The Academic Job Search: Preparing Your Job Package

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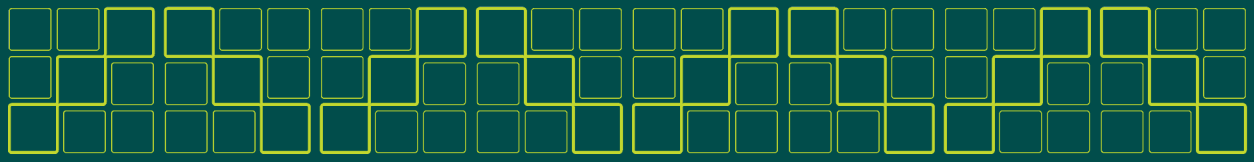

The Standard Timeline

- Early fall:
  - Decide what you are looking for
  - Seek advice & support of mentors
  - Put together job packets
  - Request letters of recommendation
  - Search and apply
- Late fall - winter:
  - Continue applying
  - Prepare for interviews
  - Prepare for job talk
- Winter - spring:
  - Campus interviews
  - Negotiate offer(s)

Making the Process Easier

- Begin networking now - on campus and beyond
- Avoid “in preparation” by focusing on publications now
- Consider key reagents or results that “sell” your story and prioritize obtaining these
- Talk with your PI about projects and reagents for the long-term
- Address thin teaching and mentoring credentials
- Reconnect with prior mentors and confirm their support
- Address lack of letter from graduate or postdoc mentor

Finding Positions

- From your mentor and scientific network
- From relevant professional societies
- Posted in journals
- On-line, including:
  - http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/
  - www.newscientistjobs.com
  - http://www.academic360.com
  - https://www.aamc.org/services/careerconnect/
  - http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/
  - http://careers.cell.com/
  - http://www.hercjobs.org
  - http://chronicle.com

To Apply or Not To Apply…

- Is it the type of institution you want?
  - Level of competition and expectations you are looking for
  - Resources you need to do your work
  - Explore US institutions of higher learning at http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/
- Is it the right amount of research, clinic, and/or teaching?
- Location acceptable to you and your family
- Fits personal, partner and/or family needs
- Factor in the timing of your search and your ability/ willingness to search another round

What Search Committees Look For

- A track record of excellence -- in research, teaching, and/or patient care
- A strong skill set -- relevant to your goals
- A good “fit” with the needs of the department
- Excellent communication skills
- Evidence of strong teaching and mentoring skills
- Evidence of leadership
- Evidence that you will be a good colleague

Application Materials

- Almost always requested:
  - Cover letter
  - Curriculum Vitae
  - Research and/or teaching plan/statement
  - Letters of reference/list of referees
- Sometimes requested:
  - Representative reprints
  - Transcripts
  - Teaching evaluations, sample syllabi (teaching portfolio)
  - Diversity statement
- Follow instructions for electronic submission of application materials

The Average Search Committee:

- Tenured and tenure-track faculty - in and outside of the hiring department
- Varies in size and power
- Members are often over-committed and very busy
- Inherently skeptical and critical
- May only be peripherally interested in your work
- Trying to get a quick picture of you and your research
- Looking for YOU to make their job easier

The Cover Letter

- Goals:
  - introduce yourself and highlight your accomplishments
  - state your broad research goals
  - state why you are a good “fit”
  - provide easy to find contact information
- <2 pages; longer if it replaces the teaching or research statement
- Can be tailored to the position
- Well written - no bullets or other organizational formatting
- Not the time to bring up two-body or other personal issues

Your CV

- Sections:
  - Contact Information (professional; centered at top of page)
  - Education (can include postdoc here)
  - Clinical Experience, Certifications and Licensures
  - Professional Experience (Avoid NIH jargon)
  - Honors and Awards (pre- and postdoctoral)
  - Grant funding (An IRTA is not a grant)
  - Leadership and Service
  - Teaching and Mentoring
  - Invited Presentations
  - Publications
- Logical order – based on the position and on your experiences
- Clean and simple to read!

Education

EDUCATION:

2003-2010	**Postdoctoral Fellowship,** National Human Genome Research Institute Postdoctoral advisor: William J. Pavan, Ph.D.
1997-2003	**Ph.D., Biological Chemistry,** Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine Dissertation advisor: Denise J. Montell, Ph.D.
1989-1993	**B.S., Biology,** Tufts University

Liberal Arts Position

Teaching Experience

General Chemistry Adjunct Faculty Member, 8/2008–5/2009
Hood College, Frederick, MD

- Taught freshman and sophomore students through active participation and "discovery" exercises; class size 14–28 students
- Prepared and graded quizzes, examinations, and laboratory activity datasheets
- Prepared lesson plans and handouts to highlight important principles in General Chemistry
- Advised students within the classroom, lab, and office hours to reinforce concepts

General Chemistry I Laboratory Instructor, 9/2005–12/2005
Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA

- Taught chemistry principles, lab safety, and basic experimentation for freshman students
- Prepared brief chalk talks covering the background for the day's experiments
- Worked directly with students to answer questions and provide scientific guidance

ASPIRE Co-coordinator, 9/2003–1/2005
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

- Designed brief lectures on diverse areas of polymer science for high school students
- Designed and implemented fun new experiments to explore polymer synthesis, properties, and characterization
- Modified, expanded and created new handouts containing experimental procedures and relevant background material with real-life examples
- Created a new website for the Outreach and ASPIRE programs

Research-Intensive Position

TEACHING and PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2008-2009	Lead Instructor, Molecular Biology and Genetics, FAES NIH Graduate School
2007-2009	Instructor, Molecular Biology and Genetics, FAES NIH Graduate School
2007-2009	Mentor for summer students
2002-2003	NSF Teaching Fellow, Dunbar High School, Baltimore, MD
2000-2001	Teaching assistant, Johns Hopkins Medical Students, Metabolism and Embryology
2000	Teaching assistant, Johns Hopkins Graduate Students, Genetics
1999-2001	Mentor for undergraduate students
1993-1997	Biologist, National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, Laboratory: James R. Sellers, Ph.D.

