

Some Collective Wisdom from The Job Market

*by Political Science Graduate Students
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We don't know how to write a good cover letter. We don't know how to make a good presentation. We can't get you a good job. However, we did all just go on the job market. While your advisor will be your best source of advice about the job market, we hope that getting some inside tips on the mechanics of the process are helpful. Here are some of the things we learned.

Applying

Most of the work involved in applying for jobs is done well before the actual deadline. You should begin thinking about the process at the beginning of the summer. Obviously, getting your writing samples in order is the top priority, but start poking around for jobs, formatting your CV, writing your letter, and asking professors for letters.

1. Where to find jobs:

Most postings are available on APSAnet.org. If you are an APSA member, the posting service is free to search. Log into <http://www.apsanet.org>. At the bottom of the page is a link named "ejobs." It will take you to the search engine. The search engine will allow you to search by multiple criteria, but subfield and region are the two most useful.

- ◆ While APSA places postings in area categories, it is not safe to just look at those categories. Last year, both Yale's and Stanford's postings ended up in the "Other" category. In contrast, UPenn's general postings turned up in both "Other" and subfield specific categories.
- ◆ Once you complete your initial scouring of APSAnet, you will probably have the desire to check back often. APSA's search engine has a useful button entitled, "View all new jobs from the last 2 days." It will show you ALL the postings from the past two days regardless of subfield. There are never more than 12, so it is easy to read them and find jobs under strange headings (such as "Other"). (You can also select "last month" in the standard search process.)
- ◆ Some schools seem to post at the last moment, so it is useful to check the listings frequently. If you hear about a job through the grapevine but don't see it on APSAnet, go to the website of the department in question. NYU had jobs posted on its website two months before APSAnet (and the APSAnet posting appeared only a few days before the deadline).

2. Timing

Jobs begin to be posted on APSAnet in June and July. More schools are pre-interviewing at APSA itself. You should have as many of your materials as possible available before APSA.

- ◆ Give your c.v., your draft cover letter, and at least two dissertation chapters to your letter writers by mid-August [ed. note: two chapters are optimal, but it is possible to go on the market with less. Talk to your advisor]. This gives them time to suggest revisions, and they will have enough time to write specific, detailed letters by early September. You need at least three letter writers, and a few schools require a fourth letter, so you probably want to get four letters right up front. That also lets you mix and match which letters go out to which schools (research versus teaching schools, for example), which Yvette will do for you.

◆ Many faculty members still believe the market doesn't really start up until late October. This is no longer true. Although perhaps a fluke, 2 of us were asked to submit files informally in July. Make sure you have all your materials ready by September 1st at the latest - August 15th if possible - including your letters if at all possible. It starts to get very expensive paying the \$15 express fee for your dossier to be sent from the dossier office. As a guideline, below are the deadlines for the (60+) jobs to which David and Alexandra applied:

o	Sept. 15	13%
o	Oct 1	41%
o	Nov 1	39%
o	Other	7%

◆ The dossier office generally won't send your folder until all of the materials are complete. However, Yvette will tell you whose letters are AWOL, which will let you harass the necessary person. She will also send out an incomplete file upon request.

◆ The price for sending out a dossier is the same whether or not you include a transcript - so you might as well include the transcript, even though not all schools explicitly request it. The only exception would be for rush service, as getting the transcript takes Yvette a couple of days. [Be warned: the box you need to check for a transcript is very, very small. Look out for it on the form.]

◆ The job market lasts until the late spring. Some schools do not begin interviewing until after most schools have made offers. So don't lose hope and continue to check APSAnet.org through January or even later, particularly for one-year positions.

3. The Packet:

You will be sending off a packet containing a letter of introduction, a curriculum vitae, and one or two writing samples. Some schools will also ask for a statement of teaching philosophy or a syllabus or student evaluations. More rarely, a school will specify that they do not want to see writing samples, or that they want only a single short sample. The dossier office will send off packets including only your transcript and letters of recommendation. The cover letter should not exceed three pages, and one full page is likely sufficient. You may wish to have two or three cover letter templates for different types of schools, especially if you're applying for jobs in more than one subfield (both comparative and IR, for example). Traditionally, C.V.'s are supposed to include only the basics - education, dissertation title and committee, publications, presentations, research and teaching specialties. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that including university and department service, any kinds of workshops or special training (ICPSR methods courses, e.g.), honors, and other "padding" may help. While the dossier office is fairly reliable, glitches can happen. For anything complicated or last minute it is best to work with Yvette, who is very reliable and knowledgeable.

