

# How to get a tenure-track job

(Everything you need to know and  
were too afraid to ask)

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<http://mysite.science.uottawa.ca/rsmith43/Handout.pdf>

# Audience

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- This workshop is for students, postdocs and junior faculty only
- If this isn't you, we ask that you please leave the room
- We want this to be a safe space, where everyone is free to ask anything, without worrying that their advisor or future employer is in the room.

# Don't panic

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- The whole tenure-track application process may seem daunting
- But it's something you can conquer
- Most important: don't be discouraged
- As math biologists, you have exceptional and highly valued skills.

# Definitions

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- What is tenure anyway?
- Assistant/Associate/Full professor?
- Postdoc?
- Visiting Assistant Professor?
- Lecturer?

# When to look for tenure-track jobs

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August: Decide if you're ready

(it's generally okay to wait an extra year if you're not)

September: Start sending applications

(Occasionally jobs have late August deadlines, but September is the crucial month)

November–Jan: early interviews, job fairs at big conferences

Feb–Mar: most interviews occur.

# When to look for postdocs

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- Any time
- This is especially useful if you finish your degree at an odd time
- Postdocs often run late (eg April) but the tenure-track cycle starts early
- Be aware of deadlines.

# Where to look for tenure-track jobs

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- SMB job listings
  - American Mathematical Society
  - The Chronicle of Higher Education
  - Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM)
  - mathjobs.org
  - Higher Ed Jobs
  - Academic 360
- (websites listed on Handout).

# Finding jobs

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- Looking for jobs should become a weekly activity (eg every Saturday morning)
- During peak times, 100 jobs appear every week
- Some advertisements are directly in your area, but others are more general.



# Where to look for postdocs

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- Websites of academics in your research area
- Unlike tenure-track jobs, postdocs are generally not advertised
- You can cold-email universities or individual professors.

# Think outside the box

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- Are you sure you want to be in a math dept?
- For math biologists, the opportunities are enormous
- Other departments need mathematicians or statisticians and simply can't get them
- Eg epidemiology, health sciences, medicine, community health, pathobiology
- Consider multiple departments, joint/cross appointments, non-university tenure-track positions (eg NIH).

# Advance preparation

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If you're some significant way off, there are steps you should take now:

- Can you angle your research so that you have strong answers for significant questions in your field?
- Can you take education courses to strengthen your teaching credentials?
- Can you apply for fellowships to increase your likelihood of attracting grants?
- Can you get some supervising experience?

# Application preparation

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Polish or rewrite your

- Cover letter
- CV
- Research statement (future projects, grants)
- Teaching statement (teaching philosophy)  
(sample links on Handout)
- Research the institutions
- Should you tailor your application?
- If you want somewhere that has trouble attracting people, say so.

# Letters of reference

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- Talk to your referees about their letters early
- You must have one from your advisor
- You also need a teaching-specific reference
- You should have at least 4 references
- Should you send more if they ask for less?
- Sign up for Interfolio or your local equivalent (link on handout)
- This makes referees happier (less work)
- It also circumvents potential interpersonal conflicts (it's a one-time upload).

# Interview preparation

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- Research the institutions  
(especially crucial for phone interviews)  
(plus other departments if interdisciplinary)
- Know details of faculty you could work with
- Know details of any special or interesting programs they have
- Prepare questions for them  
(this is crucial; serious questions only)
- Why do you want to go there?  
(don't talk about the view).

# The phone interview

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- Question #1: What is it about our institution that attracted you to us?
- Research, research, research
- Have a sheet of paper by the phone
  - you can write down questions
- It's a tough interview because you're flying blind and can't judge reactions
- You'll be talking to a whole group of people and won't be able to judge reactions or even how many people are listening.

# During the phone interview

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- It's acceptable to ask for a list of who'll be present in advance
- You can research these people and confirm who's there at the start
  - shows interest, prepares you for what to expect
- Just beware that doors may open and close
- Prepare questions to ask  
(eg interdisciplinary, tenure process)
- The secret: be enthusiastic.



# The campus interview (general)

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- The interview starts the moment you step out of the plane and ends the moment you step back on it
- You're on the entire time
  - yes, even in the bathroom
- Regardless of what they tell you, you do not get downtime
- Be discreet
- Do not gossip about your department or anyone else (get into the habit now)
- The interviewer is not your friend.

