



Campus Visits for STEM Fields

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Workshop outline

1 hr.

Preparation

Interview Structure

1-on-1 interviews

Answering questions

Job Talk

Chalk Talk

Teaching demonstration

Dinner

Follow Up

30 min.

Q/A

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Preparation

Prepare for the Elements

- Check the weather, pack extra clothes (all professional attire), comfortable shoes, medicine, toiletries
- Snacks, water, backup copy of everything, breath mints, notebook, pen
- KEEP IT ALL PROFESSIONAL

Prepare for your Meetings

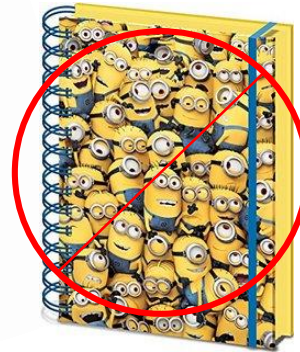
- Do your research: committee members, department, institution
- Develop questions for different audiences
- Develop and practice answers to questions
 - How do your answers change based on audience?
 - Try to make broader connections
 - Prioritize conversation over monologue
- Mentally prepare for VERY long days → make sure to show enthusiasm!

Prepare for your Performance(s)

- Get information on length, format, audience, AV needs, topics before
- Practice, practice, practice – set up mock talks for job talk, chalk talk, and teaching demo



Accessories: This, Not That



Preparation

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Prepare for your Performances

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In the room: Attire

EVERYONE

- **FIT, NOT \$\$\$\$**
- Dress professionally
- Avoid bright colors
- Avoid busy prints
- Layer for flexibility

WOMEN

- Easy on the jewels
- Make sure the hair is not getting in the way

MEN

- Very clean facial hair
- Simple tie



In the room: non-verbal



- **80% in 20 Seconds**
 - Smile / Energy
 - Handshake-ready
- **Eyes up**
 - Where?
 - Bridge of the nose
 - Keep them level
 - But you can look off!
- **Posture**
 - Convey confidence, openness, and friendliness
 - Don't get too comfortable or informal



General Rules of Conduct

Treat EVERY meeting and encounter as significant

Don't:

Be fooled by informal settings

Don't get tempted to “chill” or “hang” with graduate students and undergrads

Do

Be nice, open, curious, and enthusiastic

Show your POV

Avoid gossip, negativity, and “dirt”...



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Campus Interview Structure

1-2 days, 12+ hours/day

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Campus Interview Structure

Who you'll meet with:

- Search committee chair
- All/most search committee members
- Dean (and/or provost, president, chancellor)
- Grad students, postdocs, undergrads
- Potential faculty collaborators

1-2 days, 12+ hours/day

1-on-1 interviews

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Typical questions: research



- What's state of the art in your field?
- Who would you collaborate with?
- Who are your competitors?
- Which of the ideas in your proposal would you tackle first?
- How do you see your research fitting in with the department?
- What techniques are you proficient in?



Research Questions (I)

The Question

“How do you envision your future research program at this institute?”

Motivation

Interviewers want to know if you can go beyond current projects and whether your future plans align with the setting of their institution—specifically in the job you are applying for...

Traps

- Narrowly focusing on your current research topic(s)

Tactics

- Talk about current or near-future projects that build on your work
- Talk about your long term goals
- Be prepared to discuss what it will take to get your research started (including questions of funding)
- Consider ideas for connecting work with community



Typical questions: research



- Tell me about your current research program. What contribution does it make to our field? What do you plan next?
- In doing your research, why didn't you _____?
- What facilities do you need to carry out your research plans?
- What are your plans for seeking external funding? When will you have sufficient preliminary data for a grant application?



Research Questions (II)

The Question

“Tell us about yourself/discuss your current research”

Motivation

The interviewer wants to see how you situate yourself within a discipline.

Traps


- Thinking and speaking like a junior trainee
- Repeating your cover letter
- TM's: Too much information, too much specialized information and jargon, too much monologue

Tactics

- Brevity: Two sentences instead of three
- Use smaller “building blocks”: instead of a 3-minute response think about three, 1-minute responses
- Focus on broad stakes of the research and not on its details



Typical questions: teaching

- 
- How has your research influenced your teaching?
 - What is good teaching? Are you a good teacher? Why?
 - How would you encourage students to major in our field?
 - What is your approach to teaching introductory _____? What texts would you use?
 - What special topics courses would you add to our curriculum?



Teaching Questions (II)

The Question:

“How can you contribute to the curriculum (major/gen ed requirements)?”

Motivation:

What is your take on the broad pedagogical goals of a major in your field? What kinds of courses can you teach that align with those goals? What other forms of student learning can you help the department achieve?