◆ While the career service office provides useful advice, most of the workshops are scheduled too late for political science graduate students to take advantage of them (other departments tend to start the application process later). Mary Johnson has said that she would be happy to have department specific events, but students need to ask her (or get the department to ask her).

◆ You can buy departmental stationery for the cover letter from the department's front desk (a.k.a. Alice). If Alice is gone for some reason, Sandy Nuhn in the business office can also sell you stationery.

◆ Writing an interesting cover letter about yourself is harder than you might imagine. Make sure you give yourself time to show the letter to people. In fact, other people may be able to better phrase your cover letter than you can unless bragging about your achievements comes naturally to you. Some professors have copies of letters that they think are convincing. You may want to look at these letters and use them as a template. The Academic Job Search Handbook has some template cover letters and C.V.'s that may be useful, along with plenty of other advice.

◆ You should figure out which professors you would like to write letters on your behalf and ask them early in the summer. Asking early makes it more likely that your letters will be available for the first set of deadlines and makes tardy faculty members all the more guilt ridden.



Be sure to remind faculty members about the letters periodically until Yvette says they are in. If you are worried about the content of your letters of recommendation, consult with the department chair. He can request and read over the letters and tell you if you should get additional letters or if any of your letters should not be sent out.

- ◆ You should be nice to Yvette in the dossier office (it's in HGS). First of all, she is very friendly and actually does care about you getting a job. Second, she can provide useful information about the status of your dossier. Third, when you really need her in a pinch, she tends to come up trumps (like sending out a dossier on the last afternoon before Winter Break).
- ◆ For peace of mind, it really is worth paying the extra 50 cents for tracking by the US postal service. Many schools are very slow to let you know that they have received your package, and some will never notify you at all.

4. A Professional Website

While not necessary (and sadly not sufficient) to the job process, a professional website can be very helpful to the process. Most committees don't wish to be overwhelmed by paper and yet individuals frequently want more information about your work. A website allows you to provide easy access to articles and working papers not provided in the packet.

- ◆ All graduate students have access to a website address (generally your net id tacked on to the address <http://pantheon.yale.edu/~>). The Student Computer web pages can offer advice on setting up a website: <http://pantheon.yale.edu/help/>
- ◆ Ask Thomas Hallihan or the current department website manager to create a link in the graduate student directory to your website.
- ◆ If you keep the website basic (one page with links to papers), creating one takes only a few hours and can save time sending files in the long run.

Interviews

The interview process typically begins with a telephone call from the chair of the search committee letting you know that the school would like to bring you in for an interview. [If the chair calls to ask for additional information, you should take this as a good sign. At least someone on the committee is seriously looking at your file.] For one of us, in two cases an initial interview invitation was rescinded a few days later for no apparent reason. Retractions can happen, so don't take it personally if it happens to you. Interviews can last from one to three days in length. Most interviews have the following components:

1. *Job talk* - You present an example of your work for 30-45 minutes and field questions for 30-45 minutes. Be sure to practice your job talk many, many times. Don't worry about being flat if you practice it too much. You will always have a surge of adrenaline at the school once you get there. Go to the job talks at Yale to see how people organize and conduct their talks. You can pick up a lot of tricks to employ (and avoid).
2. *Short interviews with individual faculty members* - These interviews can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour and be held with people both within and outside your subfield. A typical pattern is that junior faculty try to sell the school to you, while senior faculty seem to have the most power in whether you get the job or not. Don't place too much trust in the friendliness and informality of junior faculty; the senior faculty are your real targets - keep them in your sights.
3. *Meeting with an administrator* - The administration doesn't want to hire anyone with severe and obvious defects, which is the primary purpose of this meeting - though you should be prepared for questions about the purpose/educational mission of the school, if relevant. In general, this meeting is relatively low-stress. It can be a useful way to find out more about university policies on salary, benefits, etc., although it's probably not a good idea to bring those up if your interviewer does not.



