Seeking a Position in Academia

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Talk to CU Postdocs
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• What is a cover letter?
  ○ Accompanies a resume/CV when applying for a job - should only be one page.

• Is it important?
  ○ Very important.
  ○ Often the way to decide between interesting candidate and the discards

• Cover Letter Purpose
  ○ Makes a connection with your employer
  ○ Lets employer know what you are applying for
  ○ Conveys, implicitly, why the employer should hire you
  ○ Calls attention to pertinent parts of resume
  ○ Provides the employer a sample of your writing skills
• Should include
  
  ○ Your return address
  ○ Date
  ○ Employer’s Name and Address
  ○ Salutation
  ○ Body of letter
  ○ Closing Signature
  ○ *Telephone number and email address*

• Tips
  
  ○ Personalize each cover letter
  ○ Demonstrate you know something about company or institution
  ○ If you know a person that employer would know, then identify this person.
  ○ Identify what your applying for
  ○ If responding to ad, then link your experiences and skills to the job.
• **Format**

  - **Personal information** - name, address, phone, email at top of page
  - **Education**
  - **Experience/Work** - summer jobs, internships, teaching assistantships, computer skills, foreign language skills, special things outside of major like a writing or business courses
  - **Honors, awards, fellowships, scholarships, etc.**
  - **Significant Research or Work may have performed**
  - **Professional Achievements and Services (short courses may have taught)**
  - **Highlights in Scientific Literature about your research**
  - **Volunteer activity**
Promoting Yourself

Get a good list of action verbs to represent your accomplishments. Your cover letter and CV are really key. Make sure you proofread everything.

- **Research skills**
  - clarified, collected, critiqued, diagnosed, discovered, elucidated, evaluated, examined, extracted, identified, inspected, interpreted, interviewed, investigated, organized, reviewed, summarized, surveyed.

- **Teaching skills**
  - adapted, advised, clarified, coached, communicated, conducted, coordinated, enabled, encouraged, evaluated, explained, facilitated, guided, informed, lectured, stimulated, trained.

- **Leadership skills**
  - administered, assigned, chaired, coordinated, developed, directed, evaluated, organized, oversaw, planned, prioritized, produced, recommended, revamped, scheduled, supervised.

OK! Decide you want an academic job - how do you start?
Where to apply

- What type of job are you searching for?
  - Research and Teaching
  - Teaching Only

- Tailor your CV and teaching philosophy according to job. Even if teaching position you should emphasize your lab and software skills.

- Send your letter writers anything that needs to be emphasized for the particular job.

- How many places do you apply for?
  - Worry about letter writer burnout
  - Are you going to put a serious effort into preparing everything?

- Select your letter writers
  - Can be different for different jobs
  - Make sure letter writer knows you rather than just being an important person.
  - Help your letter writers - summarize your accomplishments or contributions to your papers.
Letters from Referees

- Letters determine whether or not you will get invited.

- It is critical that letter writers rank the candidate. Usually saying in the upper 10-15% is just not good enough. Should be best person in last couple years, top grad student in past couple years, comparable to someone who just got a job, etc.

- Probably best to not compare with someone already at the same institution.

- Best to compare to another person who already has a tenured job at a good institution.

- It is best to talk about the research or capabilities of the candidate. Also good to mention experience at hearing the person talk, leadership potential, etc.

- Adaptability - how is the person at creative thinking and problem solving?

- Collegiality - how is the person’s group effectiveness and interpersonal skills such as in negotiation and in teamwork?

- I like to see a statement about the person’s ability to learn, to absorb, and to process and to apply information quickly and effectively.
Got the Interview!

- Find out what kind of interview.
  - Screening Interview (often done at national meetings or at conferences)
  - Phone interview
  - Committee/panel interview
  - One-on-One Interview (most common)

- Find out who is on the search committee

- What kind of presentation will you give
  - Technical Presentation to search committee
  - Colloquium - what level should you pitch the talk
  - Seminar - how technical should the talk be
  - Teach a class - at what level
  - Always better for the talk to be short than too long
  - Judgement is often made on how you answer questions

- Research the department
Interview questions

- Questions you should think about
  - What kind of courses can you teach?
  - What service committees are you interested in being on? Grad committee, Colloquium committee, undergrad advising, etc.
  - What do you need to get started - space, students, questions about sharing resources with other faculty, needed facilities - electronics, machine shop, etc.
  - How do you plan to get the resources you need - have you ever written a grant?
  - Any outreach activities?

- Do you have any questions?

- How do you handle criticism?

- How are you at doing lots of things at the same time? How do you prioritize?

- How do you manage stress?

- How did you become interested in this field?
Interview tips

- Dress appropriately.
- Show up on time.
- Be prepared to answer questions.
- Put the interviewer at ease.
  - Fine to take notes.
  - Make eye contact when a question is being asked and when you are answering it.
  - Demonstrate interest by asking questions about department and the institution. You can view each interview as your interview.
  - How do you plan to get the resources you need - have you ever written a grant?
  - Always let interviewer finish her question.

- Body Language
  - Give a firm handshake and walk confidently into the office.
  - Make eye contact
  - Sit still and straight - there are rules about crossing arms as trying to hide something. Try to avoid fidgeting.
  - Avoid long silences and speak slowly.
Questions that can’t be asked

- Your religion, political beliefs, or ancestry.
- Your birthplace.
- Your native language.
- Your age or ages of children.
- Your maiden name, your marital status, or anything about your spouse.

After the interview send an email message to the people who matter on the search committee saying how you appreciated the visit. Make it real short.

Keys to Salary Negotiations

- Never discuss salary until end of interviewing process, when they say want you.
- Never be the first to mention a salary figure.
- Do homework ahead of time on what you need.
- During interview, try to determine whether salary is fixed or contains room for negotiation.
- Do research on salaries in your field and for the institution.
What to negotiate?

- Space - lab location, office location, who will take care of the renovation.
- What is the teaching assignment? How can you get time off or buy your way out of teaching?
- Can you get any funds for shops beyond the start-up package?
- How do you secure support for travel to a conference?
- Can you get a commitment for Teaching Assistant support for a grad. student?
- Postdoc/ Research Assistant support
- Is there any help for writing grant proposals?
- How do you get nominated from OJI, Sloans, Packards, CAREER awards, etc.
- Is there internal (within the university) support you should apply for? At CU, we have JFDA.
- Summer Support
- Can you get added to group grants? Are there institutes or centers in your area?
- Salary - compression exists at all institutions, should ask for more than you think you can get