

# Success, Failure, and Meaning as a Postdoc

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Postdoctoral Research Symposium  
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# Positionality

Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina - 2023

# Who I Am

**Pennsylvania State University**

College of Information Sciences and Technology  
(University Park, PA)

7/2024 –

**Associate Professor** with tenure  
Director, Human Language Technologies Lab  
Graduate Faculty, College of IST  
Graduate Faculty, Social Data Analytics  
Affiliate, Center for Socially Responsible Artificial Intelligence  
Affiliate, Social Science Research Institute  
**Assistant Professor**

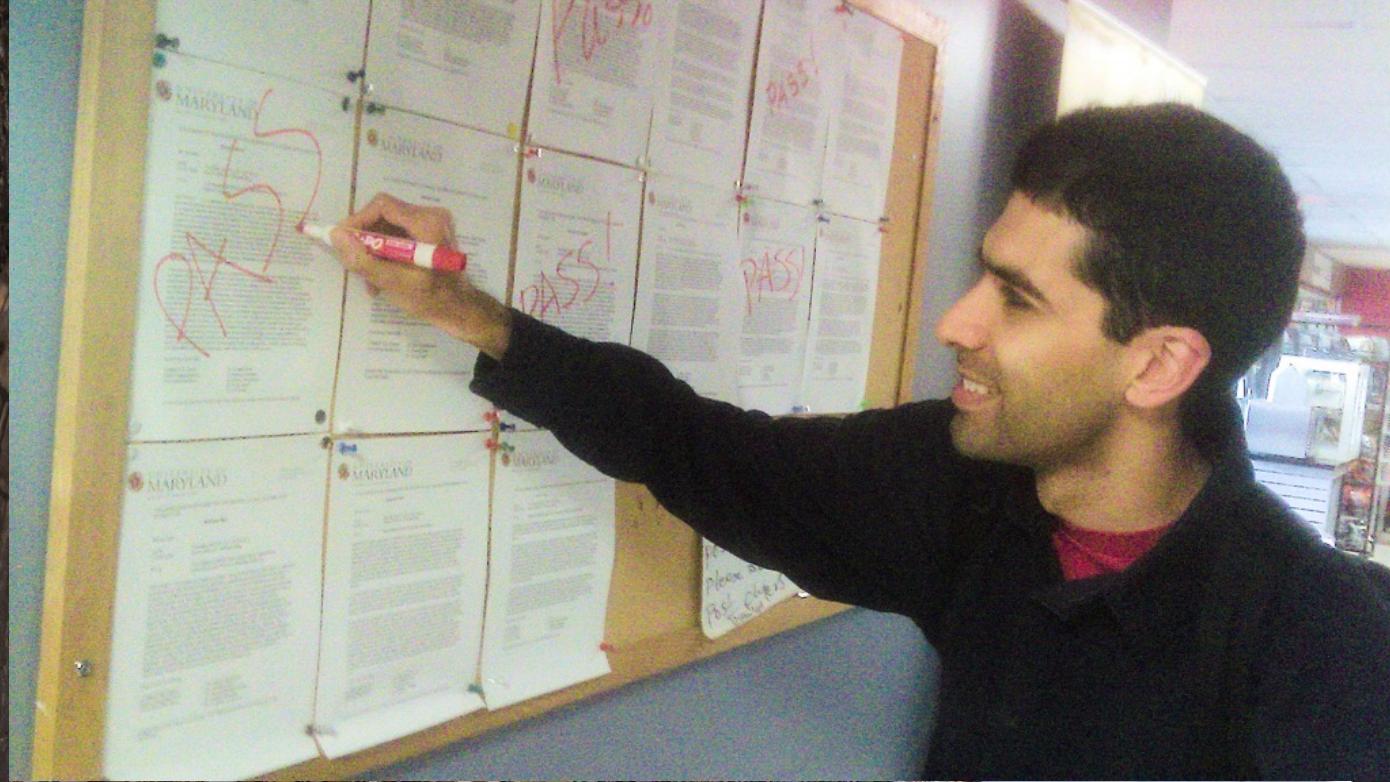
8/2018 – 6/2024

**University of Cincinnati**  
EECS Department  
(Cincinnati, OH)

8/2016 – 8/2018

**Assistant Professor**  
Director, Human Language Technologies Lab  
Member, Institute for Analytics Innovation

Why did I move?  
Academia is a job—not an ideal.



# How I Became a Postdoc

How did I *really* get my first postdoc position?

