

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

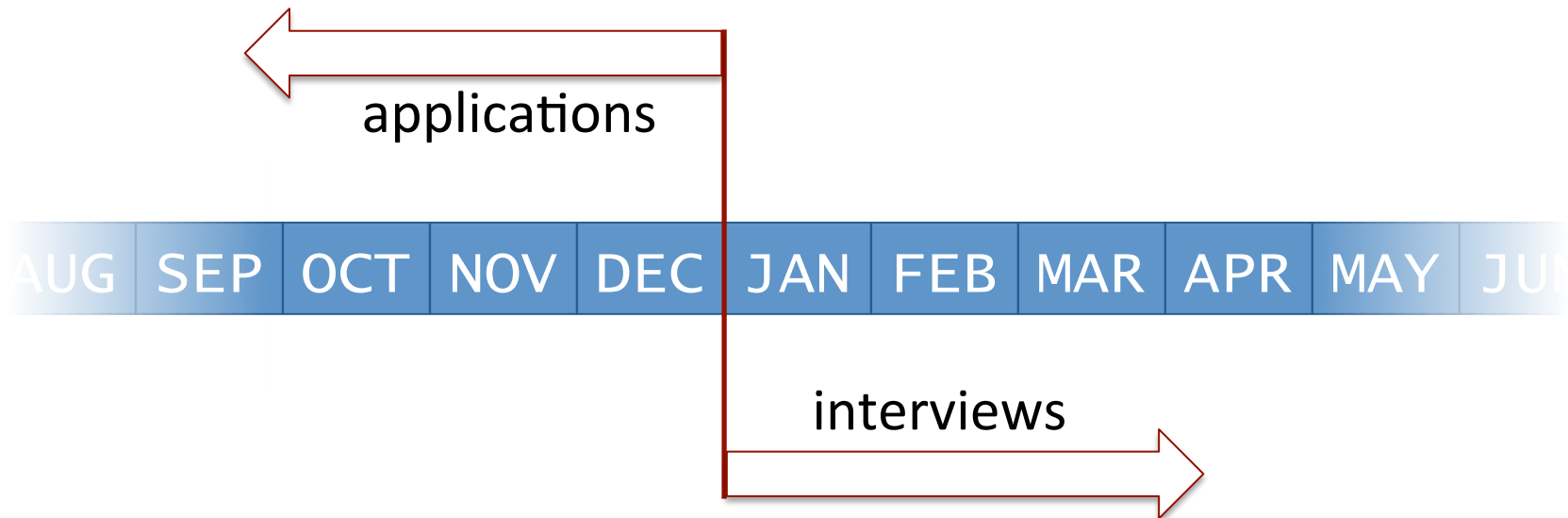
Why academia?

- 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!