

Common Academic Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why do you want to work at (this school)?
3. Tell me about your dissertation.
 - When will it be completed?
 - How does it fit into the field?
 - How many publications do you think you can get from it?
 - How do you explain your research to someone not in your discipline?
 - What class can you teach?
 - What classes do you want to teach?
 - What do you think of our curriculum?
4. Tell me about your teaching techniques.
 - What are your teaching strengths/weaknesses?
 - What steps have you taken to improve your teaching?
 - What strategies do you use to get students involved?
5. What are your research plans for the next 5 years? 10 years?
 - How does your research fit within our department?
 - Are there members of our faculty you could collaborate with?
 - In ways might you include undergraduates in your research?
 - What are your research strengths/weaknesses?
 - Who might fund your research?
6. In which journals do you expect to publish your work?

Questions You May Want to Ask During an Academic Interview

General Questions

1. What's expected of a junior faculty member? For example: teaching load, publication expectations, faculty committees/governance, student advising etc.

2. How much time does faculty spend on teaching?

- How many preps?
- What is the average class size?
- What's the ratio between upper and lower division courses?

3. Explain the tenure process and requirements.

For the Search Committee Chair

1. What are you looking for in this position?
2. Are there any "land mines" I should be aware of?
3. What should I expect when talking to the Chair, Dean?

For the Dean

1. How much interaction do you have with junior faculty?
2. What research funds are available?
3. What are the most dramatic changes you see for the college in the next 5, 10 years?
4. What percentage of faculty who apply for tenure are given tenure?

For Department Chair and Faculty

1. What lab space/office space is available?
2. Who is in charge of graduate admissions? How are graduate student applications evaluated?
3. Is there a sabbatical system? How does it work?
4. How are CA's and TA's funded?
5. Is there release time for services activities such as clubs, directing theses and independent study?
6. Are there opportunities to develop new courses?

For Graduate Students

1. What kind of support do you get from faculty?
2. Which professor serves on the most graduate student committees?
3. Why did you choose to get your graduate degree here?
4. Do you get opportunities to co-author publications?
5. Which faculty do you find most approachable?
6. How much information do you receive about career preparation?

Top 5 Academic Interview Questions and Answers

by Dr Catherine Armstrong

This article will list the most common interview questions for lecturer positions and suggest some possible answers to them. The examples of good answers are not the only options. There are, of course, many other ways of successfully answering these questions. These are suggestions to get you to think constructively about what you could say.

1. Why do you want to work here?

Bad answer: 'Because I desperately need a job, stupid!'

This is a tough one. What they are asking for is some thoughts on what you have seen and heard about the way they do things that make you want to work for them. The emphasis in the question is on the word 'here'. So, to answer this question you need to know a lot about the university and the department. Look at the person specification for the job. If they are obviously looking for someone who is a good teacher rather than an international researcher, answer this question by prioritising teaching.

Good Answer: 'I wanted to move to an institution like this that prioritises good teaching practice and dedicated pastoral care of students. I believe I can offer this because of [x and y examples of experience from your previous career].'

2. What makes you different from the other candidates?

Bad answer: 'Um, they all seem to be much more confident and professional than me and I am very intimidated'

This question is not requesting that you attack the character of your fellow candidates or compare yourself negatively to them. It is short-hand for 'why should we hire you?' or 'why are you special?' Again think about the person specification and make sure you know what sort of academic they are looking for. Tailor your own responses to that as much as possible. Make sure you give examples from your own history to support your assertions. So, for example, if it is an up and coming department looking for a high-flying researcher to boost their reputation, emphasise your role in this. If there is anything you do that makes you stand out, for example a skill or area of experience, mention that here too.

Good answer: Although I am an all-rounder and could contribute to departmental life in many ways, I know that I have the international research profile that you are looking for. [Go on to give details of books and articles written, prizes won etc.]

I also think I am unique in that I have direct experience of running online courses and would be happy to take a lead on introducing that here if colleagues were interested.

3. What are your plans for research?

Bad answer: 'Not sure. I have been so caught up with trying to find work that I haven't thought about it.'

This question is obviously asking you to look forward to the future, so drawing up one year, five year and ten year research plans is helpful before going into an interview. (If you are completing a PhD and looking for your first job this might sound a little excessive, but believe me, it will make you stand out and be taken seriously). They will not just want to hear about the topics you wish to cover but will crucially be interested in two other areas: research funding and your output (i.e. publications). As well as telling them about your exciting projects, tell them how you're going to pay for them (which grants you will apply for) and what published benefits there will be in concrete terms. Aim high at this point; you don't want to sell yourself short. You *can* write that monograph or get an article into a world-renowned journal. The scope of your ambition will help to sell you as the ideal candidate here, so don't worry about sounding arrogant.

