

# **Interviewing Strategies for Jobs in Academia**

## **Career Connection**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Younkin Success Center**

**688-3898**

**[www.careerconnection.osu.edu](http://www.careerconnection.osu.edu)**

# **Interviewing Strategies for Jobs in Academia**

## **Objectives**

- To learn proven strategies for the different types of academic job interviews.**
- To have an understanding of what skills and experiences search committees are looking for in candidates.**
- To learn how to formulate answers to frequently asked interview questions.**

# 4 General Categories for Academic Institutions

1. Ph. D. granting institutions
2. State universities or college regional campuses
3. Small universities or colleges offering a liberal arts curriculum
4. Community colleges

**\*Each institution will be interested in different qualities in it's job applicants.**

# What the Committee is Looking For:

- Credentials (Skills and accomplishments)
- Motivation (Why them and clear career goals)
- Fit (Potential for work environment and collegiality)
- Salary and Benefits

# Credentials that Search Committee Looks For:

- Degree: Ph.D. in hand
- Research: Publications, conferences, grants and program
- Teaching: Philosophy and experience
- Administrative: Advising experience, university service, extension

# Questions Assessing Skills/Experiences

- Describe your research
- What is your basic teaching philosophy?
- What unique contributions can you make to our department?
- Tell me about your experiences serving on committees
- Tips for effective responses
- Develop a list of your top 5 skills (research, teaching, administrative) and support these with examples
- Review performance evaluations from students and faculty
- Research the School
- Make a list of courses that you may want to teach related to the position
- Review your vita and cover letter
- **Self sufficient - effectiveness**

# Questions Assessing Motivation

- What makes you think you would like to teach in a small liberal arts college?
- What makes you think that you would be able to earn tenure here?
- What do you know about our program?
- What attracted you to this university?
- Tips for Effective Responses
- Make sure you have a career objective and identify how the position you're applying for supports your career path
- Think about what you will have accomplished in your tenure track

# Questions Assessing your Personality- Work Style

- What's your ideal work environment?
- What would frustrate me the most of working with you in a committee?
- What will be the positives of having you as a colleague
- Tell us a situation in which your students learned a significant lesson
- How would your students describe you?
- Tips for Effective Responses
- Consider taking the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory to help you understand some of your work-related preferences
- Identify ways in which your weaknesses can be turned into positives

# Demonstrating your Skills = say it + back it up + connect to university/program needs

- Back up skill with experience (**story telling**)  
How? STAR technique, directness, “I”/”we”
- Foreign language, adaptability skills, open minded, team work, creativity etc ~ transferable skills (**add diversity to program**)
- Expect to demonstrate the skill by performing (teaching a class, colloquium)
- Weakness question: (**self-disclosure**)
  - Answer with similar skill and back it up with story
  - Answer with STAR technique and go to the future
  - Clueless? tell story when you learn something new in the academic setting

# Demonstrating Motivation

- Do your homework: research the school and program (**initiative**)
- Have clear career goals (**goal oriented**)
  - **Tenure track**

# Demonstrating Fit

- Ideal work environment
- Personal strengths and weaknesses (take your strengths to the extreme)
- Conflict question
- Of the wall-questions

# Interviewing Tips: Handling Illegal Questions

- You can answer the question; however, you are giving information that is not related to the job.
- You can refuse to answer the question; but you run the risk of coming off as confrontational.
- May re-phrase, “What’s the relationship between my \_\_\_\_\_ and the job requirements?”
- You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply for the job.

# Handling Illegal Questions

- Inquiry Area: National Origin
  - Illegal Question: Are you a U.S citizen?
  - Legal Question: Are you authorized to work in the U.S? (Opportunity to explain H-1B)
- Inquiry Area: Marital/Partner/Family status
  - Illegal Question: Whom do you live with? How many kids do you have?
  - Legal Question: Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?

# Building Confident Interviewing

Preparation by researching the organization and it's needs

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Formulation and practice of your answers

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Know yourself and know what you want

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= CONFIDENT INTERVIEWING

## Consider using these techniques

- **The Parrot Technique**, Repeat back the question using your own words
- **The Delay Technique**, Reflect the question back (e.g How would you handle conflict? You may say "Has this department had problems in the past?
- Educating the employer, cannot have lunch because you are fasting, offer alternatives!

# Types of interviews

- **Telephone Interview**
- **Conferences Interview**
- **On-site Interview**

# Types of interviews: “The Telephone Screen”

- Purpose is to “screen out” applicants.

The screening committee is assessing your interest in the position, your ability to substantiate your skills and expertise verbally.

- Be prepared to discuss:
  - Your research and your future agenda
  - Your approach to classroom teaching
  - Your university service/advising experience
  - Your interest in the department and institution.

