

Discussion on Interviewing for Academic Jobs

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First:

Interviewing can (and should) be fun

Outline

- Questions at any time
- Types of interviews
- Preparing for the interview
- During the interview (look over tips)
- After

Types of interviews

- Phone/Skype/Facetime (30-90 minutes)
- Brief visit (1/2-1 day)
- Full visit (2-3 days)
- “Sham” (don’t worry, learn from them)

You be asked for either a research or teaching seminar, both, or research and “chalk talk.”

Prior Preparations I

- 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 new 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).
- Teaching plans: consider placing core or service courses first priority (because the department typically needs them taught more than your specialty dream class). But 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.

Prior Preparations II

- 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).

During I

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. To varying degrees, these are the people who make the hiring decision.
- 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 will ask about teaching load and professional expectations. Usually save start-up and space specifics for later but generals ok.
- 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.

During II

Tips:

- 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. But also don't cut yourself short.

During III

- 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. One per dinner or reception is fine.
- 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, but often do).
- 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.