

Preparing for Academic Job Interviews

**FRI., FEB. 17, 2006
2-3:30pm**

Penny Beuning

Resources

- Books:
 - “Tomorrow’s Professor”, Richard Reis
 - “Academic Scientists at Work”, Boss and Eckert
 - “At the Helm”, Kathy Baker
 - “Making the Right Moves” BWF and HHMI
<http://www.hhmi.org/grants/office/graduate/labmanagement.html>
(entire book can be downloaded free)
- Websites: Science’s NextWave
www.ScienceCareers.org
- Google ‘academic job interviews’ and similar terms

**Visit Schedule
Dr. XX**

9:00 – 9:30	Professor	9:00 – 9:30	Arrival, Chair
9:30 – 10:00	Professor	9:30 – 10:00	Search Committee
10:00 – 10:45	Graduate Students	10:00 – 11:30	Proposed research presentation/discussion
10:45 – 11:15	Professor	11:30 – 12:15	Drug Discovery Institute
11:15 – 11:45	Group faculty	12:30 – 2:00	Lunch
11:45 – 12:00	Refreshments	2:00 – 3:00	Facilities tour and wrap-up: Chair
12:00 – 1:00	Seminar: “Title”	3:00	Departure
1:00 – 2:15	Lunch (with graduate students)		
2:15 – 3:00	Chair; lab tour: facilities manager		
3:00 – 3:30	Vice-Provost		
3:30 – 4:00	Dean, College		
4:00 – 4:30	Wrap-up: Chair [and faculty unable to attend group session]		

ITINERARY FOR DR. XX

WEDNESDAY

- 5 pm Arrival at Airport, check in at xxx, staying for 2 nights.
7 pm Dinner with Professor (xxx-xxx-xxxx) upon arrival and after check-in.

THURSDAY

- 8:45-9:00 Dept Administrator, Rm Bldg, Phone xxx-xxx-xxxx
9:00-9:45 **Dept. Chair**
9:45-10:30 Professor, Rm Bldg, Phone xxx-xxx-xxxx
10:30-11:00 Professor, Rm Bldg, Phone xxx-xxx-xxxx
11:00-11:30 **Director of Personnel**, College, Rm Bldg Phone
11:30-12:00 **Associate Dean**, College, Rm Bldg Phone
12:00-1:30 Lunch: Professor and Professor
1:30-2:00 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
2:00-2:30 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
2:30-3:15 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
3:15-4:00 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
4:00-4:15 Break; set up for talk
4:15-5:15 **Colloquim talk:** "Title"
5:15-6:00 **Research Presentation**
7:15 pm Dinner: Group of faculty

FRIDAY

- 10:00-10:30 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
10:30-11:00 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
11:00-11:45 Professor, Rm Bldg Phone
11:45-12:00 Break
12:00-1:30 **Lunch with graduate students** X, Y, and Z.

Practical Matters

- **Get schedule/details in advance! ASK for clarification if necessary!**
- **Have passing familiarity with all faculty research areas; for people in related fields, read a few recent papers.**
- **Bring extra copies of:**
 - **CV, everything you sent with your application (teaching statement, research proposal), syllabi of any courses you have taught, reprints and preprints, business cards**
- **MULTIPLE backups of all talks you are giving in MULTIPLE formats!**
- **It is nice to have a printout of slides for all talks and key figures to help in your discussions or for you to review on the plane.**
- **Carry bottled water, lip balm, a small snack you can have during a break, if necessary, dental floss, mints, extra hosiery or tie.**

“One-on-One” meetings

- **Faculty, one-on-one or in groups**
- **Dept. Chair, usually 1-2 meetings or more**
- **Students, usually in groups**
- **Administrators**
 - **Human Resources**
 - **Deans, Provosts**
 - **Dept. Administrators**

Faculty meetings (individual or in groups or with search committee):

- Be interested in them/their research
- Good if you can ask an insightful question or two, point out potential area of overlap with your research, potential collaboration, etc.
- In group meetings, they will usually tell you about the undergrad/grad programs and any special programs or new initiatives.
- Meetings with groups of faculty might be focused on teaching or research; it is OK to ask for clarification of your schedule!

Faculty Meetings

They may ask:

- How big do you want your lab to be (students/postdocs/techs/undergrads)?
- What kind of students do you want (their backgrounds)?
- How/where will you get funding?
- Have you ever written a grant or worked on a major grant? Was it funded?
- What will be the specific aims of your first grant?
- Which study section will you submit your grant to?
- What are your research priorities?
- What will your first student work on?
- What will students in your lab learn?
- Will you do all of this work yourself (in your lab) or will you collaborate with others, and what will their contributions be? Have you lined up these collaborations?
- What kind of experience do you have supervising student researchers?
- What is the biggest problem/question in your field?
- Where do you want your research to be in 5/10 years?
- How will you demonstrate independence from your advisor?
- Have you agreed with your advisor on projects that you will take with you?
- How will your expertise fit into our program (research and educational/teaching)?

- What can you teach? What would you like to teach? Which textbook would you use?
- What do you think is important for students to learn?
- What have you taught?
- What new courses might you want to develop?

- “Tell me about yourself”
- Have you always wanted to be a professor at a research university, college professor, chemist, engineer, etc?
- What other interests do you have/what do you do in your spare time?

