

~~Handwritten notes and scribbles at the top of the page, including phrases like "Do you have a...?", "Interests - research...", "I'm not a... describe the...", "Who are the...?", "What is the...", and "What for...".~~

Pursuing an academic career

A personal experience of the interview process

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November 16th, 2005

1

Outline

- Choice of an academic career: what, where, when?
- The process
 - Timeline
 - The application package
 - The interview
 - After the interview
- Negotiation tips

2

Choice of an academic career: what, where, when?

What

→ Non-tenured: post-doc/research scientist/R&D

- Post-doc/research scientist

Pros: typically higher number of publications, no teaching required for the job. Typically necessary in the sciences, not in engineering. *Cons:* no status/power/security, time limit.

- R&D

Pros: industry experience is a plus for teaching and maturity. *Cons:* it is difficult to publish and go back to academia.

→ Tenure-track: assistant professor *(higher pros)*

Pros: gets you in the tenure-track process earlier. *Cons:* higher stress level job.

3

Choice of an academic career: what, where, when? (cont'd)

Where

→ Teaching-oriented institution

Pros: little research expected, less pressure for tenure

Cons: typical course load is 3 courses/quarter or semester, less money. Very difficult to have consistent research program with undergrads only. Administration may require some undergrad research.

→ Research-oriented institution

Pros: better for research-oriented people. *Cons:* much more challenging for tenure, high stress level.

4

Choice of an academic career: what, where, when? (cont'd)

Where

- www.usnews.com for ranking of graduate schools
 - www.usnews.com best graduate schools: yearly subscription ~\$15
- Files : usnews1, usnews2, usnews3, usnews4

\$15/year
Share between graduate students.
* Good ranking academic don't go below 50.
In particular look @specialty.

5

Choice of an academic career: what, where, when? (cont'd)

When

→ **Soon after Ph.D.**

Pros: less time to tenure. *Cons:* more maturity may be needed to handle the job. See slide on 'what'.

→ **Few years after Ph.D.**

Pros: typically higher maturity. *Cons:* may not be needed. See slide on 'what'.

6

The process: timeline

- Most jobs are advertised between September and March for jobs starting on following academic year
- Committee receives high number of applications (in engineering, ~ 100+/position)
- Committee selects the short list (in engineering, 4 to 5 applicants)
- Interviews held as early as January
- Decision/offer/negotiation by April/May

7

The process: the application package

- Cover letter

Mention where the ad was found. Summarize your biography.

- **Research interests**

Most important if research institution! Needs to be reviewed by several people (in and out of area). Should include list of prospective funding agencies. Be passionate about it.

- **Teaching interests**

Most important if teaching institution! In all cases, include list of classes you can teach (undergrad and grad level). Check courses offered by department. *Make suggestions of what you could add.*

8

The process: the application package (cont'd)

■ CV (curriculum vitae, vita)

Start from most recent event, include dates. No need of birth date. If permanent resident/US citizen, include it, otherwise do not mention it (the location of your BS degree will give it away).

Education –include Ph.D. advisor and thesis' title

Professional experience

Teaching experience

Fellowships and awards, certificates (time to brag)

Research funding (if applicable) → Focus on any grants you have had write that were funded.

Areas of interest →

Publications → publish or perish → peer reviewed conference papers.

→ journal publications

→ "submitted" vs "about to submit" or "in preparation"

The process: the application package (cont'd)

Publications

Journal papers: get used to your new mantra, **publish or perish!**

■ Peer-reviewed journal publications

Submitted, accepted, in print/available on web site, manuscript in preparation, to be submitted to *Name_of_journal*

■ Peer-reviewed conference proceedings — acceptance rate: _____

■ Conference proceedings, presentations

10

Don't be subtle, Brag!

The process: the application package (cont'd)

ask them before you put them on your list. Ask them to review your package.

■ References

Should include your Ph.D. advisor unless there are problems → this is a big problem

Reference typically not required with the application

- Spell-check is important
- Have friends/professors review your package
- If under-represented minority, find a way to highlight it (professional organizations, involvement in outreach programs, etc?)

11

The process: the interview

- Interview offer typically happens by phone –give your cellphone number if applicable
- Reference letters may be asked before interview → ask references before giving their names, and ask them to let you know about letters
- Travel arranged with interviewer: flight/car, hotel, meals, everything should be reimbursed within reason.
- Reimbursement may take up to 2 months. Keep all receipts and submit them asap.
- Interview takes 1-2 full days, allow 1 full day for travel - leave time if cancelled flights

12

The process: the interview (cont'd)

- Study department web site: faculty and staff profiles, info about department and college, city if you can.
- Pay attention to assistant vs associate vs full professor numbers, young vs. old department
- Pay attention to people in your area: they are possible allies or enemies. Look for their papers or at least abstracts of their papers.
- Prepare to ask questions

see if dept. is biased.

13

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Other considerations

- Dual-body problem
 - if spouse/significant other in academia, do mention it during phone call
 - some departments may pay expenses, but you would need to ask and it is awkward
 - if possible, travel with spouse, 2 people better than 1
 - if possible, ask for meetings spouse/prospective dept.
- Current job
 - secret interview & make a good excuse ("Piano")
 - non secret interview

easier to ask for their travel after you get an offer.

14

Discuss anything that will affect your happiness.

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Preparing for the interview

You will be asked for a 50-60 minutes presentation (allow for 10 min. Q&A)

→ **Critical part of the process, prepare it very well**

Presentation should answer all these questions:

- why do we care about what you are doing?
- why are you better than the competition?
- can you explain your work to an engineering audience outside your field?
- are you a good communicator (for students, faculty, prospective funding agencies)?

