Making the Shortlist — Crushing the Interview: Keys to securing your first academic position

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Presenters

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Workshop Objectives:

- To empower participants with the knowledge, skills and best practices needed to navigate the academic interview process from start to finish.

- Topics to be covered include:
  - Preparing an application that can help you make the short list
  - Preparing for the in-person interview
  - Effective post-interview follow-up including how to respond to the offer

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Workshop Organization

- 1. **Making the shortlist:**
  - 1a. Preparing accurate and informative *curriculum vitae* (CV)
  - 1b. Preparing a research statement that informs and inspires
  - 1c. Preparing a compelling teaching statement
  - 1d. Preparing a diversity statement
  - 1e. Preparing an effective cover letter
  - 1f. Securing letters of recommendation
- 2. **The interview process:**
  - 2a. Interview styles by discipline
  - 2b "0" (the Skype interview)
  - 2c. Preparing for the demands and expectations of the interview
  - 2d. Interview "1" (the first in-person interview)
  - 2e. Interview "2" (the call-back, in-person interview)
- 3. **Follow-up and response to the offer:**
  - 3a. The courtesy letter
  - 3b. The rejection letter
  - 3c. The offer
  - 3d. Conclusion

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1. Making the shortlist!

1a. Prepare an accurate and informative curriculum vitae (CV)

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1a. Preparing an accurate and informative CV

- Your curriculum vitae **is the story of your professional life**

- Shows the search committee (SC):
  - Your educational history
    - if appropriate, the title of your Ph.D. thesis
  - Where your research was done
  - Your mentors
  - The titles of your various research projects
  - Your papers and presentations
  - A very brief summary of your research
  - Teaching experience
    - Indicate institutions, dates, courses, level of responsibility, class size, your vision
  - Awards, scholarships/fellowships, research funding
  - Names of 2-5 references (academics who know you well)
- The CV is ***not*** a resume or research statement.

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1a. Preparing the CV and Web-based Content

- Make it easy for the SC to review your CV

- For most SCs, your **list of publications is key**

- Identify or sort your publications as follows
  - High impact articles vs. lower impact articles
  - Primary research vs. review articles
  - Peer review vs. non-peer reviewed articles
  - Listing articles in reverse chronology is helpful but not mandatory
  - Importance of having a Personal Research Website
  - Importance of being on Google Scholar, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, etc.

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1a: SC members are looking for –

- Relevant skills and qualifications for the job

- Accomplishments appropriate for your career stage
  - Explain any career changes & time spent off the academic path

- Teaching experience, preferably across a wide range

- Diversity statement

- Recognition for your contribution to your field

- Good publication record
  - Evidence that you will continue to make contributions to the field?

- Success in obtaining funding

- First impressions matter!
  - Committees see many CVs and may only spend a few minute on yours
  - Make your CV accurate, easy to read and error free

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1b. The Research Statement

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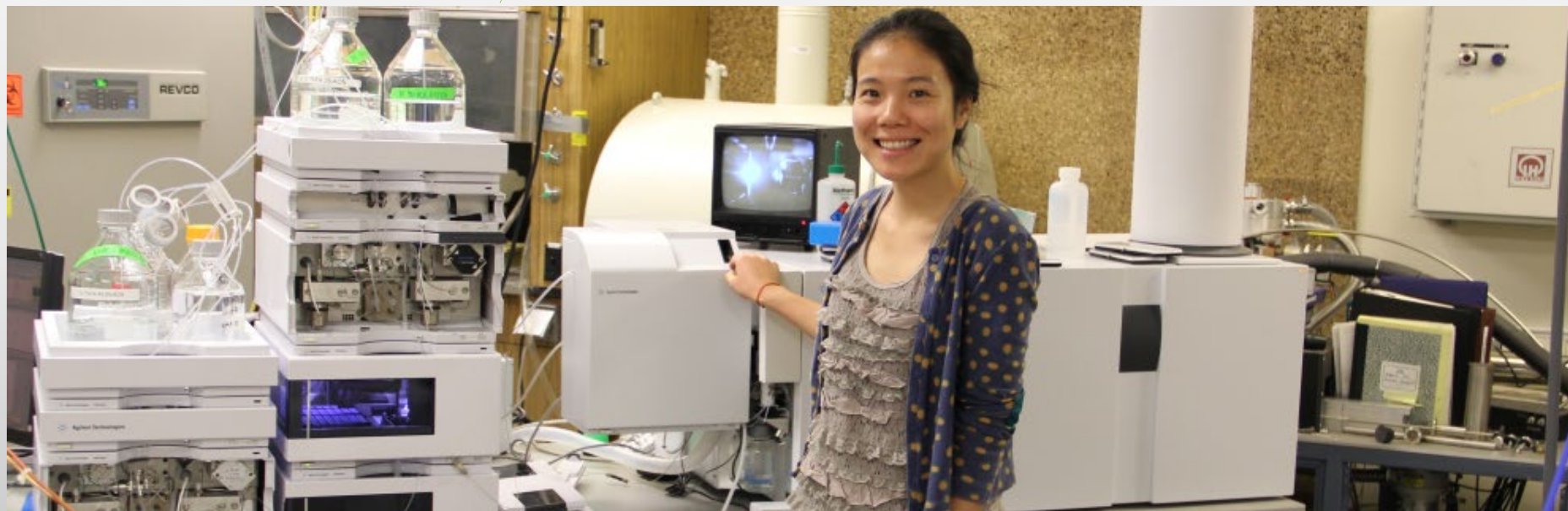
1b. The Research Statement

