

Academic Interview Preparation Resource Document (8/16/01)

This document is a synthesis of different responses shared by graduate students and faculty in various fields of education. The document is a work in progress. Please feel free to update it and/or revise it to suit your needs. Also, remember that all things included in this document are based on different experiences of different people. Some of these things may not apply to everyone or every situation. The best of luck and success in your current and future job searches.

Take care,

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PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW:

The chair of the search committee will contact you about travel arrangements and of your schedule. It is customary for you to meet with faculty in the department, for you to present a colloquium(ia) , and for you to meet with a Dean or Vice President of the University. Find out who else is on the search committee.

COLLOQUIA:

Job Talk

You will be asked to give a “job talk” or “colloquium.” The purpose of your colloquium is **NOT TO IMPRESS THEM WITH YOUR RESEARCH!** The search committee is already impressed with your research record. That is why they have invited you for an interview. The purpose of the colloquium is to provide the DEPARTMENT a sense of who you are, the scope of your work, and to some extent an indication of your teaching. Don't make the mistake of creating a talk that is too technical. Be sure that you can speak to someone who is not an expert in your field, and that you give introductory words on how your research fits into the "big picture".

Teaching Colloquium:

You also may be asked to do a “teaching” colloquium, which specifically provides evidence of your teaching commitment and competency. Universities are continually under pressure to improve their instruction. Some universities are thinking about Lee Shulman and the Carnegie Institute’s focus on the Scholarship of Teaching. Gone are the days of the impeccable researcher who has to have his/her arm twisted to teach a class.

The potential for stellar scholarship may not be all the committee and department are looking for in your interview. Several scholars have pointed out, that good teaching may not get you tenure, but bad teaching will prevent you from getting tenure. Be sure to check if you have the choice of what you can present, or are specific criteria (like an existing course) that you may have to prepare something for.

- **PRACTICE YOUR TALK** (Several times). Make sure you do this before an audience that will be critical of potential flaws, rather than a friendly audience that will not tell you where you made mistakes. Also, invite people not in your area/field for the mock talks.
- **WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?** Ask the search committee chair who your audience will be, and what material they would like you to bring along. Be sure to bring copies of your vita, and preprints or reprints of your work to hand out to faculty members who may request it during the course of your interview.
- Try to ask the committee chair more about the position, and the composition of the committee. It is important to identify the type of person they are looking for, and to see how you compare to their ideal candidate.
- **ANTICIPATE LIKELY QUESTIONS THAT YOU WILL BE ASKED, AND THAT YOU WILL WANT TO ASK.**
- **RESEARCH YOUR POTENTIAL COLLEAGUES AND THE DEPARTMENT PROGRAMS.** Websites are very helpful. Find out what the fields of interests and current projects of department faculty. Think about potential collaborations. Find out the existing courses offered (and that you might want to teach) and what courses you might bring to the program. Some universities may want you to teach undergraduate, graduate, and credential courses.

THINK ABOUT LOGISTICS:

- **TRAVEL:** Plan, if possible, to arrive a day before your interview so you will have time to relax, prepare yourself for the interview, and to have a cushion in case there are any travel delays.
- **DRESS:** Be sure to dress professionally. I would recommend a suit or sports jacket with a tie for men, and a suit or professional looking dress for women.
- **BACK UP:** Always, always, always, have a back-up plan if technology or something breaks down. For example, power point presentations should have transparency version back up.

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN PREPARATION

- What are the concerns/research interests of each search committee member?
Search on WWW

Look at course bulletin of that school, try career services/placement library

- How does your research overlap with that search committee member's? Ask if they have considered asking my research questions in their area of interest?
- Talk about overlaps with other department faculty members/programs. Prepare ideas to talk about & discuss
- What areas in their job description are not strengths in your vita?
In what ways do you have experience in those areas?
Improve these weaknesses if possible e.g. if no teaching experience, create a syllabus & write out teaching philosophy.
Discuss with the relevant people.
Reinforce if appropriate in the thank you letter.

