Academic Job Hunt: How to Ace your Interview for an Assistant Professor Position

Arne Gennerich, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Anatomy and Structural Biology

September 20, 2012
Key Questions

1. What is the purpose of being on the job market?
2. What do I have to consider before I apply?
3. What can I do to increase my chances to get an interview?
Key Questions

4. How should my application package look like?

5. What else do I have to prepare before I interview?

6. What is the difference between a seminar talk and chalk talk?
7. Is there anything I can do to ‘facilitate’ a job offer during the days and weeks after an interview?

8. Should I communicate other job offers to search committees?

9. How do I negotiate a job offer?
Seminar Overview

1. Introduction

2. Things to consider before you apply

3. Preparation of the application package

4. What you can do to increase the likelihood to get an interview invitation
The Purposes of Job Interviews

1. To get a job

Rule of thumb:

50 applications ➔ 5 interviews ➔ 1 offer
The Purposes of Job Interviews

2. Networking

*Example:* during 5 job interviews, you will meet 50-100 professors one-on-one for 20-45 minutes... who will invite you to give conference talks, institutional talks, and to review papers and grants.

**Networking is essential for your career!**
The Purposes of Job Interviews

2. Networking
Seminar Overview

1. Introduction

2. Things to consider before you apply

3. Preparation of the application package

4. What you can do to increase the likelihood to get an interview invitation
Things to Consider Before You Apply

➡️ Ask yourself: Is it worthwhile to enter into the job market?

Do I have enough/high quality papers to be successful at those schools where I can envision myself working?

➡️ Where should I apply?

- undergraduate colleges
- universities/graduate colleges
- medical schools/research institutes
# The Pros and Cons of Undergraduate/Graduate Colleges and Medical Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Pro</strong></th>
<th><strong>Con</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate College</strong></td>
<td>9-month salary/a lot of teaching :-)</td>
<td>high teaching load/limited research time/undergraduates only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate College/University</strong></td>
<td>medium teaching load, 9-month salary, graduate students/postdocs</td>
<td>medium teaching load</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical School/Research Institute (e.g. Scripps, Salk)</strong></td>
<td>minimal teaching load, graduate students/postdocs</td>
<td>75-100% NIH-based salary support expected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seminar Overview

1. Introduction

2. Things to consider before you apply

3. Preparation of the application package

4. What you can do to increase the likelihood to get an interview invitation
Preparation of your Application Package

- Have your package (cover letter, CV, research proposal, teaching statement, and reprints) ready by mid September.

CV

Research Plan

- begin now & select references

- begin in early July
Select References

- PhD advisor
- Postdoc advisor
- Professors who know you and your work well, i.e. people who are able to write about your character, talents and academic accomplishments and skills

Provide your research proposal, CV and reprints to help your references to write detailed letters

Adapted from Dubocovich and Emerita “Interviewing for a Faculty Position: The Dos and Don’ts”
Question: What if I don’t get along with my adviser?

Answer: If you do not have a good relationship with your adviser and cannot ask for a letter of recommendation, make sure you explain why in your cover letter. Be completely candid about the situation.

Not having a recommendation from your adviser is a red flag to the search committee and will not be ignored.

The committee may even contact your adviser anyway. A letter from another faculty member from the same institution may be critical in this case.
Job Advertisements

- Science Careers:  http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/
- Nature Jobs:  http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/
- American Chemical Society:  http://chemistryjobs.acs.org/jobs
- Physics Today:  http://careers.physicstoday.org/jobs/
Cover Letter

1. State the purpose of the letter and why you apply
2. Describe your postdoctoral accomplishments
3. Describe your future research plans
4. Describe how you and your research will impact the future development of the department/institution
5. State what your application package includes
Research Proposal

Example 1: 3 pages
1. Abstract
2. Aim #1
3. Aim #2
4. Aim #3
5. Summary

Example 2: 4-5 pages
1. Abstract
2. Research accomplishments
   2.1 Graduate work
   2.1 Postdoctoral work
3. Research plans
   3.1 Aim #1
   3.2 Aim #2
   3.3 Aim #3
4. Summary
Teaching Statement

Check WWW for examples!
Seminar Overview

1. Introduction
2. Things to consider before you apply
3. Preparation of the application package
4. What you can do to increase the likelihood to get an interview invitation
Things to do to get invited...

50-500 received applications

? 

5 selected applications

your application
Things to do to get invited...

