



Graduate College Career Services Office

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ACADEMIC INTERVIEWING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Overview

The job interview is an organized event in which information is exchanged in order to determine suitability for a specific position of employment. In the academic world, members of a search committee will use the interview to assess your interest in a position, the quality of your research skills and training, your potential for success as a teacher and researcher, and your ability to fit into the campus community. Interviews are also an opportunity for potential employees to gather information about the position and climate in order to decide whether or not to accept a potential offer.

Academic interviews traditionally involve a campus visit; however, many departments and universities now do all or part of the applicant screening process through less costly conference and telephone interviews. Most applicants are brought to campus only when they have made the “short list” of three or four candidates under consideration. This document will discuss the different types of interviews and focus on the preparation necessary to have a smooth, successful interview experience.

So What Happens After I Mail My Application?

A Multi-Stage Screening Process

After you have mailed out your application letter, the next move must come from the employer. If you have not received an acknowledgement letter after two or three weeks, it is not unreasonable to call the department and ask if it has been received. However, try to keep phone calls to a minimum. In general, search committee members will review your materials soon after their arrival. In addition to the acknowledgement letter, you also may receive some type of applicant survey form in the mail, gathering data for affirmative action purposes. The form will ask for information regarding your gender, ethnic identity, and veteran status, and it usually arrives with an enclosed return envelope. Completion of this form is entirely voluntary, and failure to complete it will not jeopardize your candidacy in any way. However, the data gathered is necessary for the university to comply with federally-mandated reporting requirements, and your compliance aids the institution.

As many positions have literally scores of applicants, the committee will initially seek to reduce the applicant pool to a more wieldy number by eliminating the most unlikely candidates. The criteria for initial screening vary widely, but in general, applicants with poorly written letters and CVs won't make it past the first cut. Search committees

sometimes also quickly reduce the field by eliminating candidates from less prestigious institutions or advisers, applicants who do not yet have the PhD “in hand,” and those with research interests that are not a precise match to the needs of the department.

If you make it past the first cut, a member of the search committee or departmental secretary may contact you and request additional materials, such as a dissertation abstract, academic transcripts, teaching portfolio, or writing sample. Send these materials as quickly as possible. Search committee members will evaluate these documents to further refine their list of candidates. In some fields, it is standard to contact applicants who made the first cut and ask them to interview at an upcoming annual meeting of a professional organization. You might also be contacted for a telephone interview.

Pre-Interview Preparation

Before any type of interview—telephone, conference or campus visit—dedicate time to research and planning. It is important to learn more about the institution you are interviewing at—it will improve your performance at the interview, enable you to ask smart questions, and most importantly aid you in your assessment of your “fit” within the institutional culture.

With the advent of the Internet, research has never been easier. Most of the information you need can be obtained online. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* features an Employers Profile section in which numerous colleges and universities have voluntarily provided in-depth profiles with extensive information for prospective candidates.

Topics to Learn More About Before the Interview

The following is a list of issues and questions you may wish to explore prior to the interview. It is general and by no means comprehensive.

- Basic statistics on enrollment, diversity, and composition of the student and faculty population.
- Mission statement and core values.
- Strengths (and weaknesses) of the institution—what programs are highly ranked? Which ones aren't?
- Learn a little bit about the campus. Does it have any prominent or historical landmarks? Is the department you will be interviewing with housed in one of these?
- The basic organizational structure of the university. Know the names of key university leaders (president, chancellor, provost, dean of the college and head of the department to which you are applying).
- Recent topics of interest to the campus community (for example, did a member of the faculty recently receive a Nobel Prize? Does the campus have a highly contested mascot? Have tuition increases been announced? Are there fiscal struggles?)
- Is the campus on semesters or quarters?

- Type of community. Is the university's role in the community large or small?
- What types of facilities or resources are available to support faculty members with teaching?
- What types of cultural events are important in the community? Is there a large performing arts center? Are intercollegiate athletics prominent?
- Learn more about the specific department to which you are applying. Learn the names of faculty members and their scholarly interests. Is there anything interesting or unique about the history of this department?
- Does the campus have interdisciplinary centers to promote scholarly research (such as an international or global studies center, a biotechnology center, or Latino/a studies center). If so, what is faculty participation in these?

Take a look at the programs of study catalog (usually available online). Just a glance through this may give you a good idea of the breadth of programs (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) available at the university.

