**How to Mount an Academic Job Campaign**

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**1. Some principles to remember**

* Start early
* Apply broadly
* Be positive
* Don’t be shy
* Don’t be humble
* Each application or interview is just practice for the next time
* You have a full-time job: finding a job
* Dumber people than you have succeeded at this

**2. Locating the jobs**

Begin in August of the year before you want to start working. If you plan to finish your dissertation during the coming academic year, get started on the job market. If your dissertation is already finished, this is your year for the big job search.

Decide on the subject and disciplinary fields in which you will be applying.

Decide on any geographical limitations you may have. Then rethink them. Except for community colleges, every search is a national search (partial exception: the South).

Decide on what types of schools most interest you—liberal arts colleges, state universities, research universities, community colleges, etc. Articulate to yourself, on paper, why it is you prefer that kind of school. Then broaden your expectations.

Subscribe to *Chronicle of Higher Education* or read it in the library. Read it every week throughout the year. Read both the display ads (the index is at beginning of the job section) and the small ads arranged alphabetically and running below the display ads. Make a photocopy of every ad that is remotely interesting to you.

Subscribe to job listings specific to disciplines or fields in which you will be applying: *AHA Perspectives*, AAAS list serve, H-net, etc. Read them every time they come out and make a copy of every ad that is remotely interesting to you.

**3. Organizing your search materials**

Start a separate file for each job to which you consider applying. Include the job ad; a copy of your initial letter of interest; copies of all subsequent correspondence; information you gather on the school, its faculty, the town; etc.

Group the files, perhaps with headings like these:

To apply

Application in, no response yet

Live applications with responses

Interview upcoming

Job offered

Rejected

Make a computer master sheet, dated at the top, with these same headings and summary information such as those below. Keep it up to date on disk and paper.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name of school | Brief job  description | Deadline | Date you  applied | Date they  replied | Disposition |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
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Research each school to which you apply on the web. Find out about the school’s mission, the department to which you are applying, anything you can about salaries and teaching loads, the town in which the school is located, etc. This is more important as you go on than at the outset. Don’t let this slow you down or keep you from applying initially.

**4. Crafting a letter**

Draft separate standard letters for the different types of jobs to which you will be applying: different fields (literature, cultural studies, ethnic studies, American studies, history, etc.) and different types of schools.

Every letter should contain:

* Opening paragraph identifying the job, expressing your interest, and perhaps summarizing why you think you are an especially good candidate for this job.
* Paragraph summarizing your educational and job history.
* Paragraph (maximum two) describing your dissertation and any publications or awards.
* Paragraph (possibly two) describing your teaching experience and the fields in which you are prepared to teach, highlighting the success you have had as a teacher.
* Paragraph describing your research agenda and the directions in which you see your work growing.
* Closing paragraph letting them know that letters are coming and reiterating your interest in their specific job.

Have your mentor read and critique the letter.

**5. Curriculum vitae**

This is a whole separate discussion.

**6. Letters of recommendation**

Start a letter file at the career counseling center or in your department. Send it to every job for which you apply, whether or not they ask for reference letters at the outset. Sign the waiver of the right to see the letters. Talk with the counselor to have her or him go through the letters and check for weak or hurtful ones.

Ask for letters from people who know your work well, and from people who know your work who are themselves well known. Give your letter writers a copy of your c.v. along with whatever forms are required.

Get letters that speak to your teaching as well as ones that speak to your research.

Tell your mentors where you are applying (exception: when a mentor wants to control or limit where you will apply out of a desire to have you reflect well on her or him; it’s about you, not him or her). Ask your mentors if there are people they know at the schools to which you are applying, and ask them to make a call and put in a good word for you.

Ask mentors to write special letters to jobs that fit you especially well, or places where they have strong connections.

Fine line here: don’t pester them, but don’t be shy.

**7. Go to your disciplinary association’s annual meeting**

Some schools will do initial interviews there and will expect you to be there. There is usually a job placement process with a walk-in or appointment system. It’s grueling, but go through it.