Good answer: 'in the next year I will be finishing up the revisions on my manuscript for *x book* which is due for publication on *x date*. I have several other projects on the go that I wish to pursue after that [give details]; if my funding applications to the *x* and *y* grant bodies are successful I should be able to see those projects to publication by [give date].'

4. What courses could you offer to teach?

Bad answer: 'I am so desperate for a job that I will teach anything you ask me to'.

You want to seem keen and flexible and show that you are happy to fit in with the department's teaching requirements but they also want to hear about new courses that you would like to offer. In order to answer this question you need to look at the department's current undergraduate curriculum. That way you can be sure the courses you have invented will fit in with what they offer now. So if the department already has a course on Nazi Germany, do not propose to offer a new one. You have to be careful here: do not let your creativity run away with you. If you do get the job, your new colleagues might say 'I loved that course you proposed in your interview, can you run it next year?'

Make sure you suggest something that you could feasibly teach, preferably based on your previous experience. Think about whether you would offer it in the first, second or third year, and briefly state what some of your teaching exercises and assessment strategies might be. If you can make use of technology then mention that too.

Good answer: 'I would be happy to contribute to some of the existing courses you run, such as *x* and *y* but I also have a few ideas of my own that I feel would appeal to students in the *x* year of their education. [Describe the course] I feel that it would fit into your curriculum particularly well because it complements your other courses in *x* field but is unique because it covers an earlier time period or uses different resources [examples].'

5. How would you contribute to the administration of the department?

Bad answer: 'Don't you dare find me a time-consuming admin job to do. That's not why I became an academic!'

Here they want you to talk about your past admin experience if you have any, and to show your enthusiasm for this side of things! Fake it if you have to. Pretending that you are desperate to become the new admissions officer will help you to get the job if that's what they are looking for. If you have experience of running your own courses, managing an entire programme, or doing a specific administrative task then mention that. If you can, give an example of a contribution or innovation that you instituted in that role. If you are at the very start of your career then simply show even more enthusiasm and emphasise the transferable skills that are vital in these roles, i.e. being efficient, well-organised and a good communicator.

Good answer: 'I look forward to having the opportunity to fully contributing to the life of the department. I have a special interest in the area of admissions/ exams/head of year etc'. I had some experience in this role at my last institution and realised that I have the skills necessary to do it well [name them] and actually implemented changes to their policy on x. However, I realise the need for flexibility here and would happily take on the challenge of any administration role that would suit my level of expertise

(8/16/01)

This document is a synthesis of different responses shared by graduate students and faculty in various fields of education. The document is a work in progress. Please feel free to update it and/or revise it to suit your needs. Also, remember that all things included in this document are based on different experiences of different people. Some of these things may not apply to everyone or every situation. The best of luck and success in your current and future job searches.

Take care,

Julia Aguirre
Assistant Professor
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PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW:

The chair of the search committee will contact you about travel arrangements and of your schedule. It is customary for you to meet with faculty in the department, for you to present a colloquium(ia) , and for you to meet with a Dean or Vice President of the University. Find out who else is on the search committee.

COLLOQUIA:

- **PRACTICE YOUR TALK** (Several times). Make sure you do this before an audience that will be critical of potential flaws, rather than a friendly audience that will not tell you where you made mistakes. Also, invite people not in your area/field for the mock talks.
- **WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?** Ask the search committee chair who your audience will be, and what material they would like you to bring along. Be sure to bring copies of your vita, and preprints or reprints of your work to hand out to faculty members who may request it during the course of your interview.
- Try to ask the committee chair more about the position, and the composition of the committee. It is important to identify the type of person they are looking for, and to see how you compare to their ideal candidate.
- **ANTICIPATE LIKELY QUESTIONS THAT YOU WILL BE ASKED, AND THAT YOU WILL WANT TO ASK.**

- **RESEARCH YOUR POTENTIAL COLLEAGUES AND THE DEPARTMENT PROGRAMS.** Websites are very helpful. Find out what the fields of interests and current projects of department faculty. Think about potential collaborations. Find out the existing courses offered (and that you might want to teach) and what courses you might bring to the program. Some universities may want you to teach undergraduate, graduate, and credential courses.

THINK ABOUT LOGISTICS:

- **TRAVEL:** Plan, if possible, to arrive a day before your interview so you will have time to relax, prepare yourself for the interview, and to have a cushion in case there are any travel delays.
- **DRESS:** Be sure to dress professionally. I would recommend a suit or sports jacket with a tie for men, and a suit or professional looking dress for women.
- **BACK UP:** Always, always, always, have a back-up plan if technology or something breaks down. For example, power point presentations should have transparency version back up.

