

*If you've been invited to interview for a faculty position, congratulations! The first part of this document provides suggestions to help you prepare for all types of academic interviews. The second part discusses tips for specific kinds of academic interviews (conference interviews, phone interviews, and campus visits).*

## **DO YOUR RESEARCH**

Before any academic interview, it is imperative that you do your research – on the institution, department, program, search committee members, faculty members, community, etc.

- Purpose:
  - Research should help you decide whether or not you really want to apply, accept a job interview, and accept an offer.
  - Research helps you prepare answers to questions you may be asked during an interview.
  - Research helps you formulate thoughtful questions to ask those who are interviewing you.
- Using the Internet:
  - University - university website, university newspaper, university course catalog, university profile in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
  - Department - departmental website, departmental student handbooks, department's profile on the websites of professional organizations in your field
  - Specific Individuals - general search browser, academic material search engine, professional organization search window
- Asking Colleagues:
  - Professional colleagues around the world
  - UW faculty members and classmates
  - UW alumni - search for Huskies at [www.linkedin.com/alumni](http://www.linkedin.com/alumni)

## **PREPARE ANSWERS TO POTENTIAL QUESTIONS**

Nearly every faculty interview will include questions about your research, teaching, and personal characteristics. You can start preparing answers to potential questions well in advance of interviews. This will allow you more time to prepare answers to institution-specific questions after you are invited to interview.

- Three Important Steps:
  - Look at lists of sample interview questions and jot down a few thoughts for each question, including concrete examples to demonstrate your point.
  - Practice saying your answers aloud to yourself.
  - Do a mock interview.
    - Schedule a mock interview at the Career Center by visiting <http://careers.uw.edu>. The 50-minute appointments usually consist of 25 minutes of interviewing and 25 minutes of debriefing. We aim to create the most realistic interview possible for your situation. You can record the session on a flash drive. Sessions are free for students; \$60 for postdocs and alumni.
    - Gather a group of colleagues and have them ask you the most difficult interview questions they can conjure up.
- Attitude:
  - Demonstrate that you are a confident, calm, forward-thinking professional.
  - Answer questions in an organized manner – if you are surprised by a question, take a brief moment to think or even ask for time to think so you don't end up rambling.
  - Present yourself in a lively, engaged, audible manner; thinking of interviews as conversations rather than interrogations might help you maintain positive energy.
  - Convey passion for your work and excitement about the possibility of working at the institution with which you are interviewing.

- Answer Strategy:
  - Keep your answers short – about 90 to 120 seconds in length.
  - Whenever possible, use specific examples from the past and present to answer questions rather than talking abstractly about the future. A method for structuring your answers to behavioral-based questions is the STAR method.
    - SITUATION (I was teaching English 101 to 100 undergrads at a research university.)
    - TASK (There was a group of 5 students that talked throughout each lecture and disrupted the class so I needed to find a way to prevent them from talking.)
    - ACTIONS you took to accomplish the task. (I met with the 5 students individually. I was firm, yet considerate. I told them \_\_\_\_.)
    - RESULTS (The students reduced their talking and began contributing to the class. The quality of their work increased and they raised their grades.)

### EXPECT A VARIETY OF QUESTIONS

Search committee members will likely ask about your current research activities, future research plans, teaching, service, and personal characteristics. They are also likely to ask questions to assess your interest in and fit with their institution, department, and geographic region.

- Current Research: You need to be able to discuss your research in 10 seconds and in 1, 10, and 30 minutes. You need to be able to discuss your work with professionals who have knowledge in your specialty and professionals who have knowledge in your field but not in your specialty.
  - Tell us about your research.
  - How did you choose your dissertation topic? Why does it interest you?
  - How does your research contribute to the field?
  - How does your research relate to the work of \_\_\_\_?
  - What theoretical framework did you use in developing your research? Why?
  - Why did you choose the specific method / instruments / sample / analytic technique?
  - What are the strengths of your most recent work?
  - If you could do your project again, what would you change?
  - What do you most enjoy about the research process?
  - How do you compensate for your research-related weaknesses?
- Future Research: When interviewers ask about your future research plans, they want to make sure you are an emerging professional so it is important for you to answer such questions thoughtfully. Formulate a 1-2 year plan, 3-5 year plan, and 5-7 year plan. Think about future projects, publication and presentation outlets, potential funding sources, individuals (inside and outside the department) with whom to collaborate, and necessary space, equipment, and personnel.
  - Tell us about your publication plans for your most recent work.
  - Have you submitted your work for presentation at any conferences?
  - What are your short-term research plans?
  - What are your long-term research plans?
  - What equipment will you need to accomplish your plans?
  - Will you require research assistants?
  - How will you find funding for your research plans?
  - Are you expecting the department to provide lab start-up funds?
  - What are your other research interests?
  - How do you plan to involve students in your research?
  - Do you see yourself doing collaborative research? What kind? With whom?
- Teaching: Be prepared to answer questions about your teaching – no matter what type of institution is interviewing you. You'll likely be asked about your past teaching experience and future teaching goals. Be ready to discuss how you can adapt what you learned from past teaching positions to future teaching experiences (especially if you'll be teaching different grade levels or class sizes than before).



