Strategy and Etiquette for Graduate Students Entering the Academic Job Market[1]

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Abstract. This paper highlights important issues for graduate students seeking academic employment in Agricultural Economics. Emphasis is placed on developing a strategy to provide clear and reliable signals that the candidate will be a successful assistant professor, not just a successful graduate student. Publishing, teaching, and grant writing are identified as three important areas in which credible signals must be delivered. Advice regarding the interview process is also provided.

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1. Overview

Ph.D. students from departments of agricultural, resource and applied economics (which we will refer to jointly as AE departments) have numerous job opportunities. Many students seek employment in business and industry or in governmental and non-governmental organizations. Recent evidence suggests approximately one-third of Ph.D. graduates in AE enter the academic sector to teach, conduct research, and provide public service (Zepeda and Marchant, 1998). For those students considering the academic job market we offer in this paper some insights into what it takes for a graduate student to land an academic job.

Our motivation is simple. We believe that if all potential candidates understood the workings of the academic job market, and if all candidates understood the importance of some key job market signals they would be competing – to borrow language from Choi's advice on publishing in economics – "in terms of the beauty of their ideas, not in terms of cosmetic skills." We also believe our profession's best interests will be served by counseling prospective candidates and thereby raising the standards, qualifications, and performance of future colleagues.

The most important piece of advice we offer is the following: *if you seek an academic appointment, you must look not so much like an outstanding graduate student (which everyone expects you to be), but instead like an assistant professor.* This requires planning, understanding the unwritten rules of the job market, and learning how to present yourself as a professional. At the outset, however, we must emphasize that our advice focuses on preparation, not posturing. Moreover, our advice is not a guaranteed recipe for success. Even well qualified students with strong records and good recommendations sometimes are unable to land the academic positions they desire. Nevertheless, our perspective is that many qualified students fall short of their aspirations for an academic career simply because they do not understand the basic workings of the academic job market and fail to appreciate the advance planning required to be a successful candidate. Although Ph.D. students can consult a number of good sources as they prepare themselves for the AE job market (e.g Blank, 1998; Loveridge, 1996), in this paper we attempt to provide a longer-term perspective for the student (and advisor). In the following sections we focus not only on the final stages of a graduate student's career, but also on the value of placing those final steps into the context of an entire graduate program.

The job market as a signaling game

The academic job market, like many job markets, can be viewed as a signaling game. Signaling games are among the simplest forms of games with imperfect information. Perhaps the best-known example is Spence's (1974) model of the job market. The original statement of the game involves wage determination, and includes asymmetric information regarding worker productivity. The game goes as follows. A job seeker knows something about her level of productivity and chooses a level of education. The potential employer observes the worker's education, but not her productivity, and offers a wage. The game has a number of variants and refinements and admits a range of solutions. A theme that runs throughout is the importance of employer's beliefs about future job performance and the link between signals (which are observable) and underlying performance (which is not). Viewed in this way, one's task as a job-seeking candidate is to send favorable and reliable signals regarding potential performance as a faculty member.

The key to being a successful job candidate is to send the signals that are most important to prospective employers. As one colleague puts it, "the asymmetric information problem faced by search committees favors those candidates who send concise, clear signals about their training and ability" (Thompson, 1995). The traditional view is that department reputation, advisor, course grades, and prelim scores determine a candidate's job prospects. While these signals are important, they are only indirect indicators of future performance and may not be as important as other aspects of your credentials. Departments hire assistant professors *not* graduate students, and assistant professors are expected to perform in vastly different ways than are graduate students. Hence, it is our view that the most reliable signals that you can send to the job market are those that directly indicate essential aspects of faculty scholarship.

In general, faculty members are expected to conduct research, publish scholarly work, teach, write successful grant proposals and extend information to industry, government, and the public. The order of emphasis for these aspects of professional responsibility vary from position to position, but it is likely that you will be called upon to perform in at least two areas, for example research and teaching.[2] If you can send potential employers reliable signals that you can

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[2] In the jargon of university administrators, positions are typically described in terms of "splits." For example a position involving teaching and research is a two-way split. A position involving teaching, research, and extension is a three-way split. Percentages are used to further refine one's

contribute in these areas, you increase your probability of getting an academic job. Everything else is secondary.