Practice, Practice, Practice

There is no substitute for practice. Take every opportunity to exercise your interview skills and job talk. Your department can help. Some UIUC graduate departments arrange mock interviews for academic job candidates—be certain to participate. In addition, mock interviews are available during the academic year to all students, including graduate students, at the [Career Center](#). While this mock interview experience is not specific to the academic job search process, it can still be very valuable to graduate students, especially because a Career Center counselor will videotape your performance and review it with you. Register with the Career Center at least two days in advance: (217) 333-0820.

When preparing for your interview, consider the questions you might be asked and prepare and rehearse your answers. Additional information about interview questions and structured responses is found below.

Take time to rehearse your job talk prior to your interview, too. Some departments arrange for job candidates to present their job talk to an audience of their peers. This can be intimidating, but evidence suggests that students who participate in this type of rehearsal have more positive interview experiences and receive more offers. If your department does not already offer this type of service, talk with your adviser and see if a special session can be arranged for you.

Things to Take to an Interview

There are a few things you should always carry to an interview:

- Name and phone number of your contact person
- Itinerary and hotel information
- Extra copies of relevant materials, including your CV and references. You may also want to bring additional copies of a writing sample, teaching statement, and research statement.

- Any slides, notes, or electronic equipment necessary for your job talk.

How to Dress

Appropriate interview attire can vary by the formality of a discipline. Suits are common in business-oriented fields, while less formal attire is often suitable in most other disciplines. The “power suit” of the business world is usually not necessary for academe. The best sartorial advice for both men and women is probably to wear professional clothing that is comfortable to you. Clothing should be well-tailored and pressed, hair should be neat, shoes should be polished, fingernails should be clean and trimmed, and cologne or perfume should be avoided. Women should also avoid excessive jewelry or cosmetics.

For men in most fields, appropriate interview attire includes a sports jacket, tie, and most types of non-jeans trousers. If you feel as though a tie strangles you and you believe your discomfort will be easily visible to others, you may be better off in something else—perhaps a tab collar shirt, turtleneck, or dressy polo shirt with a sport coat. Professional clothing can be more complicated for women—they have more choices and are simultaneously more likely to be judged for their appearance. Pant suits are now well-accepted and are a comfortable option. Skirts and dresses are also appropriate. Ask a female faculty member in your department for advice if you are in doubt. Comfort is an especially important point for women—narrow skirts, sheer pantyhose, and high heels look good, but they can actually hinder your interview if they make you so uncomfortable that you are not at your best. During a campus visit, you may be escorted on a walking tour of campus, so select shoes that will enable you to walk comfortably for several blocks. Clothing should also be climate appropriate; for instance, sandals are a poor choice for a winter interview in the Midwest.

Conference Interviews

Many disciplines do a great deal of interviewing at large national conferences. These interviews are typically screening interviews—an opportunity for employers to quickly learn firsthand about a multitude of applicants. Sometimes you might be contacted in advance of a conference interview (generally because you have already sent preliminary application materials) and other times you might not know you have the opportunity to interview until you arrive at the conference, see a list of departments recruiting candidates, and select a time slot. Conferences often have job boards on which candidates may sign up for interview times with various institutions. When signing up, allow yourself plenty of time between interviews and other conference events. Interviews sometimes take place in meeting rooms, but more often occur in hotel rooms or suites. Take care that you determine the site of your interview well in advance of the actual event.

Conference interviews are obviously much shorter than on-campus interviews, usually lasting about half an hour. They are administrated by a smaller number of personnel, and you will usually not be critiqued by all members of the search committee during this interview. Beware that you may have the opportunity to meet other representatives from the interviewing college or university at other conference events, so prepare to be “on” for the entire event.

Prepare for a conference interview as you would for any other interview: dress professionally in clothing appropriate to your discipline, research the position,

department and university, and try to be yourself. Because conference interviews are so short, there is little time to assess all elements of your compatibility with a position, but it is a good opportunity for search committees to evaluate your personality and potential “fit” into the campus and departmental climate.

Unlike the on-campus interview, the expenses of the preliminary conference interview are your responsibility.

Telephone Interviews

Telephone screening is a cost-effective method for academic departments to eliminate candidates from the search, and it is often used to whittle the field to a short list for the campus visit. You might receive a phone call from a search committee member at any time—either to talk with you independently for a few minutes or to arrange a time for a more prolonged interview with other members of the search committee. As a result, make an effort to be prepared for this phone call – it will help you make a positive first impression. Keep your organized files of application materials near the phone, so that you might quickly recall details about the university and position. If you are not prepared to participate in an interview at the time you receive a call, it is better to try to reschedule than to make a poor first impression. Remember that a phone interview will generally not get you a job – it’s an intermediate step on the way to a face-to-face interview.