➡ Ask your boss or one of your references to call/email the search committee chair/committee members or any other faculty at the interviewing institution

➡ Look for someone you know or any faculty with common interests, optimally in the department you are applying for a position

➡ Ask your friends whether they know faculty at the host institution, and ask them to call their contacts
Seminar Overview

5. Preparation of an outstanding seminar talk

6. Design of an NIH-study section suitable chalk talk

7. Generation of an equipment list and budget

8. Scheduling of multiple interviews
Seminar Talk/Job Talk

Everyone makes their decision based on your seminar presentation!

Think of the audience (who is going to be present, what is their background?)!

Concentrate on what your audience needs to know, not on what you know!
Seminar Talk/Job Talk

➢ Tell the audience a story, don’t show just data!

➢ Even your grandmother should be excited by your presentation and be able to follow (do NOT overwhelm the audience)

➢ Get EVERYONE in the audience to like you

Follow these rules and you will get the job!
Structuring the Seminar Talk

~5 minutes introduction

~30 minutes science: tell a story, state hypotheses and show how you tested them

~5 minutes summary and conclusions: tell the audience what they have learned and why the world is now better thanks to your findings

~5-10 minutes future directions: tell the audience what’s next!
Structuring the Seminar Talk

- Initiate attention: Face the audience with your feet apart and greet the audience and introduce yourself, and smile!

- State your topic and say what your seminar will cover using visual aids when possible (animations, colored micrographs, etc.)

...captures the audience’s attention and makes the audience want to hear the rest of your talk!
Structuring the Seminar Talk

- Present information in a logical order
- Use a consistent layout
- Use visual aids to spark interest and ‘show’ instead of just ‘tell’
- One point/graph per slide only
- Provide clear links between main points and slides. Know what’s next!
Structuring the Seminar Talk

Conclusion

- Summarize main findings
- Re-state the purpose of your talk, re-answer questions and say what you have achieved
Structuring the Seminar Talk

- Provide an outlook on the future research you are planning to work on
Presentation Strategies and Tips

‣ Arrive early and become familiar with the environment and audio/video projector equipment

‣ Rehearse your presentation out loud, and adjust content so that your seminar will last for 45-50 minutes

‣ Give at least TWO practice presentations and ask for feedback to help you improve
Presentation Strategies and Tips

- Be natural, enthusiastic, spontaneous, and conversational (be yourself)

- Be confident and relaxed; if you are confident and relaxed, your audience will also feel relaxed and confident (the listeners tend to mirror your attitudes). To gain confidence, practice!

- Make eye contact and smile; if you don’t look at the listeners, they will feel excluded but if you smile at them, they will perceive you as a friendly person and smile back at you

Tips adapted from Toastmasters International “Gestures: Your Body Speaks”
Presentation Strategies and Tips

- Pause for emphasis: pause just before and after you say something important
- Use gestures to strengthen the impact of your words
- Summarize and reinforce key points (if possible with images)
- Pose questions and answer yourself
- Speak clearly and slowly
Presentation Strategies and Tips

- Believe what you’re saying; if the audience is convinced you are sincere and trustworthy, they will pay attention to what you say.

- Deepen the tone of your voice to increase the believability!

- Move just before you speak, then stand still while delivering the important message.

Tips adapted from George Torok, Our Shared Resources, “10 Tips for Presenting Your Key Points with Lasting Impact”, and Toastmasters International “Gestures: Your Body Speaks”.
Presentation Strategies and Tips

› Make them laugh just before, then get serious and deliver the important message (when your listeners laugh they open their minds and are more willing to accept new information)

› Look your audience in the eyes, never read the important message. If you read it, it will look like you don’t really know your message or believe it.

› Don’t read your slides to your audience!

Tips from George Torok, Our Shared Resources, “10 Tips for Presenting Your Key Points with Lasting Impact”
Presentation Strategies and Tips

- Be aware of body language (don’t keep hands in pocket!)
- Only look briefly at the canvas if necessary and seek eye contact with every member of the audience most (>95%) of the time
- Show something exciting (e.g. an animation) at least every 15 minutes to break the rhythm (people fall asleep after 15 minutes otherwise)
Seminar Overview

5. Preparation of an outstanding seminar talk

6. Design of an NIH-study section suitable chalk talk

7. Generation of an equipment list and budget

8. Scheduling of multiple interviews
Purpose of the Chalk Talk

...is to demonstrate two things:

(1) that you have a feasible (and fundable) plan for what you are going to do when you open the door to your new laboratory

(2) that you can think on your feet and respond effectively to sharp criticism. The chalk talk should present in detail the future directions of your research. It is like a verbal NIH/NSF grant proposal. State several interesting problems (Specific Aims) and explain how you plan to solve them.

