

### Answers to Placement Questions

#### **A. When do I start to think about the job application process?**

**You should begin to think about the job application process at least by the time you begin your second year of coursework!** This does not mean you should start applying for jobs at that point – in today’s job market you are not likely to be hired unless you have either finished your dissertation or are close to completion. However, the decisions you make in your graduate career early on can affect your ability to find the type of job you prefer later. For example, it is important to share your work with faculty who can later serve as letter writers. Prior to the year that you are applying for jobs, you should think about what types of writing samples you will need to include in job applications and teaching materials that would be useful. This type of preparation in earlier years can be time-saving and valuable when you are on the job market. The Placement Director and/or your adviser can help you with this preparation.

#### **B. How do I choose which jobs to apply for?**

Of course the primary considerations in choosing which jobs to apply for are your own preferences (geographic, type of job, type of institution) and your qualifications. In some cases, you may be uncertain whether your qualifications fit the job ad or much about the institution advertising. For example, the ad may say that the employer is primarily interested in applicants with fields in International Political Economy and you have a field in International Relations with some exposure to IPE. Should you apply for the job? In these and other situations, your thesis adviser and/or the Placement Director can give you helpful advice and recommendations.

#### **C. What should be included in my letter of application?**

The letter of application should mention the following:

1. Position you are applying for, i.e. “I request to be considered for the Assistant Professor position in International Relations in your department, etc.”
2. Whether your placement materials are included or will be sent separately your department and, if so, that they should contact you if these have not been received.
3. Your fields, thesis adviser, and dissertation topic (a brief abstract may be summarized within the letter).
4. When you expect to finish your PhD or completion date.
5. Any special reasons why the position’s advertisement particularly suits you.
6. Any particularly outstanding publications or conference papers that highlight your work.
7. Contact information (phone number and email address).
8. Reference to your department’s placement website and any other web information you have.
9. Keep the letter short, concise, and interesting.
10. **Please have your thesis adviser and the placement director read your letters of application to see if they have any suggested revisions or changes.**

#### **D. What goes in a cover letter for my teaching evaluations?**

It is important to not just send out teaching evaluations without explanation. Discuss how evaluations are calculated at your university (i.e. the rating scale) and note that certain types of questions are standard or required. Discuss how your evaluations demonstrate your ability to teach. You should also include other materials related to your teaching – syllabi you have written for courses, web page addresses for course web pages you have designed, teaching philosophies and goals. **Again, please have your thesis adviser and the placement director read your cover letter for advice and feedback.**

#### **E. How should I construct my vita?**

Vitas should be short and clear. It is important that readers can easily pick out publications and research project descriptions. **Keep your vita concise. “Padding” your vita will undermine your credibility as a candidate. It is a good idea to have your thesis adviser and the placement director read a draft of your vita.**

1. Address
2. Education (including dissertation title, dissertation advisers, expected completion date, three to four sentence description)
3. Awards and fellowships
4. Published Research and Work Under Review for Publication (List any academic refereed publications first. Non-refereed academic publications should come second and be separated from refereed publications. Non-academic publications can be listed elsewhere at the end of the vitae. If you have a question as to which category applies, ask your advisers or the Placement Director. If a paper is under review for the first time at a journal, some also put the journal where the paper is under review. However, this practice is often criticized as misleading – implying a publication that does not yet exist – so be aware that doing so may penalize you in some readers opinion. If you have received a revise and resubmit on a paper, however, do not hesitate to mention that journal x has requested that you revise and resubmit the paper. You can state something like “this paper is being revised as requested by x” or “as requested, a revised version is currently under review at journal x”)
5. Conference papers (here be careful that you do not look like you are presenting lots of papers that never go anywhere – it is better to omit conference papers that have no chance of making it into publication than to look like someone with little coherence – goal is to show that you attend conferences and present but that your research has progression as well).
6. List of references.
7. You should use a font and format style that is both easy to read and professional looking (remember that Professors are older!).

#### **F. How do I select people to write letters of reference?**

1. You should have a minimum of three letters of reference from faculty members who are familiar with your research and educational background. Ideally, these should be members of your committee and should include your adviser. If your adviser or members of your committee do not write for you, potential employers will note this and it will undermine your credibility. You may also ask for additional references from faculty who have supervised your teaching but who are less familiar with your research.
2. Select the faculty members who you would like to write for you and ask them individually if they are willing to write you a reference. Provide them with an up to date CV and samples of your writing. The faculty members will provide the letters to Cyndi Christensen, the Placement Secretary.
3. You should ask letter writers if they would like to see where you are applying before your materials are sent out. Letter writers may have contacts at some universities and may want to contact the potential employers by phone, email, or an additional letter. If your letter writers want advance notice of where you are applying, you need to recognize that this means getting them the list of names **in time for them to give you feedback**. If this is the case, a good way to do this is to send via email the list of jobs you want to apply for with information about when you need to have your application in the mail. You should begin discussing where you wish to apply when the ads come out – **not** the day you are ready for your applications to be mailed.