Traps

- Overly narrow focus on your subfield
- Stepping on toes

Tactics

- Talk about advanced courses you are prepared to teach
- Think about what and how you teach develops translatable skills
- Talk about innovative teaching strategies you can bring
- Be familiar with the major/gen ed requirements, and be ready with some (modest) thoughts on how you might contribute to curriculum development



Typical questions: general



- Why are you interested in this type of institution?
- How do you feel about living in a small town like this in an isolated rural area?
- If you have more than one job offer, how will you decide?
- Do you have questions for us?
(Hint: YES)



General Questions

The Question

Why do you want this job? Why are you interested in this institution?

Motivation

The interviewer wants to see how you see yourself fitting in, that you understand the position and the various contexts of the job (disciplinary, departmental, institutional, etc.)

Traps

- Not understanding the specifics of position, department, institution

Tactics

- Do your homework (“it’s a great university!” will not get you the job)
- Weave things that excite you about the into your story—a story that combines your past and present with the future you see yourself having at that position



General Tips for Success

- Your answers are too long
- Understand what motivates the question
- Answers have beginnings, middles, ends
- The # of possible questions is not infinite
- It's okay to ask for time and clarification
- Know your strengths and weaknesses
- Practice the way you play
- Always have good questions ready



From Research to Questions

- Before you applied, you did research on the institute...right?
 - Revisit that information before your on-site interview
 - Unique features that you can identify with/feel passionate about
 - Look at the website again - read the mission statement!
- Break down the position posting to identify themes
 - Do they mention service? Teaching? In what order are these listed?
 - Is contributing to diversity a part of the job description?
 - Did they ask you to teach a specific course? Create a new course?
 - PUI or SLAC - incorporate undergrads into your research program
- Think about bigger picture items for meetings with Deans

All of this research leads to....

INFORMED questions that lead to SUBSTANTIVE information



Questions to ask committee

- Is the size or composition of the student body changing?
- Can you tell me more about the tenure requirements at _____?
- How is teaching evaluated? What kinds of evidence are considered in this evaluation?
- What constitutes service and how much is expected of junior faculty?
- What initiatives are in the pipeline for the department (teaching, research, mentoring, outreach, etc.) and how will this position be related? Or, can you tell me more about this new program and how I would be involved?



Campus Interview Structure

- Determine audience
- **Practice** with audience (including faculty)
- Show your independence without showing off
- Relate your work to the big picture
- Keep it succinct; don't try to include too much

1-2 days, 12+ hours/day

1-on-1 interviews

Job talk

Chalk talk

Teaching demonstration

Dinner



Job Talk/Research Seminar

Know your slides

Practice your talk many times

Know your data

Do not try to cram in too much

Do not exceed allotted time

Know your audience

Adjust complexity appropriately

Anticipate difficult questions



Campus Interview Structure

- Build in a brief introduction and review component
- Focus on future research
- Discuss possible funding sources
- PowerPoint is often unnecessary
- Try asking for 5-10 minutes at the beginning to write on board

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Chalk Talk (your future work)

Ask about customary format, audience, etc.

Less formal and more interactive

Like a (verbal) grant proposal

Think in terms of specific aims

Be prepared to talk about experimental details

Present alternative strategies

Can split into short and long-term goals

Could incorporate funding mechanisms



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- Determine audience (often undergrads)
- Stick with your stylistic strengths
- Find out what the students are studying



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- Still interviewing!



General Rules of Conduct

During meals:

Avoid:

Spicy foods

Food that may impact your breath

Food that may upset your stomach

Messy foods

Don't:

Order the most expensive dish on the menu

Order alcohol at lunch

Order more than one drink at dinner

Get drunk

Complain about the food

Do

Follow your hosts' lead in everything



“Informal settings”



Illegal Questions

Illegal Questions

Questions about national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest and conviction record, military discharge status, race, gender, or pregnancy status are illegal.

Any question that asks a candidate to reveal information about these topics **without the question having a job related basis** are a violation of various state and federal discrimination laws.

Examples of Illegal Questions

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Are you planning to have children?
- What does your husband/wife do?
- How old are you?
- What is your religious affiliation?



Illegal Questions

How to Deal with Illegal Questions

If asked an illegal question you can:

- **Choose not to answer**

“I’m uncomfortable with this question and prefer not to respond”

- **Choose to answer**

- Respond directly and briefly if you feel comfortable doing so

- Respond to the intent of the question

“Nothing in my personal life will prevent me from taking this job”

- Ask for the motivation behind the question

“It’s not clear to me why you’re asking about this. Can you please explain?”

- Deflect

“It’s interesting you ask me about children--do you have kids yourself?”

- Ignore and change the subject

“I hear the music scene here is great”



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Follow up

- You should send individual thank-you emails within 24 hours of the end of your visit
- Yes, you should email every person you met with during your visit
- You should try to make each email specific by incorporating details from the meeting you had with that individual



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Questions?



For Appointments:

gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu

- > **Academic & Career Development**
 - > Presenting & Interviewing: Advising
- > **Communication Skills**
 - > GRADTalk: Advising
- > **Teaching Practice**
 - > Chicago Center for Teaching (CCT)