The following guidelines apply to phone interviews:

Before the Call

- Disable your phone’s call waiting feature. If this is not possible, ignore any incoming calls during the interview.
- Eliminate distracting background noise and take the call in a quiet room.
- Have your application materials and list of questions handy for easy reference.
- Have a note pad and pen for note taking.
- Have a glass of water available.
- You might consider dressing professionally for the interview. Believe it or not, it can help you to project a professional demeanor.

During the Call

- Do not use speakerphone.
- Show interest and enthusiasm in your voice. If you smile when you speak, you will sound more upbeat.
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Offer to send or e-mail any additional information or supporting documentation at the end of the call.

- Conclude the call with an expression of interest in the position and ask about the next step.
- Send a thank you letter after the interview.

The Campus Visit

In the final stage of most academic job searches, the top 3-4 applicants are brought to campus for a one day (or possibly multi-day) set of interviews. Campus visits generally consist of a job talk, multiple interviews, and meals with search committee members. Some departments will also have candidates teach an undergraduate level course. Candidates are carefully scrutinized and assessed for their fit with the department and university culture.

The Invitation

If you are invited for a campus interview, you will probably be contacted via telephone by a member of the search committee. During this conversation, the faculty member will highlight the main parts of your campus visit, and together you will determine the date(s).

Making Arrangements

When you have made the short list of candidates, the institution will reimburse you for all necessary travel and lodging expenses, unless otherwise indicated. You will probably be expected to make your own flight arrangements. When booking an airline ticket, look for the lowest-priced economy class flight that will reasonably suit your schedule. It is generally not necessary to take an inconvenient flight just to save a little money on air fare, however. Your hosts will likely make your hotel reservations, but you will probably be expected to pay the bill at the hotel. Save all receipts (airfare, hotel, taxis, etc.) for reimbursement later, and carry a credit card and plenty of cash for unexpected expenses.

Usually candidates are expected to arrive on the evening before the interview and depart after 5:00 p.m. on the last day. In general, the host department will assume responsibility for escorting you about campus during your visit. They may or may not make arrangements to pick you up and drop you off at the airport. Confirm these details before you leave home. If they are picking you up at the airport, dress professionally for the flight.

When flying, beware of checked luggage. Lost or delayed luggage is an unnecessary worry—carry on anything that is absolutely essential to your visit, particularly your laptop, slides, presentation, and lecture notes.

When making arrangements, ask about the availability of audiovisual equipment you will need for your job talk. Request a copy of your itinerary before your arrive. You may also want to request a packet of information about the department or university to help you.

The Day of the Interview

The campus visit is the most important part of the job search process. You will be “on” for the entire visit, and you will have very few solitary moments when you are alone and not being evaluated during the interview trip. The university will arrange a series of

meetings—with individuals, faculty, and students—and you will shuttle from one meeting to the next all day. Somewhere during all these activities, you will also be served breakfast and lunch and give your job talk. You may also teach a class. Throughout your visit, one or several people may serve as your host, escorting you from place to place. A surprising number of applicants feel they can confide in the host, but remember that your host is not your friend. You are always being evaluated. A sample itinerary follows:

Sample Interview Schedule

A. N. Applicant
Department of Mechanical Engineering
Leading University

Wednesday, January 18, 2001

7:15 p.m. Arrive Somewhere Airport, American Flight #4126;
Tim O'Shenko will meet at airport. Staying at the Respectable Hotel [Confirmation #0048809-0]. Dinner with Tim O'Shenko.

Thursday, January 20, 2001

8:15 a.m. Breakfast - Newton Raphson will meet in the lobby of the Respectable Hotel.
9:45 Pete O'Tube, 332D Hallowed Hall. O'Tube will escort to Dean Noe.
10:30 Dean Jess A. Noe, College of Engineering, 106 Ivied Hall
11:10 Oki will escort from Dean Noe
11:15 Kerry Oki, Associate Head of Department, 154 HH. Oki will escort to lunch.
12:00 noon Lunch - Faculty Club [Kerry Oki, Ken Dewitt]
1:15 p.m. Monty Carlo, 122 HH
2:00 C. D. Point, 248 HH
2:45 Tim O'Shenko, 332C HH
3:30 Seminar preparation, 248A HH. O'Shenko will escort to seminar.
4:00 Seminar, "Evaluation of Composite Interface Properties Using Clever Experiments," 218 HH. O'Shenko will escort to reception.
5:00-6:00 Reception, 158 Hallowed Hall. Jenny Rater will escort from reception to dinner.
6:30 Dinner, Wholey Cow Steakhouse [Jenny Rater, Will Burn]

