

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond

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The process of securing a faculty position is fraught with ambiguities and unanswered questions. In Part 1 of this series, we described the university hiring process, considerations for candidates entering the job market, and the typical components of an application. Here, we provide an overview of processes following the selection of potential candidates for a faculty position. We base our advice on our experiences as candidates in multiple job searches and as members of search committees, while acknowledging that there may be considerable differences in the process between and even within institutions.

### **The Selection of Candidates**

As described in Part 1, the search committee typically plays a central role in reviewing submitted applications and selecting promising candidates for further consideration. Depending on the number

of such cases, the search committee may identify several candidates for phone screening in order to select a final smaller pool for campus visits. Phone interviews are generally brief and typically entail discussing the applicant's qualifications to determine fit with the position. In other cases, when fewer candidates are considered strong contenders, those individuals may promptly be invited to campus. Depending on the institution, these invitations may have to be approved by various administrators (e.g., department chair, dean, provost, etc.).

### **The Campus Visit**

Assuming you fit the requirements of the job posting, your careful preparation of application materials will hopefully result in an invitation for an on-campus visit. These visits are considerably more involved and longer than a typical job interview, so knowledge of the process

is essential. After all, these visits will determine who is (and is not) eventually offered the position. In this section, we provide insight into the campus visit, as well as pointers that will help applicants navigate on-campus visits.

### **Don't Think of It as an Interview**

Although it is tempting to think of the campus visit as a job interview, in reality, it is often so much more than that. Typically, you will spend one to two full days visiting the campus meeting various members of the scholarly community. While this certainly provides the search committee the opportunity to further evaluate your suitability for the position, it also serves other purposes. First, it provides opportunities for the broader faculty and, often, the students to become familiar with you as a scholar and potential colleague. Second, it provides the opportunity for you to familiarize yourself

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 74

## **So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond**

with the students, faculty, administration, and others in the university community. Third, you will have the chance to learn more about the college/university and location. You may tour the university and/or city to learn about university resources, residential communities, and other issues pertinent to relocating. Thus, while the campus visit provides an opportunity for the search committee to determine whether they think you should be offered the position, it also provides you the opportunity to determine whether you want it. The importance of the latter should not be underestimated. Think of it more as a mutual audition rather than just an interview.

During the visit, questions that are more general in nature may be asked, as well as questions that are more targeted towards your research and teaching. We provide examples of such inquiries in Table 1. While it is important for the various university stakeholders to determine if you are a good fit for them, you should be equally engaged in evaluating whether the university is a good fit for you since the campus visit is a time for you to gather the data you need to determine if you could be happy in the department, university, and community. Expectations for promotion and tenure are an important aspect to determine. Examples of other questions you might ask of the people with which

you meet during a campus visit are also included in Table 1. Another consideration is whether you can envision yourself content living in the part of the country in which the university is located. Practical considerations to be explored might include spousal employment (i.e., the health of the job market in the area, necessity for a spousal hire within the university), relocation assistance, housing options, and recreational activities.

### **Arranging Your Visit**

The search committee will often generally make (and pay for) your travel arrangements and accommodations. Many universities will arrange travel and accommodations for visiting candidates while others require applicants to arrange their own travel and sometimes accommodations. Similarly, most universities arrange to pay for costs associated with travel and accommodations upfront, while some may require the applicant to pay for these costs, save receipts, and obtain reimbursement after the on-campus visit. Such arrangement will typically be explained to you, but if not, you may inquire as to the procedures to determine the expenses for which you may initially be responsible. The search committee chairperson also typically prepares a detailed itinerary for your visit which may

include who will meet you at the airport or train station upon your arrival, as well as who will drop you off at the conclusion of the on-campus interview.

Your campus visit will generally include meals with faculty and others, meetings with program stakeholders, and a research presentation. You may also be asked to provide a teaching demonstration, and may be provided tours of the college, university, and surrounding community. The dates, times, and locations of each meeting and presentation you must attend will generally also be provided, which you should ask to have as far in advance as possible. If possible, ask that you have a brief break (e.g., 15 to 30 minutes) in your itinerary before your talk so that you have time to get everything set up, calm your nerves, and tackle any glitches before your audience arrives.

On-campus visits tend to be tightly packed with few opportunities for down time. Plan and pack accordingly. If you need breaks during the day (e.g., for a conference call that cannot be rescheduled, to pump breast milk) be sure to communicate this well in advance since your itinerary may not otherwise include any breaks. If traveling to a different region, check the weather so that you will have appropriate attire. Be prepared to wear your suit and shoes all day. You will need to look professional, but also be comfortable since you will

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 75

## **So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond**

likely be shuffled from one meeting to the next from breakfast through dinner. It is probable that you will be accompanied by one or more members of the search committee for all onsite transportation (e.g., to and from the airport/train station, to and from meetings) and meals.