THE INTERVIEW:

- 1) YOU ARE “ON” FOR 48 HOURS
- 2) MEETINGS: Often there are several meetings scheduled during your interview: with the committee, administrators (deans), students, and individual faculty members. Some of these meetings feel very “formal” or “informal.” BUT, they are all part of the interview process. The committee already knows about your background on paper. They want to find out more about your personality, your professional opinions regarding issues in your research, and your concerns about education. Other activities (meetings, dinners) are also opportunities to the faculty, staff, and students to get to know you and vice versa.

Do not assume that everyone on the committee has read your vitae and publications closely or recently. And, it is likely that the department has not read anything, so their impressions of you are from your interactions during the talk and meetings.

- 3) FIND OUT ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT: Is this a place you can envision yourself working in for several years? This is your chance to find out. Ask questions about the position: the success of previous Assistant Professors in securing tenure, mentorship process for junior faculty, collaboration among the faculty, future directions of the department, priorities of the department and of the institution.

*Be sure to meet with faculty that are most similar to you such as junior faculty, faculty of color and/or women faculty members to get their impressions of the department/university and professional support. Think carefully about discussing “sensitive” subjects like balancing family and work or potentials of conflicting demands and over extension of commitments because of role as a faculty of color or woman faculty member.

- 4) SALARY: This is an important issue. And, should be discussed at some point during the interview. If you can, research the salaries of starting professors at that institution. Some salary scales are of public record. Have a ball park figure in mind. And, see if possibilities exist to start at different “steps” depending on experience. You may have to make a case for higher salary, if offered a position. If it is not, there are ways to ask about it in an appropriate and indirect manner. It is worthwhile to ask about tenure and promotion criteria and the departmental record, fringe benefits (such as sabbatical leaves), internal research support, teaching loads, external support – “buy-out” of courses etc.
- 5) LISTEN CAREFULLY AND KEEP EMOTIONS IN CHECK: During the interview try to remain neutral AND friendly. Don't express extreme dissatisfaction.

POST INTERVIEW:

- Return your expense vouchers and receipts in a timely fashion to get reimbursed for your trip.
- WRITE A THANK YOU LETTER FOR THE INTERVIEW. Let the committee know whether or not you are still interested in the position. Mention parts of the interview that you enjoyed. Do not make judgmental or critical statements regarding your assessment of the department.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are two sets of questions compiled below. One set are questions you may be asked in the interview. The second set consists of questions that you, as an interviewee, may want to ask. Both sets of questions were generated from various job search candidates' experiences.

QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE ASKED:

Your Research:

- Tell me about your research goals and program?
- Describe your research at the level you would to a non-expert/undergraduate/beginning graduate student? (This is a typical question from a Dean who is a nonscientist)
- What contribution has your research made to your field?
- How does your work address culture, language, race, ethnicity, socio-economic factors?
- What is left out of the talk?
- What is the most significant piece of research you have read in the last year?
- What do you envision for creating a research program here?
- Do you plan to apply for research funding?
- What is the funding record of your field?

Your teaching:

- Tell me about your teaching experience.
- Tell me about your experience working with teachers.
- What are “essential elements” of a math education program? (e.g. could be teacher education, science education, or preparing future policy makers)
- What would you change in a undergraduate/graduate/teacher education curriculum?
- What courses would you be interested in teaching?
- What courses offered at University X would you be qualified to teach?
- Would you teach a methods course?
- How do you address culture, language, ethnicity, race in your courses? Give me an example or an activity that helps teachers/researchers talk about these issues.
- Do you feel comfortable taking on graduate students in the current employment environment?
- How would you teach an introductory course? a course for non-majors?
- How would you teach math methods? Elementary and Secondary.
- Many of our students are more/less talented than those you are used to at your present institution. How successful would you be with them?
- How will you encourage students to major in our field?
- How should teacher education programs be set up so that prospective teachers are prepared to teach?