- How would you teach a course in \_\_\_\_?
- What texts would you choose for \_\_\_\_ course?
- Which of our existing courses are you most interested in teaching?
- What new courses are you interested in developing?
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- What teaching methods do you use?
- What constitutes a good teacher?
- How do you define teaching effectiveness? How do you evaluate it?
- What have you learned from your teaching evaluations?
- How do student characteristics impact teaching and learning?
- What do you most like about teaching?
- What is your favorite teaching experience thus far?
- In what ways do you still need to grow as a teacher?
- What was your worst teaching mistake? What did you learn from it?
- What is an ideal class size for you?
- What is an ideal course load for you?
- How does your research influence your teaching?
- How do you think teaching undergrads is different than teaching grad students?
- How is teaching majors different than teaching non-majors?
- How do you evaluate student learning? What are your grading policies?
- How do you use technology in your teaching?
- How do you motivate / engage students?
- How do you encourage critical thinking?
- Service: Every department has a service requirement but the types and amounts of service expected vary widely among disciplines, departments, and universities. Search committees will likely want to gauge your attitude about service and ascertain the types of service activities that most interest you.
  - What types of staff / faculty committees interest you?
  - With what types of student groups / committees / activities would you like to be involved?
  - What type of supervisory relationship would you like to have with students?
  - How important is service to you, as compared to teaching and research?
- Institution & Department: Search committees want to make sure the people they hire are going to be happy in their department and at their institution. It is not in anybody's interest for a candidate who really wants to do research and work with graduate students to get hired by a teaching-focused school that only serves undergraduates. Committees will ask you questions about how you see yourself in their department, university, and city so they can assess your fit.
  - How do you feel about teaching only undergraduate / graduate students?
  - How do you feel about teaching at an institution affiliated with \_\_\_\_ religion?
  - How do your values coincide with the values of this institution?
  - How do you feel about living in \_\_\_\_?
  - Why do you want to teach here?
  - What most excites you about our department?
  - What reservations do you have about this position / department / institution?
  - How long would you plan to stay here?
  - Where do you see yourself in 10 years, 20 years?
  - How do you feel about teaching in the evenings?
  - What do you think about teaching older students?
  - How do you feel about collaborating closely with other faculty in the department?
  - What unique strengths would you contribute to this department?
  - What makes you think you could earn tenure here?
  - What professional criticisms have you received? How are you improving in those areas?
  - What professional accomplishment makes you the most proud?



- **Personal Characteristics:** Search committee members are interested in you as a colleague - they want to know what it will be like to work in the office next to you and serve on various committees with you for an indefinite number of years. Therefore, you can expect a few questions about you as a person. Be careful that you only divulge personal information you are comfortable divulging. Legally, you do not have to disclose your age, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religious preference, etc. If you're asked a question you do not feel comfortable answering, figure out the underlying question (i.e. Can you fulfill the duties of this job?) and answer it, rather than answering the question asked.
  - What are your non-academic interests?
  - Why are you interested in this field of study?
  - Why did you decide to pursue a position in academia?
  - What other career paths have you considered?
  - How would you describe your doctoral program?
  - What are your personal strengths and weaknesses?
  - Where else are you interviewing?
  - Is there anything that would prevent you from accepting this position?

### PREPARE QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWERS

Search committees are usually genuinely curious to know what questions you have for them. It is important to have questions prepared. Ask questions that demonstrate you have done your research on their department and school. Try to avoid questions about salary, retirement, and sensitive departmental politics.