**G. How do I select writing samples to include in my file?**

Ideally your writing samples should include chapters from your dissertation. **Make sure you discuss with your adviser whether the chapters are ready for “prime time.”** Other writing samples to include are papers that are ready or close to ready for submission to journals or have been presented successfully at conferences. Always include a copy of any single-authored published work you may have. **Again, discuss which papers best show your work with your adviser before including them.**

**H. How do I construct a statement of research and teaching interests?**

Again, such a statement should be short and concise – highlighting where your research is headed in the future and the courses you are most interested in teaching. However, it is important not to appear too narrow. For example, even the most high powered research departments will want to hire individuals who are willing to teach undergraduates and to teach courses that are in high demand (the core undergraduate classes in the standard fields). Departments in smaller universities have need for faculty with diverse fields who can teach a wide variety of courses. Flexibility is a good trait.

**M. What else do I need to do to help improve my ability to get a job?**

When you are interviewed you will probably be asked to give a “job talk” to the interviewing department and may also be asked to guest lecture in a class. One extremely good way to observe how job talks are conducted is to make a practice of regularly attending the job talks of candidates who are being considered for appointments in your own department. You can gain substantial information about the placement process by participating in your university’s interviewing through attending the talks and meeting with the candidates. **It is even more important to gain practice with job talks and guest lectures before going on job interviews.** You should also ask faculty members who teach courses that you are interested in teaching if you could give guest lectures in their classes.

**Questions to Ask on Job Interviews  
(courtesy of Denise Powers and UNC)**

**Questions to be asked of any Faculty Members at the institution where you are visiting:**

Ask about Department politics:

- Governance structure
- General state
- Factions
- Issues
- General “Culture” questions – formal/casual, open door availability, co-authoring with other faculty & grad students, etc.

Ask about Department and university facilities and resources:

- Secretarial
- Copying
- Library – main & department
- Computers (servers, PCs, printing, consultants, software available for research & teaching)
- Travel money
- Summer money (is it teaching only? is it automatic or competitive?)
- Seed & small grants (summer & during regular year? for equipment, RAs, etc.?)
- Telephone

- Recreational/entertainment
- Audio-visual equipment and supplies
- Strengths & weaknesses of department & university in facilitating research
- Availability of RAs and TAs? How often? How do you get them?
- What overhead costs are included in any annual budget?

Ask about Department & university history & criteria regarding tenure & promotion:

- Expectations regarding research
- Expectations regarding teaching
- Expectations regarding service
- How serious are early reviews (3<sup>rd</sup> year, for example) treated – are contracts terminated early?

Ask about Department workload:

- Course load (graduate v. undergraduate)
- Course size (does everyone have to teach large lectures?)
- Do you have control over teaching assignments?
- Committee service
- Student advising (graduate & undergraduate)

As about their Research and teaching interests: (if you have done your home work, you will have gotten a list of faculty in the department and will already have looked up their more recent publications)

- What are they working on
- What do they plan to work on in the near future
- What are they teaching
- Do they get to teach what they want?

Financial health of the department, college, university

City and community

- Housing, neighborhoods, costs
- General cost of living
- Recreational & entertainment
- Public transportation
- Local politics & orientation
- Schools

**Questions to ask of Junior faculty members only:**

Relations with senior faculty

Fairness of evaluations and raises

Tenure and promotion process

Cooperation and competition among junior faculty

Any special benefits for new faculty when they came

- Course reductions & negotiation of substance
- Additional travel money

- Service load reductions
- Moving costs and/or extra salary
- PCs and other equipment (be specific about what you need & want)
- Purchasing allowance at library (journals, books, foreign language material, electronic resources – JSTOR, archives)

**Questions to ask of the Department Chair:**

Department politics

- Governance structure (get this out of the way first, are decisions decentralized? What committees exist? What are the chair's powers? Is there an associate chair? Who is DGS? DUS?)
- General state
- Factions and issues

Position of the department in the college and university

Position of the college in the university

Salary and other benefits (also ask this of the dean)

Course load (graduate versus undergraduate)

Service load (comprehensive exam committees, department committees, search committees, college or university responsibilities)

Evaluation process, contract renewal

Tenure and promotion process, criteria, history (some places have written policies, get them)

Junior sabbatical (what year? how long? competitive or automatic?)

Any special benefits for new faculty

- Course reductions
- Service load reductions
- Moving costs and/or extra salary
- PCs and other equipment
- TA and RA assignments

What things stop tenure clocks? paid leaves (off-site sabbaticals such as at overseas institutions or Brookings)?, unpaid leaves?, pregnancy?