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN PREPARATION

- What are the concerns/research interests of each search committee member?
Search on WWW
Look at course bulletin of that school, try career services/placement library
- How does your research overlap with that search committee member's? Ask if they have considered asking my research questions in their area of interest?
- Talk about overlaps with other department faculty members/programs. Prepare ideas to talk about & discuss
- What areas in their job description are not strengths in your vita?
In what ways do you have experience in those areas?
Improve these weaknesses if possible e.g. if no teaching experience, create a syllabus & write out teaching philosophy.
Discuss with the relevant people.
Reinforce if appropriate in the thank you letter.

THE INTERVIEW:

- 1) YOU ARE “ON” FOR 48 HOURS
- 2) MEETINGS: Often there are several meetings scheduled during your interview: with the committee, administrators (deans), students, and individual faculty members. Some of these meetings feel very “formal” or “informal.” BUT, they are all part of the interview process. The committee already knows about your background on paper. They want to find out more about your personality, your professional opinions regarding issues in your research, and your concerns about education. Other activities (meetings, dinners) are also opportunities to the faculty, staff, and students to get to know you and vice versa.

Do not assume that everyone on the committee has read your vitae and publications closely or recently. And, it is likely that the department has not read anything, so their impressions of you are from your interactions during the talk and meetings.

- 3) FIND OUT ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT: Is this a place you can envision yourself working in for several years? This is your chance to find out. Ask questions about the position: the success of previous Assistant Professors in securing tenure, mentorship process for junior faculty, collaboration among the faculty, future directions of the department, priorities of the department and of the institution.

*Be sure to meet with faculty that are most similar to you such as junior faculty, faculty of color and/or women faculty members to get their impressions of the department/university and professional support. Think carefully about discussing “sensitive” subjects like balancing family and work or potentials of conflicting demands and over extension of commitments because of role as a faculty of color or woman faculty member.

- 4) LISTEN CAREFULLY AND KEEP EMOTIONS IN CHECK: During the interview try to remain neutral AND friendly. Don't express extreme dissatisfaction.

POST INTERVIEW:

- Return your expense vouchers and receipts in a timely fashion to get reimbursed for your trip.
- WRITE A THANK YOU LETTER FOR THE INTERVIEW. Let the committee know whether or not you are still interested in the position. Mention parts of the interview that you enjoyed. Do not make judgmental or critical statements regarding your assessment of the department.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are two sets of questions compiled below. One set are questions you may be asked in the interview. The second set consists of questions that you, as an interviewee, may want to ask. Both sets of questions were generated from various job search candidates' experiences.

QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE ASKED:

Your Research:

- Tell me about your research goals and program?
- Describe your research at the level you would to a non-expert/undergraduate/beginning graduate student? (This is a typical question from a Dean who is a nonscientist)
- What contribution has your research made to your field?
- How does your work address culture, language, race, ethnicity, socio-economic factors?
- What is left out of the talk?
- What is the most significant piece of research you have read in the last year?
- What do you envision for creating a research program here?
- Do you plan to apply for research funding?
- What is the funding record of your field?

Your teaching:

- Tell me about your teaching experience.
- Tell me about your experience working with teachers.
- What are “essential elements” of a math education program? (e.g. could be teacher education, science education, or preparing future policy makers)
- What would you change in a undergraduate/graduate/teacher education curriculum?
- What courses would you be interested in teaching?
- What courses offered at University X would you be qualified to teach?
- Would you teach a methods course?
- How do you address culture, language, ethnicity, race in your courses? Give me an example or an activity that helps teachers/researchers talk about these issues.
- Do you feel comfortable taking on graduate students in the current employment environment?
- How would you teach an introductory course? a course for non-majors?
- How would you teach math methods? Elementary and Secondary.
- Many of our students are more/less talented than those you are used to at your present institution. How successful would you be with them?
- How will you encourage students to major in our field?
- How should teacher education programs be set up so that prospective teachers are prepared to teach?

About potential “fit” with department:

- What do you think is the proper balance between research and teaching?
- Would you be able to take on a student immediately?
- Can you incorporate undergraduates in your research?
- Are you willing to be involved in committee work?
- How will you enhance our department?
- Why have you changed jobs so frequently? (A good answer will be something like "increasing growth opportunities")
- Why are you interested in our school/department?
- If you get more than one job offer how will you decide?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Who else is interviewing you?
- What kind of salary are you looking for?
- Name a salary that will make you content for the rest of your life. (advice laugh heartily)
- Refresh my memory, review your vita with me.
- Identify your strengths and weaknesses. (Give one of each, and describe how you will overcome your weakness) You may also want to think about this with respect to the position “description.” Are there aspects of your work that currently do not fit in the scope of the position that you are open to think about?
- What are some of specific things you would like to address/learn in your own professional development? How is this connected to your work as an academic (scholarship, teaching, service)
- Prepare to answer questions about your research/preparation background for the position.

