

Navigating the Job Market

These notes were taken at the session organized by the SWS Career Development Committee in Atlanta, Georgia, in August 2003. The panelists were Mary Beth Stalp, Assistant Professor at Northern Iowa University; Laura Fingerson, Assistant Professor at UW-Milwaukee; and Denise Copelton, Visiting Assistant Professor at Franklin and Marshall College.

Deciding Where To Apply

Before applying to schools, decide if region matters to you. If you or your family does not like any particular region, it may not be a good idea to interview there. You should also know the focus of places you are applying to, and how it relates to your career preferences. If you are a research person, do not apply to teaching places, and vice versa. But, on the other hand, be open to new possibilities because you might surprise yourself. Apply to anything that is connected to your field since job descriptions might not be entirely accurate. Sometimes committees may even switch their requirements after the ad is placed. You may also send emails to committee members to ask additional questions.

Presentation of Self

Know the skills that you can bring to the department. If you think that your research is outside the mainstream, think about how to sell it. It is harder for women to sell themselves than men; therefore, learn to act confident and present yourself as an expert in your field. Remember: you know more about your topic than anyone else. Know that your research is great, and show enthusiasm about it. You should also keep in mind that being on the job market is a big pressure, and the competition is going to be high. Be ready for this pressure, be patient, and do not be discouraged!

Preparing Your Materials

Try to use as many resources as you can, and get advice from as many people as possible. SWS is a great resource for this. When you are putting together your CV and teaching portfolio, ask people to show you theirs and go online to look at other people's materials. Suggest to your references that they write two separate letters for teaching and research schools. Your cover letter should also be different for research vs. teaching schools. In addition, ask your department if they will help you with copying and mailing your applications and CVs.

Interviews

ASA Employment Services. Employment services at the ASA meetings are different from job interviews in the department because they interview many people in a short time. The advantage of interviewing at the employment services is that it is an early deadline, which forces you to finalize your CV and teaching portfolio. You will also learn to talk about your research and dissertation in a short period, about 5 minutes. In addition, there is a good chance that a school will remember you.

Phone Interviews. Prepare for phone interviews and do not disregard them as unimportant. They need to be taken seriously because they help the committee cut the long list short. Temporary positions often hire entirely from phone interviews. When being interviewed over the phone, have your cheat sheet in front of you, know whom you are talking to, and what their interests are. If a phone call from the committee takes you by surprise and you do not feel prepared, come up with a delay tactic (e.g., "I have to go to teach right now, just let me call you back"). Then take some time, even just one or two hours, to prepare for the interview.

Job Interviews. Find comfortable clothes for interviews in advance so that you will not have to shop the last minute. Take care of these things as early as possible because these are the things you can control. Before the job interview, do a mock interview with an experienced

person. Ask people who have been through the hiring process recently what types of questions they were asked, and think about questions that you will ask the department (always ask questions!). Good examples of the questions you can ask your potential colleagues are: What is your favorite thing about being here? If you could change one thing, what would it be? It is also helpful to know to whom you will be talking. Dig on the web and learn their teaching and research interests. However, you need to maintain a healthy balance so that people do not think they are being stalked!

It is important that you ask about tenure requirements and teaching loads. How has tenure gone for the last few appointments? How heavily do publication/teaching/services weigh in tenure decisions? Can I bring a new course into the curriculum? When negotiating courses off, consider taking off the second semester of your first year, rather than the first.

During the job talk, get to your data and findings fast. If you are using PowerPoint for your presentation, bring overheads as back-ups in case there are technical problems.

Thing to Never Do on an Interview. Do not bring up the salary during the interview. The dean/chair will give you information about the package, and you will talk more about it at the offer stage. During meals, do not expect to eat a lot, because you will be doing the talking. Never drink alcohol and do not order spaghetti, salad, or sandwich (they can be messy to eat). It is inappropriate to offer to pay for the meal when out on a job interview.

Teaching a Class

At teaching colleges, you may be asked to teach a class. Find out whom you will be teaching to (an actual class or a bunch of faculty pretending to be a class), what equipment will be available, and talk to the instructor teaching this class. Ask for the class syllabus—you do not want to do a lecture on something that was already covered. Do not try something new in this

class; instead, focus on what you know already has worked well. In addition, be conscious of when in the semester you are teaching. Students may lose enthusiasm toward the end of the semester, and their lack of response may have nothing to do with your presentation.

Accepting a Job

Find out what people in your university are earning in their salaries, so that when an offer is made to you, you can have something to compare it with. Do not be afraid to ask people who have recently been hired about their packages. Furthermore, state universities are obliged to publish salaries and many post on their websites. The *Chronicle* publishes yearly salaries, and *Footnotes* began publishing pieces on starting salaries as well. It is a good idea to negotiate everything: salary, moving money, start-up money, etc. Always ask for more.

If You Don't Get the Job

If you are on the job market for more than one year, it is okay. Many people do not get a job in their first year. If the department does not want you, it is not personal; there may be many different reasons. If you are second on their list and do not get the job, ask them “why” in a subtle way so that they do not feel pressured. For example, you can say, “I am still on the market. Tell me what can I do to improve my performance?” They might offer you some recommendations. If not, just let it go.