Think carefully about what you will need for your presentation(s), and be sure to communicate this to the search chair well in advance. That said, you should be prepared for technology difficulties and plan accordingly. Consider including handouts and be prepared to do your talk without any additional audiovisual aids (e.g., PowerPoint) should the equipment fail. Be sure to have your presentation materials saved on a flash drive and, when possible, share the materials via email or other means with the search committee or staff so that they can download them to their computer and make copies as needed.

### **Doing Your Homework**

Given the importance of this visit, it is wise to engage in appropriate preparation. While you likely did some investigation of the program and institution when you prepared your application materials, you should gather additional information in advance of a campus visit based on the provide itinerary. Your primary concern will likely be to prepare for your research

presentation, but you should also take time to prepare for the other meetings that will take place by familiarizing yourself with the people with whom you will meet and the program, department, college, university, and other local organizations. For instance, you may learn about the local research centers or clinics, school systems, or other organizations with which you could develop professional relationships as a member of the faculty. Familiarize yourself with the research emphases and areas of expertise of the faculty with whom you will meet. Even if a faculty member's research interests are not consistent with yours, basic awareness of their work will at least give you some things to talk about. It will also demonstrate that you are knowledgeable of the faculty and their areas of research. While it is certainly not expected that you know everything about the university or the individuals within it, you should demonstrate a basic level of familiarity and interest. If nothing else, be prepared to ask questions about various elements of the position, program, and institution. Such knowledge will help facilitate informed conversations during the time you spend with faculty while visiting campus.

You will also likely be asked questions about your interest in potential collaborations with other scholars, centers, or organizations. If you seem

unfamiliar with these, search committee members may take your lack of knowledge as lack of interest in the position. This, in turn, can undermine your chances of a job offer. You may consider having a list of questions for each individual or type of individual with which you meet (e.g., program faculty, department faculty, administrators, current students). This is also your chance to assess collaboration and collegiality within the unit, so be prepared to interact with faculty, students, and administrators to ascertain how these individuals interact and engage with you.

Your campus visit may also include a meeting with students that are typically not attended by the search committee or other faculty members. Search committees often consider student input in their hiring decisions, so these meetings provide a way for the students to get to know you. Like your meetings with faculty, it is important to be professional, genuine, warm, and engaging. Perhaps more importantly, meetings with students are also a valuable opportunity to gauge the climate and collegiality of the program, department, or college. Students are often very candid, and this can be helpful for determining whether this position is a good fit for you.

### **The Research Talk**

The research or job talk is a central component of the campus visit, particularly for positions in which

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 76

## **So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond**

research is a primary area of your work. The job talk is usually a 45-60 minute formal to semi-formal research presentation, with additional time allotted for discussion and questions. You may ask the search chair about the desired structure of the presentation (e.g., how much time to allow for discussion, whether to focus on a single study or your broader research agenda). You can expect the attending faculty to inquire about the specific study or studies discussed, implications, future directions, and the links to their own work (which is why it helps to do your homework in advance — see above). The job talk is your opportunity to demonstrate that you can design and carry out solid research that has the potential to lead to publications and grant funding. You might best accomplish this by presenting one study, acknowledging the study's strengths and limitations, and demonstrating the ability to respond to questions about the study in a thoughtful and meaningful manner. It is also advisable to dedicate several minutes at the end of the presentation focused on ideas for future research studies that stem from the research study presented even when the search committee suggests that a single-study talk is desired. This demonstrates that you have considered developing a cohesive research agenda that has long-term viability. When posed with challenging questions, don't be afraid

to ask for clarification or to say, "I don't know" or "I don't know that yet." Use those tough questions to acknowledge a new angle or unanswered question.

Typically, faculty members from across the department attend the job talk, along with some of the department's students. The talk may be video-recorded to allow those not in attendance to evaluate your performance. It is common for faculty and students attending the job talk to rate the candidate using a rating scale prepared by the search committee. Alternatively, the search committee may disseminate your CV and other materials (e.g., representative publications, sample syllabi) for review and then solicit feedback on your overall suitability. The increasing use of web surveys means you may be evaluated by people with whom you have no direct interaction.

In preparing for your research talk, you should be thoughtful in your selection and presentation of the topic. Structure your talk in a way that reflects your scholarship and desired trajectory. Be concise in your preparation of visual materials, avoiding wordy slides or overly complex graphics. You should gear your descriptions to both generalists and specialists since your audience will likely include faculty who do not have a background in school psychology. Be sure to practice your talk, preferably with an audience to ensure timely progress and

clarity. You should also be familiar enough with your talk to proceed without slides or other visuals if necessary. A good rule of thumb is to plan for mishaps so that you can maintain your composure regardless. In general, do not underestimate the importance of the research talk; in some cases, it may be one of the most important aspects of your campus visit, particularly in research-intensive institutions.