From WISEST Initiatives, “Sources for the proposal talk”
Design of the Chalk Talk

- Prepare ~30 minute presentation
- Start with a short ~2 min introduction (summarize the concepts and key questions)
- Present 2-4 specific aims - designed for your future R01 - using the same presentation guidelines I have laid out for your seminar talk (one graph per slide, use visual aids, etc.)

Optional: prepare a handout with graphs and summary of the specific aims

Note: Sometimes, candidates are asked not to use Powerpoint and to use only a chalkboard/whiteboard
Tips for your Chalk Talk

Have answers to the following questions:

‣ What are the funding agencies to which your work is relevant? (NIH, NSF, DOE, private foundations, companies,...)

‣ How will you differentiate yourself from your postdoc advisor- will that person become a competitor? (i.e. is your project sufficiently separate from hers/his?)

‣ Who is the major competition for you in your field?

From Blue Lab Coats, “Unsolicited Advice: Job Search (Pt. 10)”
Design of the Chalk Talk

Have answers to the following questions:

- What is your vision for the next 10 years?
- What are your major equipment and facilities needs?
- What are your views about teaching?
- How do you want to develop your career (size of lab, students versus postdocs, teaching, etc...)?

Questions adapted from Drummond-Barabosa “Job interviews: handling the stress and finding a good fit”
Chalk Talk...

...informal chatty atmosphere with a lot of back-and-forth between you and the audience with the aim to convince the audience that you are fundable

Talk to your boss about what science you leave behind and what science you will take with you!
Seminar Overview

5. Preparation of an outstanding seminar talk
6. Design of an NIH-study section suitable chalk talk
7. Creating an equipment list and budget
8. Scheduling of multiple interviews
Equipment list

...a list of things you need to be able to run your lab
Budget

Estimate the total necessary budget. For example:

- $200k-$1,000k for equipment (microscopes, centrifuges, etc.)
- $100k-$135k for supplies ($33k-$45k per year for an initial three-year period)
- Salary support for lab members (e.g. a technician and a postdoc, ...) for a three-year period
Seminar Overview

5. Preparation of an outstanding seminar talk

6. Design of an NIH-study section suitable chalk talk

7. Generation of an equipment list and budget

8. Scheduling of multiple interviews
Seminar Overview

9. The interviewing process

10. The post-interviewing correspondence

11. Job offer and job negotiations
How is the search run?

- Funding for the position is secured
- Search Committee (chair and members) is formed
- Candidates are reviewed
- Reference letters are requested
- Short list (3-6 candidates) is created
- Invitations for first visit are extended (phone, e-mail)
- Itinerary will be provided before your arrival

Adapted from Dubocovich and Emerita “Interviewing for a Faculty Position: The Dos and Don’ts”
The Interview - Tip 50 :-)

Note what’s out of your control:

• the pool of candidates
• how your research fits in
• people’s personalities and moods

⇒ DO NOT TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY!!!

Tip from Drummond-Barabosa, “Job interviews: handling the stress and finding a good fit”
The Interview - Day 1

- Breakfast with the search committee chair
- One-on-ones with faculty
- Job talk
- Lunch with trainees (ask if not offered)
- Faculty outside department (ask if not offered)
- Dinner with committee

Adapted from Dubocovich and Emerita “Interviewing for a Faculty Position: The Dos and Don’ts”
The Interview - Day 2

• Breakfast with faculty
• Meeting with the Dean?
• More one-on-ones with faculty
• Chalk talk (note that the chalk talk is sometimes also part of the second visit and occasionally absent)
• Exit interview with department chair/search committee chair
• Second dinner?

Adapted from Dubocovich and Emerita “Interviewing for a Faculty Position: The Dos and Don’ts”
How to get a job offer in 14 steps

1. When you receive the call, express how excited you are and how much you look forward to the visit

2. The time to decide whether you want the job, is after they offer you a job!

3. Better overdress than underdress, but don’t wear high heels (you want them to remember you and not your clothes)

4. Always be polite and never be defensive when someone asks critical/hostile questions

5. Try to convey a positive personality. Play up the young, fresh and cheerful angle. Universities need infusion of optimism!

Tips 2 and 3 adapted from Jacquelyn Gill “How to get a faculty job in 20 not-so-easy steps”
How to get a job offer in 14 steps

6. Find out as much as possible about the department/institution and local area you are visiting. Coming informed really does make an impact and allows you to ask more in-depth-questions!

7. Know as much as you can about the professors you are going to meet one-on-one (print out papers/laboratory website contents for light airplane reading on the way to the interview)

8. Make professors talk about their research and ask questions (show you would be a good colleague)! Keep the conversation running, even if the professor is moody and appears to not be interested in talking to you. Be friendly, make them like you!

