

The Academic Job Search

There is no one right way to go about conducting an academic job search, but the following information represents best practices as summarized from several publications.

Beginning the Process

It is recommended that you begin your academic job search a year before you want the position. It's important to keep in mind when universities post positions, conduct interviews, and make decisions. In many cases, universities begin their searches for new faculty a year before the position begins. However, each discipline has nuances to the hiring process. Your best bet is to be proactive and seek advice from your dissertation chair/committee.

Things to consider before you apply:

- Institutional characteristic – are you interested in a private or public university, do you want to work at a large or small institution, are you looking for an emphasis on research or teaching or both?
- Departmental characteristics – are you among many in your field of research or an in-house expert, does the department focus on graduate or undergraduate teaching, or are there opportunities/expectations that you socialize regularly with the people in the department?
- Geography – do you want to be in a city or rural area, are you willing to relocate and where, will you consider working outside the US?
- Competition – how competitive are you, are you willing and capable of writing grants or obtaining outside funding?

Necessary Materials

Although each academic discipline may request the submission of a variety of documents with your application, there are three documents that are requested across the board: a C.V., cover letter, and letters of recommendation. You should create your application materials early since many deadlines are in October/November.

The Curriculum Vitae

A curriculum vitae or C.V. is the academic version of a resume. It details your academic achievements and educational background. The length of your C.V. is determined by content. The average C.V. is more than two pages and as your career develops, could be in the twenty page range. A C.V. starts with contact information, however, the proceeding sections vary in title and order. The following is a list of the most commonly included sections in a C.V.

- Education – begin with your highest degree earned or in progress
- Dissertation – include anticipated completion date, title, and name of advisor
- Teaching and research experience – include position title, name of the institutions, responsibilities, accomplishments, and dates for each position held. You may want to subdivide this section into teaching experience and research experience.

- Honors/Awards/Fellowships – include the date, title, and if possible, the degree of competitiveness.
- Publications – include academic and relevant non-academic publications. It is often suggested that you place your publications section on the first page of your C.V.
- Presentations – include the title of the paper and the name, location, and date of the conference/meeting where you presented your work.
- Grants received – list the funding agency and the project for which the grant applies. Dollar amounts for major grants may also be included.
- Skills/Certifications – this section is especially important for those fields, such as nursing and education, that have a certification process.
- Professional memberships/leadership – this section should list professional memberships and committee work. This is also the best place to put conference organization and/or moderation.
- Related/Non-traditional work experience – include this section if you are applying to a professional school and have experience working in that profession.
- References – list the names of the people who write letters of recommendation for you including their title, institution, telephone number, and email address.

For additional material, see Steve Joy's *Academic CVs: 10 Irritating Mistakes* found at <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/nov/01/academic-cv-job-10-mistakes>.

The Cover Letter

This is usually the first document read by search committees. It should be tailored to the position you are applying for and be no longer than one page. The following is a list of common elements included in a cover letter.

- Contact information
- A clear statement with the exact title of the position you for which you wish to be considered.
- Research interests
- Teaching areas
- Dissertation and methodology
- Grant/funding experience
- Highlights of critical, interesting, or groundbreaking findings

- Connection between dissertation and the current position
- Summary of publications, grants, teaching experience, and other important academic accomplishments

For more information on the general do's and don'ts of writing a cover letter, visit USF's Career Services at <http://www.usf.edu/career-services/students/cover-letter-dos-and-donts.aspx>.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are best when written by someone who knows you, your research, and your character. Letters from well-established or well-published scholars in your field are impressive and can help you make the short list. A favorable letter from your dissertation chair is expected and any application without it is considered suspect.

Additional Materials

In addition to a C.V., cover letter, and letters of recommendation, some institutions may require one or more of the following materials.

- Dissertation Abstract
- Dissertation Chapter or Other Writing Sample
- Research Statement – a statement that discusses your plans for future research and gives context to your research interests.
- Teaching Philosophy – this is a statement, no longer than a paragraph, that expresses your pedagogical approach. It is usually the first part of a teaching portfolio that others will read.
- Teaching Portfolio – a series of documents that recreate your teaching strengths, accomplishments, and goals. It is worthwhile to create a teaching portfolio while creating other application materials because it can be utilized to present you as a well-rounded candidate.

Interviews

The best way to prepare for a campus interview is to:

- Practice your job talk with an audience – if possible, schedule a practice job talk session with your department inviting both faculty and students. You will be able to practice your job talk and your ability to field questions as well as receive feedback on your presentation and responses.
- Practice interview questions – it is important to practice answering interview questions out loud. Practice with your dissertation chair, advisor, trusted colleague, or friend.
- Study your audience – find out as much information as possible on the institution and department. You want to know and understand the growth, challenges, reputation, culture, and focus of the institution and hiring department. Also, remember to keep the opinions of individuals in perspective.

Areas That Must Be Discussed

Regardless of the type of institution, in an interview you must be prepared to discuss your dissertation, future research interests, teaching, and your interest in the institution. Be prepared to field a variety of questions regarding your teaching and research agendas. Be able to place your dissertation and future research interests within the department, suggest courses you can develop and teach including reading materials with assignments, and situate your research and teaching philosophy in the overall institution's mission and goals.

Job Talks

A job talk is an opportunity for you to showcase your research project, skills as a researcher and presenter, ability to answer impromptu questions, and your professionalism under pressure (Barnes, 2007). The following should be included in your job talk: an informative title, purpose of your research, theoretical framework, research question(s), data and methods, major findings, summary, links to broader issues, future research, and conclusion.

Interview Questions

In an interview, questions should run both ways. In other words, once you've answered all the search committee's questions, you should be prepared to ask some of your own. Common topics are students, funding opportunities, expectations for faculty in regards to teaching load and advising, university and department committees, collaborations, and tenure expectations/requirements. The following lists of questions that might be asked during an interview were taken from Vick & Furlong (2008, 184-186).

Examples of questions that might be asked about your research:

- Why did you choose your research topic?
- Could you tell us about your current research?
- If you were to begin again are there any changes you would make to your dissertation?
- I see you have very few publications...
- What are your plans for applying for external funding over the next few years?
- How do you see your research fitting in with the department?

Examples of questions that might be asked about your teaching:

- What is good teaching? Are you a good teacher? Why?
- How do you motivate students?
- How do you feel about teaching required course?
- What is your approach to teaching introductory ___?
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- If you could teach any course you wanted, what would it be?

Examples of other types of questions that might be asked:

- Can you summarize the contribution you would make to our department?
- What do you think is the optimal balance between teaching and researching?
- Why should we hire you?
- Are you willing to become involved in committee work?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- How would moving to our university affect you and your family personally?

Resources

Barnes, S.L. (2007). *On the market: Strategies for a successful academic job search*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

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