

Faculty Job Interviews Part 1: The Application Process

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Having been through a number of academic faculty interviews this year, I thought it would be a good time to convey some useful tips about the process. The blog is split into two parts: how I got academic faculty position interviews and how to handle the visits.

I went on the job market 4.5 years into my postdoc with a K99 award and good publications. Knowing how competitive the field is, I wanted to apply broadly. The two main ways I applied for interviews was (1) responding to ads on job boards, university and research institute websites and (2) talking to people in the field, asking if they knew of any open positions. To my surprise, the first approach was relatively ineffective. I responded to some 20 job

openings and did not hear back from most of them, and got few interviews. Several university websites are out of date and the most promising openings were just not on there. My second approach, networking, was much more successful. In particular, I got three interviews through people I met at the 2018 ISEH meeting in LA, including the session chair of my ISEH talk. I only knew of my current job because I was referred to it by a Department Chair that I met at a schnitzel restaurant during a stem cell meeting in Heidelberg. I also emailed Chairs at institutes that I would like to join and reached out to peers who recently made the transition to independence.

You will need the following documents to apply:

1. Cover letter. Mine was built up as follows: express enthusiasm for the institute, describe your research experience, describe your future plans, why I am a great fit for the institute (optionally name people you could collaborate with), closing.
2. Research Statement. They usually ask for three pages. I had a brief description of my envisioned research program, one page about my prior contributions, and one page about the specific projects and aims I would start with.
3. References. Three letters including your PhD and postdoc mentors.

Some institutes will also ask for a publication list, teaching statement and/or vision statement. I did not adjust the application materials to the specific institute I was applying for (other than the cover letter), but I heard others that did.

In total I applied to 30 positions and was fortunate to be invited on 10 interviews. I probably reached out to more places than the average applicant, and I am happy to have done so. First, it was great for my network, it met so many people with similar interests and it helps to put their papers into context. Second, the interviews are really fun. The talks can be stressful, but the one-on-one meetings are great and it is very interesting to learn how different institutes function. Third, going through the motions several times improved my interview skills. I think I did a better job of presenting myself at the tenth interview compared to the first. In my next post, I will cover the visits in more detail.

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