Opinions on Educational Issues:

- What do you think about vouchers?
- What do you think about standardized-testing?
- What do you think about math reform?

“ILLEGAL” QUESTIONS:

These shouldn't be asked of you, but they may be. Here is some advice on how to respond to them.

- Do you plan to have children? I see you are concerned with my commitment to this position. Let me tell you about my research plans for the next few years. I plan to pursue them whatever personal decisions I make.
- What does your spouse do? If you think that the ease of relocatability of your spouse is an asset, feel free to answer. Otherwise, politely ask the interviewer why the question is important and how it relates to the position you are seeking. Use tact.

- Are you married? Can you tell me how you feel that would be important for the position we are discussing? I would use caution not answering some of these questions.
- What is your ethnic/racial background? Or, Aguirre, that is an interesting name. Where are you from?

Even though these questions are illegal, use caution in how you answer them. You may piss off an interviewer by pointing by deflecting the question or asking about its relevance to the interview, which may result in an unfavorable recommendation. It is a tricky situation. Listen carefully and think hard before you answer them.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK:

About the position:

- Who is on the search committee?
- What is the selection process/how do they decide?
- Describe the ideal candidate for this position.
- List three positive aspects of this position. List three disadvantages.

About department “fit” and expectations:

- What is your vision of the department five years from now?
- What is the policy/process for tenure? Is there a policy on early tenure?
- What is the policy for family leave and/or maternity? How does that affect the tenure-clock?
- What are the bases for promotion and tenure? How are the faculty evaluated?
- What percentage of the faculty are currently tenured? What is the tenure-rate?
- What is the percentage of tenure track faculty that have been promoted?
- What is the rate of and what are the reasons for faculty turnover?
- Do faculty collaborate with each other? How is collaboration work supported by the university? How does this count in the tenure process?
- Do faculty work with schools? How is this work supported by the university? How does this count in the tenure process?
- Describe the ideal assistant professor's first year?

About Research:

- What support for research work is available?
- Describe the travel budget?
- Think about what would consist of your “ideal” start-up package for your research work at the University. What would you need? Think about supplies, office space, lab space, research assistant funding, technology (hardware, software). If the University doesn’t offer much initially are their avenues to get support?

About Teaching:

- What is the typical teaching load? Can research hours be counted as part of the load?

- What is the policy for buying out teaching of classes
- What graduate and undergraduate courses would be my responsibility?
- How often are course load assignments changed?
- Who is involved in curriculum development decisions and how are they made?

About Committee work:

- What kind of committee work would I be expected to work on? What are the current standing committees? How are committee members selected?
- What is the average number of hours per week spent on committee work?

About Department Program:

- How active are the members of the faculty in national professional organizations?
- What are the admission requirements for undergraduates and graduate students?
- Characterize the student population in terms of demographic, geographic, economic, and scholarship ranges.
- How is College of Education situated in university
- What reforms in the state?
- What are students like?
- What is the emphasis in the teacher education program?
- How does this program think about teaching (intellectual, technical)
- Could you talk about a day in this department? Could you walk me through a day?

About the surrounding community:

- What is the cost of living in the community?
- What are the cultural opportunities in the community?
- Do faculty tend to live near the university or commute?
Advantages/Disadvantages?
- Are there tuition waivers for professors (and family)?

Meeting with Grad students:

What's it like to be a grad student here?

What is the process like to get your degree?

Some Typical Academic Interview Questions AND SOME FOR YOU TO ASK

Carol Ormand adapted the questions below from a list of interview questions compiled by Heppner & Downing in conjunction with following journal article: Heppner, P. & Downing, N. (1982) Job interviewing for new psychologists: riding the emotional roller coaster. Professional Psychology 13: 334-341.

Questions you may be asked

You may, of course, be asked a wide variety of questions. However, the list below is made up of questions that are fairly typical of interviews for academic positions in the geosciences.

About your research

1. Tell me about your research.
2. Where will your research take you next?
3. What kind of [support/start-up/lab space/equipment] will you need for your research?
4. How will you fund your research program?
5. How will you involve students in your research?
6. What is your approach to supervising [undergraduate/Masters/Ph.D.] student researchers?
7. How would you go about recruiting talented students to [the geology major/your research program]?

