

TO: Job Market Students, 2009/10
FROM: Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz
DATE: November 23, 2009
RE: David Laibson's Job Market Advice for the ASSA Meetings

David Laibson, always a keen observer of market and non-market behavior, wrote these notes about five years ago to share with job market students. We are attaching them with minor alterations. David's wisdom is as relevant today as it was five years ago.

Planning for AEA/ASSA meetings

1. don't pack interviews in too closely (try to schedule interviews with hotel locations in mind)
2. try to leave 30 minutes to an hour between interviews; elevators, traffic, distant hotels, all take their toll (elevators are amazingly slow when thousands of people try to take them at the same time, e.g., at 3:00pm when everyone is moving to their next interview)
3. be eager to take early morning or late day interviews or weird day interviews (this will leave you more time to fit them in without cutting things too close)
4. if you can, schedule your most important schools early in the day (people will be fresh and you won't be late)
5. get a flu shot (they're free)
6. bring ear plugs and ask for (CG says, "insist on") a quiet room when you check in (i.e., away from elevators and ice machines)
7. leave an extra copy of your schedule with a friend (just in case you lose the original)
8. do not put your schedule in checked baggage
9. get and use disclosure codes (these are the codes for the hotel rooms. Nicole will be collecting these and will make them available in the Harvard suite.)

What they might ask you at the interview (in addition to: "Tell us about your work")

1. teaching interests
2. dream course
3. how would you teach XYZ (what would you bring to the course)
4. where is your field heading
5. where are you heading; what's your research agenda; beyond thesis, what are you doing
6. why haven't you done any empirical (theoretical) work? do you intend to?
7. is your thesis representative of your future work; (OK either way)
8. are you a good teacher
9. how will you interact with (feisty) business students
10. how do you motivate the crazy assumptions in your papers
11. what is the intuition behind that result?
12. do you have any questions about our school? (Optimal answer: I know that your school is great, and that's all that matters right now.)
13. how would you test your model
14. how is your model identified

15. are you familiar with the results by person Y on your topic
16. what is a real-life example of what your job market paper is about

How to prepare

1. have answers to all of the questions above
2. 2-3 minute summary; and 5-6 minute summary (front-load: get the bottom-line, interesting, important stuff out before they cut you off)
3. find out where you have to go ahead of time (its easy to suddenly realize that the place is across town, or not publicly known); get info immediately when you arrive at the meetings; some info will not be easy to obtain
4. go to the Harvard suite to relax and gather info
5. dress in a way that doesn't draw too much attention to your clothes; men should wear jackets and ties; if you are talking to business schools suits are appropriate but not necessary.
6. wear comfortable shoes, you may have to make a mad-dash
7. bring a small umbrella
8. find out who's on the interview committee (if that info is available); look them up on web. Find out about the faculty at each place you are interviewing. More information is better than less; you'll feel more at home with the interview group.
9. know all of your work, not just your job market paper
10. be ready for unexpected problems (have city map, a cell phone, water, and a little snack food)
11. personal hygiene matters, particularly at B-schools: get a haircut in advance; shower every day (or more).
12. bring copies of your job market paper and resume (just in case the committee lost them, or didn't make enough copies for all interviewers).
13. get to all interviews early, so you don't arrive in a last minute sweat; do not jog to your interview, no matter how late you are; you may feel good while you're running, but you'll start sweating when you arrive

In the interview (as in a fly-out seminar)

1. be fresh and friendly, use appropriate body language (e.g., sit up straight)
2. don't be defensive
3. remember, they're looking for a colleague/teacher/researcher, show them diverse interests, good communication and fun
4. be yourself, but smooth your rough edges (e.g., suppose you have a tendency to talk over others)
5. don't be needlessly controversial or confrontational (don't say people are irrational, unless you want to spend 10 minutes of your 30 minute interview discussing that assertion); don't make gratuitously controversial statements
6. listen well
7. don't be condescending
8. but don't let them intimidate you
9. don't get flustered, catch your breadth and keep on going
10. be able to say: "good question, I don't know the answer, but I'll think about it," i.e., don't feel that you have to have an immediate answer for everything

11. don't think you know what they are thinking; they might be tough, but that doesn't mean they don't like you. The worst interview is the one where the interviewers are silent. It means they are either bored or dead.
12. don't take anything personally
13. turn off your cell phone!