4. *Dinner with members of the department* - A chance to see how you behave yourself in a social setting. So behave yourself! Don't gossip, drink too much alcohol, etc., even if everyone else is. Sometimes this is a purely casual affair; other times, candidates are asked questions about their research, colleagues' work, department politics, etc., so be prepared.

5. *Class Lecture (only some schools)* - Some schools (usually liberal arts colleges) will ask you to teach a class. Ask about the format, e.g. length of the class, number of students, title of the course, topic of lecture, etc. For some schools, the lecture is just as important as the presentation of research. Practice as much as you can.

6. *Meeting with graduate students* - This can be quite a strange experience at first since they obviously look at you as potential faculty rather than a fellow grad student. These are not high stress meetings but be prepared for questions regarding which graduate courses you plan to teach etc.

A Few Job Talk Tips:

- ◆ When you set up the interview, ask for the format of the talk, and confirm that you will be able to use an overhead or powerpoint.
- ◆ Practice, practice, practice. Naomi delivered and then substantially revised her talk four times before it finally became presentable for a real interview. Practice with your overheads so that the timing is right. Practice slowing down and speaking emphatically during key points. Practice not standing in front of your projected slides. If applicable, practice with using a laser pointer.
- ◆ If you think the font size on your slides is big enough, make it bigger. Don't cheat by ramming text up to the margins. Many schools still provide old-fashioned "square" projection screens.
- ◆ Bring water.
- ◆ Most schools will give you about 20 minutes before the talk to "prepare." Use this time to freshen up, take deep breaths, and make sure your papers and overheads are in order.
- ◆ Turn off your cell phone.
- ◆ Q & A is the most important part. Do not relax after your talk; the real interview begins when your scripted talk ends.
- ◆ Treat each question as a separate interview. Many people ask long-winded questions and 3-part questions. It is okay to take notes; this will help you remember everything, and it conveys that you are taking the question seriously.
- ◆ Don't be dismissive of questions. Devote time and thought (even if you think you have the answer pat). Say why you think it is a good question (asked often, your next research project, captures the crux of your argument, etc)
- ◆ Detail slides that have been cut from your presentation can be useful during Q&A.
- ◆ For your own purposes, start building a list of frequently asked questions and practice answering them. If someone asked a question in your practice job talk, it will probably come up again and again.
- ◆ Remember that you don't necessarily need a finalized answer; most people just want to see you think. If you are in the process of solving the part of the puzzle they raise, say so and describe how you are approaching it.
- ◆ Avoid jokes, unless you're a comic genius, in which case you should joke very, very infrequently.



The most basic piece of advice for all of these components, "Relax and be yourself." You know more about your topic than any interviewer, and most people are trying to get a sense of whether you'll make a "good colleague." What follows below are a few minor details to keep in mind while preparing for your interviews.

1. Take an umbrella. If you question this advice, talk to David about how he felt interviewing with standing water in his shoes and a shirt ready for Spring Break at Daytona Beach.
2. Bring easily portable food. Nearly all of us have stories about not being fed for one reason or another.
3. Wear clothes that you feel comfortable in, both physically and mentally. You can go a week wearing pretty much the same two days of clothing - you better like it and think you look good in it. You will spend a large portion of the day on your feet- it is not the best idea to try out new shoes or go for challenging high heels. Also, you frequently don't have time to change from the plane to interviewing, so you want something you can sit on a plane in and still look okay. Wear interview-appropriate clothing on the airplane! Baggage does get delayed or lost - especially if you're flying USAir between New Haven and Philadelphia. This happened to Jason not once, but twice.
4. Drink decaf. If you are not careful, by the end of the day you can have been offered 8 cups of coffee and, as a consequence, may start sounding like one of the chipmunks.
5. Bring a pharmacy of all potential medicines you might need. Remember aspirin, cough drops, tums and anything else for a nervous stomach. Remember Kleenex and breath mints too.
6. Take bathroom breaks. Really. The bathroom is a time to freshen up, collect your thoughts, or briefly review a description of the next person who is interviewing you. Job interviews start as early as 7:30am and continue until after dinner, sometimes as late as 11:00pm. Little bathroom breaks help you to re-focus during the long day.
7. Limit your alcohol consumption at dinner! Your dinner partners will likely order wine and maybe even cocktails and scotch, but you don't have to drink and you should not have more than one. Dinner can be fun, but it is still a job interview and you should keep your wits about you.
8. If you ask, most departments will provide you the schedule of interviews in advance. However, the schedule is often finalized only at the last moment and is usually sent a day or two at the most prior to your interview. Even then you can expect frequent last minute changes, so make sure that you are at least familiar with the names of all the people you could reasonably be asked to meet. Try to get as much information from your advisors or even other people who have interviewed there.
9. Questions to prepare for:
 - ◆ Describe your dissertation in two minutes. You will get very good at summarizing your work by the end of the job hunt.
 - ◆ What course ideas do you have? "I want to teach intro classes" is an answer most departments like to hear. If you have a statistics background, offering to teach statistics or research methods can win points. However, most people asking this question probably want a little more in terms of structure or content. It might also serve as an opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to teaching with your stellar class ideas. Research departments might ask you to list courses you'd like to teach, but liberal arts schools might ask more detailed questions about particular readings you'd assign.
 - ◆ What is your next research project? At the very least, you should have prepared a convincing lie.