A friend, due diligence, and luck.

Prague, Czech Republic - 2019

# What I Did

Carnegie Mellon University  
School of Computer Science  
(Pittsburgh, PA)

8/2015 – 8/2016

**Project Scientist**

*Supervisor: Norman Sadeh*

1/2015 – 5/2015

**Lecturer** (Natural Language Processing)

8/2014 – 7/2015

**NSF International Research Fellow**

When I interviewed for faculty openings, no one asked me to explain this sequence of positions.

Black  
w  
Sadeh

University of Edinburgh  
School of Informatics  
(Edinburgh, United Kingdom)

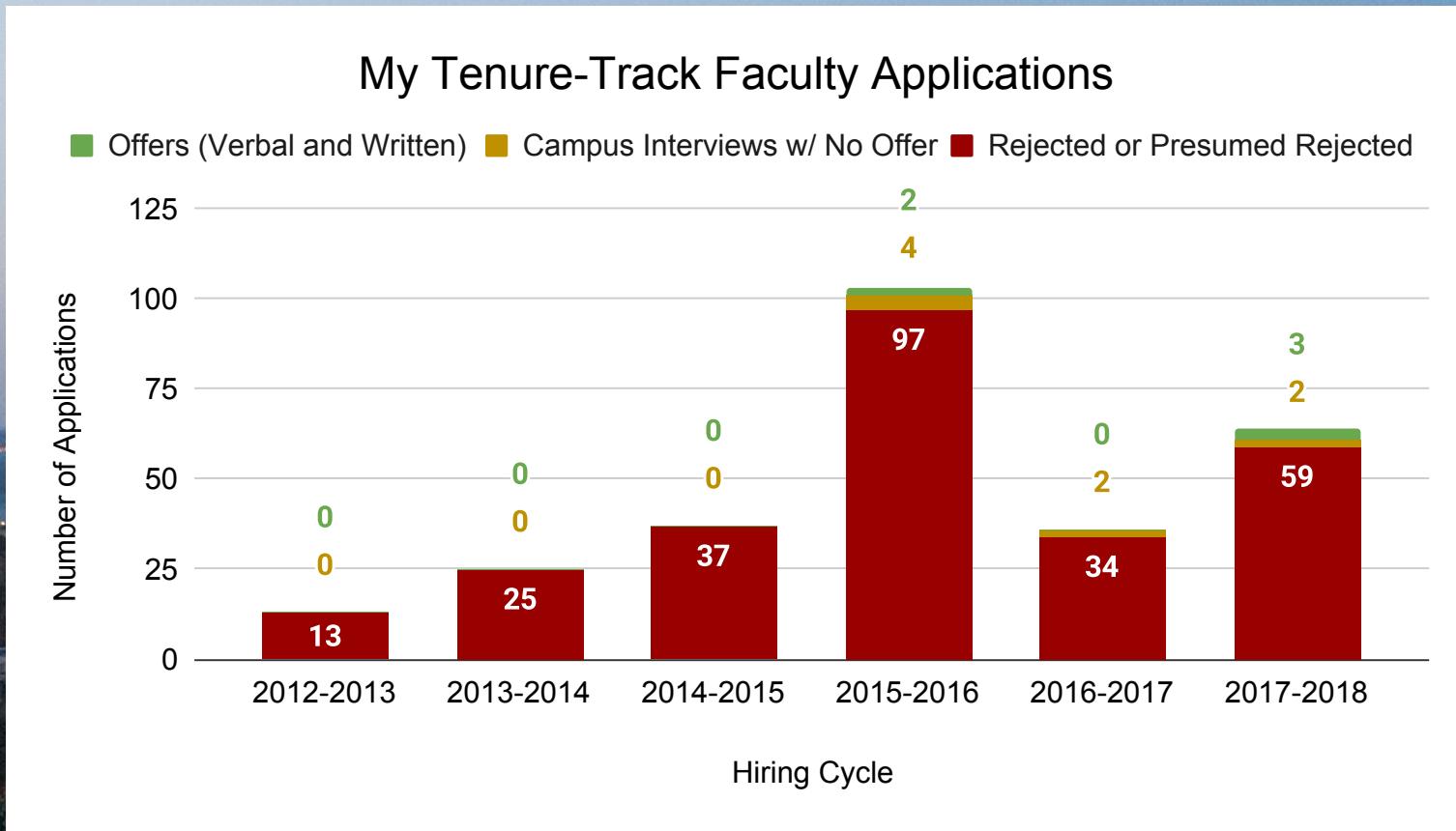
International Research Fellow

*Host: Jon Oberlander*

Wait... What?

