

Off the Market: Immediate thoughts just after the job market experience in Fall 2011¹

There are loads of handbooks and tips for being on the academic job across disciplines. As I started getting ready in the summer of 2011 for the job market that fall, I skimmed several of the handbooks. This blog entry will be piggyback off of these, and give a perspective of someone that is just off the market... and successfully got a job. As a doctoral candidate in public administration and policy, I was aiming for a tenure-track assistant professor position in a public administration department, or a political science department with a public administration track. Starting in June 2011, I started paying attention to job announcements on websites (<http://www.higheredjobs.com/> and <http://www.publicservicecareers.org>, as well as the website of the American Political Science Association, see also February 10, 2012 FFLC blog post “Job Search – Where/How to Begin” for other strategies, <http://uafuturefaculty.blogspot.com>). I also started getting my materials ready and had two of my committee members look that them in June and July. By September, I had a general packet that included: a cover letter, a curriculum vitae, a research statement, a teaching statement, a five-year research plan, and four writing samples. In addition, early in September, I attended a big conference in my field, the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, and interviewed with three schools. This was helpful to get me prepared and talking about myself and my research.

September 2011 through December 2011, I applied to 17 positions at 16 schools. I applied to all schools that had one or more of three key words (in my case, nonprofit management, public policy, and international development). Of those 17 applications, 4 were completely online, and 13 were sent via postal mail. I was surprised with how different each application process was—online vs. postal, one writing sample versus four writing samples, etc. Additionally, some schools required teaching evaluations and graduate transcripts. Over the months of November and December I would receive five flyouts. First, I had two phone interviews and one video skype call, which ended in two of the flyouts. In addition, one of the interviews from the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting also led to a flyout. The two final flyouts were direct calls for a campus visit from the application packet.

Application Packets

Putting together an application packet takes a lot of organization, especially if you are doing several. In order to make it easier for your references (most required three references, often in hardcopy with the application, but some just requested a list of people that were able to provide references), I recommend surveying the job announcements and due dates and then organize rounds. I had two rounds, one in which letters were due to me at the end of September and one in the beginning of October. This seemed to help. I sent all the reference letters, sealed and signed, with my application packets that were in hard copy. The four online applications were submitted through a link that was directly sent to my references. I used Rethemeyer’s guide to preparing my packet that is available on the Rockefeller College website². This was very helpful.

Organization will also help with keeping costs down. I spent only about \$30 on postal costs because I did not have to rush anything. Printing was another unexpected cost with which hopefully your current academic department can help you. For some schools I applied to I needed to send up to 40 pages of material, taking into account writing samples. I was able to spread printing across different sources, including the computer labs at the SUNY downtown campus and the Graduate Student Organization uptown. But this took planning. I only used nice paper for the cover letter, and this was paper I had

¹ This short article was first published on The Future Faculty Leadership Council (FFLC)’s blog on February 22, 2012. The Future Faculty Leadership Council is a group of graduate students who organize events for the UAlbany graduate student community on becoming successful faculty members. Visit FFLC: <http://uafuturefaculty.blogspot.com/>

² You can find the handbook here: http://www.albany.edu/rockefeller/user_current_graduate_students_3tabs.shtml

inherited from another graduate student who had moved. Some departments will supply these materials, I have heard, so do explore. In addition, transcripts cost money and sometimes take time, take that into consideration.

I soon learned that once the application was in, there were still other small steps that needed to be done. I received several emails that requested me to fill out an Equal Employment Opportunity form via online or in hard copy, this usually included information on gender, race and ethnicity, and the position to which I was applying. It also needed to be signed. When it was hard copy, I was requested to mail it in, scan it or fax it. This took a little time, so be prepared. And know where you have access to a scanner and/or a fax machine.