- Purpose:
  - to guide the SC through the evolution of your research,
  - to highlight your research accomplishments,
  - to show where your research will be taking you next (your vision)

- How will you, your research, your teaching benefit the institution to which you're applying.
  - Discuss grants you have obtained or expect to pursue
  - Department Faculty:
    - Know who's in the department and who may be a potential collaborator
  - How will you involve students in your research

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1b. Research Statement Questions

1. What got you interested in this line of research?

2. What burning question are you trying to answer?

3. What challenges did you encounter along the way, and how did you overcome them?

4. Why is your research important to your field?

5. How can your research be applied to solve larger societal or global problems?

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The Research Statement: Three Things Search Committees (SC) like to see.

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Research Statement: 3 things SC like to see!

1. Summary:
   - SCs are often overwhelmed with 100's of applications
   - Engage the interest of the SC quickly.
   - Start with a brief summary, key bullet points (like a grant proposal).
     - This helps your SC advocate to champion your application at SC meetings.
2. Paint a clear picture of what you have done *and* what you will do over the next 5-10 years.
   - Your plan must fit with the immediate and long-range research needs of the department or college, as stated in the job description
3. Show your knowledge of funding opportunities.
   - Know the names of appropriate funding agencies and their programs

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The Research Statement:

Three Things SCs

don't like to see!

Research Statement: 3 things SCs **don't** like!

1. Long, rambling statements that fails to clearly communicate your research hypothesis, short term objectives and long-term goals.

   - SC members should not have to read to the end of your statement to get the importance of your research and your ability to conduct it.

   - Inadequate description of your methodologies and technologies and why they are necessary to advance your research.

2. No long-range vision of where your research will lead, how it will advance the field and benefit society.

3. No explanation why you're the right person for this position

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1c. The Teaching Statement

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1c. Teaching Statement

- In 2005, a search on HigherEdJobs.com revealed that of the 1,000 ads for faculty jobs, 64% requested teaching statements

- Today, requests for teaching statements are commonplace

- This indicates that institutions regard teaching as key to their missions.

- Demonstrate that you have reflected seriously about
  - Educational experiences
  - Technologies and methods
  - Relationship between your research and your teaching

- Discuss courses you are interested in developing.

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Teaching statement do's and don'ts

- Don'ts:

1. Don't rehash your CV.
   - demonstrate that you are ready to "hit the ground running" in terms of teaching.
2. Don't pontificate when describing your philosophy of teaching.
   - Avoid dry, excessively abstract philosophical generalizations.
3. Don't be generic:
   - Tailor your statement to the department and college.
   - Demonstrate that you understand what the department expects of you.
   - A "mass mailing" approach to a job search is a recipe for failure.

- Do's:

1. Consider this an opportunity to sell yourself.
2. Connect your teaching and research and how it will inspire the next generation of scientist.
3. Remember, your statement reflects how you think on paper.

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The Teaching Statement: Three Things SCs like to see.

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Teaching Statement: 3 things SC like to see!

