

## **SWS Career Development Committee Workshop – Summer 2004**

### **Preparing for Job Interviews**

#### **Laura Fingerson**

Assistant Professor of Sociology  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
lrf@uwm.edu

#### **Joey Sprague**

Associate Professor of Sociology  
University of Kansas  
jsprague@KU.EDU

#### **Heather Sullivan-Catlin**

Associate Professor; Chair of Sociology  
SUNY Potsdam  
sullivha@potsdam.edu

#### **Idee Winfield**

Associate Professor of Sociology  
College of Charleston  
WinfieldI@cofc.edu

---

### **The Interview Process**

#### **A. General Advice**

- You are always being interviewed, even during casual times (e.g. breakfast, riding from the airport to the hotel). Be positive. Don't disclose too much and don't be overly critical of anything--you never know who they are or who they know. Pretend you're running for office but be yourself. Be gracious.
- Be very organized. You may want to bring printouts from the college's website with info about the department, the faculty, names of the dept. chair, dean, and provost, etc.
- Provide evidence for your answers as much as possible. Instead of saying what you will do, emphasize what you have done.
- Emphasize how you will fit into the department.
- Be prepared to answer the same questions repeatedly.
- Tailor your answers, when possible, to the university (one common error is for candidates to focus on their research when interviewing at teaching universities, or vice versa).
- Don't reveal other interviews you have had or will have or your salary expectations.
- If available, have business cards ready to hand out.
- Remember that you are interviewing them, too! Treat this time as an information gathering session for yourself. Keep a set of questions on a note card in your pocket or purse and check the card when you go to the bathroom to make sure you're getting the information you want/need.

#### **B. Phone Interviewing Tips**

- Know if it is a conference call or if there is only one other person on the other end. Know who is on the other end! (Usually they will introduce themselves.)
- Have all your info about the position - including the CV and cover letter you sent and printouts from their website - available at your fingertips so you can look anything up instantly. Or be on-line so you can look up their info on the web, if necessary.
- Take detailed notes on what they say (if you type quicker than you write longhand, use a computer)
- If they call you unexpectedly, always defer the conversation and ask when you can call back/they can call back. (saying "I have to run teach a class" is always a good excuse). That way, you can prepare yourself for the interview, both mentally and by having all the materials ready.
- Treat the phone interview like an interview, not like a casual conversation.

#### **C. Possible Questions**

##### **Questions they might ask you:**

##### *General*

- Why did you apply here? Your degree is from Prestigious State U. Why do you want to teach at a (community college; four year college; small liberal arts institution)?
- Why are you leaving your current job?

**Note:** Do NOT complain about your current university, department, or job.

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the most important book you've ever read in sociology?
- Where would you invest your time the most in the academic role if you could, on teaching, research, or service and why?
- What can I tell you about (our program, our dept., our institution) that you'd like to know?

### *Teaching*

- How do you propose to teach X course, given that this is a (community college, small private liberal-arts university, large public university with classes over 100)?
- What courses are you prepared to teach? What courses are you willing to teach? What courses would you love to teach or eventually propose and develop for the department? (Note: Ideally, you should be willing to teach at least two core courses: introduction to sociology, research methods, and/or theory). What textbooks do you/will you use for these courses?
- Focusing on our current curriculum (interviewer shows you a list), what sociology courses would you most prefer to teach if you could choose? Are any of these choices courses you have taught before?
- How do you adapt your courses to large and small classes?
- Describe a course objective and some strategies you have used to achieve that objective.
- Describe your teaching philosophy.
- What is your view of using technology in the classroom and how would you potentially incorporate technology in your teaching?
- What are some technological innovations you have used in your courses?

### *Research/Scholarship*

- How is your cutting edge research tied to particular classics?
- What is the theoretical significance of your work? Why is it important to those outside the field?
- Tell me about your dissertation. Where are you in writing the dissertation? When do you plan to defend? Is that date realistic?
- What are your short-term and long-term research plans? What is your next project? What do you plan to do with the dissertation? Do you plan to seek external grants?
- What type of research agenda do you have for the next five years? What do you see attempting to publish in this time and where?
- Why did you become interested in sociology? How did you get interested in your research specialization?

### *Service*

- Beyond teaching classes, what service oriented tasks are you willing and capable of performing?
- What types of department, university, and/or professional service are of greatest interest to you and do you have any apprehensions about such work?

### Questions you might want to ask:

#### *Faculty*

- Tell me about the students you teach. What is most challenging about teaching these students?
- How ethnically diverse is the student body?
- Tell me about the courses you teach.
- How much departmental and university committee work are you involved in?
- Would you say that the department has a particular intellectual bent?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department?

- What is the most important quality in a candidate?
- Why is the position open? Is the department or university expanding?

#### *Undergraduate students*

- What are some qualities of your favorite teachers?
- What courses would you like to see taught in the department?
- Why did you major in sociology?

#### *Graduate students*

- Tell me about some of your research projects.
- Tell me about the relationship between faculty and graduate students.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department?
- How would you describe the relationship between graduate students and faculty here?

#### *The Chair*

- What is the profile of the typical undergraduate student? How many majors?
- Who does undergraduate advising?
- How many graduate students are there in the program?
- How does the university support research? Do faculty take sabbaticals?
- Is there travel money available?
- Tenure: What are expectations for tenure (e.g. importance of scholarship, teaching, and service)? How are decisions made? What are some general reasons that people were denied tenure recently?
- What are expectations for committee work for tenure-track (or non-tenure track) faculty? Does that change after people receive tenure?
- What is the typical teaching load and class size (undergraduate and graduate)?
- What teaching and research support is available (university grants, GAs, TAs, supplies, software)?
- What is the status of the department in the university?
- Politics are an inherent part of most departments. What sorts of issues cause most concern or friction? Are there lines of division based on age, tenure, specialties etc.?

#### *The Dean/Other Upper Administrators*

- What have been some of the biggest recent changes here?
- What are some challenges the university faces?
- What is the department's relationship with the university?
- What are profiles of the typical undergraduate and graduate students?
- Is the curriculum set or are new course proposals encouraged?
- Describe the tenure process.
- What are strengths and weaknesses of the department? And of the university?
- What is the most important quality of a faculty member here?