Phone Interviews

I was surprised with how much schools used the phone to contact me, more so than emailing me. Be prepared to take calls and have a place where you would be able to have a phone interview. (This was a challenge for me as I did not have an office and there was construction in my home at the time.) About three weeks after sending my first round of applications I started to receive calls. As I mentioned above, I had two phone interviews, one of which ended in a flyout and one video skype which also ended in a flyout. Phone interviews were with more than one person, in the case of the skype call, all four people on the search committee were on the call. It is hard to judge how the phone and video interviews went. In the case of one phone interview, the *first* question I was asked was “How much do you want to make?” Frankly, I was stunned that this was the first question. As instructed by my professors, I did not give a number but skirted around it saying I wanted a competitive salary for the field, etc. However, I was really turned off by the interview approach. I did end up accepting the flyout, it was my first, and it was invaluable for practice and a positive experience, but, yes, the school paid very low. I did not end up with an offer, however, I knew it was not right for me. I never heard back from the other phone interview school, not even an email saying I had not been selected for a campus visit. As mentioned, the skype call ended in a flyout.

Flyouts (also called Campus Visits)

The four months from September to December were busy. After application packets were made up and sent in September and October, I had five trips in November and December, and between these, I needed to be in Albany on Wednesdays for a class I was teaching, and the fall is also conference season in my field so I was attending and presenting at two international conferences. At one point, I had three interviews in a ten-day span—not recommended! (see also Rethemeyer, p. 8).

Everything you hear about flyouts is true. They are exhausting but also exciting as you try to picture yourself in a location and at a school. I was surprised with how long preparing for each flyout (and even the phone interviews) took. In some flyouts, I did not get a schedule until the day of, this was not ideal and made it hard to fully prepare. I spent at least a half day preparing for each of the trips. I had my job materials, and was now comfortable with talking to people about myself and my research, however, now I needed to focus on my job talk and in the case of two of the five schools, I needed to conduct teaching presentations.

On each trip, I met with an average of 20 faculty members over 15 minute meetings or meals (and usually an hour with the department chair) and an average of 8-12 students per visit. My job talks were attended by 12-40 people and lasted from one to one and half hours depending on the school. I had two schools that also required a teaching presentation. For one of the schools, I had 14 graduate students and the instructor, and for the other I had 30 undergraduate students and 15 faculty members observing. Every school was a little different. However, for most schools, I was picked up from the hotel at 7:30am and brought back after dinner, sometimes as late as 9:00pm. One campus visit spanned over 3 days, and

because of flight delays was then further extended to stay a fourth night! (It should be noted that fortunately the search committee at this University was wonderful and put me up for another night and took me again out to dinner. However, it was also like I was still on the interview! ☺. I did end up with an offer from this school.)

For the individual meetings with faculty members, I generally saw two formats. The first was that the faculty member had just printed out my CV and scanned it in front of me and asked the first question that came to mind. This was often “I see you were a painting major in undergraduate...?” By the end, I was a pro at this question and it gave me time to explain my educational track and professional experience from painting in undergraduate studies to a dissertation related to regulatory policy. In addition to that question, I received a lot of open-ended questions like “Tell me about yourself” or “Tell me about your research.” I essentially used these questions to talk about my educational track and professional experience and how I became interested in my dissertation topic. Be ready for these questions.

The second format I saw was that faculty members just started the meeting with asking me if I had any questions. I was very surprised with how many of the individual faculty meetings were left for me to steer or even lead. This was very prevalent, so be prepared! Newhouse calls this “institutional preparation” (Newhouse, 1997, p. 109). I would have general questions about the school and department (e.g. support for conferences, teaching load, research funding, publishing expectations, tenure process, etc.), but also individualize it, especially if a faculty member is at all interested in similar research. It was the worst when I felt I was searching for questions.

Leaving the campus visit I never really had a good sense of how it went. People are really kind and generally send you off feeling positive. I did leave campus visits knowing that the job or school was not a good fit. This is why the campus visit is so important. I went to one school that since June 2011 when the job announcement came out, I was convinced that it was the perfect job for me, that the job announcement had been written *for me*, and while not in my geographic preference, I was convinced that the opportunities at the school would make that not matter. However, the campus visit was not my best and I did not ‘love’ it. I was shocked and disappointed and nervous, I thought, now what? You just never know.

After each flyout, I would send an email to the search committee chair, thanking him or her and the committee. I was surprised that sometimes I did not get an email in response wishing me luck or something of that sort. In fact, for one school that I loved and which became my first choice, the chair did not respond and I was devastated. What did that mean? I asked myself. However, a week later I got the job offer. Lesson learned—try not to read into things too much.