1. Willingness to teach large introductory courses.
   - You should know relevant courses by name and number

2. Ability to contribute to, and develop curricula for, courses in needed areas of specialization

3. Awareness of modern classroom methods and ethos
   - Technology: power point, podcasting, clickers, document management tools, e-Textbooks, videos, online instructional tools, electronic grading, etc.
   - Methods: peer instruction, flipped classrooms, etc.
   - Respect and sensitivity to diversity in the classroom

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1d. The Diversity Statement

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1d. The Diversity Statement

- A relatively new requirement (or option) in many academic position applications
  - There are on-going discussions on how to evaluate these
  - These statements are not only used in the hiring process but "Contributions to Diversity" are part of the merit and promotion processes at many universities
- Purpose:
  - To understand and give credit to faculty candidates for their commitment, efforts they have made and results they have achieved to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in their research, teaching and service activities
- Focus on issues such as race, gender, social class and sexual orientation

1d. What to Include in A Diversity Statement

Specific Examples of

1. Commitment
2. Creation of programs
3. Enriching the classroom environment
4. Exposure to research opportunities
5. Leadership
6. Mentoring
7. Outreach
8. Recognition of challenges and/or inequalities
9. Service

The Diversity Statement: Three Things Search Committees (SC) like to see.

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Diversity Statement: 3 things SC like to see!

1. That you **took time** to provide a statement of contributions to diversity

2. **An awareness** of inequities and challenges in education faced by historically underrepresented or economically disadvantaged groups and the negative consequences of underutilization of this talent pool

3. **Demonstrated track record** and metrics for assessing success in activities (such as mentoring, teaching and outreach) that aim to reduce barriers in education, research and career paths of underrepresented or economically disadvantaged groups

4. **Specific plans** of how you plan to contribute to your new department, college and university through participation in on-going programs, new activities or through national or off-campus organizations.

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The Diversity Statement:

Three Things SCs

don't like to see!

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Diversity Statement: 3 things SCs **don't** like!

1. A general statement of philosophy

2. No specific examples

3. Little or no knowledge of the campus policies, programs, support systems, etc., related to diversity, equity and inclusion

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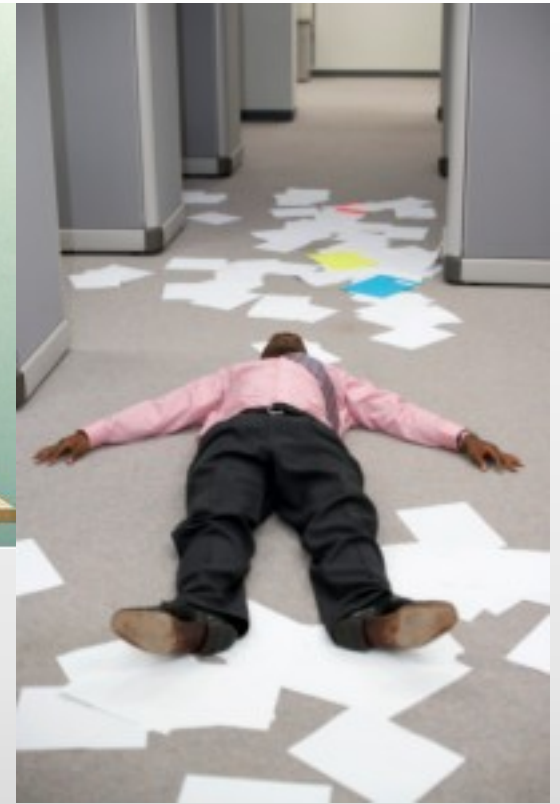
1e. Your Cover Letter

Now that you've prepared your CV, research and teaching statements, reframe (not repeat) the high points in these documents into a Cover Letter. This may be the only and last document a SC member will ever read.

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1e. The Cover Letter

- Typically 1-2 pages

- Provides a personal introduction to you and your application

- Explains why you are interested in the position, department and university

- Sparks interest in the reader

- Draws attention to your strengths and explains anything not in the rest of your application

- Sheds a new light or emphasizes certain highlights in your application but does not repeat what is already in your CV, teaching statements or research statement

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1f. Securing letters of recommendation

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1f. Letters of Recommendation

- Want 1-2 page letters from individuals who know you and your work
- Cultivate professional relationships with people who have strong reputations in the field, write detailed letters and follow through
- Make it **easy** for recommender:
  - Provide an updated CV, research statement, teaching statement
  - Provide the job description and ask if they have any insights or knowledge about the position, department or university
  - Provide your cover letter or a brief written statement of why you want the position and what makes you uniquely qualified for it
  - Provide a set of bullet points of your accomplishments and strengths related to the position
  - If they ask you to draft the letter have someone else review/edit it
- Pick references that can comment on different aspects of your application
- Be aware of differences in style between US and international writers

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Letters of Recommendation:

Three Things SCs
like to see.