2. The early years: preparing to be a candidate

Properly preparing to enter the academic job market will take time, energy, advance planning and—most of all—perseverance. Ideally, you should begin thinking about the job market and begin building your application packet even before you have taken your qualifying exams. Deciding early in your program whether you want an academic job will help you organize the remainder of your graduate program. Your choice of major field, minor field, advisor, coursework, dissertation topic (and even dissertation title) can all have an important influence over the final outcome of your job search.

One of the first decisions a graduate student makes is that of major field. While most students choose a major field on the basis of personal interest (clearly a prerequisite), many students fail to see the strategic importance of their choice. Although we must strongly emphasize that choosing a major field solely on the basis of the job market is a risky proposition, when choosing fields you might want to at least pause to consider the supply and demand balance for specialties. For some guidance, consult any up-to-date survey of the profession (some past surveys include Schrimper, 1985, 1998; Brandt and Ahearn, 1993; Marchant and Zepeda, 1995). These sometimes point to emergent imbalances between job vacancies and job seekers. For example, utilizing an official survey of all AE departments in the U.S., Zepeda and Marchant (1998) argue that currently supply and demand for fields of specialization are not in balance. As evidence they cite statistics showing that the most popular field among recent AE Ph.D. students has been natural resource/environmental economics, but that a disproportionate share of new jobs have been in the field of agribusiness management. Whether such an imbalance can persist over

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responsibilities, giving rise to nomenclature such as 80-20 splits or 15-15-70 splits. It is important to note that although many academic positions involve research and teaching, some recent evidence suggests demand for extension positions will be growing in the near future, and that as many as half of all new department hires in AE in the next five years will have extension appointments (Hanson, 1997). *Ceteris paribus*, those graduate students who can demonstrate experience and articulate vision in all three areas – teaching, research, and extension – will have an advantage over their peers.

time remains unknown: information on the number of openings in any given field is difficult to acquire and the number of new hires fluctuates from year to year due to retirements and demand-driven changes in program focus. It may also be possible to spot future trends may by examining data on numbers of graduates and hires that are maintained by the Food and Agricultural Education Information System, which is available on-line (http://faeis.tamu.edu). You may even consider calling recent graduates from your department who are now assistant professors to find out what kinds of positions might be opening up in their departments.

Another important choice that a graduate student must make is that of an advisor. Without a doubt, this choice must be based on common interests and an ability to work together. However, several other factors are worth examining as well. One, consider whether a particular faculty member has a reputation for helping students finish in a timely manner, and whether the faculty member has successfully guided previous students into academic jobs. Two, find out whether the faculty member has a favorable reputation for helping students (or a bad reputation for failing to mail letters of reference on time). Three, find out whether the faculty member is well known professionally. This final point is important because the value of a letter of support is often highly correlated with a faculty member's reputation. If your advisor is not well known, then consider this when forming your committee, and ensure that all committee members are well aware of your progress.

The job market should likewise be considered when choosing coursework. The courses that you choose will indicate both the depth of your understanding in a particular area and the breadth of your skills across economics. A strong combination of theoretical work and applied skills is a recipe for success, whether you are heading into research, teaching, or extension. Depth can be developed not only by taking the required courses within your department but also by taking related courses across the university. If you are interested in pursuing a job in extension, you might want to emphasize applied skills (e.g., accounting or finance) and complement these with basic courses in animal or plant sciences. If your focus is research or teaching, consider combining complementary major and minor fields. For example, if you are majoring in natural resource economics, consider course work in economic development; if you study marketing, add course work in trade. Such combinations may allow you to later tap into two job markets rather

than just one. Recognizing the professional advantage afforded by strength in more than one area, some graduate programs have even instituted a two-field requirement.

Once you have chosen a field and an advisor, you should immediately begin to collect and organize information. Your ultimate goal will be to compile a *job packet*, i.e., a collection of documents that represents you as a candidate. Talk to fellow students who are currently on the job market and start collecting examples of all of the documents that you will eventually need to have in your packet. Start a job search notebook and dedicate a subdirectory on your computer to the topic. Make plans to attend professional meetings, and subscribe to newsletters or listservers. Also, if possible, serve as a graduate student representative on your department's faculty search committee. Many departments have a non-voting slot reserved for a student, and by participating in committee meetings you will quickly learn how peers are marketing themselves, and how search committees judge candidates.