Don't be surprised when

1. they cut you off in the middle of your description of your work, interests, background, etc.
2. people eat during your interview
3. people walk in and out during your interview
4. people reveal that they have no idea who you are and what you do
5. they're tough, to the point of rudeness
6. they argue amongst themselves
7. they yawn (they've had a hard day too)
8. they watch TV
9. they reduce the time of your interview

Fly-out advice

1. practice your job talk lots and lots of times.
2. try not to give your job talk for the first time at your "favorite" school(s); if possible give the talk somewhere else first (like a dress rehearsal)
3. try to group trips together (i.e., Pitt and Carnegie will be happy to try to coordinate your visits – saving you time and lowering their costs)
4. If "University of X" has asked you to fly out for an interview, you can call "Y State" and propose giving a talk even if "Y State" hasn't yet called you for a fly-out. (Of course, only do this if "Y State" also interviewed you at the meetings.) Ask if "Y State" is also interested in a fly-out, which could be coordinated with Stanford to save expenses. This kind of "cold-calling" applies when schools are close geographically and close in quality and one of the two schools has already contacted you for a fly-out.
5. planes are often delayed, particularly in snowy places; schedule your travel plans accordingly; do not plan to arrive at midnight if you have a 9 AM meeting the next day. Schedule in big buffers if you can. Also check your flights ahead of time.
6. do not check your computer
7. ask people who interview you (one-on-one during a fly-out) about their research
8. do not "run out of time" in your seminar; pull slides rationally from the middle of the talk if you find that time is short; do not race through your critical final slides; e.g., the slides that discuss your central findings, or your estimation results, or your summary slides. Think ahead of time about what slides you will pull if the need arises. Practice.
9. if you receive a job offer from school X, and school X is overwhelmingly preferred to school Y, tell school Y about the X offer and give them the opportunity to cancel your fly-out to Y. When you do this be very nice about school Y. Bend over backwards to show respect.
10. remember that your talk is for a general audience of economists; on the other hand don't be afraid to do some technical stuff, but keep non-specialists on board with lots of intuition
11. don't underestimate the effects of exhaustion (your exhaustion)

12. use your fly-out as an opportunity to evaluate the school; remember you may need to decide if you want to work there
13. keep your receipts (including flights, hotels, cabs, etc.)
14. bring a clean shirt (or whatever) for each day of interviews; bring a back-up shirt and tie, just in case
15. have fun
16. get your schedule in advance; request prep time before seminar
17. As Samuel Jackson said “personality goes a long way”
18. leave time for questions in your seminar presentation (preferably throughout the presentation)
19. think about how you fit in with the faculty at the school you are visiting; who would be a natural collaborator, or who would you enjoy talking shop with; etc.
20. do *not* ask about remuneration details during your visit; you have to wait until they offer you a position.
21. always tell the truth; don’t game the job market (this is a repeated game and reputation matters)
22. be good to your classmates and quickly turn down jobs that you don’t want
23. don’t feel a need to state your preferences over schools; you probably don’t know them yet
24. this is an opportunity for people in your profession to get to know you and your research; don’t forget this coming out party element of the job market
25. if you fall, pick yourself up and get back on that horse; don’t let setbacks knock you permanently off balance
26. spend lots of time preparing (get priorities straight)
27. don’t say anything negative (e.g., about other schools) that is likely to be remembered and repeated
28. don’t be surprised when even on a fly-out, nobody seems to know much about you (e.g., departmental members ask you about your joint location problem though you don’t have a spouse and haven’t been on a date in five years, or the Dean asks you, “Are you a job candidate?”)