Clinic Coordinator**- 2005-2006. Responsibilities included: overseeing clinic matters, coordinating changes within clinic policies, marketing to local agencies, assisting in annual program interview day and effectively communicating problems between staff and student therapists to program director.

• **Research Assistant**- 2004-2007. Responsibilities included filing paperwork, grading papers, running errands, holding office hours, running appropriate statistical analyses, organizing data, qualitative coding, and editing manuscript.

**Publications**


**Presentations**


**Member**

AAMFT, NCFR, GSA, APA, AAECT

**Personal Data**

Height: 5’11” Marital Status: Divorced
Weight: 185 pounds Hobbies: Sports, Computer Games
PREPARING YOUR CV: TIPS FOR SUCCESS
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Organization and Appearance
• Your 1st page should contain the most important information.
• Follow correct APA formatting in the citations for your presentations and publications.
• Put the most important and relevant sections first. Order this information based on the emphases of the position. For example, if you are interested in a position at a research university, put your research experience before your teaching experience.
• Put information in chronological order (from most recent to oldest).
• Make sure the formatting is consistent throughout each section of your CV.
• Use spacing to make your CV easy to read and follow. Do not cram everything together.
• Do not include text boxes or tables.

Writing Conventions
• Use 1st person carefully.
• Limit the use of repetitive phrases such as, “Responsible for…”
• Use “action” verbs such as developed, organized, taught, or supervised.
• Double check grammar and spelling. Ask mentors or colleagues to proofread.
• Use formal language.
• Avoid slang or abbreviations (e.g., “I was the departmental gopher.”)
• Avoid acronyms. Spell out AAMFT, NIMH, COAMFTE, etc.

Content
• Do not include “fluff” in your CV (e.g., high school committees, undergraduate clubs).
• Remove personal information (i.e., marital status, number of children).
• Be honest and don’t exaggerate the truth.
• Do not include publications that have just been rejected.
• Listing articles as “submitted” or “in preparation” is fine, but make sure that they are balanced by published articles.
• Summarize employment and education rather than including too many details.
• Using active voice, provide information on what you accomplished and contributed to each job position.
• Describe any award or honor that is not easily identifiable to others.
• Only include conference presentations. Do not include conference attendance.
• Include the title of your dissertation and the name of your advisor.
• List any licensure or credentials that may be needed for the job.
• List professional memberships and relevant leadership experience.
• Provide explanations for gaps in work history.