Department and university facilities and resources

- Travel money
- Seed money and small grants
- Strengths and weaknesses of department and university in facilitating research

Financial health of the department, college, and university

Time frame and process on making decisions about job offers (theirs and yours)

**Questions to ask of a Dean or other administrator:**

Position of the department in the college and university

Position of the college in the university

Department politics

Evaluation process, contract renewal

Tenure and promotion process, criteria, and history (department and college, especially if there have been arguments with the department)

Department and university facilities and resources

- Travel money

- Seed and small grants

- Strengths and weaknesses of department and university in facilitating research

Financial health of department, college, and university

**Questions to ask of Graduate students:**

Who are their advisers? (check for clumping or other dysfunctional patterns)

What do they do? (i.e. research)

Relations with faculty?

What do they like/dislike about program?

What sorts of courses have been offered during their time there? What would they like to see offered?

How many people have placed and where?

What are they looking for in a faculty member?

**Questions to ask of Undergraduate students:**

Are they doing senior theses? What are they doing?

What are they looking for in a teacher?

**Questions You Might Be Asked on Job Interviews**

Who do you work with, who is your adviser? What does this person do?

Your research

- Dissertation

- Other projects

- Publications and presentations (details, do you intend to follow up on these?)

Future plans for research and grants  
What would you like to accomplish in the next 5-10 years?

Your teaching

What have you taught?  
What would you like to teach? (be careful about making commitments)  
How would you teach a course on x?  
What book(s) would you use?

Questions about Iowa: faculty, graduate program, politics, gossip (be careful not to be tempted into discussing gossip too much as this can make you look less professional and you may not know much about the person asking)

Local (i.e. departmental) political issues (which faction would you fit into?)

Where else have you applied? Where else do you have interviews?

I missed (or will miss) your job talk, would you summarize it for me?

What can I tell you about the department/university/community? (have questions ready for your specific needs/interests)

What bad things (or good things) have you heard about our department?

If we offered you a job how likely do you think it is that you would accept it?

Illegal questions (marital/partner status, sexual preference, religion, etc.)

**Questions You May Be Asked at Short Interviews at Professional Meetings (like APSA, the Midwest)**

Who do you work with, who is your adviser? What does this person do?

Your research

Dissertation (be prepared to summarize it in a few sentences that make it sound interesting and exciting as well as important)

Other projects

Publications and presentations (details, do you intend to follow up on these?)

Future plans for research and grants

What would you like to accomplish in the next 5-10 years?

Your teaching

What have you taught?  
What would you like to teach? (be careful about making commitments)  
How would you teach a course on x?  
What book(s) would you use?

Given the limited amount of time, the other questions such as the following are less likely, but given that there is a wide variation in what people do, don't be surprised if you hear the following questions:

Questions about Iowa: faculty, graduate program, politics, gossip (be careful not to be tempted into discussing gossip too much as this can make you look less professional and you may not know much about the person asking)

Local (i.e. departmental) political issues (which faction would you fit into?)

Where else have you applied? Where else do you have interviews?

What can I tell you about the department/university/community? (have questions ready for your specific needs/interests)

What bad things (or good things) have you heard about our department?

If we offered you a job how likely do you think it is that you would accept it?

Illegal questions (marital/partner status, sexual preference, religion, etc.)

### **Questions You Should Be Prepared to Ask at Short Interviews at Professional Meetings Such as APSA or the Midwest**

Again, I suspect there won't be a lot of time to ask much. You want to learn about the department but you also want to concentrate more on making a good impression at this point. That is, I would not ask the kind of social or lifestyle type questions that you might ask if the interviewing process was more serious. You want to come across as someone who is interested in working with them and finding out about the department in terms of work aspects first. This is of course my opinion, but first impressions can affect whether you can to the point of actually deciding whether you want to live in the locality or not. It is important to treat these sorts of preliminary talks as serious and work related -- I have been around with interviewers after such meetings when they met a candidate that appeared too casual, too lax, too uninterested in the work aspects of the job -- they were not impressed.

Here are some of the questions I would concentrate on in these sort of short interviews:

Strengths & weaknesses of department & university in facilitating research

Ask about Department & university history & criteria regarding tenure & promotion:

Expectations regarding research

Expectations regarding teaching

Expectations regarding service

How serious are early reviews (3rd year, for example) treated - are contracts terminated early?

Ask about Department workload:

Course load (graduate v. undergraduate)

Course size (does everyone have to teach large lectures?)

Do you have control over teaching assignments?

Committee service

Student advising (graduate & undergraduate)

As about their Research and teaching interests: (if you know in advance you are going to meet with someone from a particular school, do some research now before going to the meeting -- a lot can be learned on the web)

What are they working on  
What do they plan to work on in the near future  
What are they teaching  
Do they get to teach what they want?

Financial health of the department, college, university

Position of the department in the college and university

Position of the college in the university

I would not ask about salary at this point -- let them bring it up -- I think this is too early but they may want to tell you.

Time frame and process on making decisions about further interviews -- their schedule after the meetings.