

# Preparing for an Academic Interview

Source: Heiberger, M.M. and Vick, J.M. (2001)  
*The Academic Job Search Handbook*  
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press



**Career and Employment Services**  
*Guiding You from College to Career*  
Kansas State University

## On Campus Interview Checklist

### Before the Interview

- Get all details straight when you arrange for the interview.
- Find out the length of the interview day and what meetings to expect during it.
- If you do not already have a complete job description, ask to have one sent to you.
- Will you be making a presentation? If so, on what? How long? To whom? How should it be delivered? What audiovisual or computer facilities will be available to you? If you want to use a particular kind of equipment, don't hesitate to inquire about it.
- Will you be expected to teach a class? If so, to whom? On what? What has been covered so far this semester? If you would like to use audiovisual materials, find out what equipment will be available.
- Confirm all travel arrangements. When planning travel, allow more than enough time to compensate for flight delays or traffic jams. Find out how reservations should be booked (if you need your tickets paid for in advance, try to negotiate that with the department). Save all receipts.
- Make sure you know the name of the person who has called you, where you are to arrive, how you will be met, the name of the person who will meet you, and all relevant phone numbers.
- If there is enough time before the interview, ask to have any materials that would help you learn more about the school and department sent to you.
- If you encounter unavoidable delays while traveling to the interview, call as soon as you can and explain why you will be delayed.

### Learn about the Institution and Faculty

- Use Web sites. In addition to specific information, try to get a sense of the campus culture.
- If you are visiting an institution where sports are a major part of campus life, learn the names of the teams, both at the campus you are visiting and at your own institution, and how they are playing this year. Sports are sometimes used as icebreakers.
- Use Web and library searches for information on publications by members of the department. Try to learn the names of everyone in the department, so you can address them by name during your visit.
- Ask everyone who might know something about the institution to discuss it.

### Practice

- Practice your presentation.
- Time your talk to ensure that it's the right length.
- Develop a "cocktail party length" brief summary to give to those outside the department.
- Be sure your transparencies, handouts, and presentation software are ready in plenty of time. If you are planning a computer presentation, bring backup transparencies in case there's an unexpected computer glitch.

### Bring

- Extra copies of your vita.
- Copies of your dissertation abstract.
- Copies of your statement of research interests.
- More than enough handouts. Make sure they look good.
- Samples of syllabi for courses you designed, reprints, abstracts of articles. You will not necessarily distribute all of these during the day but you'll be nervous the night before the interview.

- Don't check anything important through on the airplane. Bring all the essentials in carry-on luggage.

### During the Interview

- Remember that each new person you meet hasn't heard your story yet. Be prepared to tell it again and again and again with enthusiasm.
- If the day includes social events, follow your hosts' leads in deciding how much to talk about professional, and how much about social topics.
- If you don't catch a name when you're introduced to someone, have it repeated, so that you know it. Shake hands when you meet someone.
- Acknowledge everyone present in a group interview, and, if possible, say goodbye to people individually when you leave.
- At the end of the day, find out when a decision will be made, and when you may call if you haven't heard anything. Find out if you should turn in receipts or send them later.

### After the Interview

- Take care of any extra receipts.
- Write a thank you note to the main person who arranged your day. You can ask that person to convey your thanks to others. Reiterate your interest in the position. It isn't necessary to write to everyone with whom you spoke.

## Questions That Might Be Asked in an Academic Interview

### About Research

- Why did you choose your dissertation topic?
- Can you tell us briefly what theoretical framework you used in developing your research?
- Of course you've read \_\_\_\_\_? (names an unfamiliar article/ book related to your dissertation).
- If you were to begin it again, are there any changes you would make in your dissertation?
- In doing your research, why didn't you \_\_\_\_\_? (This question can take many forms. You are being asked to respond appropriately to an intellectual challenge to your work.)
- What contribution does your dissertation make to the field? Is it important?
- You realize that several members of this department tend to approach the subject from a very different perspective than does your advisor . . .
- Tell me about your dissertation (asked in a meeting with a dean who knows very little about your field).
- Why didn't you finish your dissertation sooner?
- I see you have very few publications . . .
- What are your research plans for the next two/five/ten years?
- What are your plans for applying for external funding over the next few years?
- When will you have sufficient preliminary data for a grant application?
- What facilities do you need to carry out your research plans?
- How do you see your research fitting in with the department?
- Who would you collaborate with?
- What kind of start-up package do you need? (This question applies primarily to people in fields where research requires expensive resources.)
- Do you have the permission of your mentor to take this work with you? (This question applies primarily to postdoctoral fellows applying for faculty positions).

### About Teaching

- Are you a good teacher?
- How do you feel about having to teach required courses?
- What is your approach to teaching introductory \_\_\_\_\_?
- How do you motivate students?
- How would you encourage students to major in our field?
- In your first semester you would be responsible for our course in \_\_\_\_\_. How would you structure it? What textbook would you use?
- Many of our students are probably (more/less academically talented; older/younger) than those you've become used to at your institution. How successful would you be with them?
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- If you could teach any course you wanted to, what would it be?
- Have you had any experience with the case study method?
- What do you think is the optimal balance between teaching and research?
- Have you had any experience with distance learning?
- How would you involve undergraduates in your research?
- Have you taught graduate or professional students?
- Have you supervised any graduate students, rotations, or research projects or taught specialized skills?

### About Your Willingness to Participate in the Department and School

- Can you summarize the contribution you would make to our department?
- Are you willing to become involved in committee work?
- Why are you interested in our kind of school?
- What institutional issues particularly interest you?

### About Your Career and Personal Choices:

- If you have more than one job offer, how will you decide?
- How do you feel about living in a small college town like this in an isolated rural area?
- I can't imagine why a young person like you would want to go into this field . . .
- I understand your spouse is completing his/her Ph.D. What if you receive job offers in different locations? (This question is not legal in most contexts, but you should be prepared for it.)
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Who else is interviewing you?
- What will it take to persuade you to take this job?
- What kind of salary are you looking for?

### Do You Have Any Questions for Us?

- The right answer to this is always yes, or you risk appearing uninterested.
- Prepare some questions in advance, but, above all, ask questions that show a response to what you have learned from the interviewers and that are lively, rather than formulaic.
- Questions about salary and benefits are not appropriate now. Wait until you are offered a job to ask about these matters.