Be diligent in formally corresponding with people you meet. Many jobs are found "through the grapevine." Even if many of your efforts lead to dead ends, the practice of corresponding with colleagues will have payoffs by improving your oral and written communication skills. In your interactions, focus on being professional. Print business cards – before you need them. Similarly, build a curriculum vitae (CV). This résumé should be current, complete but brief, well organized, legibly printed on white paper, and free from errors.

3. The middle years: emphasizing three important performance signals

Publishing

Publishing in peer-reviewed journals tends to define one's life as an academic. For many assistant professors tenure decisions are largely based on one's publication record – hence the adage to new faculty: "publish or perish." For this reason, when making a hiring decision a department will look for signals that a candidate can publish. The most reliable signal of this is evidence that you have already published, or are taking the necessary steps to publish your work. Keep in mind that publishing is neither easy, nor expeditious. It requires fresh ideas, an ability to organize and communicate ideas effectively in writing, and persistence and wherewithal to guide a paper through the long process from submission to acceptance. The protracted nature of the publication process – often two years or more – cannot be overemphasized. Slow initial turn-around at some

journals, the need for multiple revisions, and the inability to find sufficient blocks of time to make substantive revisions all lengthen the process. But if you can demonstrate the ability to persevere, your employment prospects will be strengthened measurably.

When building-up the publications section of your CV, we encourage you to keep in mind the (admittedly subjective) hierarchy that we propose in Table 1. Many students aim for a 6 or 7 on the scale. Unfortunately, while a chapter of your dissertation is important evidence of progress, it is unlikely to suffice in a competitive job market. At absolute minimum, you should have a formal working paper at the time of your application and evidence that you will complete your dissertation on schedule. Without these signals you are unlikely to be taken seriously for an appointment that involves some degree of research. However, putting out even a working paper will take advance planning. Discuss your concerns with your advisor – at least one year in advance – and try to work towards a co-authored staff or department working paper. Additionally, we recommend that you have at least one paper in review at a peer-reviewed journal (which indicates a commitment to the completion of a well-defined piece of work) at the time of your interviews. Remember that your goal is to look like an assistant professor, and assistant professors *always* have papers in review.

Table 1. Publications Hierarchy

1	Article in top-ranked journal
2	Article in a lower-ranked journal
3	Book chapter
4	Published book review or selected paper at AAEA meetings
5	Processed working paper (e.g. department working paper series)
6	Working paper or submitted article
7	Completed draft of dissertation chapter

Try to cover several publishing categories. Providing evidence that you work in a variety of formats sends a strong signal to the job market that you are serious about publishing your work. For example, writing a book review is a relatively easy way to get your name in print and learn the ropes, and many – though not all – journals are happy to receive unsolicited reviews of new books. (Start with a letter of intent to the book editor, who typically is *not* the manuscript editor). If you have any interest in extension, you should also seek out opportunities to write – either alone or with a faculty mentor – in extension-oriented outlets. Keep in mind that even if you have a 4.0 average and several publications, you will not be a competitive candidate for an extension position if all of your publications are theoretical.

If you have written a Master's thesis, you might want to consider it as a source for a publication. Another strategy for getting published is to never let a term paper die. Many successfully published papers have begun their lives as term papers that received encouraging (or even discouraging) comments. Accordingly, choose paper topics carefully, looking not only for the minimum requirement to satisfy course requirements, but also for potential to extend work at a later date. Consider your instructor's comments as a first review. Revise the paper, pass it to fellow students for comments, revise it again, present it in at an informal seminar, revise it again, and send it to a journal. If it gets rejected, incorporate comments, revise it again, and resubmit it elsewhere. Papers refined in this way are also good candidates for submission to the selected paper sessions at the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA) meetings. Bear in mind that the time required to bring a written piece to fruition can be quite long. A good (if somewhat chilling) primer on publishing is provided by Hamermesh (1992).

Teaching

An important mission on most Land Grant university campuses and many other college campuses is teaching. Not surprisingly, many departments strongly emphasize teaching, especially teaching directed toward undergraduate students or the public. If you aim to be a serious candidate for an academic job your file must contain evidence of either classroom teaching experience or outreach.

