

More Tips for Obtaining a Job in Academia

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A January 2004 *TIP* article provided tips for obtaining a job in academia (Barbera, Carr, & Sasaki, 2004). In this article, we provide additional advice about different aspects of the application process.

What is the Basic Process?

Preapplication Preparation

As Barbera et al. (2004) mentioned, early preparation is crucial. First, decide the nature of the position you desire (i.e., business vs. psychology, research vs. teaching school, tenure track vs. contract positions). Some teaching schools offer renewable contracts or noncontract, employment-at-will positions rather than tenure-track jobs. Second, consider workload requirements for each position. The amount and type of work you do will vary by department and institution. Generally, a 2/2 teaching load (2 fall, 2 spring courses) is standard for a research-intensive institution, although some top research institutions offer lighter teaching loads. Teaching loads at smaller teaching institutions are typically significantly higher and research expectations are lower. Third, consider courses you will be expected to teach, their level (undergraduate or graduate), and whether you will supervise student research. Realize that working at a teaching institution may make it difficult or impossible to move to a research-intensive university in the future.

There are a number of places that post open academic positions. When searching for positions, be sure to:

- *Check multiple sources.* Different kinds of positions (e.g., business vs. psychology) tend to be posted in different resources.¹
- *Realize university positions and budgets are unpredictable.* Positions may open unexpectedly that a university wants to fill immediately.
- *Emphasize positions that fit your interests and abilities.* Job fit is important, but don't define fit too narrowly. The market for I-O academics is often tighter than the market for applied jobs.

¹ Locations of position postings are provided at the end of this article.

- *Apply to all relevant positions, regardless of geographic location.* Don't rule out positions based on geographic stereotypes; you may be in for a pleasant surprise when you visit the area! Applicants who have personal geographical limitations can expand their search in other ways.
- *Apply to both business and psychology programs.* Applying to both I-O and business programs can expand your search.
- *Apply for numerous positions.* You will hopefully identify 10 to 50 positions that meet your requirements.
- *Realize that advertised positions may not get filled or really be open.* Openings can be cancelled due to budget cuts or positions may be posted due to university requirements even though the department has pre-selected a candidate.

Your Application Materials

Barbera et al. (2004) provide important tips regarding preparing your vita and teaching portfolio as well as lining up letters of recommendation. You should also include a research statement discussing your research projects and goals in your application packet. In addition, include reprints or preprints of relevant publications. You will often receive a confirmation that your materials have been received or a notice that particular materials are missing from your packet; be sure to follow up on missing materials (e.g., letters of recommendation).

Interviews

There are two basic types of interviews: phone interviews and site visits.

Phone interviews. Many departments use phone interviews. The main purpose of the phone interview is to narrow the applicant pool to a few candidates who will be invited for onsite interviews. For the phone interview, be enthusiastic and prepared! Answer interview questions succinctly, emphasizing how your background fits the position. Revealing extraneous information about yourself can hurt your chances of being offered the position. Ask relevant questions about the position, and thank the committee at the end of the interview.

Site visits. The site visit gives the department a better opportunity to get to know you and further assess fit. Social skills inevitably play a greater role here. Be sure to:

- *Dress professionally but conservatively.* Keep jewelry, perfume/cologne, and accessories to a tasteful minimum.
- *Be confident and pleasant, not confrontational or too personal.* Polite disagreement is fine, but don't debate with the selection committee.
- *Be prepared to pay for expenses out of pocket.* Some departments will handle all travel details for you, others will not. Keep receipts for reimbursement.

A contact person will probably communicate with you prior to your visit and show you around and make sure you are where you need to be throughout the site visit. This person is a great resource!

- *Ask your contact person for a copy of your schedule in advance.* This will help you prepare for scheduled meetings. Ask for 30 minutes immediately before your job talk to get accustomed to the room and mentally gear up.
- *Ask to meet relevant faculty/researchers at the institution and/or to visit relevant facilities if these are not included in your schedule.*
- *Request to see things of interest in the community (e.g., housing) if these will affect your decision.* Get a feel for the economy, events, and area resources by picking up a local newspaper or housing guide during your visit.
- *Do not accept an interview offer if you know that you will not take the position (e.g., spouse won't move, pay is too low to consider).* Although some candidates believe any interview is good practice, academic departments have limited budgets, usually allowing no more than three site visits. An interview "for experience only" may keep a serious applicant from being interviewed and may result in a failed job search for the department.