# Types of interviews:

## “The Telephone Screen” Tips

- Be prepared, do your homework
- Compile a list of potential questions, practice your responses
- Talk slowly, clearly, and audibly
  - “could you repeat that?” vs. WHAT!!!!?
- Take the call at home

# Types of interviews: “The Telephone Screen” Tips

- Open and available technique
- Find a comfortable position
- ~ Smile ☺ -
- Speak directly into the phone.
- Don't eat or drink anything. Avoid ah, er, hum.
- Silence on the line ~ check in
  - **sign of respect vs. taking initiative** “Would you like me to continue”
- Follow up with next steps and send a thank you letter.

# Types of interviews: “The Conference Interview”

- The relative importance and the format of conference interviews vary by fields.
- Most interviewers are looking for:
  - Effectiveness in articulating your scholarly experience
  - Your passion and commitments in the field and professional interests
  - Your potential as a future colleague
- Be prepared to clearly discuss your research & teaching within a short amount of time (45 minutes).

# Types of interviews:

## “The Conference Interview” Tips

- Check under what person’s name will the hotel room/table be registered.
- Allow at least ½ hour between interviews if they are in the same hotel
- Strike fast (interviews are closely scheduled and may follow a planned routines)
- Be able to discuss:
  - The history of your choices (how did you become interested?, how did you decide on focus?)
  - Your knowledge and your areas of growth (What have you discovered? What do you still want to know?)
  - Direction of your project (are you discovering new material? Asking a new question? Applying a new technique? Defending a position?)

# Types of interviews: “The On-Campus Interview”

- Generally 3-5 applicants are invited for a campus interview
- Typically lasts for 1 to 2 days.
- The on-campus interview is an extended version of the screening with 2 additional components:
  - the colloquium and/or
  - the class seminar

# Types of interviews: “The On-Campus Interview”

- You may meet with faculty, students, a department chairperson, a dean, an academic provost, the administrative staff, and/or outside persons in the community.
- During this interview the faculty continue to assess your degree of “fit” with the academic unit, your long range scholarly and collegial potential.

# Types of interviews:

## “The On-Campus Interview”

- Administrators tend to focus on your “fit” with and potential contribution to the institution and the overall enhancement of the visibility and reputation of the institution.
- Your potential for tenure will be assessed at all levels.
- Review your attire, arrive early, know your itinerary, greeting ~ eye contact 😊 ~ hand shake

# On-Campus Interview: “Closing with Finesse”

- Ask each interviewer appropriate questions
  - Time frame for the subsequent search process
  - Tenure expectations
  - Research Opportunities
  - Student constituencies and performance
  - Larger environment of the institution

**(It is okay to ask questions, you are interviewing them too)**

- Restate why you feel you are the best candidate **(confidence)**
- Summarize two or three of your strongest qualifications that you shared throughout the interview
- Be sure to ask what are the next steps in the hiring process

# “The Colloquium”

- “Show and tell technique”
- This is an opportunity for the search committee to assess your research (generally candidates will present his or her dissertation research)
- Be prepared for pointed and challenging questions. So practice ahead of time.
- Remain calm and do not become defensive even in the face of criticism.

# “The Colloquium”

- **Develop a good lead-in to your colloquium. Also put a lot of effort into a strong conclusion.**
- **If you are planning on using high-tech equipment, make certain ahead of time that the department can provide what is needed.**
- **Bring plenty of back-up materials. Leave time at the end for questions.**
- **Contribution of your research to the field**
  - **Use of theory, future areas of inquiry, relation between your research and teaching**

# “The Classroom Seminar”

- Find out if you will select the topic or not
- Clarify if they want a lecture, interactive seminar, something else? Who will be your audience?
- You should be prepared to use your best teaching skills and demonstrate several teaching strategies or methods. (Screening interview/ “sneak preview technique”)
- Communicating your enthusiasm for the topic is crucial.

# “The Classroom Seminar”

- “sneak preview technique” (evidence for the future)
  - Why teaching is important not just why it is interesting
  - Course design (texts, theory)
  - Pedagogical practices (teaching philosophy)
- When possible, make plenty of eye contact with students and step out from behind the podium.
- Picking students’ interest and eliciting students’ input is likely to result in favorable students’ evaluations of your seminar.

# Important Post-Interview Tasks

- Keep a record of the interview, detailed information, people seen, your insights, so that you can follow-up with them
- Send a Thank-You letter to confirm your interest in the job, show appreciation, and highlight your skills
- Prepare to respond to an offer review carefully the job, company, and geographic location
- Call if you have not heard anything and the deadline has passed