Preparing for the Campus Interview

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Tips for the campus interview

Campus interview includes (see attached typical schedule)

- Formal presentations/seminars
- One-on-one meetings
- Informal gatherings (meals) and interactions

Before the campus visit

Do your homework: investigate the institutional priorities, culture and needs

Find out

- the organization: private vs. public, department/college/university relationship
- strengths and weaknesses of the department/university
- size of the department (# T/TT faculty, # post-docs, # grad student, # support staff)
- who's on the faculty, their research specialties, especially the stars,
- what research areas the department is emphasizing
- what courses the department needs you to teach
- strength of the other STEM departments
- size and make-up of undergrad student body

How to get this info? from

- your advisor, people who went to school there, taught or worked there, visited there
- www
- brochures

Preparing your schedule

Ask to include in your schedule meetings that will help YOU determine if position is a good fit

- Assistant professors in the department
- Potential collaborators in other departments
- Graduate students in your area
- Female faculty from other departments

Don't be afraid to ask for a scheduled 30 min of prep time before your seminar

Get a copy of your schedule: what, who, your audiences for talks AND PREPARE ACCORDINGLY! Look up everyone on your schedule; find out their area of interest

The Presentations:

Continually ask yourself these two questions:

1. Who is my AUDIENCE? 2. What is the CONTEXT/SETTING?

Presenting oneself as confident and competent is a balancing act

Practice, but don't over practice.

–you need an audience, not only members of your research group

Structure of your Talks

The Technical talk (the Research Seminar on your previous work)

A typical structure for a 1-hour research seminar period:

• Introduction - 15 Minutes
  – Motivate the problem you were trying to solve; get them excited
  – Clearly and succinctly (for a general audience) state the problem and explain your solution or approach.
  – Why is your work important? You need to convince *everyone* that what you did is interesting and worth their time listening to.
  – Some background to understand it
• The MEAT – 20 minutes
  – What you did (OK to sacrifice detail for clarity, but not too simplistic)
  – Go into enough detail so that the experts can follow everything you say and are absolutely convinced that you've done good, solid work; the rest of your audience should still be able to make sense of your high-level arguments. Also you want to impress them with something that they don't understand. Only the experts should follow the last 10 minutes of this part of the talk
  – What it means
  – Summarize as you go
• The Implications – 10 minutes
  – Related work: Be scholarly. *What's new? What's different?* Explain how your work relates to others'.
  – Conclusions, future work; leave everyone with a feeling of excitement about the future of your field
• Questions and answers interspersed or at the end. – 10 minutes

Before the talk

• Look at the audience.
• Take a deep breath. Smile

During the talk

• Use eye contact.
• Pay attention to your pace.
• Use feedback: heads nodding, puzzled expressions, blank stares.

At the end of the talk

• Say "Thank you" (or something that indicates you're done).

After the talk (or later that night)

• Make minor adjustments to slides, order of slides, etc. for next interview
• Jot down reminders in the "Notes" part of the slides

The Chalk talk

The Job Talk (what you plan to do in the next 5 or more years)

Find out ahead of time what is the usual format for this talk (20-minute presentation followed by 30 minutes of discussion?)

Two main purposes

• To sell your research (your proposed work is important and fundable).
• To sell yourself (you have the expertise to carry it off).

There are different audiences in the same room.

• 1-2 experts, people who know what you're talking about.
• Everyone else.
  – Faculty/researchers in a tangentially-related field. *(How can your work help me?)*
  – Faculty/researchers outside of your field. *(Do you sound like you know what*

you're talking about? Does your research problem sound interesting, worth solving?)
– Faculty/researchers who are known to be "difficult."
– Graduate students (Watch out for some of them!)
– People out of touch with research, e.g., (some) administrators, lecturers.

