

1444 Colorado Place
Palo Alto, CA 94302
November 6, 20XX

John E. Bois, Chair
Department of English
Gorges State University
Gorges, MI 54305

Dear Professor Bois:

I am writing to apply for the position of assistant professor of English announced in the October 5 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education. My experience in the teaching of both composition and literature, my academic preparation in literacy issues, theory, and instruction, and my research experience in the areas of comprehension of literature and writing in the disciplines have provided me with the background necessary to successfully assume the position that you have described.

Though trained as a researcher, I define myself primarily as a teacher and am eager to return to the classroom. I am prepared to teach writing at many levels. At San Francisco State University, I taught composition and writing about literature (essentially a class in the short story) to both regular and remedial populations; at Stanford I have taught thesis and dissertation writing to masters and doctoral students. My courses have generally combined extensive writing experience with the work on skills necessary to that particular class and with group time spent on exercises, inductive assignments, and peer editing. I am enclosing representative evaluations of my teaching from composition classes at San Francisco State.

My scholastic training is broad and encompasses a number of the various areas that fall under the heading of English. My masters work focused on creative writing with special study of Flaubert, Faulkner, and T.S. Eliot and also included courses in the teaching of composition and composition theory. This combination of interests in composition and literature led me to doctoral work at Stanford in the unique Language, Literacy, and Culture program. This program allows a focus on the acquisition and uses of literacy skills and on the roles that motivation, situation, and culture play in literacy development. I focused on composition and reading theory, the acquisition and development of higher-level literacy skills, and reading and writing about literature.

A growing interest in the ways that readers understand literary works led to my dissertation research, a descriptive study in which I investigated the processes through which eight college freshmen and eight masters students in literature read and interpreted two short stories and two poems. By using methods of analysis that created a bridge between cognitive psychology and literary theory, I was able to paint a rich and detailed portrait of the ways in which these readers interacted with the two genres.

Although my dissertation focused on the reading of literature, I am equally interested in investigating the ways in which students write about literature and intend to pursue that in my next project. I would like to carry out intensive case studies of students in a literature class, following them from their first encounters with a literary text through the essays they ultimately produce, with the intention of tracking their understanding of the work. Since my research interests lie generally in the area of higher-level literacy skills and in reading-writing connections, over the long term I hope to use the study of literature as a framework to investigate students' abilities to analyze, to synthesize, and to read and write critically.

I would bring to this position both preparation and experience, not only in writing but also in reading, not only in literacy skills but also in literature, not only in my own skills as a writer or interpreter of literature but also in the teaching of those subjects. Having begun my teaching career in the California State University system, I am most interested in working in a state university environment, for I enjoy the mix of student backgrounds and varying levels of experience and ability that are found there.

I have enclosed a copy of my curriculum vitae, the abstract of my dissertation, and several teaching evaluations; the Career Center at Stanford will send my letters of reference. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Erna M. Gutierrez