I reinvented my research portfolio, and I went on adventures.

# The Failures



How did I keep going?

I don't have a simple answer. However...

It's OK to want big things, and it's also OK to change your mind.



# The Successes

Wasn't this great?

Sure, but sometimes it didn't feel great.

Perspective came slowly.

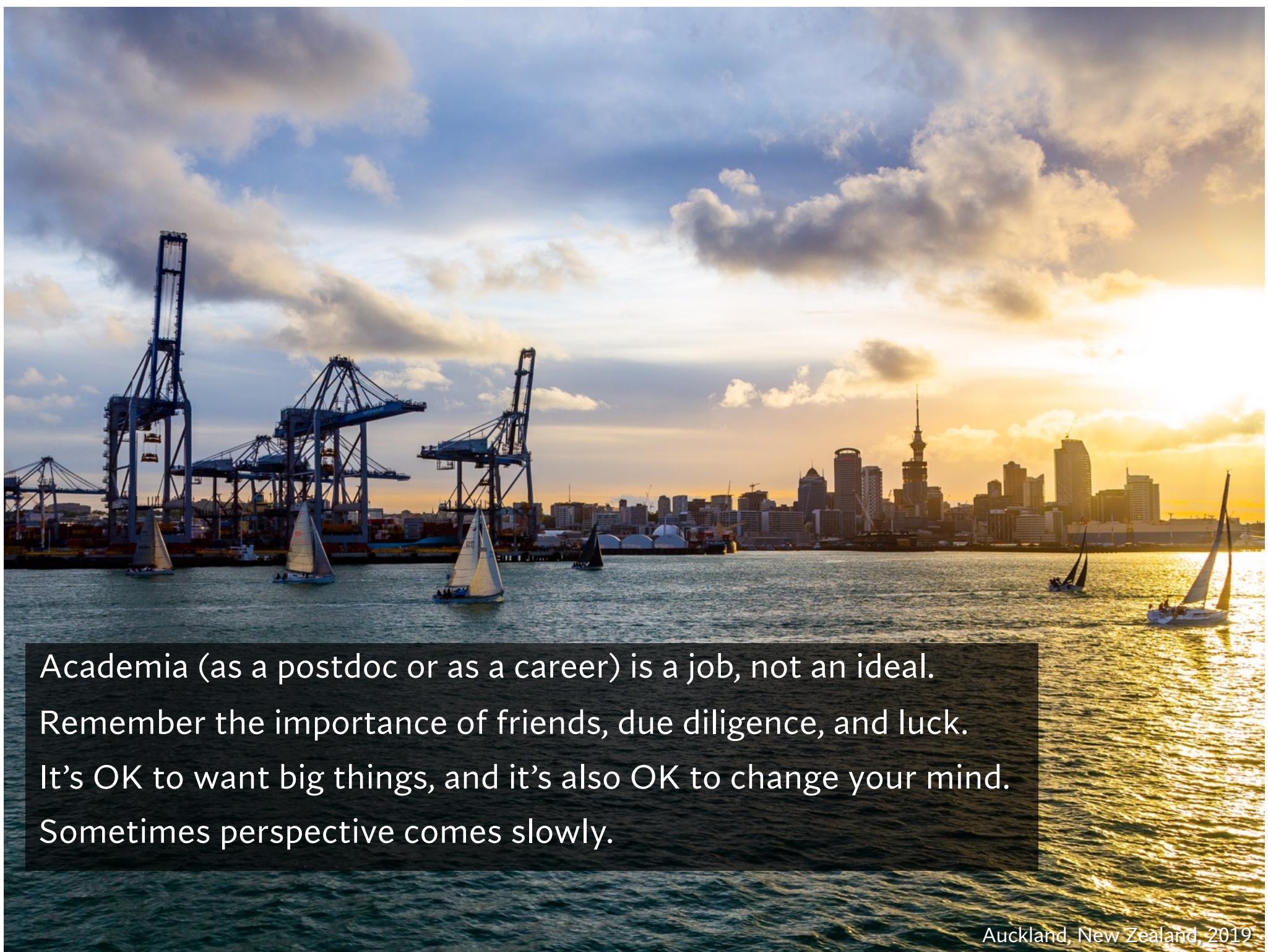
## My First Faculty Position: Application to Start Date



