The academic job search

practical advice through my largely
subjective viewpoint

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About me

• Assistant professor at UMass Amherst

• Earlier:
  – Postdoc at University of Washington
  – PhD student at UC Berkeley

• My job search:
  – During the 2011-2012 academic year
  – 8 interviews in US, 1 in Europe
Why academia?

• It’s the best job in the world!
• You are your own boss
• You have freedom to shape your own agenda
• You leave a research legacy through your students

When is it not for you?

• You really don’t like teaching
The timeline

Application deadlines:
• Commonly during December and early January
• Some as early as October 15
• They may change from one year to the next
• If you miss a deadline, you can still apply
Before application season

• During the year before you go on the job market, make every trip into a business trip:
  – Wherever you travel, make a point of contacting someone at a local school and see if you can give a talk, and/or meet with faculty.

• To keep in mind:
  – Spring semesters are sometimes not ideal for visits, because faculty is busy with the current hiring season
Preparing your materials

• Ask others for their application materials.
• Get feedback, including from people not in your area.
• Request letters early.
  – Share your application materials with your recommenders
  – Good to provide them with a preliminary list of places where you plan to apply
The applications

• Submitting applications often takes a surprising amount of time.

• Being organized is important:
  – Maintain a spreadsheet with the list of places you are considering
    • deadlines
    • links to job postings
    • username and password for each system
    • method for submitting recommendation letters
The applications

• Keep your letter writers organized
  – Some schools request that you send instructions to your recommenders
  – Ask them to keep track of the letters they have submitted on an online spreadsheet
  – Keep in mind that some schools only request letters after you’ve made the first cut
Interview invitations

• You may receive them earlier than you think
• They may push for you to visit soon after the invitation

Do NOT wait until you start getting invites to prepare your talk

• Phone pre-screening is becoming more popular
Travel

• Do not book the last flight of the day.
  – Interview season is bad weather season. Expect delays.

• Stick with one airline. This is the time to achieve frequent flyer status.

• Use carry-on luggage.

• Pick comfortable clothes and shoes. You will often need to walk a lot on campus.
The interview

Fact:
The prospect likely makes you nervous.

Fact:
Interviews can be a lot of fun.
The interview

The talk

The 1-1s
The talk

• **It is the most important part**
  – For a lot of the faculty, this will be the only interaction they will have with you.

• **Very different from any talk you’ve given**
  – Should target 3 different audiences:
    • People in your area of research
    • People somewhat familiar with your area of research
    • People who know nothing about what your area is about
How to prepare

• Practice with different audiences.
  – You will get the best feedback outside your research group.

• Your story should describe a coherent agenda, not multiple disconnected projects.

• Visit your alma mater (or any place where you have strong connections) for a “mock” interview.
The 1-1s

• **It’s fun:** you get to meet new people, and learn what they are working on.

• They won’t test your technical skills; you have established your expertise in your area.
  – They want to be convinced that your work is interesting.
  – They want to see whether you are likely to collaborate with them.
  – They want to see whether you are interested in their research.
  – They want to see if you are a nice person.
The 1-1s

Do

• ...be pleasant
• ...show excitement
• ...be ready with questions
• ...prepare for the standard questions:
  – advising style
  – research plan

Don’t

• ...be negative about anything or anyone
• ...try to stir away from a research discussion
• ...force a research discussion
• ...monopolize the conversation
• ...allow long silences
Expect the unexpected

• Not everything will go well, not all interactions will be pleasant, and not everyone will follow the rules.

• Sometimes you may face inappropriate or rude comments and questions.
The 2-body problem

• They are not supposed to ask.
  – But they still might. Be prepared to handle it.
  – You need to bring it up yourself.

• When to talk about it?
  – During application time
  – When you get invites
  – When you interview
  – When you get an offer
Rejections

• **Fact:** You *will* get rejected.
  – Don’t take it personally.
  – Even if you do great, there are many factors at play, some of which beyond your control.

Offers

• Some have a short fuse.
• Be honest about your timeline, other interviews, and other offers.
Negotiations

• Do not negotiate offers that you are not seriously considering.

• Do not drag out offers that you know you will not accept.

• Use other offers to negotiate.
Good luck!

Remember to enjoy the process!