You also get to see the books, hang out with friends, experience a new city, and maybe go to a couple of paper sessions.

This is a good time to make initial contacts with several potential publishers for your book.

You don’t need to give a paper, but if it is appropriate to the state of your work and you won’t be too freaked out by the double pressure of a public presentation and possible job interviews, it’s not a bad idea.

**8. A word about social media**

Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and other social media may be the way you like to communicate with your friends, but they can hurt you in a job search. Remember that anything you put up on social media can be viewed by any reasonably skilled person, and that may include potential employers and future colleagues.

Some job seekers say they find encouragement and helpful information about particular job openings through Facebook groups. That may be, but the encouragement can easily turn into carping and complaining that third parties can witness, and the helpful information often turns out to be misinformation.

I would suggest you go through your social media accounts periodically during your job campaign and clean up anything that might possibly be misinterpreted. You might even want to close your accounts for the duration of the search. Under no circumstances should you blog or tweet about any school you visit, no matter what the outcome of your visit. It will come back to bite you.

**9. The campus interview**

If they invite you, go—even if this job is low on your list. It’s good practice, and you may find you like the place more than you thought. Convince yourself that you want this job.

Dress up and clean up. Cut your hair, shave, buy a suit. Don’t expect them to come to you stylistically. My female colleagues say a pantsuit is better than one with a skirt, as you may have to sit on a low couch and awkwardness is possible with a skirt.

Study the school in detail before you go. Find out how the school views its mission, what kinds of students are likely to go there, who are the people that the school regards as its outstanding figures, what is the shape of the faculty and curriculum in your department (and how are they changing), what other departments and people you might connect with.

Research schools: be prepared for them to ask what you want in the way of start-up—research assistance, travel money, computers, labs, help with housing, etc.

Teaching schools: be prepared for them to ask if you can teach something quite a bit out of your area of expertise.

Be prepared to meet a lot of people. A typical campus interview lasts two days. You will meet your prospective department chair and the faculty in your department—this is the key encounter. You may have time with several individual faculty members. At most schools you will get to meet with some students, who may or may not have a voice in the hiring decision. You will meet a dean, perhaps even the president of a small college. You may be introduced to administrators who will tell you about salaries, benefits, moving costs.

Be prepared to strut your stuff. Most schools will want you to make a presentation about your research. Probably a presentation from your dissertation is best. Do not just summarize your whole dissertation—I have seen some presentations like this and they are always disasters. They want to see you being a scholar, so show some of your scholarship. But don’t get lost in scholasticism. Make clear why this is important and how it relates to the larger book you’re writing. Make your presentation lively, clear, crisp, well-organized, not jargon-laden, challenging to the best in the field but accessible to people who don’t know anything. There will be a bunch of the latter in attendance.

At most schools you will also be asked to teach a class (at a few schools this is all you will asked to do). Find out before you go just where in the course you are appearing and tailor your presentation to both highlight your teaching skills and fit the students’ preparation. Be prepared to talk about your teaching philosophy.

Don’t relax and get chatty. Be nice, but remember that they are watching you all the time you are there. They’ll probably take you to dinner; don’t drink much, even if they do.

Don’t stress out. This is just practice for the next time.

Take some small cards and stamps with you. On the plane home, write thank you notes and mail them before you reach home.

**10. If you don’t get a job offer the first year**

Relax. You will get one next year. Sit down with your mentors to review your job strategy and make a new plan. Make a plan to cover your financial needs for the coming year, and also to keep your resume continuous.

**11. When they offer you the job**

Be happy.

Get the details of what they are offering. Ask questions. Now you are in the driver’s seat. Talk with your mentors. Check with the other schools in which you were really interested, to see where their decision making is with regard to you. Wait for them if you can, but don’t give up a bird in the hand.

Make the best deal you can. The issues will vary, but will include salary, a possible reduced teaching load for the first semester, research money.

Go and have a happy start to your career. I’ll help you pack.