General advice on presentations

• Uncluttered slides, no typos, large font
• Outline easy to follow – help people stay with your talk
• Not too long or too short
• Reference the work of others in the field (especially if they will be in the audience!)
• Number your slides.
• Bring backup copies (e.g., memory stick and paper)
• Have hidden slides for anticipated questions, further details about tricky or interesting technical points.
• Rehearse for knowledgeable audience
• Practice answering questions
• Don't get defensive
• Check out the room and projector ahead of time
• Begin by saying, "Good Morning! It's such a pleasure to be here."
• At the end, say, "Thank You, I'd be happy to take any questions."
• Have multiple versions of the talk in your head, for different audiences and different durations.
– The one-hour seminar version.
– The technical one-on-one version.
– The dean/department head version.
– The "waiting for the elevator" or ride up/down the elevator version.
Prepare a 2-minute elevator speech which describes your research in a compelling way to someone outside your area and relates your goals to the goals of the college (or department)

Expect the Unexpected: "Hard" Questions after your talk (adapted fromRebecca Richards-Kortum & Sherry Woods 2004 U Texas, "How to Stand out in a Campus Interview")

1. I don't think you've accounted for the research of Barnes and Bailey. Aren't you familiar with their model? I think it invalidates your main hypothesis.
2. Unpublished research in my lab shows exactly the opposite effect. You must not have done the proper controls.
3. I believe a simple non linear equation explains all your data. Why have you wasted your time on such a complex model?
4. (To the candidate) Well you didn't even account for phenomena x. (Aside to the audience) How can all this research be valid if she didn't account for x?
5. How does this differ from the basic model that we teach in sophomore transport?
6. It looks like you've done some interesting modeling. Is there an application of this work?
7. What a wonderful little application. Is there any theoretical support?
8. Those results look too good to be true. Have you accounted for systematic error?
9. You've done some interesting work, but I don't see how it could be considered engineering. Why do you think you are qualified to teach engineering?
10. Your work appears to be a complete replication of Fujimoto's work. Just what is really new here?

Good Responses to Hard Questions

- "That's a really good question...thank you for asking it."
- "You make a very good point…I have a couple of responses…"
- "We've discussed this question a lot in our research group and here's what I think…"

THE ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

1-on-1: Questions you might be asked

Easy

- Why did you do what you did for your thesis research?
- Why did you use your approach and not something else or someone else's? (Know the assumptions and limitations of your approach and solution.)
- What's so interesting about your thesis research? What's novel about your contribution? Why should I be interested in the problem or solution?
- What's the key insight to your solution?
- What are the one or two most significant contributions you feel you have made to the field, to Computer Science (or other field)?
- What difference is your solution or approach going to make to someone who is outside of your field?

Tougher

- **What do you want to do next?**
- What do you see yourself doing in three, five years?
- Where do you see the field being in five years? Ten? What are you going to do that will help us get there?
- What do you think are the top two or three problems in (the sub-field)? What are you going to do that will help us solve them?
- What do you think is the most significant advance in Computer Science (or other field) in the past year? Past two-three years?
- Do you know anything about X? (Be careful!)
- What do you think of X? (Be careful!)

1-on-1: Questions you should ask

Definitely

- What research are you doing? *(Get a feel for how ambitious a research project can be at this place; the scope of research activity at this place; whether there's anything going on of interest to you; potential collaborator?)*
- Do you have any students? What are they doing?
- Do you collaborate with anyone? What are you doing together? Is collaboration encouraged here for junior faculty?
- How is your research funded?
- What courses are you teaching?
- What are the students (undergraduate, Master's, Ph.D.) like?
- What do you perceive the strengths and weaknesses of this place to be?
- Do you like it here?

With the Department Head (or Dean)

Statistics, financial matters, and procedures. Find out about:

- Facts about the place
- Evaluation and promotion processes (who votes on promotions at the departmental level - is this vote typically the determining factor?)