Letters of Recommendation

- 3 or 4; typically your PhD advisor, postdoc advisor & collaborator(s)
- Ask far in advance - be sure the letter will be VERY strong
- Provide your CV and other helpful information
- Provide information on the positions
- Follow-up after 1 month
- Consider providing letters even if not requested

The Research Plan

- A summary of your research achievements and a proposal for up-coming research
  - Looks backward AND forward
- Your goal is to highlight your successes and convince them there are many more to come

What We Expect To See

- Background
  - Focused on the research field, not on you
- Past and current research
  - Key results, importance, promising directions, promising outcomes
  - Focus on your most relevant work
- Research agenda (~5 years)
  - Short and long-term goals
  - Discussion of model systems, major strategies and approaches
  - Not a grant application, but takes funding into account
- Relevance
  - Not just scientific, also fit for the specific department

Research Plan - Formatting

- Average length is 2 - 4 pages, varies by discipline
- Two major styles
  - Chronological
  - Thematic
- Helpful to:
  - Use section headings to guide the reader
  - Include one or two figures
  - Personalize to the position
  - Include a short executive summary
- Make it easy to read - wide margins with11/12pt font; bold key points
- Carefully edit & get significant input from others

Strategies For Writing Your Research Plan

- Consider major accomplishments that you want everyone to know about
- Think how you will develop your work over the next 5 years
- Then think bigger to help refine your long-term direction
- Look hard for flaws and technical challenges; consider alternatives
- Consider how your ideas “fit” grant applications; if you have funding point out what is in the grant
- Write an “executive summary” that pulls it all together

What You Are Trying To Convey in Your Research Plan

- Importance of your research
- Focus
- Independence
- Creativity
- Sophistication
- Realism
- Clarity
- Fundability

Common Criticisms of Research Plans

- Overly ambitious
- No clear direction
- Work not placed in a broader context
- Poorly written
- Doesn't address fit with the department
- Requires facilities/equipment not easily available

See: http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/1820/writing_a_research_plan/

Teaching Statements

- A narrative that includes:
  - your personal beliefs of teaching and learning
  - a description of how you teach
  - a justification for why you teach that way
- May be part of a larger teaching portfolio
  - Class syllabi
  - Student reviews
  - Details of mentorship and non-classroom teaching

Successful Teaching Statements:

- Show clear evidence that you "walk the walk"
- Are student-centered
- Are attuned to differences in learning styles and abilities
- Demonstrate your ability to reflect about your role as a teacher
- Convey your enthusiasm for teaching
- Are well-written, clear and jargon-free

Questions To Consider: Classroom Teaching

- How do I believe students learn best?
- What types of assignments and classroom activities do I use to help students learn?
- How do I evaluate if students are making progress?
- How do I accommodate different learning styles in my classroom?
- How do I help students understand the implications and significance of what they are learning?
- How do I insure that students feel welcome in my class?
- How do I address cultural, social, and/or gender issues in the classroom?
- What have I learned from prior teaching experiences?

Questions To Consider: Lab-based Teaching

- How do I believe students learn best?
- How do I organize interactions with my students?
- How do I select and shape student projects?
- How do I evaluate students progress?
- How do I address the range of learning styles among students in my research group?
- How do I help students understand the implications or significance of what they're learning?
- How do I address ethical issues and help students appreciate the role of research in society?
- How do I insure that all students feel welcome in my research group?
- What have I learned from prior experiences?

Some Details About Teaching Statements

- Generally 1 - 2 pages in length
- No standard formatting or required content
- Should reflect your teaching style and personality - write in the first-person, present tense
- Should show that you have considered the student body at the institution
- Important to give examples throughout

Common Criticisms of Teaching Statements

- Lacks experience to back-up ideas
- Assumes all students learn the same way
- Does not reflect the needs of the students/department
- Demonstrates rigid views of learning
- Does not show ability to self-reflect and learn
- Research goals are inconsistent with student needs
- Poorly written

Need Two Jobs?

- No standard strategy
- Best not to mention in cover letters, but should be discussed with dept chair or head of the search committee early in the process
- When it comes up
  - Be positive
  - Ask about local consortia/agreements that might help ((see http://www.hercjobs.org)
  - Be clear about types of positions your partner will accept, but try to be/appear as flexible as possible

Recommendations on Partner Accommodation and Dual Career Appointments (2010), AAUP at http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/dual.htm#10

NIH Resources

- Your mentors and colleagues who have served on search committees
- Your Training Directors
- Other Academic CAT Track lectures
- IC and OITE writing, grant writing, pedagogy; leadership and management courses
- Videocasts of prior OITE workshops (training.nih.gov)

Contact Me

- For examples of successful job packets from NIH fellows:
  - Email milgrams@od.nih.gov
  - Subject = SEND EXAMPLES
- To make an appointment to discuss your job materials:
  - Email milgrams@od.nih.gov
  - Use your last name in your file name (one file please!)
  - Subject = MATERIAL REVIEW