

Getting a Job in Academia:

The Search Process Demystified

For many students, graduate school is the gateway to a career in academia. But the process that academic institutions use to fill positions can be confusing and intimidating. When you're ready to make the transition from student to professional scholar, knowing how that process works will give you a leg up on the competition.

Before You Graduate

Jobs at academic institutions involve research, teaching or some combination of the two and will vary depending on the type of institution: research university, state university, liberal arts college or community college. Try to determine what type of institution you'd like to work for and whether you're more interested in research or teaching so you can build the appropriate credentials.

Take advantage of the teaching opportunities for graduate students here at UGA, even if you plan to pursue a research position. Look for ways to distinguish yourself: write a small grant or nominate yourself for awards. Develop ties in the geographic community in which you live or the academic community of your discipline.

Applying for the Job

When you apply for a job, first make sure that you have the necessary qualifications. Academic positions are defined by faculty to fit very specific needs complementary to, but not filled by, the strengths of existing members of the department. The job announcement is your key to what the department is looking for. Write a cover letter in which you refer directly to the qualifications listed in the job announcement. Describe the experiences through which you have developed those qualifications.

Always meet the application deadline. If there are two deadlines, meet the one labeled "for full consideration." (This refers to the date the search committee will start reviewing applications. If they have a full slate of good candidates by that time, they may not even consider applications that arrive later.) Include in your application materials

everything the announcement asks for; don't include anything not requested. Do not send a photo of yourself. If the announcement asks for letters of recommendation, ask your letter writers to let you know when they have sent letters. If you are asked for references, ask permission before listing anyone as a reference.

Before the Interview

In some disciplines, search committees will conduct pre-interviews. They meet with candidates at a trade show or professional meeting, for example, then narrow their choices to three, who are invited to on-campus interviews. Other times, you may get a phone call from someone at an institution requesting a personal meeting. In all circumstances, treat these pre-interview interactions as formal interviews.

Prepare for your interview by researching the institution, the department and the department faculty. Know something about the research interests of the members of the search committee and try to deduce the needs of the department and the institution.

At the Interview

Before you go to the interview, get the logistics ironed out. Typically, you will make the arrangements for your travel to town, and the hiring institution will make local arrangements such as the hotel and food. Getting from the airport to campus is a gray area; ask how that will be handled. Keep track of all your receipts if the institution is reimbursing you.

If you are applying for a teaching position, you may be asked to teach a class or deliver a lecture. You will almost certainly be expected to deliver a job talk or seminar to department faculty and graduate students. This is a critical part of the interview. Begin your presentation with a broad introduction so that graduate students and members of the department from other disciplinary areas will be able to follow you. Then, narrow your presentation to demonstrate to members of your field your specific strengths (i.e., the

“hole” that you could fill in the department). Finish on a broader note to once again include others in the room.

At some point, you will be asked whether you have questions. Always have questions. Ask, “What role do you see this position playing in the department?” or “In what direction do you see the institution going over the next few years?” Ask about job satisfaction in the department or the process of applying for tenure.

The Job Offer: Should You Take It?

Know ahead of time what salary is appropriate for the position in the type of institution at which you’re applying. For an assistant professor position, there probably won’t be a lot of room for negotiating a higher salary than offered, but there might be some leeway. Once the search committee offers you the position, they have decided that you are the best person in the country for the job. In addition to salary, consider the “start-up package.” This generally covers what you will need to get started in the position. In the humanities, it will probably be limited to office furniture, a book allowance and a computer. In the sciences, it should cover the equipment and other expenses necessary to establish your lab. Unless the position is department head or above, you will probably have to pay your own relocation expenses.

What else should you consider as you decide whether to accept a job offer? In an international survey, former graduate students said they accepted job offers at institutions where 1.) they felt they could either be happy in the future or use the position as a launching pad to future goals; 2.) they could maintain balance between their professional and personal lives; and 3.) they could get along well with their colleagues.

Based on the Graduate School seminar “Demystifying the Academic Search Process: An Insider Perspective” by David Knauft, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.

The Curriculum Vitae: Your Personal Marketing Tool

A curriculum vitae, or CV, is an expanded resume, generally two to 10 pages long. Most employers outside of academia look for resumes; for most academic jobs, you need a CV. Consider your CV the packaging as you sell yourself to potential employers: it must be polished. Write it, re-write it, edit it and ask someone to proofread it. Highlight your research, educational and professional accomplishments.

The CV allows for more detail than a resume, but don’t pad it. Make it your own; don’t rely heavily on sample CV’s from books or Web sites. Rather than just listing what you’ve done; explain the results. (Think: “increased sales by 15 percent” or “research contributed to solution of this problem.”) Quantify or qualify with numbers or descriptive phrases. Include the following topic headings: Fields of Interest or Teaching Competencies, Teaching Philosophy, Dissertation Abstract, Teaching Experience, Research Experience, Work Experience (related to the academic position for which you’re applying, as well as experiences from an earlier career, if you have one), Honors and Awards, and Scholarships and Fellowships.

Two useful books for more CV advice are: *The Academic Job Search Handbook* by Mary Morris Heiberger and Julia Miller Vick and *The Curriculum Vitae Handbook* by Rebecca Anthony and Gerald Roe. ■

Based on the Graduate School seminar “Documenting Your Graduate Experience for the Job Search” by Scott Williams, executive director of the Career Center. To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.