### **Teaching Demonstration**

In some instances, the applicant may also be asked to give a teaching demonstration as well. This may be more common at institutions where faculty obligations are more weighted towards teaching than research. To prepare for a teaching demonstration, applicants should determine the content of the course, previous material covered, and the makeup of the students (i.e. undergraduates or graduates). It is likely that a few faculty members will also attend the teaching demonstration so providing opportunities for students to ask questions allows the applicant a chance to demonstrate his/her mastery of the material, as well as ability to effectively communicate with students. Importantly, applicants should remember to present in a manner that is comfortable and natural so that students and faculty can get a realistic view of the applicants' teaching

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 77

## **So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond**

strategies and teaching persona.

### **The Importance of Socializing**

As suggested above, you should be prepared to interact with members of the hiring unit throughout the duration of your visit. You will likely engage in several meals with faculty, students, and possibly other university stakeholders. These meals are often held in informal settings such as a local restaurant or the on-campus faculty dining hall, but may also take place at a search committee or faculty member's home. These meals are intended to provide an opportunity to evaluate applicants' fit as a colleague—that is, beyond your potential to contribute to the field as a scholar and trainer, are you someone who others will want to have as a colleague (that is, do they want you in the office next door/down the hall for the next one to thirty years)?

It is likely that meals will include program faculty, departmental faculty, and at times, students. You should engage everyone who joins you for a meal. As previously noted, you will also be evaluated during informal interactions (e.g., meals, in the car on the way from and to the airport, walking from one meeting to the next with a student or faculty host, etc.). Finally, applicants often get an opportunity to engage a student or individual faculty member during the campus tour. This is a great time to get a

feeling for the campus, learn great places to grab a bite to eat, and gain insight about the college/university from the guide's perspective. However, like with informal meals and meetings, you should remain aware that the campus tour is still a part of the evaluation process for a faculty position. Thus, it is important that you maintain a professional, approachable, and authentic demeanor at all times.

After your visit, you may send follow up messages thanking the search committee chair (and other relevant faculty members) for hosting the visit. You may also send follow up messages of other faculty with whom you met. Even if you do not receive an offer for the position, you will likely encounter these individuals in professional settings and may want to collaborate with scholars met during campus visits. Therefore, it is important for applicants to demonstrate collegiality even after the interview and offer or rejection is received.

### **Managing Offers**

Hopefully, the result of your visit will be an offer for the position. An offer will typically be made by the department chair or dean and will include some or all of the following: title; contract term; salary; roles/responsibilities (e.g., teaching load, course assignments); probationary period; terms of performance evaluation/promotion; allowances for travel, research,

professional development, graduate/research assistance; relocation expenses; equipment and office space. In some institutions, many of the terms of an offer are negotiable, so you should be strategic, yet honorable, in making your requests. If any of these items are not included in the offer letter and are of concern or interest to you, you should inquire through the person who delivered the offer. It is important to be clear on the terms before you sign anything since it can be quite difficult to solicit additional support or resources afterwards. If you believe you need particular types of support (e.g., software, equipment, research assistants, space, spousal appointments) before you can accept a position, this is the time in the process to request those resources. Your requests should be based on your short and long-term goals and what you think you need in order to be effective in your position. In some instances, this will largely be informed by the circumstances most conducive to your research productivity. Some of the items you request will be essential (e.g., critical materials) and others preferred but not necessary (e.g., summer salary, course releases). This is another area in which doing your homework is important because it can provide information regarding the types and amount of resources you can procure. For instance, you'll likely be unsuccessful



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 78

## **So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond**

at negotiating a salary well above that of all other similarly ranked professors in your unit (e.g., assistant professors in the college), so it helps to inquire about such information beforehand.

If you have applied for multiple positions, you might find yourself deciding between multiple offers. In these cases, you will often compare the data gathered during your visit and the terms of the offer to determine which the best position to accept is. This is why the campus visit is so important. At this point in the process, there are several issues to consider: promotion and tenure criteria, workload, institutional resources, professional development opportunities, research support, teaching supporting, mentoring opportunities, collegiality, faculty governance, community characteristics and resources, location, and anything else that may be germane to your professional and personal development.

