

# Success in the Job Search, or, There *is* light at the end of the tunnel

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# What I'll talk about today

Finding a job – both in industry and academia – after your Ph.D.

Job application and interview schedule

What goes into your application?

The “Elevator Pitch”

Interview format and process

The all-important job talk

Negotiating an offer

# My experience

- Graduated from Berkeley in 2002
- Applied for jobs at a ton of schools and industrial labs
  - Interviewed at 10 schools and 4 labs (don't do this!!!)
  - Turned down interviews at about 5 other places
- Got four university offers, a couple of “tentative” offers, and a handful of offers from labs
  - Hardest decision I've had to make in my life
  - Also working under a two-body constraint
- Finally landed at Harvard in 2003
  - Spent a year at Intel Research Berkeley before starting here

# The Job Search Schedule

- December: Send out applications
- February/March: Get invitations to interview
- March/April: Interviews
- May: Make your decision
- Note: The academic interview cycle drives industrial jobs too.

# Plan early!

- Start building up your professional network **now**
  - Most interviews I got were through people that I already knew
- Give talks, go to conferences, give posters/WIPs, do internships
- Timing is important...
  - Try to publish a major paper 3-6 months before the job search
- Finish first draft of thesis before you go out to interview
  - Give your committee something to do while you're AWOL
- Have Ph.D. completely signed off before you start the new job
  - This sounds obvious, but too many people make the mistake of thinking they will finish up after they start the new job. They rarely, if ever, do.

# The job application

- Cover letter
- Research statement (3-4 pages)
- Teaching statement (1-2 pages) – for academic jobs only
- CV with list of references
- Representative publications
- Your web page will get lots of hits!
  - Put a prominent link to “job application materials” at the top
- Contact people you know at each place you are applying
- If you don't have a cell phone, get one.

# The Elevator Talk

- At conferences, during interviews, etc. you will often be asked “So, what are you working on?”
- Need to have a (basically memorized) pitch on your research and overall vision.
- Multiple versions: 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes.
- Tune the talk for different listeners:
  - Colleague in your field
  - Professor in a different area
  - Dean/VP.

