

Seeking a Position in Academia

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Talk to CU Postdocs
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Cover Letters

- 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



Cover Letters cont.

- 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.



The CV

- 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.



Interview cont.

- 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 a 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