

### Simply answer how to succeed in the job market

1st step: Be a good PhD student

2nd step: Know how to navigate the job market

Most people worry so much about the second step that they forget about the first step. Worrying about the second step will not help you pass the first or the second step... so, for now, simply focus on the first step.

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### Being a good PhD student

- ❖ No distraction / 100 % focus
  - Most important thing for me was controlling distractions (that is, spending time on things I should not have been spending time on)
  - Key sources of distraction
    - Everyday distractions: emails, websites, music, YouTube, etc.
      - Techniques to manage
        - ◆ Very high discipline
        - ◆ Support software, etc. (e.g., Freedom or StayTuned)
        - ◆ Time management philosophy
          - <http://www.paulgraham.com/makersschedule.html>
      - Working on the wrong things: Starting too many working papers, etc.
        - Wisdom to remember: "People think focus means saying 'yes' to the thing you've got to focus on, but that's not what it means at all. It means saying 'no' to the hundred other good ideas." - Steve Jobs
    - Understand the concept of delayed gratification and why you focus on the wrong things
  - ❖ Focus on your advisors
    - Other people are *open* for collaboration, but are not necessarily *committed*. Collaboration with them seems tempting, but is probably a bad idea.
    - Do not worry too much about the quality of the program or the advisors you are working with. The grass is always greener somewhere else. Basically everyone we have the chance to work with is a superstar with respect to his/her own research, as well as with respect to developing PhD students. So, focus on making it work.
  - ❖ Hard work
    - This is a profession that is about hard work. Nothing is going to happen if you do not put the hours in. I talked with a tenured faculty member at a prestigious university, and (s)he pointed out that (s)he had not watched a single hour of movies or TV shows during his/her PhD. You might think that this is insane, but sometimes you need to compete with people like that (of course, you still be very productive even if you watch a movie from time to time... and, I would argue, potentially more productive ☺).
  - ❖ Get feedback and advice
    - Try to get as much feedback as you can
    - Present something specific so that you can actually get feedback on it
    - Learn to discount advice from people. Some people are really just BS-ing (again, it is a good idea to trust your advisors).

- Get feedback from the experts in your field. For example, I got feedback from one of the key figures in the field using my method, and his/her advice really saved me.
- ❖ Learn how to manage your relationships with your advisors
- ❖ Emotional challenges  
Dealing with emotions is very difficult in a PhD program
  - Videos I found helpful in this context are:  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/280025/creative-breakthroughs-ta-nehisi-coates/> and <http://vimeo.com/24715531>
  - Never, ever isolate yourself
- ❖ DO NOT write a magnum opus and DO NOT try to be too sophisticated
  - People often get what I call “theory drunk”: they use all kinds of fancy terms and crazy methods instead of doing something very straightforward. It sounds good, but this approach is mostly an indicator of confusion and of not thinking things through.
  - A good way to think about your job market paper is as an “entry ticket” into the field.
- ❖ Pre mortem analysis
  - I think through projects from the end backwards, assuming that they will fail, and then look for the most likely reasons for failure.
- ❖ Understand that publishing is REALLY hard. So, do not “just start” a paper.

#### **Outcome of being a good PhD student**

- ❖ You have a strong expertise
  - “Do not worry about who you know, but be worth knowing”
  - Once you are worth knowing, ensure that people have a chance to learn what you are worth knowing for. (People will not remember you just because you know them... you need to be worth knowing.)
  - Hallen (2009 ASQ) argues that you should contact people just after you succeed in something worth sharing.
- ❖ Reputation
  - Ideally, people at schools, particularly the ones you care about, know you
  - Go to conferences
  - Meet with guest speakers
- ❖ Have an interesting research question
- ❖ Understand how signaling works
  - What do people look for?
    - They look for someone who knows how to publish (R&Rs, conference papers, etc.)
    - They look for a good teacher (teaching experience)
    - They look for someone they like to spend time with
    - They look for someone who will actually come if they offer the job
  - Valuable signals
    - R&R
    - Best proceedings
    - Talks outside of your department
    - Be aware of useless signals (e.g., a non-submitted working paper hardly signals anything)

- ❖ Your advisors and the people around you have trust in you
- ❖ Understand how the field works
  - There is a reason it is called a *job market*. It's good to understand the rules and players in the market ☺

### **Preparing for the job market**

- ❖ Limits of management
  - Be aware of the limits of managing the market. There is quite a bit of randomness that you have no control over.
- ❖ What goes into an application  
(Preparing the following material will take more time than you think)
  - 3 to 4 reference letters
  - CV
  - teaching statement
  - research statement
  - cover letter
- ❖ Do you need a website?
  - Not sure. I had one. I had more visitors than I expected, but I do not know who these visitors were or whether it made a difference (Note: I used Squarespace).
- ❖ Have some savings
  - You need to finance some job market trips (they reimburse you, but you might need to put up the funds initially)
  - You do not want to worry about money
- ❖ Have people with whom you discuss job market issues
  - I was in very close contact with my advisors, a classmate, two alumni, and two people from other schools who were with me in the job market. This support network was very helpful.
- ❖ Get access to job offers
  - The Academy has a particular list / job board
  - Some conferences, like the CCC, curate a list of jobs

### **After sending out applications before fly-outs**

- ❖ Always check your Spam folder
- ❖ Do not reschedule schools (this may lead schools to think they are low priority)
- ❖ Try to build some momentum
  - I told selected people where I had fly-outs / offers, which helped to get more fly-outs and makes the fly-out itself easier (since they start selling the school).
- ❖ Anticipate that you will need a lot of time to manage this process (booking flights and hotels, talking with departments, etc.).
- ❖ Plan visits so that your most important ones are later on, though not the last, ideally.