Other standard questions and things you should be ready for across research, teaching, service and the presentation during your campus visit:

Research: Have a list of journals in your head where you plan to submit parts of your dissertation, I often got this question. You can also use this to highlight where you have published already.

Teaching: People were interested in what I could, would and want to teach. I would look at the department's core curriculum and offerings. Try to make some suggestions on how you can meet the needs of the department. Having a specific experience related to teaching was helpful to bring up when faculty members asked me about teaching. For example, I talked about the undergraduate course I was teaching at the time and I spoke about my experiences with the Future Faculty Leadership Council. Many faculty members were interested in how I was preparing to not only be a good researcher but also a good teacher.

Service: This is also related to teaching, but I saw several universities more interested in service learning. I highlighted my interests in service learning and getting students out in the community and working with

local organizations. This might be the nature of my field—community and public affairs are what we study—but this was looked at very positively.

Presentations: The job talk can be terrifying. Yes, as all handbooks say, you need to practice; like practice a lot. I practiced in front of many audiences and I still feel my talk had weaknesses. By the last of my flyouts, I was definitely more comfortable, but I still wish I had the fall to better prepare and that the spring I could have done my campus visits. You should take all precautions, have your presentation in PDF form and ask for a half-hour before your presentation to get situated. I would have handouts of any tables that you have with your name and presentation title. Be prepared for all sorts of questions. This is hard to know, but I learned quickly, that for example, as primarily a qualitative researcher, quantitative researchers were more likely to ask about my methods. Just be ready to clearly and justify why you did what you did.

Other Observations:

- During campus visits, be prepared to ask to use the bathroom, that often is not built into the schedule.
- I had several faculty members ask for business cards in individual interviews and my department does not provide them for students, sadly. I would have liked to have them.
- Most handbooks tell you to have carry on luggage only, unfortunately these days that might not be possible with check luggage restrictions. Schools should reimburse for checked luggage.
- I choose to dress professional but very comfortable. I tried presenting in several outfits and comfort was important so I had about four presenting outfits during practice runs that got me through the five flyouts.
- Advisors can play a big part. My advisor ended up emailing the school where I was really excited about after the campus visit. My advisor wanted to let the chair know I seemed very excited about the job. At the chair's request, my advisor and him had a phone conversation that certainly helped me! (or did not hurt at least). I got the job offer the next week.
- It is almost mid February and I have not still received my reimbursements for travel expenses from two schools—one I had the campus visit at the end of November and the other from early December. Keep this in mind, the costs I needed to upfront did add up!

Good Ending

In the end, as mentioned above, I did not receive the job offer for my first flyout, the search committee chair called and left a message that they offered it to someone else and that they had accepted. But by mid December I had received two offers. By this time I had still not heard either way from two schools. This could have meant I was not their first (or second or third) choice and they each had an offer to someone else and were waiting to see if it was accepted. Or that something changed with the position, funding was lost, etc., and they just had not gotten around to telling me. I might never know. The two offers in mid December were a delight, and the positions both offered exciting opportunities. After, some negotiating (see February 20, 2012 blog post on FFLC's recent workshop for tips on this, <http://uafuturefaculty.blogspot.com>), I ended up taking a job I am very exciting about: tenure-track Assistant Professor position at Binghamton University's (SUNY) College of Community and Public Affairs in its Department of Public Administration to start in Fall 2012.

Start Getting Ready Now

If you are still a ways from being on the job market, there are so many things you still can be doing. What can you do now? Publish. Yes, having publications was a good way to get the phone interview and in some cases, the direct flyout. Teaching experience was also looked at fondly. Some good

advice I have received, was to let your fields' conferences tell you the concerns for the field and be on top of these. Take classes in these and read about them, even if they are not your dissertation.

Good Luck!

Resources:

Newhouse, M. (1997). *Cracking the Academia Nut: A Guide to Preparing for Your Academic Career*.

Karl Rethemeyer's Job Market Handbook, see Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy website:
http://www.albany.edu/rockefeller/user_current_graduate_students_3tabs.shtml