For traditional teaching positions the most favorable signal you can send will likely come from having sole-responsibility for teaching a course (Hyde and Lovejoy, 1999). However, any experience you have that demonstrates some exposure to teaching will distinguish you from

candidates without teaching experience. Experience as a teaching assistant or grader is a good signal, but this experience will carry much more weight if it reflects substantial interaction with students. If opportunities in your department for classroom teaching are scarce, be creative. Less traditional means of obtaining experience include teaching a course at community or commuter colleges, being a guest lecturer, or tutoring students as part of a paid or volunteer program on campus. In all cases, provide clear documentation that the experience involved student interaction. Ask for a letter from the faculty or staff person supervising your teaching and, if possible, obtain student evaluations of your performance to supplement your packet.

If your path is leading in the direction of a job with extension responsibilities, you should take steps to ensure that your teaching experience is relevant in that setting. Opportunities to build your credentials as an educator in this arena, of course, will depend on your interests and the needs of extension faculty in your department. Express your interests to your advisor or other faculty members as early as possible, and ask to be included in some extension activities. Ways in which you might participate include assisting with the development of training materials, making contributions to outlook meetings, or assisting with annual workshops or field schools. As in classroom teaching, care should be taken to document all aspects of your experience and obtain written evaluations of the quality of your work.

Grantsmanship

Grantsmanship is an important aspect of scholarship that students often overlook. This is unfortunate, because evidence that you can write fundable proposals can be very attractive to prospective employers, many of whom will expect you to raise money to fund research, graduate student research assistants, and – in some cases – part of your own salary.

Opportunities for extramural support fall into one of two basic categories: fellowships awarded directly to students, and grants awarded to faculty that have student involvement. The former includes university fellowships, private foundation fellowships (such as MacArthur and Social Science Research Council (SSRC) grants), and some federal fellowships (such as those awarded for Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) or by Fulbright and the National Security Education Program (NSEP)). The latter include grants administered by the USDA National Research Initiative (NRI), the National Science Foundation (NSF), or the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA). In either case, lead times of one year or more are typical and submission deadlines can fall at inconvenient times; so plan ahead. Seek out past applications as a guide and educate yourself about the competition and interests of the funding organization. If you do not have secure funding for your program, the incentive to obtain outside funding is obvious; but even if your funding is secure, do not overlook the need to develop experience in this area.

The fact that students can not individually apply for most grants should not deter you from pursuing such funding. Many proposals do not get written because faculty are short on time and therefore avoid projects that are only tangentially related to their own interests. However, if you demonstrate willingness to develop a proposal and see it through the process of approval, budgeting, and delivery, you may find faculty guidance and support forthcoming. Even if the proposal is unsuccessful (as most are), prospective employers will appreciate that you recognize this aspect of scholarship and have gone through the proposal-writing process. Finally, consider seeking funding for a post-doctoral position either to work with a faculty member in your department or with someone at another institution. Post-docs can provide some short-run job security and help give you time to build up your arsenal of publications.

4. The final year: entering the job market

As you enter the final year of your graduate studies you should have a record of research and teaching that will make you highly competitive on the academic job market. Accordingly, you will have taken steps to signal that you can be a successful assistant professor. What now? In the remainder of this paper we spell out the process of seeking employment so that you can present your qualifications in the best light possible.

Students in AE departments should be aware of two distinct but related job markets: the AE market and the economics market. Most AE Ph.D. students are placed in AE departments. However, many job opportunities may be found in economics departments and it is our opinion that these should not be dismissed without consideration. For example, in a recent survey of more than 100 undergraduate economics programs in the U.S., forty-five percent of department heads indicated they would consider hiring a suitably qualified candidate from an AE program (Hyde and Lovejoy, 1999). The departments included in this survey, which excluded those with graduate programs in economics, tended to emphasize teaching experience (although 85% reported they

expected faculty members to conduct some amount of research). Carson and Navarro (1988) review the economics job market. In general, the hiring system in economics is more standardized than in AE. Application deadlines fall at year's end; preliminary interviews are held in January at the annual meeting of the American Economics Association (AEA); and on-campus interviews are conducted in February and March. In contrast, AE departments frequently hire throughout the year, and start dates may not necessarily coincide with the start of a semester. Hence, the timing of your job-market search need not follow a specific schedule. The fluidity of the market implies that you should probably begin to apply for positions up to one-and-a-half years before you realistically believe you will be ready to start a position.