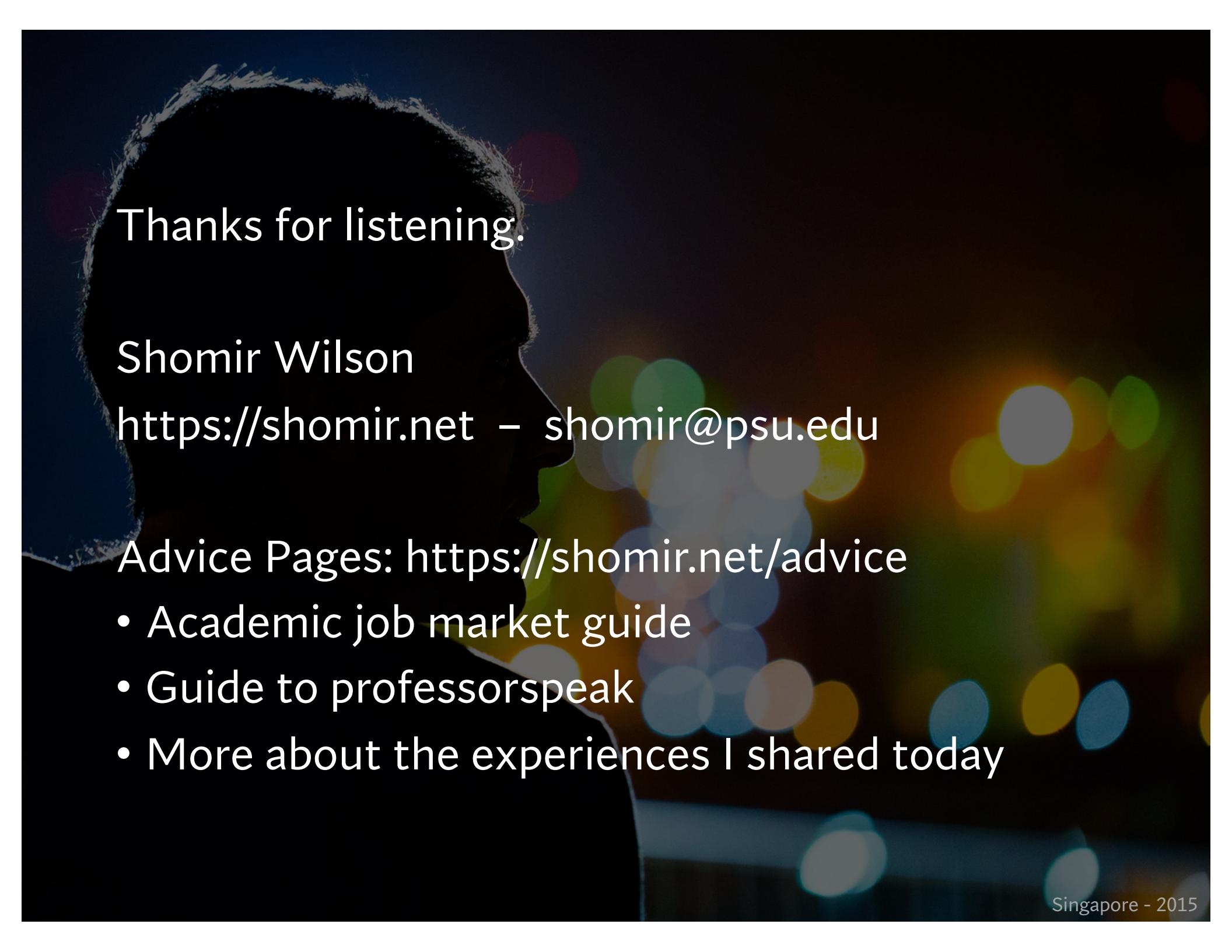
# How I Got Out

Subplots not shown in the timeline:

- Spending roughly 170 hours (~7 days) on planes
- Competing verbal offer that never fully materialized (four months)
- Short-notice interview in June 2016 at a university in the UK
- Conference in Europe the week before my start date



Academia (as a postdoc or as a career) is a job, not an ideal.  
Remember the importance of friends, due diligence, and luck.  
It's OK to want big things, and it's also OK to change your mind.  
Sometimes perspective comes slowly.



Thanks for listening.

Shomir Wilson

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Advice Pages: <https://shomir.net/advice>

- Academic job market guide
- Guide to professorspeak
- More about the experiences I shared today