About your teaching

1. What courses would you like to teach [in addition to the one or two specialty courses specified in our job advertisement]?
2. How would you teach [name of a course]? What approach would you take?
3. How would you deal with the challenge of [a large lecture class, teaching non-science majors, teaching a mix of science and non-science majors, students with poor writing/math skills, limited resources]?

About how you will "fit" in the department or at the institution

1. What attracted you to this particular job advertisement?
2. Where would you like to be five years from now?

3. How do you feel about living in [a big city/a small town/the middle of nowhere/the opposite side of the country from where you've been living]?
4. How do you see yourself fitting into a department such as ours?
5. How do you see yourself fitting into our institution? Variations:
 - At a liberal arts school: how will you contribute to our liberal arts mission?
 - At a church-affiliated school: how will you contribute to our [name of religion] tradition?
 - At a women's college or historically black institution: how do you feel about teaching at a historically women's/historically black institution?
 - At a public university: how do you feel about teaching at a public university?
 - At a community college: what do you see as the role of community colleges in today's changing educational landscape?
 - At many different kinds of schools: how will you make your classes accessible to students from a broad (racially, economically, academically) spectrum of backgrounds?
6. We have a fairly heavy teaching load here. How will you make time for research, on top of all of your other responsibilities?

Questions you may ask

It is wise to be prepared to ask some questions, yourself. It shows that you have done some research about the institution, the department, and the position, and it demonstrates that you are interested enough to want to know more. Here are some questions appropriate to each of the people (or groups of people) you are likely to talk to. There is some overlap of questions, as more than one person may be able to answer a particular question. In some instances, it's helpful to see whether you get the same answer to those questions from different people.

[To the chair](#) | [To the dean](#) | [To the committee](#) | [To the faculty](#) | [To the students](#)

To the department chairperson

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department? the institution?
2. Is the administration supportive of the department and its program? How does that support manifest itself?
3. What are the immediate needs of the geology program? How do you see me fitting into those needs?

4. Where do you see this department, five years from now?
5. What are the relationships like among the various departments in the college/university?
6. How are departmental decisions that affect the faculty made?
7. What behaviors are valued in this department?
8. What are the procedures for promotion and tenure?
9. Are salary raises computed on a percentage basis or a sum increase? What has been the past "track record" for raises?
10. What kinds of monies are available to cover professional convention expenses?
11. What other resources are available, such as research assistants, teaching assistants, computer services, research space, and secretarial assistance?
12. How do you handle transportation for field trips? How does that work?
13. How would you characterize the students here, both geology majors and the general student population?

To the college dean

1. How do you perceive the department in relationship to other departments in the college/university? How do you perceive the college in relationship to other colleges in the university?
2. Five years from now, where would you like to see the college? the department?
3. How is the economy affecting the financial budget for the university? the college? the department?
4. What are the strongest departments on campus? the "up and coming" departments? What do they do particularly well?
5. At a publicly-funded institution: What is the legislative atmosphere in the state regarding funding for higher education? How does this state compare with other states in terms of funding for higher education?
6. What have been the enrollment trends in your college? In the university? Why?

To the search committee

1. Where is the committee in the job selection process? How many people are you bringing to campus? What is your timetable for making a decision? When can I expect to hear from you?
2. How did this position become open?

3. Who was in this position previously? Why did they leave? What did this previous person do well in their job? What do you wish he/she had done differently?
4. If you had magical powers, and could create the perfect person for this job, what would that person be like?
5. What does the work load consist of in terms of courses, advisees, etc.?

To the department faculty

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
2. How do you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
3. What are the challenges currently facing the department or program?
4. How would you describe the ideal candidate for this position?
5. What kind of research is being done within the program? within the department?
6. Do you do collaborative research with other faculty members, either in this department or in other departments?
7. What is the expected courseload? number of advisees?
8. What are the students in the program like? How are they selected/recruited? What have your graduates gone on to do?
9. What is the history of the program? the anticipated future direction of the program?
10. What do you like best about working here?
11. What are the areas of conflict in the department? How is the conflict handled?
12. How would you describe [name] as a department chair? For how long is he/she going to continue to be chair? What will happen after that?
13. What are the support services like (e.g., secretarial assistance, teaching and research assistants, travel monies, field trip logistics)?
14. What do you do for enjoyment?

To the students

Students can be very informative, as they are usually not inhibited in offering their honest opinions.

1. What are the strengths of the program here?
2. What do you wish for, that you don't have, as a student in this department?
3. What are your professional goals? after graduation? in five years?