The process by which departments hire assistant professors may seem mystical to a student, but it generally follows an established pattern. Loveridge (1996) describes the process and internal workings in detail. A new position is advertised for about three months. A faculty search committee reviews submitted applications and narrows the group of candidates for more detailed consideration by the entire faculty. Sometimes, phone interviews or interviews at annual meetings of the AAEA are used to narrow the field. The committee then selects between two and four candidates for on-campus interviews. After all candidates have interviewed on campus, the faculty vote on candidates and – depending on the particulars of the department – the department head makes a decision as to which candidate is preferred. The department then forwards its decision to university administrators who are usually responsible for the actual hiring decision.

The job packet: selling yourself on paper

A review of job packets by a search committee is the initial screen for candidates. Therefore it is important that you devote attention and thought to your packet. A general list of what to include in your mailing will usually appear in the job advertisement. However, the quality and uniqueness of your job packet count for much more than whether you have assembled the necessary pieces. Obviously, the content of your CV will largely be determined by this stage in your academic career. Nonetheless, you still have some control over how your qualifications are presented and should remain mindful of the job description when assembling your packet.

The basic contents of a job packet should always include a cover letter, transcripts, a CV, a list of references or sealed letters of reference, and a dissertation abstract. While it is possible to

be invited for an interview on the basis of this information alone, we believe a clearer signal of your qualifications will emerge if you submit several other items, even if the job announcement does not request them. These include a sample or samples of your writing (i.e., the one or two highest ranked items from Table 1 that you can provide), a brief outline of your research plan for the coming years and evidence of your teaching and extension performance and style.

In most cases, you will be applying for more than one position. Each of these will be described a bit differently by its job announcement. Consider, therefore, tailoring each component of your packet to specific positions. You may, for example, have some choice regarding which papers to include in your packet, or which aspects of your teaching to emphasize. In all cases, you want to send a signal that you are the best candidate for that particular job. In some cases it may be appropriate to call the chair of the search committee to gain insights and details regarding teaching needs or other aspects of the position. Certainly make use of the internet, literature searches, and conversations with faculty to get a sense of the nature of the department and what aspects of your record will be most appealing. Some issues to keep in mind when preparing your packet include whether you could meet an undergraduate or graduate teaching need, whether you might provide complementary research, and whether your technical strengths complement those of the department or fill gaps that the department is looking to fill.

Your letters of reference are perhaps the most important part of your job packet, yet these are also elements least under your control. Keeping this in mind, it goes without saying that maintaining contact and good relations with your committee members is important at all stages in your graduate career. The first time you ask for letters of recommendation, you should do so verbally. Provide a copy of your cover letter, your CV, your dissertation abstract (which may be tentative at this stage), a copy of the job announcements and clear written instructions on when and where letters are to be sent. Comments by your references on various components of your packet (papers, statements, teaching evaluations, etc.) can be extremely valuable, so try to provide each faculty member with a copy of your packet at least six weeks before the application deadline. Inform them in advance if you think other letters will be required and ask for instructions regarding requesting additional recommendations. If one of your referees is notoriously negligent in letter-writing responsibilities, find out how you might verify that the letters have been

sent on time. Most faculty members will not be offended by a gentle inquiry or reminder a week before the deadline.

Your job packet should document your teaching experience and abilities. You may include a summary of teaching evaluations and a statement of your teaching philosophy and interest. If you have substantial experience you may want to compile and include a teaching portfolio.[3] In referring to your teaching interests in your cover letter, it would help to know the course(s) that the department expects to fill with the position in advance. This will probably not be mentioned in the job announcement but can be learned through a phone call to someone on the search committee. You should also review the department's course offerings and note courses that you think you would be willing and able to teach at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Finally, mention areas of topical or geographical expertise that will make you unique in the classroom.

Your job packet should exude professionalism. In academia this typically does not mean color-coded resumes, expensive paper or elaborate fonts. On the contrary, readers will place a premium on clarity and concision. Keep your cover letter short, well organized, and to the point. Consider brief subheadings (e.g. for research, teaching, or extension) in the cover letter if it runs more than a single page (two pages is probably sufficient). Your CV should follow a standard style for an academic vita (ask your advisor or a colleague for an example) and must not misrepresent your achievements (e.g. a manuscript in review should not be listed under publications). All material should have a professional appearance and should be your best work. Finally, aim for having your packet arrive at least one week before the closing date. This saves you money on overnight mail and avoids the impression that you are a procrastinator.