- Research funding profile of the faculty (distribution among NSF, NIH, DOE, industry, state)
- Any institutional sources for research funding besides start-up package?
- Any travel support for junior faculty?
- View on sole PI vs. collaborations for junior faculty
- How well does department support faculty nominations for national awards and prizes
- Teaching load, released time for junior faculty
- Computing facilities support: who buys, who maintains
- Benefits (health, dental, retirement, tuition exemption, etc.)
- What are the P&T criteria? (# publications since hire, #$ federal, conference proceedings, etc. what is the primary criterion?)
- How well does the department compete with others for college funds
- Is space a problem? (An important question if you will run an experimental program)
- What is the projected stable size of the faculty for the department? Future hires in which subfields?
- What are the strategic directions of the department?
- If you could change anything about the department, what would it be?

More General Dos and Don'ts

• Show conviction, passion about something.
• Have an inner voice, a rudder that steers you. Know yourself.
• Show an interest in what people are saying, but
  – Don't try too hard to please.
  – Don't be too agreeable. Don't be spineless. Stand up for what you believe in.
• **Listen carefully** to what people are asking or saying before answering questions or responding to comments.
• Don't say anything stupid.
  – If you don't know anything about something don't pretend that you do.
  – Don't talk off the cuff.
  – Don't be glib, especially with people you don't know.
• Keep detailed notes (people's names, impressions, etc.).
• Dress neatly.
• Avoid interviewing pitfalls
  – Being too collaborative
  – Being too "easy" ("this institution is my first choice!")
  – Failing to ask questions about the work of your host
  – Focusing too much on social aspects of department/city
• With respect to you:
– How are hiring decisions made? (So you know when to expect to hear from someone.)

Ask Host or Anyone When Appropriate

Find out about
• Getting students, quality of students, support for students.
• Academic programs at all degree levels (B.S., Master's, and Ph.D.).
• Expectations of junior faculty.

Meals

• If you have any dietary restrictions, speak up.
• Mind your table manners.
• Relax, be yourself, but don't get drunk.

• Be prepared to talk shop. Some faculty/researchers will be able to talk to you only during a meal; they might miss your job talk. *(And, some just might like to grill you to wear you out!)*
• It's a good time to bring up social issues, e.g.,
  – life on campus, life in town/city, housing, schools for kids, two-body situation, outside interests
  – But don't ask about these too much unless
    • you get the sense that they really want you, or
    • you can't live without something or without being able to do X.
• It's a good time to hear the real "scoop" on a place.

Time left over?
• Ask to talk to some graduate students.
• Get an informal tour of campus, neighborhoods where you might live, town or city. *(Show an interest in your surroundings.)*

Post-Interview
• Keep in touch with your host or department head.
• The chance to write a formal "thank you" is in the cover letter enclosing your receipts for a reimbursement check.
• Use names of people you met; makes a more personal connection with the department
• Don't pester people about status of the search, but don't let too much time go by. *(Show that you're still interested, a "live" candidate.)*

OFFER:
Do get it in writing
– Starting salary *Negotiate as high a starting salary as possible;* subsequent raises are percentage increases.
– Starting date (this is when your tenure clock starts and sometimes affects when benefits kick in)
– Space (very important if you need laboratory space) and what is included in it (fume hoods, deionized water line, power requirements, ... in move-in condition, remodeling expenses NOT to come out of your start-up package)
– Support for computing and networking facilities (for office, home, traveling; to start up a lab)
– Support for summer(s) (how many months for how many years)
– Support for students (how many for how long)
– Moving expenses
– Release from any teaching responsibilities (how many semesters)
– Any special deals, using your *n* years of prior experience, etc. towards tenure clock
– Is there a time limit for spending out your start-up package?

Ask about, and maybe get in writing if you sense you need to
– Secretarial support
– Policy about if you haven't finished your thesis after you start

• Don't ask (now) about support for telephones, size, location, or paint color of your office, a room with a view, office supplies, parking, etc. You will sound silly. You may ask later, when it is more appropriate.