Preparing for the Academic Job Market II: On-campus Interviews and the Teaching Pitch

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Based on a September 2012 talk by:
Jody Peters of the Career Center and George Lopez from the Kroc Institute for International Peace
General Advice

- Attend job interviews in your own department
- Portray yourself as a colleague
- Show enthusiasm
- Be invested in your work
- Think of yourself as a faculty member from the time you start applying for a job
On-campus Interviews and Job Talks

- **Purpose of Interview:**
  - Get to know you
  - Share information about the position and university

- **Many different formats – get details before arriving**
  - **Job talk** – here is my research
  - **Chalk talk** – plans for future research
  - **Teach a class** – exemplifies teaching style
  - **Individual meetings** with faculty, post-docs, graduate or undergraduate students, administrators
Typical Schedule

- Typically 1.5 to 2 days
- Must give a job talk
- 30 minute meetings from breakfast through dinner
- Plan to be exhausted, drink lots of caffeine, yet never have time to go to the bathroom
Before Going on Interview: Preparation

Know Your Audience:

Review the university/department mission statement.

Look over the faculty interests and research profiles.

Get a copy of your schedule in advance!
Tell an interesting story that is supported by data.
Job Talk

Big Picture
For the Generalists:
Why does the research matter?
Who cares or should care?

Current Work

Nitty Gritty
Details

Future Goals

For the specialists
Data, graphs or figures
5 Types of Questions

Amplification
Contradiction
Multi-barreled
Hostile
Incomprehensible

*shared by Yasmin Solomonescu, Assistant Professors of English, University of Notre Dame and originally developed by Professor Paul Stevens, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Early Modern Literature and Culture, & Placement Officer, University of Toronto
Informal presentation (mainly to faculty) about immediate, medium and long-term plans.

Example question: “Outline how you envision the three specific aims of what will be your first R01 application?

Connect research to special opportunities at that campus – faculty collaborations, field stations, research facilities.
Teaching a Class

- Format: What kind of teaching do they want you to demonstrate? Lecture? Interactive seminar? Something else?

- Available Technology

- Audience: Faculty? Students? What level of students? How familiar with your field?

- Practice – friends, colleagues, students
Teaching a Class

Bad example: Candidate reads a long essay that he had written

Good example: Candidate put 2 quotes on board and got everyone involved immediately in heated discussion. Quotes were from Shakespeare and Metallica.

Teaching situation for interview is artificial - make it fit your personality and comfort level.

Bring syllabi example and talk about typical assignments.

Keep a sense of humor and remain flexible.
Meeting with Individuals

You can meet with anyone and everyone

- Search Committee
- Faculty/Colleagues
- Students
- Human Resources
- Librarians
- Lab Managers
- Department Chairs
- Deans
- Administrative Assistants
- Anyone you ask to meet
Meeting with Individuals

- Your always “on,” so always act like it
- Opportunity to dialogue rather than you presenting – let them get to know you!
- Don’t assume they have read your CV
Questions You WILL be asked

Describe your program of research
You need a long and a short answer and one for experts and non-experts

Corollaries
What is the broader significance of your research?
What are the limitations of your research?
What research project will you do next?
Questions You WILL be asked

How would you teach....

A service course in your field?

Any course on your CV that you say you can teach?

Corollary
What courses would you like to teach and how would you teach them?
Questions You WILL be asked

Tell us how your research has influenced your teaching… In what ways have you been able to bring the insights of your research to the courses at the undergraduate level?

Try to focus on specific examples!
Questions You WILL be asked

Why do you want to work at “Shall Remain Nameless” College or University?

Corollaries:

- How do you see yourself contributing to our department?
- What three things are you looking for in an academic position?
- Your degree is from “Prestigious Research U,” what about “Mediocre U” interests you?
You may get “unusual questions

- What is the best idea you ever had?
- What is the most important question in your subfield?
- What do you see as your own weaknesses, as a scientist/scholar and teacher?

These are examples – other questions will come up you haven’t thought through. Practice answering questions before you go on the interview. Don’t blurt out answers – take your time to think through how you want to answer.
Questions You WILL be asked

Do you have any questions?

You need to have some!
The Search Committee Chair—

Are there any surprises on my itinerary? (e.g., touchy topics, difficult people, faculty with different expectations from the search committee)

What, in particular, are YOU looking for in filling this position?
Questions you should ask

The Dean—

What research funds are available at different levels of the University?

How would you describe the department to a fellow dean? (Try to assess his/her evaluation of the department.)
The Department Chair and senior faculty—

What are you looking for in filling this position? (Do different faculty have different agendas?)