The meetings: selling yourself in fifteen minutes

Professional meetings are frequently the first place that face-to-face contact is made between candidates and employers. Job seekers should keep in mind the professional meetings of both the

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[3] Some campuses have an office to assist with the preparation of teaching portfolios, which are usually used for the purposes of tenure and promotion. These offices will probably also offer assistance to teaching assistants or lecturers interested in documenting their teaching experience, methods and philosophy. If you are able to prepare such a document, refer to it in your letter and offer to provide the search committee with a copy.

AAEA in August and the AEA in January. The AEA meetings deserve mention for two reasons. First, while most AE departments do not interview for positions at the AEA meetings, some do. Second, as noted above, many economics departments that emphasize undergraduate teaching are willing to consider AE applicants. You should be forewarned, however, that competition in the economics market is strong. Nonetheless, we are convinced that many AE graduate students have sufficient skill, knowledge, and experience to successfully compete in this market.

The AAEA meetings are neither obligatory nor essential components of a job-search, but contact with prospective employers at the AAEA meetings will serve you in a number of ways. One, interviews might lead to employment. Two, the meetings provide an opportunity to present your research in the form of a selected paper. Three, you will gain exposure to the breadth of the profession (which is almost invariably different from your own department culture). Four, you can make contacts that might be valuable in future research or on the job market. Five, by attending the meetings you demonstrate to potential employers your interest in participation in the profession. And finally, attending the meetings can help you decide whether you want an academic position since, if you are successful, attending AAEA meetings will likely be part of your professional life for years to come.

The AAEA meetings are used by departments to promote positions previously unannounced, to conduct primary interviews to narrow the range of prospective candidates, or – occasionally – to conduct extensive interviews in the final stages of the selection process. If you have applied for a position in advance of the meetings, you will usually be notified if you have made the interview cut and a time will be set up for interviews before the meetings. Interviews can also be arranged through the AAEA employment center, an information and communication clearinghouse organized by the Association. Bring with you a few copies of your job packet and be prepared to make additional copies if necessary. In the event that you get an interview, be prepared to summarize your dissertation methods and findings in three minutes or less, to discuss your research and teaching interests in the same amount of time, and to talk about what you like to do when you are not working. It has been said that no one remembers more than three points from a brief encounter, so keep your message short and sweet. If you find yourself interviewing for a previously unannounced position, use the interview to learn more about the position: some

things about the history of the position, the appointment split, and whether the department has filled other positions recently.

Students regularly present their research at the AAEA meetings. The benefits of doing so, while potentially high, are probably not as tangible as many job seekers might hope. It is rather unlikely that a future employer will happen upon your seminar amidst the mass of alternatives, or to actively seek it out (unless you are already in a limited pool of candidates). Still, the experience of presenting your work, the opportunity to receive comments on your research and – of course – the line on your CV, all make submission of a paper for the AAEA meetings a worthwhile part of your job-search strategy.

The on-campus interview: selling yourself in person

Your goal up to this point is to find yourself among the fortunate few to be invited for an on-campus interview. The department's objectives in this interview are to get to know you as a person. Much of your success during the on-campus interview will depend on how well you have prepared for the event. Before your visit you should learn as much as you can about the department and the expectations for the position for which you are applying. Typically, your on-campus interview will include one or more seminars, meetings, and meals with faculty in small groups, meetings with deans and, often, meetings with students. The interview process begins when you are picked up at the airport and ends when you are dropped off. Every snack, meal, and coffee break in the interim may form part of the interview. Each meeting will likely be your only opportunity to impress a given member of the faculty. No encounter should be taken lightly.

Your seminar is your moment of greatest visibility. It is imperative that you make the best of it. Know your audience and know your material. Aim to give the presentation from memory (since many faculty members will be focusing on your communication skills). Your goal should be to show that you are addressing an interesting issue, have a competent and innovative way of addressing the issue, and are able to put your work in the context of larger concerns. Direct your comments to an audience of non-specialists in your subject area. Avoid being either overly technical or too simplistic. For most AE departments we think it is fair to say that the point of your mathematical or econometric sophistication should be to show you can contribute technical expertise to the faculty. However, do not let mathematical pyrotechnics become your focus.