4. If you know some recent graduates, what are they doing now?
5. Who amongst the faculty do you think does a great job? What do they do particularly well?
6. Especially for graduate students, or some highly competitive undergraduates:
How many of you have published an article in a professional journal? presented at a national convention? belong to national professional organizations?
7. How frequently do you socialize with faculty? with other students in the program?
8. Is the program atmosphere conducive to your learning and development? Would you recommend it to a friend?
9. If I were a good friend of yours, what would you tell me that I might not ordinarily find out about this place?



Questions to Ask (And Be Prepared to Answer) During an Academic Interview

The following questions have been collected from diverse resources by Kathryn L. Cottingham, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences, Dartmouth College.

Dean

Big Picture

- What is the long term plan for this school/institution?
- How does this department fit into the long-term plan?
- What is the outside perception of this department? Strong? Unified? Interactive?
- Admissions profiles:
 - Undergraduates: who applies? who is accepted? who comes here? Where do they go after graduation?
 - Graduates: who applies? who is accepted? who comes here? Where do they go after graduation?

New Faculty Assimilation/Success

What sorts of programs are available for new faculty members?

- Formal mentoring?
- Orientation?
- Written faculty handbook?

Research

- What resources are available to initiate student research?
- Is there support for summer research by undergraduates?
- Are competitive, within-institution seed grants available?
- What are the indirect costs of grants?
- What are the expectations for the summer? On campus? Or is field work OK?

Teaching

- What are typical teaching opportunities, across the college?
- How much variation is there across departments?

- Are teaching training opportunities available? What kinds? How often?
- Can one buy out of teaching obligations?

Faculty Review/Tenure

- What is the schedule and mechanism of faculty review?
- How much of the department is already tenured? Is there a quota?
- Who decides tenure and how?

Sabbatical Policies

- Are sabbaticals available?
- If so, how do they work?
- Do benefits continue?

Details

- What salary range?
- How paid?
- Can grants be used to supplement summer salary?
- How do raises work?
- What are the benefits?
- What retirement plan(s) would be available?
- What type of health plans are available?
- Any benefits for tuition for family members?
- Will they pay moving expenses?
- Are there resources available to assist spouses in locating jobs?
- Who insures equipment?
- Who would I be negotiating with?
- What is the time frame for making a decision?

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Department Chair

Big picture

- What is your vision for the department/school? Where is it going in the next 5 years? 10?

- When was the last planning exercise? Can I get a copy?
- How does this position fit in to that vision?
- Is the department growing or shrinking?
 - Which subfields?
 - Are there tensions among the subdisciplines?
 - What are current plans for future hires?

New Faculty Assimilation/Success

- What sorts of programs are available for new faculty members?
 - Formal mentoring?
 - Written faculty handbook?

Department Administration

- How big is the department?
- Is it unified, or split along disciplinary lines?
- How often does the department meet to discuss departmental business?
- How are decisions made?
- How is chairmanship determined? How long is the term?

Students

- What kind of graduate students do you attract?
- Where do they go once they finish their degrees?
- Who pays for graduate students? Are there any training grants?
- Do students have a say in search decisions?
- Do students have a say in department administration?
- What interdisciplinary collaborations are already in place? (Are there any training grants, for example)
- How many undergraduate majors come through the program each year?

Research

- What is available as "set up" money?
- Is there department research support available? Of what kinds?
- Are there vehicles available for field trips/research use?

Teaching

- What secretarial help is available for working with courses? With grants/papers?
- What is the teaching expectation through time? How many courses?
- Which courses?
- What would this person teach over the next 3 years?
- How much flexibility in what an individual teaches?
- How much flexibility in when courses are scheduled (within a week, within a year)?
- How big are classes? Are teaching loads weighted by the number of students in the classes?
- Is there time to prepare the first course?
- Can I teach a seminar the first semester/quarter?
- Are TAs available? For what courses?
- How much funding is there for courses, particularly new ones?
- How do ideas for new courses get processed?
- What are the teaching labs like?
- Are there computer teaching labs? Software? Support personnel?

Service

- What non-teaching expectations are there?
- What are the "standing" department committees?
- How does undergraduate advising work?
- How does graduate advising work?

Promotion & Tenure

- Are there annual reviews before tenure?
- Who decides on tenure?
- On what criteria are decisions made?
- Are the criteria written down and handed out to new faculty?
- What are the unwritten criteria?

- What percent succeed?
- Is there a "tenuring up" policy?
- schedule -when do people come up for tenure?
- What are the criteria for promotion to full professor?

Details

- Can I see the space for this person?
- How much office space, lab space, offices for graduate students?
- How long to remodel? Who pays?
- Ethernet? Networks? E-mail? Who pays?
- Reprints? Page charges?
- IMPORTANT FOR YOUR SANITY: When will a decision be made? When might I be notified?

