Discussion on Interviewing for Academic Jobs
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Prepare before:
Dress; business attire, perhaps a little on the casual side. Better to dress up than down, make sure clothes fit and you are comfortable (physically and emotionally) in them.
Research the faculty, read or skim some papers. Research the department.
Prepare your own elevator talks on your research, especially a version considered/prepared for people outside of your field (how far afield might your colleagues be?).
Think about what resources and expectations the department might have (e.g., figure out whether they will have $1M or $50k for startup, and have an appropriate plan).
In suggesting courses you would like to teach, know well what is taught now and by whom; you don’t want to seem as if you are taking over someone else’s territory.
Have an answer to question, “What would your first grant proposal be?”
Know your own work and field thoroughly.

You need to have a vision of who you will be in 5-10 years; don’t leave a vacuum for them to fill in (it won’t be as good a vision as yours).

Types of interviews:
Phone/Skype/Facetime (1-2 hours)
Brief visit (1/2-1 day)
Full visit (2-3 days)
You be asked for either a research or teaching seminar, or both.

During:
Who you will meet:
Search committee (often at the beginning and end), individual faculty, students, department Chair, and often Dean. Each has a different responsibility, perspective, and agenda.
A) Committee starts with a “feeling out” of each other. If you do not get the answer before, at some point they are good to ask about expectations for tenure.
B) Chair will be the person you would negotiate with should there be an offer, and is the source of most of the professional answers. This is whom you ask about teaching load or professional expectations.
C) Dean ultimately must approve all offers, but will likely not know your field, so you need to communicate effectively with them (e.g., clearly explain the importance of your work).
D) Faculty. Show them you will be a good colleague, that not only will you do great things, but that they might benefit themselves from having you in the department, if only as a good foil.
E) Students; don’t undervalue their contribution to the search. Treat them with respect and interest.

Have prepared questions written down or at least in your mind for each type of constituent listed above.
Do not ask about salary. You can ask the Chair about start-up, but only if you have no idea what they might be in a position to offer, and preferably as a last resort (let them broach the subject if you can).
Be engaged and enthusiastic at all times. Make eye contact. Demonstrate to them (without begging or fawning) that you want the job.
Imagine yourself hired and happy at the institution (but don’t act like you are expecting it). Engage faculty in conversation, especially about their work (ask intelligent and informed questions).

A common question is a variant of “why do you want this job?” or “why would you be happy here given our teaching/research expectations?”

Emphasize what you CAN do, not what you may NOT want to do.

Be succinct in your answers (here is where preparation helps). Don’t talk about yourself for 20 minutes without a break. Encourage a conversation, not a lecture.

Most departments are hiring a colleague (to interact with), not just a teacher or researcher.

Don’t drink, or don’t drink much, and not without food.

Minimize your discussion of personal issues. Be cautious about volunteering information on the employment needs of a spouse. (They cannot ask you about such things).

Effective communication of how you would fit into the department is key.

Be prepared for adversarial questions (some people may question your results or even your approach); stay cool, have a respectful response. If the person is right, acknowledge the “good point” and ask to discuss it with them later (and do so). If you honestly think they are wrong, don’t abandon your position, gracefully defend it, but if the defense would go on a long time, offer to discuss it later.

Be prepared to contribute to the institution (Service), but don’t over-commit (at least in your mind).

Be true to yourself.

Remember, the interview does not end until you are home (every interaction will be noted).

After:

Follow-up communication.

Remember that the final decision is very complicated and largely unpredictable. I have seen searches completely invert the preference order during the subsequent discussions by the search committee, and for all sorts of reasons that may have little to do with how good you are. Don’t take rejections personally, we all get them.
Preparing for Academic Interviews

The key to successful interviewing is effective preparation. It is critical for you to be prepared to talk about yourself and your understanding of an institution to convince a hiring committee of your ability to do the job.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABOUT YOURSELF</th>
<th>PROSPECTIVE INSTITUTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Current research</td>
<td>• History/mission of the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Future research plans</td>
<td>• Research interests of the faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teaching skills and interests</td>
<td>• Knowledge of courses offered, student population</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Accomplishments</td>
<td>• Understanding of the position</td>
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Researching Institutions

To prepare for upcoming interviews, collect information on:
- Department’s course offerings
- Institutional mission
- Research/teaching ratio
- Student population
- Faculty interests

Sources of institutional information:
- Internet
- Your faculty advisor or other mentors
- Any friends/family/acquaintances with connections to the institution
- Online college/university newspaper
- College guides

Preparing for Questions about Yourself

Current research
- Prepare to talk about your dissertation/research to a variety of people
- Develop two synopses of your research: one for experts, one for non-experts: PRACTICE THESE!
- Think about the impact your work has had on the field

Teaching
- Prepare to talk about general philosophy as well as classroom methods
- Think about how you might incorporate technology in the classroom
- Be ready to talk about what you can teach as well as what you would like to teach
- Consider specifics of how you would teach introductory courses (texts, materials, etc.)
Future research plans

- Critical to consider your research plans for the next year, 5 years, 10 years
- Give consideration to plans to apply for grant funding
- Be ready to express your plans in a convincing way, even if they are preliminary

Sample Questions

Research:

1. Describe your current research.
2. Why did you choose to focus on this area?
3. What is the broader significance of your research?
4. What limitations exist in your current project?
5. What will your next research project be? Are you planning to make changes to your current project?
6. Tell me where your research will be in 5 years.
7. What are your plans for applying for external funding?

Teaching:

1. Describe your philosophy of teaching.
2. How do you motivate students?
3. Describe a course you have taught in the past and how you evaluated the students' learning.
4. How would you teach this (introductory level, intermediate, advanced level) course? What primary and secondary texts would you choose?
5. How have you used technology in the classroom?
6. How would you increase enrollment in this major?
7. Describe your ideal course. What does the syllabus look like? What texts would you envision using?
8. How do you plan to bring the insights of your research into courses at the undergraduate level?
9. Given your research work at a large, prestigious research university, what attracts you to teaching at a small liberal arts college?

Willingness to participate in the department and school:

1. Can you summarize the contribution you would make to our department?
2. Are you willing to become involved in committee work?
3. Why are you interested in our kind of school?
4. What institutional issues particularly interest you?
5. How would you see yourself contributing to mission of the college and to the campus atmosphere?
Career and personal choices:
1. If you have more than one job offer, how will you decide among offers?
2. How do you feel about living in a small college town like this (in an isolated rural area, etc.)?
3. I understand your spouse is also seeking a tenure-track position. What if you receive job offers in different locations?
4. Where else are you interviewing?
5. What will it take to persuade you to take this job?
6. What kind of salary are you looking for?

Questions you might ask the interviewers:
1. What is the largest single problem facing your department right now?
2. What is the usual promotional time frame?
3. What do you like most about this college/university?
4. What is life like in this city/town?
5. What are the next steps? When can I expect to hear from you?

Final tips
- Do not accept campus interviews to “practice” your interviewing skills
- Do your homework to anticipate departmental needs, both in terms of research and teaching
- Review sample questions and practice your answers
- Bring extra CVs/resumes to the interview
- Dress appropriately
- **ALWAYS** bring a list of questions you have for the interviewers
- Don’t volunteer negative information—even if you have plenty to give
- Address faculty (and all interviewers) as they were introduced (i.e., use first names if this is how one is introduced)
- Be ready to sell your candidacy to students
- Exercise good manners and display collegiality at all times
- Send follow-up thank-you letters or emails
- Remember: departments are seeking a colleague….so consider the interview a conversation among colleagues!