- ◆ What is your research agenda? A slightly grander vision is required here. Tie your dissertation into some broad theme.
- ◆ What resources do you need for your future research? We wouldn't recommend describing these unless you are actually asked.
- ◆ What worries do you have about moving to the location of this school? At this point, you should have decided (with the help of your advisors) whether you want to bring up spouses/partners etc. Departments can't ask, and most don't. On the other hand, if you don't say anything, departments will have a harder time finding solutions. People have different strategies for dealing with matters like spouses. You should at least have planned what yours will be before facing this question.
- ◆ How will you contribute to the ethos of the particular institution?
- ◆ What questions do you have remaining? By the end of a day of interviews and delivering your job talk, this may well be your least favorite question.
- ◆ What should I know about you that is not on your CV?
- ◆ If anyone asks you for gossip at Yale or anywhere else, be very careful what you say.

10. Questions you may want to ask (in general, you should ask anything that you would like to know about - don't be shy):

- a. What type of work is expected for tenure (the books versus article debate)?
- b. What is the tenure rate for junior faculty? If nothing else, it is fun to watch people torture statistics to make it sound not quite as bad.
- c. How collegial is the department? What are the main schisms if any in the department? How would they affect my research? Are there examples of co-authored papers within the department? Do you seek advice on working papers from within the department or primarily from outside sources? What kind of field series, working groups exist within the department or university? (Asking for a comparison with other places seems to make getting answers easier.)
- d. How much support does the department receive from the university when compared with other departments? Will the department be expanded or contracted and in what areas?
- e. How strong, if they exist at all, are the institutional links between other departments/institutions of interest for your research?
- f. What are the internal funding opportunities? Is there help for getting external funding? The schools that have such resources tend to advertise them. If you are not hearing anything, all the more reason to ask.
- g. How often do faculty receive sabbaticals?
- h. What is the quality of research related facilities available to the faculty? (libraries, stat-labs etc.)
- i. What is the teaching load? How is it divided (undergraduate vs. graduate, seminars, lectures etc.)
- j. What tasks are junior faculty expected to take on within the department?

11. If you are expecting to make a powerpoint presentation from your computer, bring overheads and the presentation on a disk as back up. Also, utilize the any preparation time they give you to set up the equipment. In Alexandra's case, her powerpoint presentation only worked in 2 of 7 attempts. It is helpful if you send yourself and the administrative assistant in charge of your visit a copy of your file in advance. [Warning: make sure to cut our "extraneous material" such as notes to your self in the "notes" section, as you run the risk that this file will be distributed, for example to people not present at the talk.]

12. As we all know from being graduate students, we can be very useful sources of information. If for no other reason (although I can think of many), be nice to the other graduate students you meet. Seemingly, job candidates often aren't. They can tell you just how many other people



were invited in; whether you are a real candidate or just there to placate somebody, who is on the committee; whether you can expect any odd behavior from your job talk audience; whether there are standard questions you will be expected to answer, etc. Also, graduate students have an important voice in the hiring process at some schools (or, at least serve as a valuable source of information to the search committee).