- **Research:**
  - What financial resources are available to start a research program?
  - Are funds available to hire research assistants to help with data collection and analysis?
  - How interested are students in becoming involved in research with faculty?
  - What are the expectations about new faculty securing outside funding?
  - What departmental funds are available for attending conferences?
  - What are the library resources like here?
  - Are their campus resources to assist with grant-writing?
- **Teaching:**
  - Do professors have teaching assistants to help with grading?
  - Can I teach in the summer?
  - What is the course load the first year on the job, as compared to subsequent years?
  - What courses will I likely teach?
  - What technical support is available in classrooms?
- **Service:**
  - What are the expectations regarding service activities (types & hours)?
  - In what types of services activities do current faculty members participate?
  - How active are faculty members in professional associations?
- **Institution & Department:**
  - Why do you have positions open in this department?
  - Why are you looking for somebody with \_\_\_\_ specialty?
  - What facilities and equipment are available for new faculty?
  - Describe the review process for new faculty.
  - Describe the tenure process here.
  - What are the expectations for research, teaching, service, and advising?
  - What constitutes a great faculty member in this department?
  - Describe a typical week for faculty members here.
  - Where do you see the department (or institution) heading in the next 5 years?
  - What do you consider to be the department's greatest strengths?
  - What is the most rewarding part of being a professor here?

- What are the department's weaknesses? What are you doing to improve upon them?
- What do you anticipate being the biggest challenge for new faculty in this department?
- Do you have an official mentoring program for junior faculty?
- How would you describe relationships among faculty members in this department?
- How would you describe relationships between students and faculty members?
- Describe a typical undergraduate / graduate student in this department.
- How is this department perceived within the university?
- How is the university perceived in the community?
- What is it like to live in this community?
- Personal & Logistics:
  - When will I hear from you regarding this position?
  - What types of \_\_\_\_ activities are available in the community?

### TAKE CARE OF LOGISTICS

Students are typically interviewing for faculty positions while they're finishing their dissertations, teaching, and fulfilling other responsibilities so logistics tend to be forgotten. It is important that you prepare your email account, voicemail, and wardrobe for the interviewing process.

- Computer & Phone:
  - Make sure your email account is not full and check your email regularly.
  - Try to make your filter minimally sensitive and be sure to check your "junk" folders so you are certain to receive emails from schools to which you are applying.
  - Make sure your answering machine and voicemail are working properly and have professional greetings recorded on them.
  - Keep a pad of paper, a writing utensil, and a list of questions by your phone so you are prepared to schedule interviews over the phone.
  - If you're in a place where it's difficult to talk (like a bus) and you receive a call from an unknown number, consider letting it go to voicemail and returning the call at a better time so you can make the best possible first impression when speaking with potential employers.
- Clothing:
  - If you do not already have a suit or other professional clothing, buy some before you are invited to interview. If a school does not give you much lead time before scheduled interviews, you want to spend your time preparing for the interview, not shopping.
  - When selecting clothes, remember that you will likely be standing, sitting, getting in and out of cars, going to dinner, walking around campus, etc. so you need to select outfits that are comfortable, versatile, and modest yet professional.
  - If you purchase new clothes or shoes, be sure to break them in before your interview.
  - If it's been a while since you've worn your suit, be sure to try it on ahead of time.

### CONFERENCE INTERVIEWS

In many disciplines, preliminary faculty job interviews take place at major conferences. It is important to know the dates of the major conventions in your discipline and find out how to participate in the interview activity. As with any interview, the point of the conference interview is to assess your knowledge, professionalism, and fit.

- Overview:
  - The conference interview usually consists of several parts.
  - Interviewers will usually ask about your teaching and research.
  - They will also likely discuss their department and assess your fit with it.
  - The interviewers will typically ask if you have questions for them.
  - Finally, procedures for following up after the interview are usually discussed.
  - Be sure to remain energetic and focused – despite distractions.