15

If someone asks you a question that you don't know answer to then write down their contact information and get back to them ASAP.

- Don't underestimate graduate students.

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Preparing for the interview

- Allow at least three days to prepare for your presentation
- Do dry-runs, review it with as many people as you can, present it to your grandma if you can
- Have one or two back-up copies of your presentation
- Bring any supporting material (specimens, papers)
- Bring your own pointer and laptop power supply
- **Practice on eye-contact**

→ You may not know answers to all questions: ask the person for contact info and get back to that person once you know the answer

16

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Luggage

- Carry-on and laptop → **do not check-in luggage**
- Be paranoid, e.g. have also back-up copy of presentation on yahoo account
- Dressy clothes for interview: dark suits but not stuffy. Comfort is secondary to looks.
- Comfortable shoes, you will walk a lot
- Bring toothpaste/toothbrush for after lunch
- Wear a ring on your left hand if you want to discuss spouse/significant other. They are not supposed to ask you, but they will during meals.
- Hide tattoos/piercing if you can

For women

- Extra pair of stockings in handbag if dress suit
- Little and non-obtrusive jewelry
- Light make-up
- Pink is fine

17

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Questions

Prepare to ask questions, e.g.:

- how many applicants are in the short-list, when the decision will be made
- tenure process and expectations (of chair, dean and faculty)
- quality of undergrad and grad students, recruitment of grad students (easy, not easy); tuition waivers for out-of-state/international students
- typical support for assistant professor (reduced teaching load, reduced service, TAs, etc.)
- where are the department and the college going (e.g., growing too much, growing too little, research directions etc.)

Tip

If you cannot think of anything out of exhaustion, ask:
what do you like and what you do not like of working here?

18

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Questions not to ask

- Questions related to politics, sex and religion, unless they are critical issues for well-being
- Paternity/maternity leave, tenure-clock policies → possible trouble

19

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Orientative interview schedule

Day 1:

- Early breakfast with chair or other faculty member(s)
- Meeting one person or a group of people every 30 minutes
- Meeting with upper administration (dean, associate dean(s))
- Lunch with a group of faculty member(s) – *no spouse*
- Presentation, Q&A. You will have 10 minutes for set-up.
- More meetings (depending on time)
- 'Interview over' by 5:30 pm
- Dinner with a group of faculty member(s) – *spouse invited*.
- **Interview is not over until you are back home.**
- Note: ask for bathroom breaks, coffee, water at any time if you need them!

20

The process: the interview (cont'd)

Orientative interview schedule

Day 2:

- Early breakfast with faculty member(s)
- More meetings
- Lunch with faculty member(s)
- Lab visits
- Exit interview with chair: **time for wish-list.**

Do not give any dollar amount for start-up, but ask for reduced teaching load, summer salary, funding for graduate students and lab. You will discuss this when offered the job.

- Travel back home –unless you stay longer

you know what you're worth, ask for it.

21

The process: the interview (cont'd)

- Most vulnerable time: **meals. Keep your guard up all the time!** *This is when they'll ask questions they aren't supposed to and you'll say things you shouldn't.*
- Do **not** eat difficult food
- Do not drink alcohol at lunch. Alcohol at dinner is possible but not recommended (**do stay away if you are a cheap drunk.**)
- Ask about stuff that matters for your well-being, e.g. cost of housing, living conditions, culture, ethnic food, international airports nearby –you should like the place and be able to afford it.
- **Trust your gut feelings: you are interviewing them at the same time they are interviewing you.**

22

The process: after the interview

- Send thank-you notes (email is fine)
- Move on to next interview
- Obsessing is useless
- You can contact the chair of a department if you receive an offer from a different university, ask about the status of their process

23

The process: after the interview (cont'd)

Interviewers

- All candidates need to be interviewed
- The faculty will meet, discuss and vote
- The chair may follow vote of faculty or decide differently
- The dean may follow vote of faculty, chair or decide differently. Dean will indicate range of start-up to offer.
- The chair will make a phone call to the candidate approved by the dean, start negotiation for start-up.

24

The process: after the interview (cont'd)

Interviewee

- Offer is not made → move on with your life. If candidate #1 refuses, another offer may be made to next people on the list.
- A rejection letter will be sent after the hiring
- Offer is made on the phone → prepare for negotiation

25

Negotiation tips

- Make a list of what you need for your success
- Do not ask too much or too little — *Be fair to yourself*
- Set a priority list, e.g. importance of:
 - lab space
 - equipment (*good computers*)
 - funding for students
 - reduced teaching load
 - summer support and academic year salary
 - dual body problem: job for spouse?

26

Negotiation tips (cont'd)

- Ideal situation: more offers → you may play one against the others but do not exaggerate, be fair
Don't make enemies.
- Try to take time if you are waiting to hear from another university, do not rush but do not take too long
- If you have a spouse/significant other, her/his job prospects and opinions must be considered

27

Negotiation tips (cont'd)

- Prepare your start-up list with quotes for equipment (if possible) and send it
- Be ready to discuss it further
- Note that the offer can be withdrawn *Be fair, don't ask for too much.*
- The offer is final when you receive a letter from upper administration (following the chair's letter)
- ■ Make sure your terms have been addressed in **writing**
- ■ Keep negotiating if you are not satisfied, but be fair
- ■ The acceptance is final when you fax/mail your answer
- ■ Do not withdraw your acceptance at a later stage

28

Negotiation tips (cont'd)

My advice

- It takes time to get the right job and it is easy to take it personally –do not get discouraged
- Be diplomatic, courteous and fair, academia is a small world
- Your academic salary is subject to negotiation but not as important as other items on the list → your professional success comes from lab space, equipment and students, reduced teaching load
AND PERSONAL LIFE