13. Not all schools will pay up front for your travel expenses (at least the flights and taxis) and reimbursement can take up to two months. You should try to make sure you have some cash on hand before heading onto the job market - particularly since the job application process itself can cost several hundred dollars in copying, printing, postage, and other fees.

14. Say thank you. Say thank you after the one-on-one interviews, say thank you to the chair, thank the administrator who organized your trip, thank the grad student who organized your meetings with students. After the interview, it is appropriate to send short, professional thank you e-mails to a few key people, including the chair of the search committee.

15. Now comes the 'fun' part- waiting to hear the verdict. Most departments are quite humane and would do their best to set a clear timetable and provide you with a prompt decision. Some, however, can take months before they bother contacting you again, other may not contact you at all. Your advisors are likely to be the best source of information regarding your job prospects, especially if they have friends at the interviewing institution. If you have more than one interview you can try to get information regarding your performance on your first interview through the faculty 'grapevine' (you will be surprised how amazingly well this grapevine works) in order to be better prepared for future interviews.

Miscellaneous

1. Keep faculty and the DGS's assistant up to date on where you are interviewing. Information cascades occur in academic markets as much as in stock markets; some schools take other schools; interview decisions as a signal of quality or at least marketability. However, you may wish to talk to your advisor about how much you should publicize actual offers. A few schools may shy away from interviewing or making offers to candidates who they deem to already have "better offers." If you think this going to be an issue, you might consider calling to reaffirm to the committee your desire to live in say Kennesaw, GA regardless of your offer at Harvard (however, you better be prepared to follow through.)

2. The job market process is extremely stressful. Don't get down on yourself. Your getting a job depends upon the quality of your work, the quality of your competition, which schools are hiring, who is on the committee, how the politics of the committee play out, and whether the funding really is available. Since you can only control one small part of that equation, don't worry about the others, and don't take anything in the process personally. If nothing else, take solace in the fact that many, many graduate students - including some who have since become famous tenured faculty members at prestigious universities - have suffered through the job market as well.

3. The job market process is extremely time-consuming. Even if you don't spend your time traveling from interview to interview, you will find yourself struggling to get work done and obsessing about the job market anyway. It happens to everyone. Try to set aside a firm amount of time that you will force yourself to read, write, and generally engage in scholarly activity.

4. Some aspects of the job market process can actually be fun. Talking to people outside of your department about your dissertation can be invigorating and helpful. The benefit of all that dissertation research is that you actually do know something and can talk about with people who find the subject interesting. Seeing different campuses and departments is also interesting.



5. Have a back-up plan. In the event that you do not get a job at the end of the process, you should be thinking in advance of what other options you have. Can you teach or TA at your home institution for a year? Are there other universities or colleges nearby where you could teach for a year? Are post-doc fellowships available? Prepare for a search for one-year jobs in the spring, if necessary. Also, don't dismiss non-academic options. A Ph.D. from Yale can open more doors than you might think, and you might be much happier working in the "real world," with greater flexibility in location and free weekends too.

6. Since the market has been very tight for a few years it has forced many PhD's to opt for a post-doc or temporary jobs. This means that there are many people with completed dissertations, more publications etc. on the market. If you decide to look for a post-doc be sure to check for the relevant deadlines. Many post-docs close their application process in December and January. At this stage you might be still focused on the job market and you might easily miss these deadlines. Basically, you need to apply for most post-docs before you know the outcome of your job search.

7. Outside sources: there are a variety of outside books and articles you can and should draw upon in developing your job search strategy and application materials. Check APSA's webpage and the McDougal career center. Daniel Drezner's essay "So You Want To Get a Tenure-Track Job" (PS, 9/1998, also available on APSA webpage) is a particularly useful (if harsh) essay on the job search process. The Academic Job Search Handbook is a useful general introduction, although political science process has some unique peculiarities.

8. Finally, it is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the role of your advisors. It would be fair to say that a significant percentage of our interviews were in departments where our advisors had some close contacts. As great as your research may be, you can almost always benefit from a timely placed phone call or e-mail sent by your advisor to a hiring department. By the way, if you do find the perfect answer as to how to get your advisors to make more phone calls on your behalf, send us an e-mail - we will be happy to learn the trick.

Good Luck.

