

Success in the Job Search

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(thanks to Matt Welsh for slides from 2009!)

Outline

- Disclaimer: Focus on academic searches
- Before:
 - the schedule, planning
 - applications
- During:
 - job talk
 - interviews, other meetings
 - pit falls
- After:
 - wait, negotiate and decide!

My experience

- Graduated from U. Penn. in Spring 2001
 - job search while writing PhD dissertation and teaching 400 students at the Wharton school (don't do this!!)
- Applied for jobs at a bunch of schools, a couple of research labs
 - Interviewed at 7 schools (5 eng., 2 business) and 1 lab
 - Don't think I turned down any interviews
- Got 7 academic offers and 1 offer from a lab
 - Winnowed down to engineering over business
 - Dropped all but East coast schools
- Settled on HU, arrived in Fall 2001!

- Part I

The Job Search Schedule

- *Now: meet people and get known!*
- December: Send out applications
 - only apply to places you know you could accept
- Feb/March: Get invitations to interview
- Feb-April: Interviews
- April: Decisions, decisions! (Second visits.)
- Notes:
 - some markets are on different schedules (e.g., B-schools are a lot earlier); industry will tend to wait for your academic offers; post docs clear later as well
 - *if you have a two-body problem and especially in the same field then mention this at application time*

Plan early!

- Start building up your professional network now
 - most interviews I got were through people I had met
 - *internships are a great way to get outside letters*
- Become known, find your niche
 - give talks, ask questions at conferences, ask people about their research, tell people about your research
- Timing matters
 - try to publish a major paper in the summer before you go on the market
- Finish your PhD before you start your next job
 - don't plan on doing very much while you are interviewing
 - have your introductory chapter written (will provide the

The job application

- Cover letter (*have someone read this...*)
- Research statement (3-4 pages) (area; past, future)
- Teaching statement (1-2 pages)
- Full resume with list of references
- Representative publications (2-3)
- Your web page (photo, app. materials, email)
 - no pop-up ads
- Contact people you know at places to tell them you're applying and ask your advisor to do this
- Recruit letter writers early
 - get external letters

The Elevator Pitch

- At conferences, during interviews, etc. you will often be asked “So, what are you working on?”
- You need to have a clear and motivated pitch on your research vision- what are you doing and why?
 - Can be interactive, e.g., “do you know about area X?”
- Be prepared to start from different levels and talk to different listeners:
 - a colleague in your field (why hard, why interesting?)
 - someone in a diff. area (why interesting, connections?)
 - Dean/Chair (big picture, interest within industry, etc.)
 - *don't be defensive and expect some people to be aggressive*

- Part II

Typical interview format

- 1-2 days (usually 2 for academic jobs)
- Your job talk: 50 minutes plus questions
- Lots of 30 minute meetings with faculty
 - hopefully after your talk, but don't plan on this
 - prepare, know something about what people do and think about connections
 - your task is to build a coalition that will support your case (what can *they* get from having you as a colleague?)
- Meetings with the Chair and the Dean
- Roundtable with graduate students (ask for this if not scheduled!)

Planning the job talk

- Need to appeal to a wide audience
 - Both specialists in your area and others outside (it is OK and expected to bore specialists at the start)
- Hourglass rule:
 - First 1/3 of talk: mile high view, motivation and summary
 - Second 1/3: technical content. Ok to lose non-specialists
 - Last 1/3: Widen scope, define contributions, talk about other work and future work
 - *fun to try to build in some tension, anticipate where people will start asking questions...*
- Be clear about what you did
 - Need to let people say “candidate X solved problem Y”,

Giving the talk itself

- Find some humor early on to relax you & audience!
- Be yourself and try to enjoy it
 - a trick I used was to have a little handwritten note with key words in the first few sentences
- Treat questions carefully
 - you *want* questions; they help to provide context for you about your audience
 - listen carefully and clarify, think *why* they are asking the question? Rephrase the Q if you think it will help.
 - it is OK to defer Qs if you will get to the issue shortly
 - don't patronize or be defensive (if they have a good point then acknowledge this, say what you can, move on...)

