



So they've called you and scheduled an interview. Congratulations! Get ready for a couple of days of fun with your prospective new faculty. This could be the start of a whole new chapter in your professional career.

How to get a faculty job in 20 not-so-easy steps

1. The Golden Rule of Interviewing:

The time to decide if you want the job, is after they offer you the job. The advice below is designed to help you get the job in the first place.



2. When you schedule the interview,

tell them how delighted you are and how much you are looking forward to this. They are putting themselves out there by inviting you, and they don't want to be rejected any more than you do.

3. What to pack?

Advice: 1. Better to overdress than underdress; and 2. You want them to remember YOU, not your clothes. Wear something formal but forgettable.



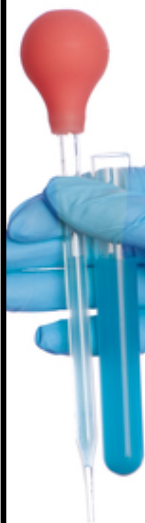
4. Don't forget to show interest in the local area



It's effective to wax ebullient about how you view moving to rural nowhere as a dream-come-true since your personal interests include not being anywhere near a theater, operahouse, symphony or having an escalator in town.

5. Wear a catheter.

Your interview will consist of 1-2 days of 20-minute meetings scheduled back-to-back with absolutely anybody they could cram onto your schedule. There will be no bathroom breaks, no water breaks, and no insulin injections. This is exacerbated by the fact that every single one of the people you meet will want to take the 20-minutes as their coffee break*. In the end, most of the interview will be a blur, except that you will be able to find the coffee cart from any point on campus blindfolded.



*Memory Lane: In the good old days the 20 minutes could be used as a smoke-break. Many a hypothesis was expounded by my shivering frame while Professor Marlboro Man got his fix.



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6. Point 5 reminds me to tell you ...



... not to wear heels. Heels make everyone uncomfortable in a scientific setting and I don't know why. It's just part of that vast incomprehensible world of feminine frivolity from which we are excluded when we gaze through that first microscope. I am not sure whether this is good or bad.

8. People will ask you personal questions.

Including questions that are illegal to ask during interviews.

Stuff like: "Are you married or are you a lesbian?", "Do you plan on having children?" and "Would you move here if we offered you the job?" and stuff that's a lot more crazy than that. I am telling you now so you won't be surprised.



7. Never underestimate ...

... just how freaking weird these 20-minute meetings can be. Sometimes you will be compulsively talked at as you walk in the door, through the meeting, and you will shut the door on someone still talking as you leave. Sometimes you will share a stony silence with your host for 20 minutes.



Many times you will be marched through laboratories, presumably to ogle shiny machines. Ogle them. Ogle them like it is the last glimpse of human civilization you will ever get. The sorry soul who is your tour guide traded her youth and health to become chained to that beeping machine, and is it so much to ask of someone to witness this reality? Resist the urge to shove shoe covers in your purse when you think your host is not looking. This is the kind of thing that a lab person will not forgive.

9. When people ask you illegal questions, you are not obligated to answer truthfully.

Well, that's my position anyway. Responses like: "I'm celibate and I'm sterile" and "All my crap is in a moving van on its way here right now" are no harm no foul as far as the author is concerned. I recommend that you don't get miffy. Nurse your wound and complain on a blog many years later after you've had the sweet sweet revenge of living well.



10. Play up the young and cheerful angle.

Academics are such relentless complainers that you can distinguish yourself just by intimating something (anything) hopeful and positive. Sincerity optional.



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11. Here's the Secret Key to Everything:



In every department there's one dismal job that everyone has been avoiding for years. It could be anything. It could be offering a required course, it could be leading an alumni field trip, it could be writing the annual newsletter — anything. If you can figure out what this job is, and state forcefully that you want to do it, the position is pretty much yours right there. Not only do you not mind teaching "Science 101 for the Declaredly Uninterested", all the events of your life have been catapulting you towards doing it. You will never feel fulfilled until you can put on your C.V. that you negotiated putting a vending machine in the department's front office. You get the idea.

12. The Seminar.



News flash: none of these people have read any of your papers and maybe two of them have read your application and recommendation letters. Everyone will make their decision based on your seminar. Honestly, at the end of 35 years, the success of your whole career comes down a few one-hour seminars. So make it good. No pressure, though.

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13. After your seminar you will be taken to the Interview Dinner.



This will take place at a fancy restaurant with a hybridized group of the faculty most interested in your subject area and the faculty most interested in a free meal. A high degree of overlap between the two groups bodes well for your chances of being hired.

14. Order something simple for dinner.



I always go with scallops because they seem classy, taste good and come in bite-size pieces. It's hard to pontificate about the future of science while gumming a fistful of baby-back ribs or while standing to gain leverage over a rack of lamb.

15. Don't drink at the interview dinner.

Your hosts will. They will drink like men who've been stuck in the Sahara Desert for ten years. This is because the fancy dinner will be at the university's expense. Years of pent up anguish suffered at the cold sinevy hand of the administration can be soothed by about \$30 of Sauvignon with astonishing efficiency. It's actually a good deal for the alumni.



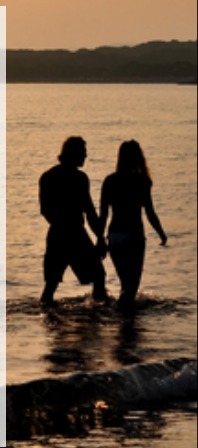
16. Don't get into a car with any of your hosts after the Interview Dinner.



See point 15 above. Chirp happily about how there's nothing like a good long walk in the forty-below to ruminate over all the fascinating science to which you've been exposed that day.

18. If they are going to offer you the job, you'll know.

You'll just know. It's like meeting your soulmate for the first time. Except your soulmate won't ask you to attend weekly meetings for the next 10 years during which your senior colleagues will complain bitterly about things that happened before you were born.



20. Repeat as necessary.

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Erratum:

When I first posted this, there was massive outcry about point 15 and I learned that some people are really genuinely horrified by the idea of passing up a free drink for any reason, personal or professional. Therefore, I am officially changing my advice to "Wash down a handful of Vicodin with 42 ounces of Thunderbird during dinner."

17. Bring bubble bath.



After the dinner, you will get so damn depressed you won't know what hit you. Everything you worked so hard for and sacrificed so much for — your deep and raw need for acknowledgment — everything just played itself out in a single hour of seminar theater followed by a cold plate of scallops and a weak iced tea. When you get back to your hotel room, the existential emptiness of it all will hit you like an 18-wheeler descending Donner Pass. A long bubble bath and a DVD of old Jackass episodes is the only constructive way to deal with this.

19. The time after the interview is like a break-up.



Don't dwell on it. Don't stalk the department on FB and try to figure out who else is interviewing. Move on with your life. Do your best to forgive and forget. Then if you ever hear from them again, it will be a pleasant surprise.