Friday, January 21, 2001

7:30 a.m. Breakfast - Carmen Vortex will meet in the lobby of the Respectable.
8:15 Leah Punoff, 250 HH
9:00 Will Burn, 362E HH
9:45 Gil Airkin, 332F HH
10:30 Clay Potts, 250 HH
11:15 S. Broken, 212 HH. Broken will escort to lunch.
12:00 noon Lunch - Faculty Club [S. Broken, C. D. Point, I. M. Shore]
1:15 p.m. I. M. Shore
2:00 Frank Stein, 266 HH
2:45 Lois Cost, 352 HH
3:30 Tour of Laboratories w/Gene Poole and Leah Punoff
4:30 M. N. Charge, Head of Department, 208 HH
6:00 Dinner, Classy Restaurant [M. N. Charge, Della Kitt]

Sunday, January 23, 2001

6:00 a.m. A-1 Limousine will pick up at Respectable Hotel.

7:00 Depart Somewhere Airport. American Flight #4127

Interviews

You will meet with a variety of stakeholders in the hiring process, and the structure and content of these meetings will vary. Some interviewers will be knowledgeable in your research area, and you may engage in detailed conversations about your research and interests. Others may know little about your research area and might be college administrators with training in a different field. Prepare for these meetings by well acquainting yourself with the organization of the institution. Be prepared to explain your dissertation research to these disparate audiences. Be certain that all versions—even the high level explanation for a lay person—conveys what your research did, why it is important, why it is interesting, and how it relates to other work or might lead to future exploration. Expect to be asked about your plans for future research. You may also be asked about potential funding.

Meals and Receptions

Some of your meetings with campus stakeholders will take place over lunch or dinner. Occasionally departments may even host small receptions or gatherings. Even though these events seem relaxed, you must still act and speak professionally as you are being evaluated at all times. In general, avoid food that is messy (like spaghetti) and observe proper table manners. It is often best to avoid alcoholic beverages, but it is acceptable to drink if it is offered. The loosening of inhibitions caused by alcohol can be risky in an interview situation, so carefully limit your intake. Make small talk, but do not discuss topics that may be considered personal, inappropriate, or offensive.

The Job Talk

The job talk, also called a “seminar,” “colloquium,” “paper,” or “presentation,” is probably the most important part of your campus visit. It is your opportunity to share your knowledge and research with a captive audience. Because of its importance, prepare, rehearse, and double check the arrangements of the room before you begin your presentation. Before coming to campus, request any necessary audiovisual equipment. Ask for accommodations you might need to make you comfortable, such as a podium, or a microphone if you are soft spoken. You should also request several minutes of quiet time before the seminar to prepare.

Immediately prior to your presentation, confirm that your needed equipment is available, take time to make certain you know how it operates, and get a feel for the light in the room (particularly if you are using slides or video). Make certain that all electronic equipment is working before you begin. Make certain you have a glass or bottle of water.

If you are using a laptop computer, allow lots of time to set up. Always bring both backup electronic and hard copies of your presentation in case something goes wrong. If the computer crashes or the software is incompatible—or if the room loses power—you will still have a presentation.

When preparing your job talk, think about the constitution of your audience—your hosts

may be able to tell you about this advance. It will certainly include members of the faculty, with varying degrees of knowledge of your specialty. The audience may also include students and perhaps administrators with training in another discipline. Attempt to make your presentation interesting and accessible to the disparate members of your audience. The people who know very little about what you do will probably try to judge the quality of your teaching and communication skills. Those with a close familiarity with your research interests will probably be assessing the depth of your knowledge. Your presentation should emphasize the significance and results of your research. In order to engage a diverse audience, Engineering professor Jonathan Dantzig recommends the following structure for the job talk:

Recommended Structure for the Job Talk

Content	Time (min)	Target Audience	Detail Level / Purpose
Background	15	Everyone present	Your parents would understand it
Your approach	10	People in related fields	Show you know the field
Your results	10	People who work in your field	Show that you are the world expert on something
Summary	10	Everyone in the room	Relate your results to the big picture

General good presentation and communication skills apply. Maintain good eye contact with your audience. Speak clearly, articulate your words carefully, and avoid talking too fast. Project your voice. Most people are nervous during the job talk, so think about how you respond to nervousness and plan for it. For instance, if your hands shake uncontrollably, you may want to avoid using a laser pointer. One female job candidate had a problem with her neck flushing when she was nervous; she concealed it by wearing a turtleneck or scarf.