- Logistics:
  - Conventions and the job interview process itself can be exciting yet draining. Combining both of these things is a recipe for stress. Therefore, it is essential to be mindful of logistics.
  - Get your travel arrangements (flight, hotel, and rental car) taken care of in advance.
  - Choose accommodations conducive to prepping for interviews and unwinding.
  - Do not schedule your interviews close together – you need to leave time for prepping, eating, traveling between different interview locations, and inevitable delays.
  - Know the name under which a department's interview room is registered.
  - Have a public transportation schedule with you at all times.
  - Have a map or directions indicating how to get from one hotel to another.
- Materials:
  - Bring copies of your CV, dissertation abstract, published manuscripts, research statement, teaching statement, sample syllabi, etc.
  - It is also a good idea to bring your entire dissertation for your own reference.
  - Bring blank paper and several writing utensils.
  - Because you will have a large amount of paperwork with you, it is a good idea to bring a professional looking briefcase or portfolio.
  - Carry all essential documents on the plane. Don't place them in your checked luggage.
- Attire:
  - Standards for dress vary by discipline. Check with somebody in your department.
  - The norm for both men and women seems to be outfits that require a jacket.
  - Generally, it is better to be dressed more formally than other candidates than it is to be dressed less formally than other candidates.
  - Wear comfortable clothes and shoes because you may be traveling between different hotels or other locations on foot.
  - Be sure to pack your interview clothes in your carry-on luggage.

### PHONE INTERVIEWS

After sifting through dozens of applications, search committees often invite several candidates to participate in screening interviews on the telephone. The content of a phone interview is much the same as the content of a conference interview. You will need to talk about your research, teaching, and interest in the department. Interviewers will also expect you to have questions for them.

- Advantages of Phone Interviews:
  - You can wear what makes you feel confident.
  - You can sit comfortably.
  - You can have your application materials in front of you and refer to them if necessary.
  - You can take notes.
- Disadvantages of Phone Interviews:
  - You do not get non-verbal feedback so it is often difficult to read how the interviewers are reacting to your answers.
  - Some departments do not have quality telephone systems so there might be an echo or a slight delay, or it may be difficult to hear everybody on the other side of the line.
- General Guidelines:
  - Choose a quiet, interruption-free environment.
  - If you use a wireless phone, make sure it is fully charged and you have good reception.
  - Listen very carefully so you can hear as much as possible on the other end.
  - Learn the names and voices of each interviewer and refer to them by name.
  - Try not to talk over others. Make sure others are done speaking before you speak.
  - Ask for feedback (Does that answer your question? Would you like me to say more?)
  - Remember to keep your answers short.
  - Maintain a strong and steady voice.



- Communicate energy. Smile as you talk.
- Have your materials organized. Avoid rustling through papers when answering questions.
- Videoconferencing/Skype
  - Many departments request to conduct interviews using videoconferencing technology, such as Skype. This allows the search committee members to see you and vice versa so you will be able to read more non-verbal cues than with a phone interview.
  - It's best to use a fast, wired internet connection and a reliable computer.
  - There is usually a time lag so you should pause after you are finished speaking so individuals on the other end have a chance to hear the end of your answers.
  - Try not to move too much because movements are exaggerated on camera.
  - Try to set up the equipment so there is a small box on your screen showing how you are being projected to the search committee.
  - Be aware of what else is in the room behind you.
  - The UW has videoconferencing equipment available for student use in these buildings.
    - Career Center - email [cbasl@uw.edu](mailto:cbasl@uw.edu) if interested in using
    - Kane Hall - <http://www.washington.edu/itconnect/connect/conferencing/>
- Electronic Records
  - Departments sometimes want to create a permanent record of your job interview using an audiotape or videotape. This provides faculty members who are not able to participate in your interview the opportunity to participate in the selection process. Electronic records also allow all faculty members to review select candidates' interviews when making their final hiring decisions.
  - If a search committee asks you if they can record your interview, you should probably allow them to do so unless you have a good reason to deny their request.

### CAMPUS VISITS

Campus visits are usually reserved for the top 1-5 candidates. The campus visit is your opportunity to demonstrate your fit with the department and your opportunity to honestly assess your desire to work at the institution. Campus visits usually last 1-3 days, with the days starting early and ending late.

