

### **WHAT IS A JOB TALK?**

- The job talk is a presentation of your research to prospective employers in academia.
- It can be similar to the dissertation defense and conference presentations.
- Job talks generally occur during campus visits or “fly-backs.”

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?**

- Departments want to learn more about your:
  - Research competencies; past and present research efforts.
  - Research interests; short-term and long-term research plans.
- You need to demonstrate your:
  - Presentation/teaching skills
  - Time-management skills
  - General professionalism
  - Enthusiasm
  - Ability to think on your feet

### **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

- Structure
  - The job talk almost always includes a formal presentation time (usually 20-40 minutes) and a time for questions (usually 20-30 minutes).
  - The formal question and answer session is often followed by a reception or meal, during which candidates may be asked additional questions.
  - Always stick to the time limits given to you by using a watch or other timepiece.
- Audience
  - Audience members can include administrators, faculty members, students, and potential collaborators from the hiring department and related departments.
  - Unless otherwise specified, gear your talk towards intelligent people who are familiar with your general discipline but do not have detailed knowledge about your specialty.
  - Find the balance – discuss sufficient detail so audience members are sure you know what you’re talking about but make sure you’re not going over their heads.
  - Be sure to make eye contact with all audience members.

### **WHAT SHOULD I PRESENT?**

- Topic
  - Job talks for current students or recent graduates are typically on the dissertation or other major projects from graduate school.
  - If you discuss projects that you have worked on with a team, be sure to articulate *your* contribution to the projects.
  - Sometimes schools will request that you present on anything BUT your dissertation.



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- **Content**
  - The audience members will only remember a few key points – don't overwhelm them with minute details, statistics, or lengthy explanations.
  - Figure out what you really want them to remember – then say it in several different ways at several different times throughout your talk.
  - Place your work in a broader context or framework – the big picture.
  - Be sure to address the “so what” question. In other words, explain why your work is important and how it contributes to the field.
  - When appropriate, give examples or anecdotes.
  
- **Organization**
  - Tell the audience what you're going to tell them, then actually tell them, then summarize what you told them.
  - Before you begin, thank audience members for attending your talk.
  - Give an agenda and briefly state why your work is exciting or important.
  - Discuss your past and present research efforts. If you have done several projects, communicate the connection among them.
  - Discuss a few ideas you have for future projects.
  - Consider briefly discussing potential funding avenues and collaborators.
  - Consider discussing how you will involve students in your research and how your research relates to your teaching.
  - Summarize your main points and thank the audience again.
  
- **Style**
  - Be professional, interesting, and animated.
  - Don't try to be someone you're not.
  - Speak clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear.
  - Don't read or rely too heavily on your notes.
  
- **Q & A**
  - Be prepared to answer questions of varying difficulty levels.
  - If somebody asks a question that you do not understand, take a moment to think or ask for clarification.
  - Don't automatically think that a person who asks a question is trying to intimidate you. Instead, be excited that somebody is interested in learning more about your research!
  - Always be respectful in your answers.

## SHOULD I USE VISUAL AIDS?

- Many people feel visual aids (PowerPoint, Prezi, handouts) help them keep on track.
- Using various types of media during your job talk implies you can use media in the classroom.
- If you use equipment, consider the following suggestions.
  - Be sure to reserve any necessary equipment.
  - Use slides sparingly and do not have too many words on each slide.
  - Make sure the slides and handouts look professional & consistent.

- Consider having a few extra slides on hand to show during the discussion section when asked relevant questions.
- Talk to the audience, not the equipment.
- Consider turning off projectors when not in use.
- Finally, if you plan to use computer equipment, take a back-up mode of presentation, such as overhead transparency sheets, in case there is a technical problem.

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE?

- Contact the department that invited you:
  - If you are not clear about what you are expected to present, ask.
  - Anticipated audience (faculty, undergrads, graduate students).
  - Audience familiarity with your topic.
  - Audience size.
  - Room arrangement (lecture style, conference room, lounge, etc).
  - Time of day.
  - Expected length of presentation and Q&A session.
  - Availability of technological equipment.
  - Request a 15-30 minute break before your job talk so you can prepare.
- Contact your home department:
  - What are the norms for job talks in your field?
  - What should you take with you?
  - How should you dress?
  - What information is known about the host department that might help you prepare?
  - What types of questions will likely be asked after the job talk?
- Practice!
  - Because the job talk is so crucial, you should start thinking about your job talk as soon as you submit your applications.
  - Practice multiple times (with different audiences) before the real thing.
  - After each practice talk, have audience members ask difficult questions and give you feedback about the content and style of your presentation.
- Try to attend the job talks of candidates interviewing in various departments at the UW so you have an idea what to expect.