Dress

- It is hard to overdress for a job interview
 - most candidates will wear a suit (and tie, if you are male)
 - but be comfortable, don't wear something so strange to you that you just can't relax
- Other suggestions
 - comfy shoes are a must, break them in
 - never check your luggage, get a good folding carry-on

Interviews and meetings

- A wonderful opportunity to meet people that know little about your area or about you
 - I am still in touch with people I met during interviews
 - Be positive about the experience
- But, it is exhausting. You must be constantly “on”
 - Day usually starts with breakfast as early as 7.30am, and can last until 9pm
- Have your elevator talk handy
- Be engaging, people are looking for a colleague
 - be prepared to ask questions about the person’s work
 - judge the level of technical detail to get into based on the person’s background
- Be ready to talk vision; not just PhD work
 - it is now time to be a leader!

Common interview Qs

- Sorry I missed your talk. Tell me everything about your work in 5 minutes.
- I totally disagree with slide 12 of your talk.
- Why is this an interesting area?
- What are the big questions in this area?
- Your approach seems exactly like X, tell me why it is different.
- What do you plan to work on next?
- Why do you want to be a professor rather go into industry?
- What is your approach to teaching?

What you should ask them

- What kinds of classes might you be able to teach
 - don't talk about teaching "load"
 - what's special about teaching at University X?
- How large are classes?
- What are the department's plans for growth?
- (If unusual) What is the tenure process like?
- (If it matters) Are there people that successfully collaborate across the University?
- How often do faculty collaborate?
- How easy is it to attract good PhD students?
 - Where have you placed your PhD students?
- Is there a good community for students?

Interview do's and don'ts

- Be positive, outgoing and articulate
- Be friendly but alert
- Listen carefully

- Don't self deprecate
- Don't gossip or say anything negative about anyone
- Don't put your feet on their table

Other meetings

- Fancy dinners...
 - You are still being evaluated!
 - Decide beforehand whether or not you will have a drink (and *don't* if other people are not)
- May have a lunch or roundtable with grad students
 - Ask questions (what is good, not so good about the department? what is missing?)
 - What do they work on? Try to find connections.
- With the Dean and/or Chair
 - High level, but need to get them excited as well about your vision
 - Can ask where the department/school is going. Show

After the interview

- Write a short thank-you email to your hosts
 - Keep them in the loop during your process
 - Make sure they know if you are really interested
- Follow-up on any other requests for references etc. that came up in conversations

- Part III

The wait

- The hardest part of the process
- Be prepared for rejection
 - most reasons are those of fit; every department is looking for something a bit different and emphasizes different aspects of research and teaching style
 - lots of people are involved and it is very hard to make everyone happy
- *You don't need 10 offers... just 1 good one*

Negotiating the offer

- The tables turn!
- Don't negotiate until all offers are in
 - the first offer is not the final offer
 - understand where they can be flexible and think about what is most important to you
- Many places can more easily negotiate on “start-up” than on salary
- Only negotiate with a place you really want to go
- You can play one place off against another
 - this is expected
 - but don't be greedy, you will need to be colleagues for many years to come!

What to ask for

- Salary
 - usually not very flexible
 - but you can ask for “summer salary” for the first 1-2 years
- Moving expenses
- Start-up
 - Lab space
 - Money for equipment and travel (unrestricted)
 - Time off from teaching (1 semester, take it later)
 - Student support (2 students for 2 years is typical)
- Be reasonable, but ask for what you need
 - they want you to succeed too
 - but you need to be able to *explain* why you need it

How to decide where to go

- Try to slim down your list early
 - Let schools make additional offers
- Think about styles of place (e.g., big vs. small)
 - small place: get to know people, get to have impact on direction of department quickly
 - big place: more likely to find the right technical expertise, might be easier to bring in great PhD students
- Do you like the people, the environment, the city?
 - this is not just about work
 - a multi-faceted decision
- Go somewhere where your research agenda can be successful and you will be respected
- Don't try to think *too* long term
 - a decision for the next 5 years or so, you can move after that