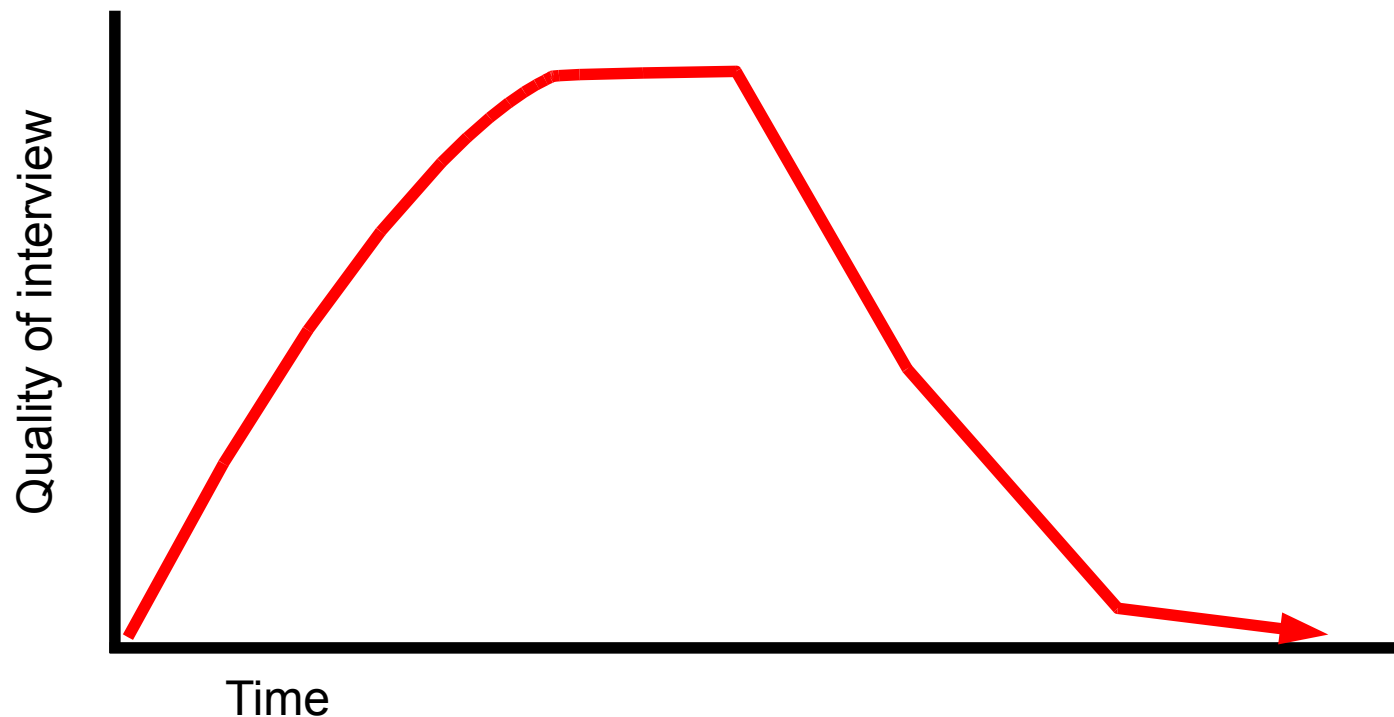
# Scheduling Interviews

## Schedule your interviews carefully

First couple are dry runs

Schedule most desirable places 1/3 through the season

Don't commit too early: least desirable places tend to call first.



Plan on fronting a few thousand dollars for interviews (you'll be reimbursed later)

Get a frequent flyer card and rack up the miles on one airline.

Don't schedule more than 3 interviews on a single trip away from home.



# Typical interview format

- 1-2 days (usually 2 for academic jobs)
- Your interview talk: 45 minutes plus questions
- Lots of 30 minute meetings with faculty/researchers
- Meetings with the chair/dean/manager/VP
- Tour of the campus/company
- At companies: Exit interview with HR or manager
- Meeting with grad students
  - Ask for this if not scheduled!

# The All-Important Interview Talk

- Your talk establishes a first impression
  - There will be no second chance – recovery not possible after a bad talk
  - You are being evaluated on the quality and depth of your research, teaching ability, and how you handle questions.
- Need to appeal to a wide audience
  - Both specialists in your area, and others in the audience not in your area
- Hourglass rule:
  - First 1/3 of talk: 10,000' overview, motivation, summary
  - Second 1/3 of talk: Technical meat. OK to lose non-specialists here.
  - Last 1/3 of talk: Widen scope, define contributions, talk about future work/plans
- Make it abundantly clear what you did
  - Talk should focus on your own work, not a general group effort
- Practice, practice, **practice!!!!**

# Giving the talk itself

- Time: 45-50 minutes, including questions.
  - Expect to get interrupted.
- Have a joke somewhere early on.
  - Good to break the ice, help you relax.
- Know the related work at the place you are interviewing
  - Do your homework
- Treat questions carefully
  - Don't patronize or get defensive.
  - Always restate question (in your own words) so you're sure you're answering the question they meant to ask.

# Dress

- It is hard to overdress for a job interview.
  - Even in casual fields (like CS) we expect interview candidates to dress appropriately.
  - Wear a suit (and tie, if you are male).
  - Most other candidates will do the same.
- My suggestion: Bring two suits
  - Need backup in case of spill, wrinkles, etc.
  - Can get one drycleaned at hotel while you wear the other.
  - Synthetic shirts can be worn multiple times in between ironings.
- Other suggestions
  - Comfy shoes are a MUST – break them in.
  - **Never** check your luggage: get a good folding carry-on.

# Interviews and meetings

- This is exhausting. You must be constantly “on”
  - Day usually starts with breakfast as early as 7:30am, not over until after dinner at 10pm or later.
- Take notes!
  - You will meet many, many people.
  - Brain dump your impressions to a (private) document at end of day.
- Have your elevator talk handy
- Engage the person you are interviewing with. Don't just sit back.
  - I am very impressed by candidates who come to the meeting prepared and interested in asking about my research.
  - If all else fails: “So, what do you work on?”