Your overheads should be clear and prepared with a large font. Consider handouts if your presentation includes tables. Emphasize key concepts, empirical results, and practical interpretations. Keep your story clear, even if it isn't simple.

Remember to allow time for questions. Learn about time limitations in advance and plan your seminar accordingly. Leaving no time for questions is like forgetting to put your CV in the packet. Be courteous and sincere in taking questions: if you do not know the answer, admit it and thank your questioner for the idea. If you find yourself on the defensive, ask those who are interested to join you after the seminar to continue the discussion.

Throughout the interview you should be seeking to gather some important information about the position. Appropriate questions include inquiries regarding available computer hardware and software support, the teaching requirements and specific courses you would likely be called upon to teach, which faculty might be interested in collaborating on research, and the number of undergraduate and graduate students each faculty member supervises. You might also ask about assistance for supporting grantsmanship and faculty development. Avoid discussing tenure requirements or salary unless someone else raises the topic. Finally, consider the visit an opportunity to find out whether you are interested in moving to the community. Many departments will try to schedule a brief tour of residential areas with an area realtor.

Your visit will probably also include at least one meeting with a dean, associate dean, or other administrator. A group interview, with you on one side of the table and five deans opposite you can be a bit intimidating, to say the least. Far from being perfunctory, the purpose of this meeting is to ensure that you have something to offer the university community. How does your work meet the teaching needs of the college? What do you expect to contribute to the school's extension or outreach program? Where does your research fit within the overall aims and needs of the college? Can you contribute in the international arena? These are the questions you must be able to answer. Still, no one expects you to be all things to all people, so do not attempt to promise more than you (or any other mortal) can deliver. Be prepared to communicate your research abstract in lay terms. Be prepared to tell deans (who may be trained as chemists, animal scientists, or agronomists) what you have studied, what you have learned, why it is important, and how it can be used. If you can do this, you will have passed their test.

Your visit will usually end with an exit interview with the department head, the chair of the search committee, or with members of the search committee. If you genuinely want the position, this is your opportunity to say so with enthusiasm. Highlight why you think you will be a good match for the department. Ask about the future path of the department and its place within the college or school. Emphasize common interests with other faculty members, competency to teach required classes (perhaps mentioning what textbooks you would use), and reasons why you would like to relocate to the area. Follow-up with a thank-you letter to the search committee chair and prepare to wait anxiously while other candidates trace your steps.

5. Summary

Our message is simple, but implies considerable effort and planning. The steps we have identified above are briefly summarized in Table 2. In preparing the table, we have intentionally emphasized a "backward solution" approach to the problem. Focus on the end product, namely obtaining a job offer, and consider the tangible evidence that you must accumulate in the semesters preceding the offer. This evidence must signal your ability to be a successful assistant professor. Strong signals of your performance in the areas of teaching, publishing, and grantsmanship form the basis of an attractive job packet.

To deliver these signals, you need to plan ahead and ensure that you have the qualities that appeal to job-search committees. Although these qualities include being an outstanding graduate student, being a good student is not enough. You should strive to have a publications record in progress, teaching experience, grant-writing experience, and the skill to present your research and yourself with confidence and enthusiasm. Meeting these goals – while at the same time attending classes, taking exams, and writing and defending a dissertation – is a bit daunting. But if you wait until the last year of your graduate program to meet the challenge it will be too late. Instead, consider the schedule presented in Table 2, modify it as needed, and stick to it. Good luck!

Table 2. Timetable of Job-Search Activities

Time	Activity
year 5	• Start new job
	• Obtain job offers and negotiate
	• On-campus interviews
year 4	• Interview at professional meetings
	• Begin applying for positions
	• Complete outline of dissertation and one chapter
	• Teach a class
year 3	• Revise and resubmit paper
	• Look for teaching assignment
	• Attend AAEA meetings
	• Write and submit book review
	• Revise paper and submit to journal & AAEA meetings
	• Obtain first teaching experience
year 2	• Give an informal seminar based on revised paper
	• Submit grant proposals
	• Research grant opportunities
	• Revise paper
	• Take qualifying exams
	• Write course paper with an eye toward eventual publication
year 1	• Choose field, advisor and dissertation topic
	• Start classes

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