Remember that the interview is as much for recruitment as selection. Ask questions that allow you to assess the fit between the department and your needs. Consult job search resources² for lists of questions to ask. You will meet many people during your interview (e.g., faculty, deans, students, staff). Assess whether information you get is consistent and fits your needs. Selection is a two-way street, both you and the department want to be happy with your choice!

Job talk. Especially for a research-focused position, the job talk is a very important part of your interview. It gives faculty members an opportunity to assess your presentation skills, teaching skills, and learn about your research. Although Barbera et al. (2004) discuss several important issues regarding the job talk, we offer some additional suggestions. The department will generally set aside an hour for your talk. Spend 40 to 50 minutes on your talk and allot the remaining 10 to 20 minutes for questions, unless the department instructs you otherwise. Begin your talk with an overview of your research program. Next, discuss research studies you have conducted and completed; two studies are typical. Simplify any complex procedures because you will likely present to a diverse audience. Blend results and discussion so that statistical results and the consequences are presented in an integrated manner. Summarize key findings and revisit how your research studies fit into your overall research program.

Some schools will also ask you to do a teaching presentation. Often this involves teaching a class on an assigned topic. Obtain information regarding the students so you can tailor your talk at the appropriate level. If you are given a choice on what to present, choose a topic you have taught already that has been well received. If you are assigned a topic, learn everything you can about the topic. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" if an audience member's ques-

² A list of relevant resources is available at the end of this article.

tion stumps you. Ask about the type of equipment that will be available, don't assume the classroom will be equipped with projectors or other equipment.

Negotiating the offer. You may need to wait to find out if you are offered a position because the university is still interviewing, they are taking longer than expected to make a decision, or they have offered another candidate the position. Be patient. If the institution is your first choice, consider contacting the chair of the selection committee several weeks after your interview to check the status of the position.

Think about what you need to set up your research program. Once you and the department agree on a start-up package, get it *in writing*. Clarify who provides basic resources such as printer toner, photocopies, file cabinets, and phone calls as some universities ask faculty to pay for such items out of their research funds. If written confirmation of the offer will not be provided for some time, follow-up on verbal negotiations with an e-mail summarizing the negotiated start-up package and asking for clarification and confirmation about the details. In addition, once you accept a position, take it! Accepting a position and backing out later is unprofessional and may hurt you later.

What Other Issues Do Different Types of Applicants Need to Consider?

Current Faculty Member Applying to Another Institution

If you are currently working in academia but are considering moving to another institution, there are several issues that are unique to your applicant status.

- *Thoroughly understand why you want to leave your present position.*
- *Establish a list of requirements for the new position.* Realize that you will face greater time constraints as you try to be productive in your current position while applying and interview for other positions.
- *Decide whether or not to tell colleagues in your current department that you are looking.* In general, it may not be a good idea to tell colleagues. The I-O community is small, however, so even if you do not tell your colleagues, they may learn that you are interviewing.
- *Request letters of recommendation.* This will be complicated if you keep your search secret.
- *Find someone to cover your classes.* You will need someone to teach classes you miss while on interviews and have a “cover story” if colleagues ask where you are going.

Consultant Transitioning Into Academia

Consultants planning to transition into academia face unique challenges in the application process in terms of both research productivity and teaching experience. Below, we discuss actions consultants can take to maintain their competitiveness in the academic job market.

Maintaining your research identity. Academic institutions want individuals who are and will continue to be productive researchers. Many consulting

firms do not value research in the same manner. Consultants who want to transition into academia should make decisions that facilitate a successful transition.

- *Work for consulting firms that value and encourage research.* Look for opportunities to work on consulting projects that are more research oriented (e.g., survey development) to continue to build research skills and gain material to submit to scholarly journals.
- *Partner with academics to work on research projects.* Academics have more time to do conceptual work, but consultants have more direct access to research samples in real organizations. This can result in a win-win situation for all!
- *Draw attention to the strengths of the data gathered in consulting (i.e., real-world applicability).* Downgrade data's limitations (i.e., unvalidated measures).