# Common interview questions

- Sorry I missed your talk. Tell me everything about your work in 5 minutes.
- I totally disagree with slide 12 of your talk.
- Your approach seems exactly like [CITE] – tell me how it is different.
- What do you plan to work on next?
- What kinds of collaborations have you done?
- What is your approach to teaching?
- Let me tell you about University of (fill in the blank).

# What you should ask them (academia)

- What is the teaching load?
- How often do faculty collaborate?
- How large are classes?
- What is the undergraduate/graduate curriculum missing?
- How many faculty do you plan to hire?
- What is the tenure process like?

# What you should ask them (industry)

- What is the management structure like?
- How do I get equipment/travel funds?
- What hours do most people work?
- Are you encouraged to publish papers/source code?
- How product-oriented is the research here?
- How often do you work with other groups in the company?
- What is the evaluation and promotion process like?



# Interview do's and don't

- Be positive, outgoing, and articulate.
  - You want them to see you as a potential long-term colleague.
- Firm handshake.
- Don't self deprecate.
- Don't gossip or say anything negative about anyone, ever.

# Other meetings

- Often will take you to a nice restaurant for dinner.
  - You are still being evaluated!!
  - Probably best not to drink! (though you will want one, badly.)
- Sometimes set up a lunch meeting with grad students
  - Often too many students, hard to get much detail.
  - Can sometimes learn things the faculty won't tell you.
  - The students will be evaluating you too!
- Meeting with the dean
  - Usually very high-level, talking about approach to research and teaching
  - Often not someone in your field: still need to explain why what you work on is important.
  - This person is **very** important to your prospects of getting an offer.
  - Opportunity to ask where the department/school/university is going

# After the interview

- Write a short thank-you email to your hosts
  - Keep them in the loop during the process
  - Make sure they know if you are really interested in the place (your enthusiasm is an important factor for them to consider!)
- At companies: exit interview
  - Rank the projects you are interested in. Helps HR understand which groups they should be targeting you for.
  - Be prepared to talk about other offers and interviews
  - Don't talk about salary yet.

# The wait

- The hardest part of the process.
- Be prepared for rejection.
  - You will not get offers everywhere.
  - They may say “We really hope you come here” but not give you an offer later.
- Realize that this is a very capricious process!
  - Lots of people involved in the decision
  - Hard to make everyone happy
  - Rejection is not necessarily a reflection on you personally
  - e.g., your research is not a good fit, overlap with another faculty member
- You don't need 10 offers ... you need 1 good one

# Negotiating the offer

- Don't negotiate terms until all offers are in.
  - The first offer is not the final offer.
  - Companies tend to negotiate only once.
  - They made an offer, and now they really want to get you ... in fact they love you, and will sweeten the offer if that's what it takes.
- Only negotiate with the place you really want to go
  - Do **not** be greedy.
  - Goal is to be mutually satisfied, not squeeze every penny out of them that you can.
- Be prepared to say why you turned offers down
  - Stay on good terms with people at the places you reject
  - Industry contacts may help you with funding later....

# What to ask for

- Salary

- Industry: 12-month salary, often with signing bonus
- Academia: 9-month salary, you pay yourself summer salary out of grants
  - *Generally ask for summer salary for first 1-2 years while you get started*

- Stock options (industry only)

- Moving expenses

- Academia

- Lab space
- Time off from teaching (one semester – but take it later!)
- Student support (2 students for 2 years is typical)
- Equipment and startup funds
  - *You want “cash”, not “equipment money”, since cash can be used for anything.*

- Be reasonable. Once you have an offer they really want you, but don't push it. You will have to work with these people after all.

# How to decide where to go

- This can take a lot of soul-searching
- Try to slim down your list early
  - Don't hang onto offers you don't intend to accept.
  - Makes it harder to decide.
  - School might be able to extend an offer to second-choice person once you say no.
- Think long term
  - Where do you want to be in 10 years? 20 years?
  - Academic jobs aren't like grad school: it is hard to move around
- Don't necessarily pick the “top ranked” school
  - Think about environment, location, size, potential

# Questions?

- These slides can be found at:  
<http://www.eecs.harvard.edu/~mdw/talks/jobsearch.pdf>