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Faculty Members

Big Picture

- What do you like best about this place?
- What do you like least about this place?
- What are you looking for in this new position? (want to know: is there agreement? Or are there opposing ideas?)
- What are hiring priorities for the future?
- What else does a newcomer need to know?

New Faculty Assimilation/Success

What sorts of programs are available for new faculty members?

- When you started
- Now
- What do you wish you'd known?

Higher Administration

- How is the [higher] administration? Rigid? Flexible?
- Are they fair?

Department Administration

- How often does the department meet?
- How are decisions made?
- Do you feel that faculty have an adequate say in day to day operations?
 - In major decisions?

Graduate & Undergraduate Students

- How about the students? Are they motivated? What do they do after graduation?
- What support is available for graduate student research? Enough computers?
- What support is available for undergrad research?
- Are work study students available from time to time?
- Is there travel support? How often? How much?
- Do all biology majors do research?
- Do they have to submit a thesis?
- Are there any curriculum changes in the works?
- Do grad students with TA's have time to get their own research done?
- How are most grad students funded?

Research

- What support is available for research?
- How's the library? Journal availability? Where do you go for the obscure stuff?
- Does the administration support travel to scientific meetings? How often? How much?
- How much equipment sharing is there?
- Do you feel like this is a congenial environment?
- How much collaboration is there within the department or college?
- How much external collaboration is there? Is this supported by the administration?
- Who does grant book-keeping?
- Is there access to mainframe or UNIX-based computers?

- How much technical support is there for computing?

Teaching

- What do you teach?
- What is the general teaching expectation through time? How many courses?
- What would you like this person to teach over the next 3 years?
- How much flexibility in what an individual teaches?
- How much flexibility in when courses are scheduled (within a week, within a year)?
- How big are classes? Are teaching loads weighted by the number of students in the classes?
- Can I teach a seminar the first semester/quarter?
- Are TAs available? For what courses?
- How are TAs trained?
- How much funding is there for courses, particularly new ones? Can you buy what you need?
- How do ideas for new courses get processed?
- What secretarial help is available for working with courses? With grants/papers?
- Is this a Mac based or PC based department? What are the student computer labs like?
- Who sets up equipment and washes glassware for teaching labs?

Responsibilities/Loads

- How are administrative committee responsibilities?
- How about advising?
- How many minor committees for graduate students?
- What percent of your time is spent on teaching, research and service?
- What is the average class size?
- What is the average lab size?
- What is your overall work load?

Sabbaticals

- What is the policy on sabbaticals? Do they have them? When? Are they automatic?
- How much?

Promotion & Tenure

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Details

- How's the salary?
- How do raises work?
- Are the benefits any good? Are they transferable to other schools?
- What are housing costs?
- Is good housing available?
- What's it like to live here? Where do most people live? In town? Elsewhere?
- Schools?
- Crime rate?
- Cultural events on campus? Locally?
- Tuition assistance?
- Opportunities for spouse/partner?
- How's the parking?
- Family leave policies? Maternity coverage? Day care?

- Who pays for photocopying, phone calls, interlibrary loans, faxes, page charges, reprints?

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Miscellaneous Questions

Salary/Benefits

(Ask administration, untenured faculty, or benefits coordinators).

- How much?
- Hard money or soft money?
- What are the fringe benefits like?
 - Health insurance. Who pays? What %? How does copay work?
 - Maternity coverage/leave. How long a leave is guaranteed?
 - Sick leave
 - Retirement plans (TIAA-CREF? How do they do it? Matching? Who pays?)
 - Any mortgage assistance programs?

Raises

(Ask administration & untenured faculty members)

- What are the typical ranges?
- On what criteria are raises granted? Who decides?

Living

- Cost of living: high/low?
- Housing costs?

Start Up

- How much money for equipment, supplies and travel as "set up" money?
- Can the spending be spread over a number of years, say two or three?
- Summer salary included?
- How about summer salary for undergraduate and graduate students until grants?
- Is there seed money available from the college/university?

Tenure

- schedule -when do people come up?

- Are there annual reviews before tenure?
- Who decides on tenure?
- On what criteria?
- Are the criteria written down and handed out to new faculty?
- What percent succeed?
- Is there a "tenuring up" policy?

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Graduate Students

Big Picture

- What do you do?
- Why did you come here?
- What do you want to do after you finish?
- What's the best thing about this department?
- What could be improved?
- What's the best thing about this institution?
- What could be improved?
- What do you want from the new person?
- What skills/courses/seminars could I offer that would be especially helpful to you?

Student Life: What's it like to be a Ph.D. student here?