### **Managing the single fly-out**

- ❖ Logistics of traveling
  - Have luggage, ID, etc. under control

- Have extra formal outfits in case one gets dirty
- ❖ Keep in mind that fly-outs take place in the winter, meaning..
  - Flights might be delayed
  - Bring a jacket
- ❖ When at the school
  - Always have your schedule for the day at hand
  - Carry a pen, paper, clicker and a USB with your presentation with you at all times

### **Interview and interaction during the fly-out**

- ❖ General behavior
  - DO NOT gossip
  - Be nice
  - Make sure you are seen as “highly flexible” and “low maintenance”
  - Focus on what you can contribute, not on what you want (generally a good attitude in life ☺). Ideally, the school will then also look for what it can do for you.
  - Be confident AND modest
  - Thank people for taking the time to meet with you
- ❖ Preparing for the interviews
  - Know about people with whom you are meeting, but there is no need to read all their papers
  - Have your notes on people ready (e.g., have five keywords that make you remember what you read about them)
- ❖ The gold standard for an interview
  - You create a link between what the interviewer does and what you do. Thus, it is not enough for them to know what you do or for you to know what they do – your job is to find the link.
- ❖ Keep in mind what they are looking for (see above)
  - Great researcher
  - Great teacher
  - Great colleague
  - Someone who will actually come if the job is offered
- ❖ Never, ever get bored
  - You can get bored of listening to / saying the same things. Find new ways to say them.
- ❖ Reading the interview setting
  - Be aware that the people who seem the least relevant might be the most relevant (e.g., members of the search committee). For example, I interviewed with labor economists. Obviously, such people are on the search committee (since my work is not about labor economics)
- ❖ Have a good set of answers for frequent questions (I’ll leave it to you to come up with good answers)
  - What is the optimal ratio of teaching and research?
  - What do you look for in a school?
  - Who do you see yourself working with?
  - What journals do you see yourself publishing in?
  - How likely are you to come here?
  - What attracts you to this school?
  - Which classes could you teach?
  - What do you want to be known for?

- What other papers are you working on?
- What are your criteria in picking a school?
- What other schools are you talking to?
- ❖ Have a set of questions you are ready to ask. Everybody will ask you if you have questions, so it's best to be ready. Ask questions you actually want to know the answers to. I was interested in the following issues:
  - Where do you see the school going?
  - From your bird's eye perspective, what makes assistant professors succeed in their jobs?
  - Could you give me feedback on my presentation?
  - What did you learn as you published more?
  - How was your job market experience?
  - What are you working on?
- ❖ Answer questions they are not allowed to ask
  - E.g., "My partner would love to come here..."

### **Presentation**

- ❖ Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse
  - I presented mine a few dozen time
  - Get feedback
  - Train with faculty and classmates
  - Make it look easy (this is really hard!)
  - Take tons of notes
  - Work on single formulations
- ❖ Logistics of the presentation
  - Present from the school's computer, not your own computer (you go nuts if your PC fails)
  - Send the school your presentation before the fly-out
  - Bring the presentation with you on a USB (I had two in case I lost one)
  - Consider bringing your own laptop as backup
  - Do not put anything customized into the presentation (the likelihood of bringing in mistakes is too high, and people will also spot differences between the presentation and the paper)
- ❖ Expect audiences that vary in terms of:
  - size
  - type
  - aggression
  - interest
- ❖ Answering questions is key
  - Everybody is decent at presenting. How you answer questions makes a big difference.
  - The key is to walk a fine line between standing your ground and being defensive
  - People will sometimes try to provoke you. You simply have to stay calm.
  - Never step back when somebody asks a question (this looks defensive). Instead, always take a step towards them.
  - It is okay to ask questions in return
  - I often took notes. This displays interest and gives you a second to think. The feedback I got was actually very helpful.

### **Managing schools after the fly-out**

Please keep in mind that you join a field for life, not just the school where you take the job.

- ❖ Follow up
  - Send nice follow up emails.
  - The email can be standard, but I would add an individual element
- ❖ Picking a school
  - DO NOT think about it before you have offers
- ❖ Rejecting
  - Say no politely and quickly. Do not “play” schools.
- ❖ Negotiating
  - Try to negotiate with only one school
  - Make clear that you want to make the relationship work
  - Go in with an open mindset
  - Try to have another offer
  - Schools will allow you to negotiate a bit, but not too much
  - Have an understanding of what can be negotiated (e.g., when to teach, what to teach, research budget, arrangements for a partner) and what is difficult to negotiate (e.g., salary, teaching load)
  - Be aware that you will work in the institution you negotiate with. You want to make the relationship work, not just win the negotiation.

#### **General advice**

The following advice was given to a friend of mine before his first solo flight in a jet for the US military. I feel that it works very well in all parts of life:

“Don't be an idiot”

PS: These were just a few thoughts. There are great resources on how to succeed as a grad student and beyond (e.g., the book by Fabio Rojas: Grad School Rulz” is a very helpful resource.”)