# The campus interview (dress)

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- Men: wear a suit and tie
- Women: wear a suit or equivalent
- You cannot overdress
- This makes you instantly recognisable, which is useful
- Some faculty may judge you entirely from a two-minute conversation in the elevator.

# The campus interview (research)

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- Be enthusiastic
- Have different versions of your research prepared:
  - the cocktail party version
  - the elevator conversation
  - the round-table quizzing
- Do not undersell yourself.

# The campus interview (teaching)

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- Be enthusiastic
- Do not trash your students
- Teaching is as important as your research, often more so
- Anyone who makes it to the interview will be a good researcher, but teaching is where you can make the difference
- If you have teaching experience as a TA, say so (some TAs only mark and proctor)
- Teaching is the lifeblood of the department.

# The campus interview (presentation)

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- The presentation is where you get to shine
- It's not just your research they'll be evaluating...
- ...they'll be looking at your teaching style too
- Make sure you start with a great introduction to the topic that a general audience can follow
- Students are often recruited to attend so committees can ask them about it later
- The question period is crucial.

# The campus interview (questions)

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- Have (lots of) questions prepared for them
- Ask about:
  - teaching load
  - conferences coming up
  - interdisciplinary opportunities
  - the tenure process
  - living in the town (but be professional)
- Don't ask about maternity leave or salary
- Faculty want to know if you'll be a research collaborator, so ask about their research too.

# The campus interview (meals)

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- Breakfast, lunch, dinner...
- ...you're still being interviewed
- Usually by the hiring committee, but they won't tell you that
- Faculty want to know if you'll be a congenial colleague
- Don't drink alcohol
- Don't order spaghetti
- Be professional (never swear etc).

# The campus interview (caveats)

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- How will you deal with illegal questions (married, kids etc)?
- How will you deal with a hostile interviewer? (don't take it personally)
- The dean will be the most important and most difficult interview
- Don't ask about salary...
- ...and dodge if you are asked (if stuck, give a \$10,000 range)
- Don't tell them about other interviews.



# The campus interview (relax)

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- All that said, relax and enjoy it
- After all, you're the star of the show
- If you weren't worthy of being hired, you wouldn't be invited to the interview.

# The offer

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- The dean will call you
- Do nothing!
- ...except ask for time
- You can have two weeks to consider
- During this time, contact other places
- Contact any places you haven't interviewed at but would especially like.

# Negotiation (general)

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- It's not only okay to negotiate, it's expected
- They cannot take your offer away, unless you do something unprofessional
- You will never be in a better position than you are now
- Even when times are tight, this is true
- The dean sets aside extra money for negotiations, so you might as well take advantage of it.

# Negotiation (specific)

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- Ask for as many things as you can
  - startup funds
  - parking spot
  - cross appointments
  - benefits
  - semester off
- Even if you get a tenure-track offer, you can usually delay for a semester or a year.

# Negotiation (salary)

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- Salary is important, as increases are cumulative
- Difference could be \$150,000 over your entire career
- This is especially crucial for women
- But there are many other things you can ask for
- Remember, you have to live there
- Get everything in writing.

# Negotiation (partner hire)

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- What if you're looking for two jobs?
- Decide if you're going to mention this before you have an offer
- Many universities have a partner-hire program, especially in smaller towns
- Or it may be a handicap  
(however, if your partner isn't in academia and willing to move, that can be an advantage)
- Dodge, but never lie.

# Negotiation (acceptance)

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- If you can play off two offers against each other, then great
- If not, you still have a bargaining tool: your acceptance
- It's like buying a car: "What can I do to put you in this car today?"

# What if you don't get an offer?

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- Keep trying
- It usually takes at least one year to “learn the market” anyway
- Don't put all your eggs in one basket
- Do you have funds for the forthcoming year?
- You can apply for postdocs at the same time
- Can you get a Visiting Assistant Professor position?
- Be wary of taking a lectureship: it'll overwhelm your time.



# Things to remember

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- There's more than one way to skin a cat
- Don't be discouraged
- Be enthusiastic
- Keep publishing: you'll only become stronger
- (If you remember nothing else, remember this)
- They're looking for three things:
  - research
  - teaching
  - grant-getting potential
- Keep trying.

# The Handout

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<http://mysite.science.uottawa.ca/rsmith43/Handout.pdf>

Includes links to:

- slides from this talk
- websites where jobs are listed
- sample cover letter, CV, teaching and research statements
- Grant resources
- Useful websites
- Interfolio.