About potential “fit” with department:

- What do you think is the proper balance between research and teaching?
- Would you be able to take on a student immediately?
- Can you incorporate undergraduates in your research?
- Are you willing to be involved in committee work?
- How will you enhance our department?
- Why have you changed jobs so frequently? (A good answer will be something like "increasing growth opportunities")
- Why are you interested in our school/department?
- If you get more than one job offer how will you decide?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Who else is interviewing you?
- What kind of salary are you looking for?
- Name a salary that will make you content for the rest of your life. (advice laugh heartily)
- Refresh my memory, review your vita with me.
- Identify your strengths and weaknesses. (Give one of each, and describe how you will overcome your weakness) You may also want to think about this with respect to the position “description.” Are there aspects of your work that currently do not fit in the scope of the position that you are open to think about?
- What are some of specific things you would like to address/learn in your own professional development? How is this connected to your work as an academic (scholarship, teaching, service)
- Prepare to answer questions about your research/preparation background for the position.

Opinions on Educational Issues:

- What do you think about vouchers?
- What do you think about standardized-testing?
- What do you think about math reform?

“ILLEGAL” QUESTIONS:

These shouldn't be asked of you, but they may be. Here is some advice on how to respond to them.

- Do you plan to have children? I see you are concerned with my commitment to this position. Let me tell you about my research plans for the next few years. I plan to pursue them whatever personal decisions I make.
- What does your spouse do? If you think that the ease of relocatability of your spouse is an asset, feel free to answer. Otherwise, politely ask the interviewer why the question is important and how it relates to the position you are seeking. Use tact.

- Are you married? Can you tell me how you feel that would be important for the position we are discussing? I would use caution not answering some of these questions.
- What is your ethnic/racial background? Or, Aguirre, that is an interesting name. Where are you from?

Even though these questions are illegal, use caution in how you answer them. You may piss off an interviewer by pointing by deflecting the question or asking about its relevance to the interview, which may result in an unfavorable recommendation. It is a tricky situation. Listen carefully and think hard before you answer them.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK:

About the position:

- Who is on the search committee?
- What is the selection process/how do they decide?
- Describe the ideal candidate for this position.
- List three positive aspects of this position. List three disadvantages.

About department “fit” and expectations:

- What is your vision of the department five years from now?
- What is the policy/process for tenure? Is there a policy on early tenure?
- What is the policy for family leave and/or maternity? How does that affect the tenure-clock?
- What are the bases for promotion and tenure? How are the faculty evaluated?
- What percentage of the faculty are currently tenured? What is the tenure-rate?
- What is the percentage of tenure track faculty that have been promoted?
- What is the rate of and what are the reasons for faculty turnover?
- Do faculty collaborate with each other? How is collaboration work supported by the university? How does this count in the tenure process?
- Do faculty work with schools? How is this work supported by the university? How does this count in the tenure process?
- Describe the ideal assistant professor's first year?

About Research:

- What support for research work is available?
- Describe the travel budget?
- Think about what would consist of your “ideal” start-up package for your research work at the University. What would you need? Think about supplies, office space, lab space, research assistant funding, technology (hardware, software). If the University doesn't offer much initially are their avenues to get support?

About Teaching:

- What is the typical teaching load? Can research hours be counted as part of the load?

- What is the policy for buying out teaching of classes
- What graduate and undergraduate courses would be my responsibility?
- How often are course load assignments changed?
- Who is involved in curriculum development decisions and how are they made?

About Committee work:

- What kind of committee work would I be expected to work on? What are the current standing committees? How are committee members selected?
- What is the average number of hours per week spent on committee work?

About Department Program:

- How active are the members of the faculty in national professional organizations?
- What are the admission requirements for undergraduates and graduate students?
- Characterize the student population in terms of demographic, geographic, economic, and scholarship ranges.
- How is College of Education situated in university
- What reforms in the state?
- What are students like?
- What is the emphasis in the teacher education program?
- How does this program think about teaching (intellectual, technical)
- Could you talk about a day in this department? Could you walk me through a day?

About the surrounding community:

- What is the cost of living in the community?
- What are the cultural opportunities in the community?
- Do faculty tend to live near the university or commute?
Advantages/Disadvantages?
- Are there tuition waivers for professors (and family)?

Meeting with Grad students:

What's it like to be a grad student here?

What is the process like to get your degree? Your preparation may be different than the university you are interviewing with (example: dissertation defense)

ADVICE

- Help them see you as collegial, stimulating, as a person who knows who s/he is and will continue to do strong research.
- Be confident. Don't be humble
- Be flexible
- Know the school