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Letters of Recommendation: 3 things SC like to see!

1. Strong supportive letters from respected academics in the field
   - Detailed letter with specific examples to back up statements
   - Someone who knows you personally, has read your publications and heard you present your work
   - Don't be surprised if you need to ask for letters from your extended network (arm's length) – becoming common
2. Comparisons of your record with other young investigators at a similar stage in their career
3. Validation of the proposed research, funding opportunities, etc.

Things that really annoy Search Committees

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Things that really annoy search committees!

1. Typos — they distract SC members from your main points
2. Lack of succinctness and inability to get to the point
3. Poorly constructed sentences and paragraphs
   - A candidate's logic and reasoning abilities are judged on the basis of his or her writing skills
4. Repetition of information found in other parts of your application package
5. Lack of familiarity with the department's research and teaching programs
6. Impersonal or generic letters of recommendation

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Questions, Answers and Discussion

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2. The Interview Process

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The World's Worst Interviewer

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2a. Differences in Interviewing by discipline:

- **Life Science**:
  - Webcam interviews
  - First in-person interview
  - One-on-one interviews with faculty
  - Meeting or lunch with grad students and or postdocs
  - Formal research seminar on first day
  - Dinner with SC members and other key faculty
  - Informal chalk talk on second day
  - Meeting with administrators (chairs and deans)
  - "Ride to the airport"

- **Engineering**:
  - First in-person interview
  - One-on-one interviews with chair and key faculty
  - Interactive meetings with small groups of faculty
  - Tour of relevant shared facilities
  - Meeting or lunch with grad students and/or postdocs
  - Formal research seminar
  - Breakfast(s) and dinner(s) with SC members and other key faculty
  - Meeting with administrators (Assoc. Deans and Dean)
  - "Ride to the airport"

- **Physics/Math**:
  - Webcam interviews
  - First in-person interview
  - One-on-one interviews with faculty
  - Meeting with grad students and or postdocs
  - Lunch with SC and key faculty
  - Formal research seminar on first day
  - Dinner with SC members and other key faculty
  - Meeting with administrators (chairs and deans)
  - "Ride to the airport"

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2b: Interview "0"

I was SHOCKED at how poorly the candidates performed on the web interview "0"

(D. Starr, Professor of Molecular & Cellular Biology, Search Committee Chair, UC Davis)

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2b. Interview "0": Webcam (Skype)

1. Webcam (Skype) interviews are becoming increasingly popular for creating the shortlist by narrowing the applicant pool by as much as 60% to 70%.

2. You must be proficient with this technology

3. Adhere to the interview guidelines (e.g., do not exceed the time limit)

4. Know how to run your power point with the webcam.

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2c. Preparing for the demands and expectations of the interview

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2c. Interview "1": The demands and expectations

- Interviews can be physically, mentally and emotionally demanding:
  - It is essential that you prepare for the interview experience as you might prepare for a marathon (practice, rest and positive mental attitude).
  - Prepare your research seminar well in advance and be ready for lots of tough but fair questions.
  - Throw away interview??? Your first interview might be . . . Bad.
  - Be well rested for what could be a 12 hour day.
  - Show your interest in the job – they want to give the position to someone who wants the job and it is critical that you make this clear (it is a courtship)

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2d. Interview "1": The first in-person interview

- Candidate interviews are typically 2-day affairs that involve:
  - 1-on-1 interviews with faculty and administrators. Group meetings with graduate students and postdoctorals
  - Group lunches and dinners with a small number of key faculty members
  - A mid-morning or afternoon research seminar
  - Informal chalk talk with faculty

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2d. "Supermom": A case study in determination and stamina

- Shortlist candidate received phone call from SC inviting her to an interview. Candidate informed the SC that she has a 3-week old baby but could make the interview in a few weeks.

- Supermom candidate arrives at the interview with husband and baby in tow. Time is allotted for breast feeding.

- Candidate has a successful two days of interviews, presentations and discussions with faculty, students and administrators.

- Supermom is offered

  the position.