Tips 6 and 8 adapted from Helen Ezell, “Interviewing for a Faculty Position”, and Drummond-Barabosa “Job interviews: handling the stress and finding a good fit”
How to get a job offer in 14 steps

9. Be on the lookout for something you could add to the department, such as running a new course or providing technical expertise, and talk about it.

10. Give an outstanding seminar! Everyone will make their decision based on your job talk! You will know directly after your job talk if they are going to offer you the job (note, however, the decision is not made until after all candidates have interviewed).
How to get a job offer in 14 steps

11. During the meeting with students, express an interest in what they work on, in their graduate program, in what kinds of careers they would like to pursue, how happy they are at this institution (show you could be a good mentor)

12. Have your equipment list ready and know what you absolutely need to be able to run your lab

13. Leave general questions for the social occasions such as breakfast, lunch, dinner and car rides

Tips 11 and 13 from Drummond-Barabosa “Job interviews: handling the stress and finding a good fit”
Topics for General Questions

- recruitment of students
- training grants and graduate programs
- teaching load
- tenure requirements, rate of tenure for junior faculty
- scientific events (WIPs, faculty seminars,...)
- core facilities
- internal grant competitions
- real estate, schools, etc.
- cost of living and quality of life

...anything that will be important for your professional success and personal happiness

Adapted from Drummond-Barabosa “Job interviews: handling the stress and finding a good fit”
14. Don’t drink more than a glass of wine at the interview dinner and order something simple to eat. During the dinner, ask questions about the local area and the university. Keep a nice conversation running and don’t show how tired you are.
The 2nd Interview/Visit

Some universities invite applicants to a 2nd interview/visit after all candidates have been interviewed...

...which can include a chalk talk (if absent during the first visit) or heavy PR to convince you that this is the right place for you.
Questions you should ask yourself

- Did you interact well with the department chair?
- Did you interact well with most faculty members?
- Will you be able to recruit students?
- Are the students productive?
- Is the environment supportive?
- Are you comfortable with their expectations?
- If you are a woman, are there other women in the faculty?

...you are also interviewing the institution!

Adapted from Drummond-Barabosa “Job interviews: handling the stress and finding a good fit”
Seminar Overview

9. The interviewing process

10. The post-interviewing correspondence

11. Job offer and job negotiations
Post-Interviewing Correspondence

Sending a follow-up email after an interview is a critical aspect of the interview process

- Once back home, write a 2-3 sentence email thanking your host and all professors you met one-on-one and, if it is true, say you are very interested in their institution/research, listing specific reasons.

- Keep the search committee head informed about other job offers or newly accepted papers.
Seminar Overview

9. The interviewing process
10. The post-interviewing correspondence
11. Job offer and job negotiations
Job Offer & Job Negotiations

- Once you receive a job offer, tell them how exited you are!
- Provide your equipment list and tell the offering institution what you need
- Communicate other job offers and use them to negotiate a better deal, but always be reasonable with your requests!
Job Offer & Job Negotiations

Negotiating a job offer is a back-and-forth between the Chair/Dean of the offering department/institution and you; the offer letter(s) are being improved until you are happy to sign the dotted line on one of the offer letters (your power drops 99% the second you sign!!!)

Confirm all conversations by e-mail:

“Thanks, I just want to confirm... please confirm that I understood correctly”

Quote from Dubocovich and Emerita “Interviewing for a Faculty Position: The Dos and Don’ts”
The Purposes of Job Interviews

1. To get a job,
2. to network, and...
3. ...about life after getting a job!
Job Offer & Job Negotiations

- Depending on the city where the university is located (e.g. LA, San Francisco, Boston and New York), you can ask for mortgage support or a down payment to buy a home.
Good luck!
Useful links

• http://asha.org/academic/career-ladder/chap3
• http://bluelabcoats.wordpress.com/2008/04/20/unsolicited-advice-job-search-pt-10/
• www.toastmasters.org/201-Gestures
• http://www.oursharedresources.com/Resource/ViewResource/241
• www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/pdf/seminar.pdf
Useful links

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JggaEc0xSBo

- http://www.google.de/url?
  sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCwQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.grad.buffalo.edu%2Fpostdocs%2Fdocuments%2FDubocovich-TheDoandDonts-030911.pdf&ei=xthdUIXqH8TQsgbBhIDIBg&usg=AFQjCNEVRHq_3gooIUTAj7lpSDBTpCivNQ

- www.sdbonline.org/DD-BarbosaPresentation.pdf