What resources are available?
Questions you should ask

**Junior Faculty—**

What classes did you teach last year?
How much influence did you have in the:
# of students?
# of preps?
Which classes and when?

What support did you receive for research?

What is the greatest frustration with your job?
Graduate Students—

Why did you decide to go here? Are you happy with your decision?

How are you treated?

What resources are available to you?
Exit Interview with Chair—

What is your timetable for filling the position?

Make sure you have ideas regarding your needs for start up, salary, etc.
Questions that can lead to discrimination in regards to race, sex, age, religion, national origin, or disability.

You do not have to provide information about your marital or parental status, your ethnic background, or any disabilities you may have.

Job candidates are asked these questions either out of ignorance or purposefully.

In some cases you may want to reveal this information voluntarily to determine if the position is family-friendly, ethnically diverse, or accommodations for disabilities are provided.
Example “Do you have children?” you can:

Answer directly AND highlight benefits

Avoid the question BUT highlight qualifications

Challenge the question and know the risks involved
Performance

✓ Dress: Comfortable, yet professional.
Business Attire

Women
Suits, Dresses: Conservative business suit, pantsuit or dress
Skirt length to bottom of knee
Choose color that compliments skin tone and hair color
Beige, black, navy or gray
Make sure clothes are not too tight or too loose

Tops: Simple style
Avoid low-cute necklines or very frilly styles

Shoes: Polished pumps or medium heels in color that matches outfit
Business Attire

Men
Suits: Dark blue, gray, black, muted pin-stripes or muted brown
Quality woven blend of natural fibers looks professional
Avoid bold pin-stripes, contrasting slacks and sport coat, or light colors

Shirts: Quality white button-down or white classic collar
Oxford blue or muted stripe also acceptable
Be sure it is ironed

Ties: Conservative stripes or paisleys that compliment your suit
Silk or good quality blends only

Shoes: Highly polished slip-ons or laced dress shoes; brown, cordovan, or black
Performance

✓ Dress: Comfortable, yet professional.

✓ Attitude: My dissertation project is fabulous and here’s why.

✓ Pace: Think before you speak; there’s nothing wrong with pausing to collect your thoughts. Be specific, not exhaustive.

✓ Fielding questions: Prepare responses to general categories of questions.

✓ Props: Bring copies of syllabi for classes or major publications.

✓ Last chance: You absolutely must ask one or two questions that can’t be answered by the website. You may also want to prepare a question for any student that may be on the committee.
Items to Bring

Carry-on bag, briefcase, or computer bag

Information you may need such as:

Copies of your CV

Application materials and job announcement

Examples of teaching materials (sample syllabi, lists of class you have taught, etc.)

Dissertation abstract and research plan

Papers you have published

Notes about your interviewers (who they are, what they do)
Emergency Items

Snacks – you don’t want your stomach growling if you haven’t been able to eat much at lunches when you are doing most of the talking

Umbrella – don’t be caught in a downpour between the hotel and the campus

Back-up items that will help you get through without any major issues (e.g., alarm clock, ear plugs, mini sewing kit, individual stain removers (“Shout Wipes”), band-aids, extra contact lenses, glasses, tissues, allergy medications, eye drops, etc.)
Additional Tips

- Get a good night’s sleep. Arrive 15 minutes early.
- Relax and build rapport at the beginning. Maintain good eye contact/appropriate body language.
- Be yourself.
- Each person you meet has their own style - adjust to it. The interviewer is in driver’s seat.
- Use bathroom breaks to re-group
- Evaluate others as they go through the experience: Go to departmental interviews. Ask about opportunities to sit on hiring committees.
- Practice your job talk!
After the Interview

- **Thank you letter:**
  - To the search committee chair for his/her time and effort.
  - Thank specific committee members, graduate students, and administrators with whom you might want to follow-up with.
  - Keep notes professional but friendly. If you learned something about the position that fits your qualifications particularly well be sure to mention it.

- **Follow up:**
  - E-mail
  - Telephone
Questions ??

Cartoon by Kerry Soper, Assistant Professor of Humanities, Brigham Young University. Chronicle of Higher Education
Resources

Professional Development Workshops

Career Center (https://careercenter.nd.edu)

Kaneb Center (http://kaneb.nd.edu/)
individual appointments (http://kaneb.nd.edu/services/consultations/)

Writing Center (http://writingcenter.nd.edu/)

English for Academic Purposes (http://cslc.nd.edu/eap/)