Building your teaching portfolio. Faculty members also need to be effective instructors, and practitioners may not have many opportunities to develop teaching skills. There are several things you can do, however, to become a more effective instructor.

- *Seek opportunities to be involved in projects where you deliver training or make client presentations.*
- *Teach as adjunct faculty at local colleges or universities.* Teaching weekend courses in an executive education setting can fit with travel schedules. Teach well and get good evaluations.
- *Teach and mentor junior colleagues (e.g., research assistants).* These skills will be important as a faculty member when mentoring students.
- *Consider a position as a visiting professor to build your teaching portfolio.*

Differences Between Psychology Departments and Business Schools

Applying to both psychology departments and business schools is one way to remain flexible in the application process and increase your applications. Because there are some differences between psychology departments and business schools, however, we discuss issues that applicants should consider when applying in both settings.

The Application Process

Timing of the application process differs in psychology and business. Psychology departments typically post positions during the fall or spring preceding the position start date but business schools often begin the hiring process earlier, typically at the Academy of Management meetings in August. Short, in-person interviews are conducted at the conference with follow-up site visits typically occurring in the fall.

General Differences Between Psychology Departments and Business Schools

Although there is great variability between schools, there are some differ-

ences between psychology and business schools that occur very often and result in different sets of advantages and disadvantages associated with each setting.

- *Students.* Psychology students at the undergraduate and master's level are typically more interested in research than business students, enabling researchers to build larger research labs. At the PhD level, however, students tend to be academically bound, so there may be fewer differences in the research orientation of business and psychology doctoral students.
- *Resources.* The most well-publicized advantage of business schools over psychology programs is the higher pay and greater resources.
- *Type of research.* Many differences between psychology departments and business schools come down to applicant preference and research interests. For those that conduct lab research, there is typically greater access to lab space and subject pools in psychology departments. In addition, if one studies theory from other areas of psychology (e.g., social), there is better access to other psychologists. Conversely, for those that primarily conduct field research, business schools offer greater opportunities to connect to organizations through executive education or employed MBA students. In addition, researchers interested in multilevel research tend to have greater access to macro organizational researchers in business schools.
- *Fit.* The issue of fit is likely to be critical in the choice of business or psychology as a setting. Many I-O psychologists may feel that there is some degree to which they must stretch to fit into both types of departments; this may be especially true if there are few I-O psychologists (or OB/HR researchers) in their department. Academics in psychology departments without other I-O folks may find that psychologists from other disciplines do not "get" their applied orientation and may feel pressure to do lab work or to bring in grants. Alternately, I-O psychologists in business schools may be forced to stretch in different ways. Some top-tier I-O outlets are not always seen as favorably in some business departments. Most business schools will also look for faculty to teach MBA students, which may not appeal to all I-O psychologists.

We encourage individuals who plan to apply to both psychology department and business school positions to take steps to better assess the fit and increase the competitiveness of their applications in both settings.

- Expose yourself to both psychology department and business school environments to assess which type of culture you prefer (Holtz, 2003).
- Attend both psychology (e.g., SIOP) and management (e.g. Academy of Management) conferences to network.
- Gain experience teaching both psychology and business classes (Holtz, 2003).
- Be aware that different journals may be valued differently by business schools and psychology departments. Avoid limiting publications to only one journal.

Summary

The application process for academic jobs is quite different than that for applied jobs and often not well understood by those applying for academic positions the first time. We hope you find these tips helpful in finding your dream job in academia!

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Additional Resources

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Special thanks to **Deidra Schleicher**, **Brigitte Steinheider**, Mia Boyd, and anonymous SIOP reviewers for comments on earlier versions of this manuscript.

Places to Find Academic Position Postings

SIOP's "JobNet" (www.siop.net/JobNet) and *TIP*

Chronicle of Higher Education (www.chronicle.com)

APA Web site's "PsycCareers" (www.apa.org/ads/)

Academy of Management's Placement Center (<http://apps.aonline.org/placement/main.asp>)

APA Monitor

APS Observer

www.higheredjobs.com

American Educational Research Association (AERA) (www2.aera.net/jobposts/)

Your department chair and/or area director