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 then 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