Faculty Meetings

- Ideally you will meet with faculty at all ranks and you can get a sense of career progression and how well junior faculty are supported.
- You may want to ask them how they feel about the department and its current direction, how collegial it is, the quality of the graduate students, how they like the institution, how things have changed over time
- Predominantly undergraduate institutions (PUIs) will be especially interested in your experiences supervising undergrads, any undergrad research experience you had, and how you will involve undergrads in your research.

NOTE about PUIs:

- An excellent resource if you are interested in a faculty position at a PUI is the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR), www.cur.org They publish several guides on mentoring undergrads and doing research with undergrads, as well as the book, "How To Get A Tenure-Track Position At A Predominantly Undergraduate Institution"

Department Chair

They will usually tell you about the department, student body, new initiatives, interdisciplinary programs with other departments, training grants, the graduate program, their own research, etc.

S/he may ask (in addition to the faculty questions):

- What kinds of resources or specialized (i.e. expensive) equipment do you need?
- Do you have other interviews? (they want to get a sense of timing and competition)
- What would it take to persuade you to take this job? (this is the time to bring up a spouse/SO's career or other special issues)
- How big do you want your lab to be (students AND square footage)?
- Where do you want your research program to be in 5/10 years?
- What salary do you want? (Conventional wisdom is do not give a specific number, say something like "I'm sure a potential offer would be competitive.")
- How much start-up funding do you need? (Do your homework; what are typical recent start-up requests for this type of institution. Make sure you can get what you need to be successful, but a completely out-of-line request could take you out of the competition. Be sure you can justify everything you request.)

You may want to ask specific questions about tenure and promotion policies, performance reviews, teaching loads and courses, service commitments, joint appointments, whether start-up funds can be used for personnel, etc. If someone did not get tenure recently, it can be informative to ask what happened.

Students

- Usually as a group of students either during the day or over a meal.

They may ask:

- How many students do you want?
- What kinds of prelim/qualifying exam questions would you write/ask?
- What kind of prelim/qual structure do you think is best?
- How would you fit into the department?
- What was your own PhD program like?
- How would you support your students?
- What kinds of projects would undergrad/MS/PhD students do in your lab?

You may want to ask them:

- What they like/dislike about the program? Why they chose this program?
- Whose lab they are in and what is their research? How do they chose labs?
- How they are supported financially?
- Prelim structure
- Courses (that YOU might be teaching!)
- Typical time to degree
- How were they selected to meet with you?
- Their career plans

Administrators

- HR person who may go over benefits and tenure.
- A Dean or Provost or similar, or both.
- They will usually do most of the talking, you should appear interested and ask some general questions.
- Be prepared to give a brief, big-picture summary of your research, and to answer some broad questions about your field.

Deans/Provost may ask:

- What are the big gaps in understanding in your field?
- How does your research complement the department/university?
- Do you think you would be able to collaborate with Prof X?
- Does your research use Y piece of equipment?
- “Tell me about yourself”
- Do you think you could take advantage of the (biotech/engineering/hospital/etc) infrastructure in this area?
- Is there potential to commercialize your research?
- What are your long-term research goals? Where do you want your research to be in 5/10 years?
- What is this paper about (looking at my CV) and what was your contribution to it?

You may want to ask them what kinds of programs their office has for new faculty or for faculty development, any new initiatives, special funding opportunities, grad student fellowship programs, starter/seed grants for new faculty or new projects, etc.

Also see the excellent list of Sample Questions You Could Ask from MIT Careers Office

“Inappropriate” (Illegal) questions

- **Are you married/do you have a partner?**
- **Do you have children?**

My own rule of thumb: assume the best intentions and answer accordingly.

They are often trying to figure out how to help make their institution more attractive to you (job for spouse/SO, on-campus day care, pre-tenure leave for child-bearing, etc)

If you perceive hostility, be professional (always!).

Common Problems

- **Unrealistic expectations, sometimes a problem when people from very prestigious institutions visit more modest institutions**
- **Complaining (about the hectic schedule, lack of amenities, poor hotel room, etc). BE GRACIOUS!**
 - **If there are serious issues that might impact their ability to recruit faculty, the time to address this is next year when YOU are on the search committee and planning the visits**
- **Confiding a negative impression about someone you met; discussing perceived hostilities with others during the interview.**
- **Refusing to teach a specific course, particularly one in your area of expertise**
- **Saying that you WILL win specific awards**
- **Expressing doubt about whether you want the job**

General advice

- **Have a 1-2 min summary of your research ready to go; everyone will ask you**
- **There is rarely one right answer to a question, but there are wrong answers; practice answering potential interview questions with others and get honest feedback**
- **DO NOT express doubt about your candidacy/potential! Don't confess!**
- **If you are unsure how you might fit into the dept, probe in a positive way**
 - **Are you planning to hire more people in X general area?**
 - **How are student committees assigned?**
- **Be positive, enthusiastic, professional, and confident at all times.**
- **Be courteous to EVERYONE you meet.**
- **Be articulate, REHEARSE answers to expected questions.**
- **Remember to send a thank-you note to your host and/or the chair or the search committee, and follow up with any information or referrals you promised to people. Email is acceptable.**
- **GOOD LUCK!**