Prepare in advance for questions from the audience. Anticipate what some of the questions might be and consider your answers before your talk. Sometimes you will have a confrontational audience member; think about how you might deal with this. In general, don't argue with anyone; sometimes you may need to direct the discussion to a new question or agree to disagree.

Teaching Demonstration

You may or may not be asked to teach an actual class or give a teaching demonstration. This practice is more common at smaller institutions and within some disciplines. When making arrangements for your visit, learn more about the group to whom you will be presenting. Often you will teach a session of an undergraduate class, with members of the faculty in observance. It can be very helpful to know the scope of the course and previously studied material when preparing your discussion. You may ask for a copy of the course syllabus, if relevant. Request necessary audiovisual equipment in advance, and ascertain that the equipment works before you begin. Prepare your class as you normally would, in the style of presentation most comfortable to you.

After the Interview

It is always appropriate to send a thank you letter to the search committee chair or department head following the interview. In academia, thank you letters are usually typed, rather than hand written, and an e-mail message is acceptable in some disciplines. Thank them for the interview and opportunity to learn more about the position. Indicate if you are still interested in the position and perhaps mention a couple of things you saw or discussed during the visit that make the institution desirable. If you feel that the institution will be a particularly good fit for you, say this and explain why. If you return from an interview certain that you do not want this position, politely indicate that you have determined you are not interested.

Interview Skills

Take time to prepare for your interview in advance. Remember that you are assessed throughout an interview not only on what you say but also on non-verbal cues and body language. Be sure to greet each person with a firm handshake and look your interviewer in the eye. Be aware of poor body language or irritating habits. Try to minimize irritating habits such as tapping your pen, twirling your hair, or avoiding eye contact. Sit up straight and talk with your hands naturally.

A Few General Tips for Successful Interviewing

- Always be positive; avoid negative words and phrases as much as possible.
- Maintain good eye contact at all times.
- Be enthusiastic about the position, the institution, your skills, and how you can contribute.
- Smile! A pleasant and relaxed smile will keep both you and the interviewer at ease.
- Keep in mind that it is impossible to control all aspects of an interview. If you encounter a question you are unprepared for, do your best and then move on.
- View the interview as a give-and-take, two-way conversation where you are gathering valuable information to help you make the best career choice possible

Structuring your Responses

When answering questions, be brief and succinct and try not to ramble. By doing this, you show the interviewer that you can listen and quickly organize your thoughts, and it gives the interviewer time to ask you other pertinent questions. Do not speak too quickly as the interviewer may have difficulty understanding you. Pausing briefly will give both you and the interviewer time to think and reflect.

Outside academia, many corporations now use behavioral-based interviewing techniques, which require the job applicant to describe past situations that relate to situations they might encounter in the new position. This approach is based on the belief that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior and is called behavior-based interviewing. Questions typically begin with phrases like “tell me about a time when you. . .” or “think about an instance in which you...”

While behavior-based interviewing is less common in academe, it can still be a useful tool to help you persuasively structure your responses to questions.

The STAR Method

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to an interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

- **Situation:** Set the stage for the interviewer by providing an overview of the situation and any relevant background information. Be specific and succinct.
- **Task:** What goal were you working toward?
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail. What specific steps did you take and what was your particular contribution? Be careful that you don't describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what you actually did. Use the word "I," not "we" when describing actions.
- **Result:** Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. Your answer may contain multiple positive results.

Make sure that you follow all parts of the STAR method. Be as specific as possible at all times, without including too much information. Oftentimes interviewees have to be prompted to include their results, so try to include that without being asked. Also, eliminate any examples that do not paint you in a positive light. However, keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result (such as "lost the game") can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.

A Sample STAR Answer

The answer below shows how you can take a very general question you may encounter and provide a STAR answer. Keep in mind that although the question may not be phrased as a behavioral-based question, answering with a concrete STAR answer will oftentimes be much more effective than just providing a more general and hypothetical answer. This question was first answered generally, but then the behavioral technique was employed to provide a specific example.

Question: What is your approach to dealing with students?

General answer: I always treat students with courtesy and respect, and I make an effort to listen attentively to their concerns and not dismiss these outright. I work with them to help them understand course requirements, and my principal way of dealing with difficult situations is to have very clearly defined expectations. When a student does approach with a complaint, I arrange a time for us to discuss their performance and my grading of it in greater depth.