When faced with two or more attractive positions in which you could envision yourself, your decision may be decided by the terms of the contract. In these cases, you may ask a school to change their offer to match or trump what you have been offered elsewhere. If you have no intention of accepting a position, you should let them know promptly so that the search committee can move forward with other options. In general, you should be discreet and

forthright with all parties since your behavior in this process will contribute to your professional reputation. Whether you accept a given position or not, the faculty on the search committee are now part of your professional community.

### **Regrouping and Moving Forward**

There may be times when your job search is unproductive or you are not offered the position for which you hoped. If you are not invited for any phone interviews or campus visits, you may ask a mentor or other trusted colleague to review your materials to identify potential improvements. Poorly presented application materials can lead to negative evaluations of your appropriateness for a position. Even when your credentials and experience are strong, failure to follow directions or conform to expectations in your field can undermine the success of your application.

If you participated in screenings or campus interviews and did not garner an offer, it could be that there was nothing wrong with your qualifications or fit per se, but that there was simply a more fitting candidate. It will often be difficult to determine why you were not offered a position since multiple factors inform the decision. If you have a trusted colleague at the institution(s) you visited, you may seek feedback regarding your performance

during the research talk and other activities. After each visit, you should also have reflected on what worked and didn't; what questions or interactions you struggled with; and what information you needed but didn't get so that you can do better the next time. You can use this information to fine-tune your efforts when a new position becomes available.

### **Resources**

- Darley, J. M., Zanna, M. P., & Roediger, H. L. (Eds.). (2004). *The complete academic: A career guide 2nd edition*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Lucas, C. J., & Murry, J. W. (2002). *New faculty: A practical guide for academic beginners*. New York: Palgrave.
- Schoenfeld, A. C., & Magnan, R. (1994). *Mentor in a manual: Climbing the academic ladder to tenure*. Madison, WI: Magna Publications. The Chronicle of Higher Education

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 79

**So You Want to Be a Professor? Perspectives on the Academic Job Search Process  
Part 2 – Interviewing and Beyond**

**Table 1**  
**Example Questions for the Campus Visit**

<b>Questions to Expect</b>	<b>Questions to Ask</b>
<p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you want to join this department, college, and university?</li> <li>• How do you see yourself contributing to our department?</li> <li>• What are your long-term goals?</li> <li>• Where do you see this field going in five, ten, and twenty years?</li> <li>• What is your philosophy of training?</li> <li>• What kind of startup package do you need?</li> <li>• What is your methodology for problem-solving?</li> <li>• How do you feel about living here?</li> </ul> <p><b>Research-Focused</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell us about your dissertation.</li> <li>• What is your 3-5 year plan for research (and why)?</li> <li>• With which faculty, centers, or departments can you envision collaborating?</li> <li>• What supports do you need to conduct your research?</li> <li>• What are your plans for applying for external funding?</li> <li>• What kinds of facilities would you need to conduct your research and teaching here?</li> <li>• How does X apply to your research? How does your research apply to X?</li> <li>• What opportunities for collaboration do you foresee here?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teaching Related</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your basic teaching philosophy?</li> <li>• What is your experience advising students' research?</li> <li>• What is your experience advising students in the field?</li> <li>• What courses would you like to teach?</li> <li>• What courses would you feel comfortable teaching?</li> <li>• How do you incorporate technology in your teaching?</li> <li>• How do you approach teaching students of mixed abilities and backgrounds?</li> <li>• How has our research influenced your teaching?</li> </ul>	<p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the availability of mentorship for new faculty?</li> <li>• What are the expectations for promotion and tenure?</li> <li>• What support is available for professional development, including conference travel?</li> <li>• What are the immediate needs of the program? How do you see me fitting into those needs?</li> <li>• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program/department/college?</li> <li>• What are the department's plans for growth and hiring?</li> <li>• What relocation assistant/funding is provided?</li> <li>• Are salary raises computed on a percentage basis or a sum increase? What has been the past "track record" for raises?</li> <li>• What is the average time that faculty spend in each academic rank?</li> <li>• How are graduate students supported?</li> </ul> <p><b>Research-Focused</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the expectations for research productivity?</li> <li>• To what degree is external funding expected/required for promotion and tenure?</li> <li>• What supports are available to support research?</li> <li>• What level of startup funds are available?</li> <li>• What other internal funding sources exist?</li> <li>• What other resources are available, such as research assistants, computer accounts, research space, computer hardware and software, and secretarial assistance?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teaching-Related</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the expected course load? What is the expected advising load?</li> <li>• What are the expectations/opportunities for summer teaching?</li> <li>• What is the availability of teaching/graduate assistants?</li> <li>• How does the department and university support the improvement of teaching?</li> <li>• How much autonomy would I have in designing courses?</li> <li>• How are advisees assigned/selected?</li> </ul>