- How much camaraderie is there among the students of different professors?
- How much say do you have in administrative decisions? Job searches?
- Do students worry about support? How are the TAs? RAs?
- How many students have their own grants?
- Do you have enough money to live on?
- Is there a department social life? Within the grads/postdocs?

Department Politics

- Do the faculty get along? Are there hierarchies? Clear schisms?

- How do things work day-to-day? Does each professor have their own lab, which works independently of other labs? Or have professors banded together in groups with more shared equipment?
- What do you hear from faculty about:
 - Job satisfaction
 - Department politics
 - Tenure issues
 - Salaries
- What do you think about these issues?

Courses

- What's a typical junior/senior course like?
- What's a typical grad course like?
- What classes are hard? How much out of class work is there? Is there a lot of variation among different sections of the same course?
- What's the grad curriculum, beyond the core courses? Do students take many courses?
- How do you like having required core courses?
- What's this statistics core course like from a student perspective?
- How big are the classes?

Teaching

- Do you have time to do your own research when you're teaching?
- How much teaching does the average student do?
- Do you get trained?
- If so, how?
- Would there be interest in seminars to improve teaching methods?
- Can you take a more active role in teaching, if you want to?

Research Training

- How many of you had M.S. degrees when you started here?
- How many of you had research experience as undergrads or as technicians?

- Do you feel like you're exposed to sufficient techniques here?
- Is there support to get training elsewhere if it's not available here?
- Do you have enough computers/equipment to get your research done?
- What do you need that I could buy with startup funds to help the community?
- Do you have enough time to do your research if you're also teaching?

Details

- How's the food? Beer?
- Do alumni come back and tell you about life after graduation?

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Questions to be Prepared For

In one of my interviews, I was given these four topics in advance:

- Future research plans: what directions do you see your research taking in the next 5-10 years? What will be the topic of your first major research proposal as a new faculty member, and where will you submit it? What balance do you anticipate between field research and lab/office based research? If field work will be important, what field sites would you want to consider in the first few years?
- Education: Given our curriculum needs within the X group, how will you contribute to the undergraduate and graduate curricula? In particular, what graduate course(s) what you like to teach, and what will be your basic teaching model (e.g. lecture, lecture + lab, discussion, etc)?
- Graduate and undergraduate research: How will you engage graduate and undergraduate students in your research program? That is, what style of advising/mentoring will you use?
- Resources: What critical resources do you need in order to establish a successful research program? What critical resources may already be here? What kind of help would you want from the X group, the Department, and the University for you to achieve your goals?

From Everham & Smallridge, ESA Bulletin Dec 1994

- What is the main point of your dissertation?
- What are your professional goals?

- What is your concept of teaching in a 4-year college as opposed to a research university?
- What specific research will you pursue if you are selected? How do you anticipate funding it?
- How has your experience and training prepared you to teach the courses required?
- What other courses might you teach?
- Why do you want this job?
- Why should they hire YOU?
- What strengths would you bring to the department?
- What would you expect from this department and administration?
- What kind of start-up funds, facilities, and equipment would you need?
- What experiences or interests do you have in college-wide activities and service?

From an underground primer by Peter Kareiva (UW-Seattle) and Dan Doak (UC-Santa Cruz):

- What research will you be doing when you show up here?
- What projects will you start next?
- Why would you want to come here?
- What teaching would you like to do?
- What is your philosophy of grad student training? How will you support students? What types of projects do you expect them to work on?
- What do you contribute to the department that is not already well covered by the faculty?
- What makes you think you could ever get any outside funding?
- What is the best idea you ever had?

- What do you do? (the 3-5 minute summary of your entire research agenda)
- Where do you see your work going in the next 10-20 years?

From an underground list of questions used by graduate students at the University of Arizona

- What kinds of tools would be available in your lab for grad student use?
- In what areas do you think your work would uniquely contribute to this department?
- With whom in the department do you envision interacting the most? Outside the department?
- What meetings do you attend? What societies do you belong to?
- What do you envision as your ideal lab: # grads, undergrads, postdocs, techs, participation of grads who are not your own students?
- To what degree do you see integrating grad students into your research program?
- Is their work usually closely related to your research focus or is it fairly independent?
- How do you help grad students get started on a project?
- What's your perspective on grad student funding?
- How would you respond to a student who is floundering (early vs. late)?
- What types of mentoring have you experienced -- and what would you do similarly or differently?
- What courses have you taught before?
- What do you see as the major challenges of teaching at a large (small) university?

Questions Known To Catch People Off Guard

- The illegal questions: spouses, children, etc.

- For example: will anything need to be done for your spouse/partner (like find them a job)?
- Would you take this job if it were offered to you?
- How would you handle an interpersonal conflict in your lab?
- A break-up between two members of the lab who were involved?