Situation: I can illustrate my approach through an example. Last year, I was a teaching assistant for a 200-level history course, in which I was responsible for teaching quiz sections and grading. Near the end of the term, I was approached by a student who was unhappy with her grade. She thought I had graded her final paper too harshly.

Task: I realized that the way I handled this situation would have very important implications, because if I was too lenient with this student I could acquire a reputation as a pushover. Yet I also needed to listen to this student carefully and assess whether she had a valid complaint.

Action: I asked the student to bring a copy of her paper to me during office hours where we would discuss the situation. When we met, I first discussed with the student the criteria I used for grading, why points were subtracted, and the basic requirements for an A paper. Then we looked at her paper and how I had graded it. I identified ways in which her paper failed to meet the criteria for an A paper and suggested ways to improve her organization and writing.

Result: While the student was still unhappy with her grade, she was satisfied that she had been graded fairly. She no longer contested the grade, and I felt that I had dealt with the student both fairly and respectfully.

Interpersonal Skills

Recent studies of what search committees want have shown that personality and interpersonal skills are important determiners in the on-campus interview. A seasoned department head at a baccalaureate institution commented, “. . . when the final decision is made among the top two or three candidates, in almost every circumstance, all of them are highly or relatively equally qualified. So in the final decision, personality usually plays a big part. But it wouldn't if qualifications weren't so important at all the earlier stages of the process.” (Broughton and Conlogue; Sheehan, McDevitt, and Ross).

Interview Questions

There are many common questions that are asked in most interviews. Many focus on your skills and personality, teaching, research, and career goals. A few of these are listed below.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you apply for this position?
- Why are you the best candidate for this position?
- How has your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What are your three biggest strengths? Your three biggest weaknesses?
- What has been your biggest challenge?
- Why did you choose your field of study?
- What things are most important to you in a job?
- What are your short-term goals? Long term goals?
- Tell me about your research/dissertation.
- Why did you choose your dissertation topic?

- What contribution does your dissertation make to the field?
- What are your research plans for the next (x) years?
- What facilities/travel/resources do you need for your research
- What are your plans for securing funding to support your research?
- What characteristics do you think are important to be a good teacher?
- Are you a good teacher? Explain why and how.
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- How do you feel about teaching [names an introductory level course]?
- Do you have any new courses you'd like to develop?
- How would you instruct and guide undergraduate research?
- What are your other interests?
- How would you describe your ideal job? What type of institution do you prefer to work at?
- How do you feel about this institution/community? Do you think you could live in this small, rural town?
- What are your salary requirements?

Questions you should be asking

You should be asking questions during your interview, especially during those moments when an interviewer asks the inevitable, “Do you have any questions for us?” Prepare a few questions in advance. In general, take advantage of your opportunity to learn more about the position, campus, and environment, and ask questions that will help you determine if it will be a good “fit” for you should you receive an offer. Follow up on things you learn during your visit—about campus and departmental structure, service commitment of faculty, and any programs that you find particularly interesting. It is usually not a good idea to inquire about salary or benefits during an interview. It is also best to be evasive if someone asks you about your salary requirements. Wait until you have an offer, then begin the negotiation process.

A Few Sample Questions

- What does the department or campus do to orient new faculty members?
- Does the campus or department have formal faculty mentoring programs?
Informal mentoring?
- How would you describe the culture of your department/college/campus?
- Why do you enjoy working here?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the campus and/or department?

- Are faculty evaluated annually? What is the evaluation process like here? How is promotion and tenure handled?

Illegal questions

Certain interview questions are legally out-of-bounds, as defined by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It is illegal (and inappropriate) for employers to consider an applicant's race, color, religion, sex, age, or national origin when making an employment decision. A few questions that you should not be asked include:

- Are you a U.S. citizen? (It is acceptable for an interviewer to ask if you are authorized to work in the U.S.).
- Where were you born? What is your native language?
- How old are you?
- Are you married? How many children do you have?
- Do you have any disabilities? (It is acceptable to ask if an applicant is able to perform the essential functions of the job).

That said, you may be asked illegal questions, particularly in social situations by well-meaning (but ignorant) interviewers. For example, during a campus visit lunch, a committee member might mention something about her children, then inquire if you also have children. When responding to such questions, assess the situation and do your best to understand the concern or reason for the question. Sometimes you may determine that you are comfortable answering the question. Other times, you may want to try to deflect the inquiry. In general, avoid responding with a combative tone.

It is acceptable to volunteer information that would be illegal for interviewers to ask.

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