- Do your homework:
  - Create a binder of dossiers on each faculty member in the department (Notes on Folks)
  - Include bios, courses they teach, recent research articles and grants
  - Show interest in the interviewer's research and teaching (this can only be done if you've done your homework).
  - Try to relax and be enthusiastic
  - Have a one-year plan, three year plan, and a five year plan (including grants)

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- "Thanks to TED Talks, research seminars have become almost pure theater." *F. Chedin*
  - Highly rehearsed
  - Well organized
  - Perfectly timed
  - Technology rich
  - Dazzling visuals
  - Impactful endings
- But the research seminar focuses on the past and what you know

- The **Chalk Talk**, on the other hand, is a forward-looking exercise that focuses on the future, the unknown and what you don't know
  - It can't be rehearsed
  - It's future focused
  - It's free-flowing
  - Little or no AV technology
  - You provide the visuals
  - No clear endpoint or conclusion
- It's a mistake for candidates to retreat to their research seminar
- Many top candidates are eliminated here.

- Be prepared to be interrupted with questions during your talk
- Research has shown that
  - Women candidates, on average, get about six more questions than male faculty candidates
  - More of their presentation time is taken up by questions
- Referred to as "invisible bias"

Mary Blair-Loy et al., Gender in Engineering Departments: Are There Gender Differences in Interruptions of Academic Job Talks? *Soc. Sci.* 2017, 6, 29; doi:10.3390/socsci6010029

2d. Interview "1": The Research Seminar

- The following are necessary to ensure both a lively/engaging discussion and fairness:
  - Implicit bias training for faculty
  - Discussion at faculty meeting prior to interviews
  - Moderator should be responsible for safeguarding the speaker's time
  - Provide an outline of essential findings early in the talk
  - Candidates should feel free to ask that questions be held until the end but only if running short of time
  - Take questions into consideration when organizing your talk and allot a reasonable amount of time for questions.

2e. Interview "2": Your turn to interview

- This is the most important of the three interviews:
    - Only the top candidate is invited
    - This is an opportunity for the department to sell itself
    - An offer is not typically made during this interview, although the department is expecting to make one
    - Frequently, you are shown lab and office space
    - The candidate's spouse or partner may also be invited
    - The department is recruiting your spouse or partner as well
    - Let the department know about any specific needs or questions your spouse or partner may have about your position (e.g., health benefits, leave, vacation time etc.) and the community (e.g., schools, hospitals, the arts, sports, transportation etc.)
    - The "ride to the airport" is a euphemism for a private conversation at the end of the interview where your host expresses the department's enthusiasm for you and that you should expect an offer in the near future

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3. Follow-up and the Offer

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3a,b,c. Follow-up and the Offer

1. **Courtesy email from candidate**:
   - A polite and appreciative email from the candidate thanking the host and key faculty is expected. You should indicate that you look forward to further communication with the department.

2. **Rejection Letter**:
   - "Thank you for your interest in the faculty position in our department. We received many excellent applications this year. I regret to inform you that after careful review, your application was not selected."

3. **Offer Letter**
   - Your offer letters may come months after a phone call from the department chair offering you the position. In this call, the chair will outline the department's initial offer in terms of faculty rank, step and startup package. *Now the negotiations begin!*
   - Things candidates negotiate:
     - ✓ Equipment, instrumentation and a room to put them in
     - ✓ Subsidies for animal facilities and care
     - ✓ Moving expenses
     - ✓ Partner Opportunities Program (POP): a position for your spouse or partner if appropriate
     - ✓ Mortgage Origination Program (MOP): a loan for your first home
     - ✓ Higher step (e.g., Asst. Prof. III instead of II) and off-scale or above-scale salary increase

3d, Conclusion

- *The application/interview process can be an enjoyable, educational and rewarding experience if you are*:
  - Prepared mentally and physically
  - Relaxed (don't adopt a "do or die" attitude)
  - Professional
  - Enthusiastic
  - Flexible
  - Genuine

- Regardless of the outcome, your interview can be a valuable learning experience and an opportunity to make new friends and future collaborators.

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Resources and References

- [National Research Mentoring Network](https://nrmnet.net/) (NRMN). https://nrmnet.net/
- Teaching Statement: http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133/
  http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/pdfs/teaching%20statement.pdf
- Research Statement: http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/writtenmaterials/researchstatements.php
- COACh-the-COACheshttp://coach.uoregon.edu/coach-membership/researchers/
- Interviewing Tips: http://icc.ucdavis.edu/mpp/academia/index.htm

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Thank You

Questions?

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