

The Academic Job Interview: Expectations and Guidelines

What Faculty Look for In Potential Colleagues

There's no way to know specifically what a given faculty member looks for when interviewing a potential colleague. It varies tremendously from person to person. Generally speaking, however, most faculty want a colleague who

- Fits in with the current faculty. This means, essentially, someone who has goals and attitudes that are compatible with other members of that faculty. Of course, this also includes general personality. People like to hire someone they would enjoy having around. They don't want someone who's unpleasant to be around, since they may see them daily.
- Has a proven track record. This is an ideal that is not always possible to meet, but if you have teaching experience, have presented papers at conferences, have relevant industry experience, and have published one or more papers, each of these will help you to get an interview. Then, you can expect much of your interview to focus on these items, as faculty members try to determine whether those experiences are valuable and legitimate.
- Is ambitious. Few faculty members want to hire someone who is lazy. The harder you work, the more you will contribute to their program.
- Will stay for several years. Hiring new faculty is a time-consuming and tiring process, so no one wants to hire a person who will leave after only 1 or 2 years. In addition, much of a faculty member's value to a department comes only after a few years experience, so they don't want to lose you before you make your greatest contributions.
- Can excel at *both* teaching and research. Even programs that place greater weight on one than the other tend to want faculty who can do both.
- Is interested in *both* teaching and research. In other words, you don't want to talk about one to the exclusion of the other.
- Is intelligent and adaptable. If another faculty member becomes ill or leaves, it is important to have others who can step in and cover their classes, even if those classes are not in your area of expertise.
- Has depth (particular expertise) as well as breadth (general knowledge of the field). Your depth, typically, is in the area of your dissertation. But you must know more than just that one area (e.g., media). Some faculty members may even ask questions designed to determine whether you have knowledge/interests outside of the field.
- Has a solid education. For example, faculty who are quantitatively oriented may quiz you about statistics and research methods to ensure that you have sufficient expertise in those areas to do publishable research.

A Few Basic Guidelines

- Do as much background research as possible on the institution, department, and faculty conducting your interview. Check the undergraduate catalogue for courses and authors typically taught. Check the school website for learning resources such as library or computing assistance.
- Have sample syllabi prepared in advance (including texts, course outlines, and means of assessment), but do not read aloud from them. You may or may not be asked to distribute syllabi.
- Arrange to rehearse with mock-interviews.
- Be able to describe your research, teaching, and future projects succinctly and engagingly. They will ask general questions, but you should give specific answers.
- Be prepared to answer the same questions over and over again during a day-long interview.
- Sound flexible. (Or, rather, do not sound too specialized/esoteric). Be willing to teach to department needs and student interests, as well as to experiment with various formats (team teaching, computer-assisted learning, etc.).
- If you have the opportunity to give feedback at the end of the interview, do not ask any questions you should have researched already. Use "Do you have any questions for us?" as an opportunity to say a bit more about yourself. (For instance, "I ran a working group on X at Harvard. Do you think there would be any interest in a similar endeavor here?" Or, "I noticed that you have a Humanities/Gender Studies/Teaching and Learning Center here. How involved are department faculty with this outside institute?")

Resources used in compiling this list include

The Chronicle of Higher Education, Chronicle Careers
Mary Dillon Johnson
"The Academic Job Interview Revisited"
<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2004/10/2004101501c.htm>

The University of Georgia, Teaching Assistant Resources
"Job Search"
<http://wwwctl.uga.edu/otaresources/jobsearch.html>

University of Maryland College Park
Department of American Studies, Mary Corbin Sies
"Academic Job Interview Advice"
<http://www.otal.umd.edu/~sies/jobadvice.html>

Michigan State University, University Teaching Assistant Programs
K. M. Johnson
"Talking about Teaching in the Interview"
<http://tap.msu.edu/workshops/2007/oct.htm#101807>

The University of Michigan, Division of Student Affairs
The Career Centre
"Interview Questions – Academic Job Search"
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/Interview_QAcademic_JS.pdf

University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences, Department of English
Michael Gamer and Anne K. Krook
"Job-Interviewing Handout"
<http://www.english.upenn.edu/mgamer/interview.html>

San Francisco State University, Department of Mathematics
Julia Aguirre
"Academic Interview Preparation Resource Document"
<http://math.sfsu.edu/hsu/interviewprep.doc>

The University of Texas at Austin, Trina Segó and Jeff L. Richards
"Ph.D. Interview Preparation Guide for Positions in Academia"
<http://advertising.utexas.edu/JR/InterviewPrep.html>

The University of Western Ontario, Teaching Support Centre
Graduate Career Day Handout October 2007
"Entering the Academic Profession"
http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/future_professor.2007-2008.html?id=79

University of Minnesota Centre for Teaching and Learning, Preparing Future Faculty Retreat Handouts (2001)

Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning Harvard University