

Colorado PFF Network Campus Visit Feedback

Participants:

[8 names suppressed]

Campus: Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado

Date: November 30, 2006

What was your overall impression of this institution?

I felt like they had interesting reforms in physics education, and that they put a lot of their effort and resources towards education, rather than research

Good.

Overall, I had a good impression of Mines. The faculty was positive and honest and they seem genuinely interested in improving their teaching. It sounds like they are supportive of their junior faculty, and while their expectations are high, they also help the faculty to achieve them.

This institution is a very academically focused institution where undergraduate education is paramount. I think it's a pretty forward looking institution and seems to be trying very hard to serve the markets that it prepares students for.

CSM is a very strong tech school. Their commitment to technical education and research is impressive for a relatively small institution.

What made the most favorable impression on you?

The physics professor's (Tom's) obvious dedication to instruction and improving physics education at all levels.

The amazing growth of the size of their physics program in the last several years (100-250, or something like that) was remarkable to hear, and means that whatever they are doing is worth studying.

The honesty of the faculty. It was very helpful to me to have them be completely honest about what they did and didn't like about their jobs and what the challenges and expectations were.

I liked how candid everyone seemed to be. It didn't feel like anyone was telling the party line just to tell it. It was an open and honest discussion from people actively involved in teaching and research to people who are considering this as a career.

CSM seems to have a strong commitment to quality teaching of introductory physics. This demonstrates their interest in physics education.

Did anything impress you less than favorably?

The panel's discussion of life as a faculty member was more than a little discouraging.

The panels on administration were thinly veiled bickering, which makes me think they have a real problem with administration there.

They seem to not really have a support system in for women faculty with families and while they said they were trying to improve the numbers of women in the school, it never really sounded genuine.

Their commitment to increasing women and minorities as faculty and students is well-intentioned, but I think misguided. I think there are pervasive policies and attitudes that will keep undermining their attempts to improve these numbers.

What were the most important things you learned on this visit?

Specifically, I learned a lot about Mines, which I knew little about, and it wasn't what I expected. I had believed before this trip that this was a school more dedicated to engineering and producing engineers (which is in part true) and one which did not focus much on education. More generally, I think this trip taught me a lot about the hardships associated with academia, as well as a lot of the technical ins and outs of daily faculty life.

Can put my finger on one thing; I had no idea what kind of school Mines was, so the whole thing was a revelation.

I learned what part of their jobs are research and what are teaching as well as the expectations of faculty at that institution. For me, it was also very interesting to learn more about the lecturer position since that would probably be more of what I would be looking for in a job. The faculty was also honest and helpful about what we needed to do to apply for a job there, which was very helpful.

I learned about what the job is, what it entails, what the expectations are, and what the development process seems to be once you are getting yourself established. I think it was a good way to develop an understanding of how academia works before getting in with both feet. I'm still not sure where I would like to go, but I feel much better about being prepared for this process in time.

I learned a great deal about the tenure and post-tenure processes. I also found it interesting to see what qualities they are looking for in the hiring process. (MB)

What do you feel distinguishes this institution from others you have studied at or visited?

I think this school is more focused on education, and more willing to put in the resources to reforming education, than other institutions. This school also seemed more focused on research than my undergrad (a liberal arts college), and more focused on satisfying the needs of an industry with its students.

Their engineering and science exclusivity is clearly unusual, and their size also makes them quite different from CU and other schools I have visited.

School of Mines is different from most schools in that it is just a technical, science and engineering school. It is also interesting in that while it is a small school, there is a great deal of focus on research.

This institution is much like Worcester Polytechnic Institute. It has the same flavor of courses and hands on experience. There are many similarities in how the educational experience looks for undergraduates. It is a very solid institution. But it is an engineering school, which means that its student body is much more uniform than a liberal arts college. Its undergraduate research experience is not unlike that of other small engineering schools. I would probably have been able to find a good distinguishing point here if I had not attended an engineering school as an undergrad.

It is small and technical.

Would you want to teach at this institution? Why?

Yes and no. Yes, because it seems like there is so much focus on education, and so many interesting and innovative programs, as well as a self-selected body of intelligent students. No, because the curriculum focuses on the applied, whereas I would like to have students more interested in physics for physics itself, and because the curriculum is so narrowly focused - I would rather have a student body that is more diverse and well-rounded in their interests.

Hard to say. I missed the second half of their presentation, but I'd need to know more about the research environment there. It seems like it would be disadvantageous to do research in such a small department and at a school so focused on teaching.

I would not want to be a professor at this institution because I do not want to work somewhere where there is such a big focus on research. I would prefer to teach somewhere where there is more of a focus on teaching. I would also like to teach somewhere where the curriculum and student body is broader and not just technical. Though the lecturer position would be interesting. There is enough physics education focus and the environment seems supportive, so I might consider that position at Mines.

I think I would enjoy teaching at this institution. I think it would be a very interesting place to teach. The students are usually more focused at a specialty school like this. They are also very innovative in undergraduate education which makes them an interesting place to learn to be an effective teacher.

Yes. I like that there is a sincere interest in quality teaching...at least in the physics department. I also like that they take research seriously as a tool to teach.

Any other comments on the visit?

I thought it was really well done, and our hosts did an excellent job.

I thought this visit was well organized and extremely informative. I learned a lot about both School of Mines and faculty positions in general. I thought it was a great visit.

It was very informative and makes the process of applying for such a position much less of a sea of questions. I think I walked away with the ability to take a first stab at looking at an institution and putting together a resume for that. I also think that from this I can chart a better plan to put myself in a position to find the job that I'm looking for. I felt that the physics department representative was very engaging when it came to talking about the physics department facilities, but scary when it came to discussing the tenure process. I appreciated his candor. However, I found some of his comments disheartening, especially towards women. Tempering his comments against those of the other panel members helped to mediate the impact of his words.

I found that the small group discussions with faculty members were the most beneficial. It would have been nice to have another physics representative since there were so many physics students present. Luckily, I had lunch near the physics professor, so I was able to get a female perspective in the small group meeting.

I liked the diversity in backgrounds of the faculty panel members. (Departments, stage in their career, age, etc.)

It would have been nice to have a few more faculty available over lunch. So that it would be possible for more people to have small group discussions with a few more faculty members.