- Elements:
  - Interviews: Candidates invited for campus visits will sit through traditional job interviews with faculty members. You will be expected to talk about your research and teaching in more detail than during conference or phone interviews. You may meet individually with several different faculty members or meet with several professors at the same time. For more information about preparing for interviews, see the first section of this handout.
  - Presentations: Perhaps the two most important aspects of the campus visit are the job talk and the teaching demonstration. The job talk usually consists of 30-40 minutes of presenting, 20-30 minutes of questions, and an informal reception. The teaching demo may range from you guest-lecturing in a real class to you teaching a topic of your choice to a random group of students and faculty. See separate handouts for more information.
  - Tours: Search committee members often take candidates on a tour of the campus, with a probable stop at the library. They usually accompany candidates on a tour of the town as well. Some departments may even arrange a meeting for you with a real estate agent.
  - Meetings: You will likely meet with the program head, department chair, and/or dean. These individuals will ask about your scholarship and interest in their institution. They will likely talk about their institution in an effort to recruit you. You may also meet with a representative from human resources or the faculty union so you can learn about benefits such as health insurance and pension plans. Try to avoid asking about retirement and salary during these meetings but be prepared to discuss these issues if they arise. You can learn about salary and benefits on a separate handout regarding the negotiation process.



- Meals: Campus visits invariably include multiple meals with various groups. The setting can include nice restaurants, department conference rooms, or faculty members' homes. Usually candidates will have a meal (or meeting) with students, without faculty members present. Students want candidates to talk some about themselves but also express interest in learning about the students and department. Candidates often share a meal with junior faculty; this gives candidates the chance to assess what it is like as an assistant professor in the department. Candidates usually eat with the entire faculty at least once; conversations may focus on your scholarship, departmental information, or professional gossip.
- General Suggestions:
  - Be prepared to offer 10 second and 1, 10, and 30 minute versions of your research.
  - Try to engage people, to develop relationships.
  - Be ready for the unexpected.
  - Be natural, cautious, diplomatic, polite, and energetic throughout your visit.
  - Try not to overindulge (in food or alcohol) at meals or receptions.
  - Always be aware of cues others give you regarding norms and expectations.
  - Be sure to set several alarms so you don't sleep through your appointments.
  - Try not to drink too much liquid throughout the day because you don't want a full bladder distracting you.
- Packing: Be sure to pack all important documents, such as your job talk notes, as well as important clothing items, personal items, and medication in your carry-on luggage. In addition to the normal suitcase contents, consider packing:
  - Professional:
    - Updated copy of CV
    - Cover letter
    - Syllabi from courses you've taught
    - Draft syllabi for proposed courses
    - Teaching philosophy
    - Summary of teaching evaluations
    - Dissertation abstract
    - Dissertation
    - Publications
    - Research plan
    - Job talk saved in at least two electronic formats (jump drive, CD, email, etc.)
    - Job talk transparencies (in case computer doesn't work)
    - Job talk handouts
    - Pad of paper and pens
    - Information about institution / department / position / faculty
  - Personal:
    - Portable high-energy food you can quickly eat between meetings
    - Umbrella and other items for inclement weather
    - Casual clothes for exploring the city on your own
    - Breath mints
    - Watch
    - Alarm



- Travel Arrangements:
  - Try to arrive by afternoon of the day prior to your interview. This will allow you some time to prep, eat a good meal, relax, and sleep.
  - Below are some clarifying questions you should ask.
    - Who is responsible for making the travel arrangements?
    - Who is responsible for paying for the travel arrangements? (usually the dept. pays)
    - What documents do I need to be reimbursed for my expenses?
    - Will somebody pick me up at the airport and transport me during my visit?
    - When will I receive my agenda? Can I have one prior to my arrival?

### THANK YOU NOTES

- Logistics:
  - Within 48 hours of completing your interview, send brief thank you notes or emails to the department chair and other individuals with whom you spent significant time on an individual basis, such as search committee members and deans.
  - It is not necessary to send thank you notes to individuals with whom you only interacted for a few minutes or in a group setting.
- Content:
  - Thank you notes should be concise, sincere, and positive.
  - In your thank you letter, express your appreciation for the interview, confirm your interest in the position, briefly restate the reasons you match well to the position, and provide contact information for following up.
  - If you promised to send additional information such as extra copies of your publications or teaching evaluations, be sure to send them with your thank you notes.
  - If you paid for the trip and will be reimbursed by the department, send your receipts and other necessary documentation with your thank you notes.

### REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- University of California at Berkeley, Career Center - <http://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDhiring.stm>
- The Chronicle of Higher Education – Advice and Vitae Sections
- Vick, J. M., & Furlong, J. S. (2008). *The academic job search handbook (4<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.