

Navigating the Political Science Job Market for Caltech PhDs

ver. 0.1.0

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I am assuming you to be a potential entrant in the political science job market from Caltech's Social Sciences PhD program. I entered the program in 2015 and am scheduled to graduate in June 2020. This is my post-mortem of the job market.

HSS is a small program. In many cases, you will be the one and only one political science PhD candidate in your cohort, and there will not be many recent graduates that you personally know. Acquiring up-to-date information and networking requires much courage, time, and effort. **While you should always strive to acquire up-to-date information, hopefully this can serve as a guide for you to better prepare for the political science job market.** I am trying to be very open about my failures and successes, so that you have an accurate idea of what can happen. Much of the advice has been picked up from other candidates/colleagues/the Internet, especially on the interviews part. **Please do not circulate this outside the division.**

Summary

- Actively look for information **outside** Caltech (listservs/conference friends) and learn what they do in terms of **professional development**.
- Aside from a good job market paper, have at least **two more papers that you are willing to showcase as near-complete works**.
- Have your website and application packet ready **well in advance** to receive feedback from your advisor, placement director, and your peers.
- Inform your committee/letter-writers **early**, and **frequently communicate** with them about (1) what research you do, and (2) how you intend to frame your story.
- **Do mock job talks/interviews early**. If the division does not arrange them on time, request them—ideally, the first talk should be during the spring semester, the second one at the start of fall, and the third in the fall, spaced at least 1 week apart.
- **Practice self-care**—eat well, sleep well, try to exercise a bit, and use the counseling services if necessary. Don't "disappear" at all costs.

The academic job market incredibly imbalanced. There are not many jobs compared to the number of job market candidates—I cannot stress this enough. There is a surprising degree of randomness/luck, and its outcome does not reflect your values as a person or as a scholar. To cap it all, there is a lack of clear, standardized, and high-quality information about the market (see thread on <https://twitter.com/JohnHolbein1/status/1225096104091406336?s=20>). You are not a failure if you end up not pursuing a job in the academia—job outcomes are not monotonic by performance.

I thank Alexander V. Hirsch, R. Michael Alvarez, and Lucas Núñez for their comments and suggestions. **Please reach out to me if you have suggestions about improving this document.**

The general timeline of the job market is shown in Figure 1. Note that this assumes that you have built up a good research profile prior to market opening, and **more emphasis should be placed for years 3 and 4 in the PhD sequence.**

POLITICAL SCIENCE JOB MARKET TIMELINE		
Jan	The committee members should be decided. Letter writers should know that they would be writing LORs for you, as early as possible.	Talk to junior faculty / recent graduates about their experience. You can/should be asking for help.
Feb	(I'm of course assuming that you have an idea/frame for your JMP. Meet with your advisor/committee members often.)	
Mar	Good time for a proseminar prez. before MPSA. Keep receiving feedback from in-house. <u>Make clear to audience that this is JMP (make the audience pay attention)</u>	Can people in different fields e.g. economics understand your punchline/pitch?
Apr	MPSA at early Apr: present job market paper. <u>Website should be ready</u> (even if it is mostly empty at this stage.)	
May	Recommend monthly or more freq. meetings with committee (individually or together). Discuss frequently issues and framing in paper. Start drafting various docs for JM packet.	There may be a supportyourcohort Slack channel available, put together by other JMCs. Check.
Jun	<u>First draft of JMP should be ready. "Packet" should be halfway (finish ASAP, get feedback!)</u> Circulate it among faculty and receive in-house feedback.	
Jul	Finish CV/research/teaching/diversity statements. Gather unofficial/official transcript and student evaluations (official). Put together APSA eJobs spreadsheet. Website ready.	
Aug	<u>First deadlines start (Aug 15)</u> . Schools are frontloading, so beware. All LORs should be ready. Generic cover letter should be finished. APSA at end of Aug.	higheredjobs.com chroniclevitae.com appam.org/job-listings/ may also have jobs, but most US jobs are available on APSA/MPSA. Twitter and Polmeth ListServ may be faster than APSA eJobs.
Sep	Major deadline(s): Sep 1, Sep 15. Early flyouts also possible. In-house job market talk likely last week of Sep or first week of Oct (must be earlier).	
Oct	Major deadline(s): Oct 1, Oct 15. Most schools Oct 15. First flyouts. Good time to schedule proseminar/individually scheduled small-scale presentations.	
Nov	Major deadline(s): Nov 1, Nov 15. Much less than Sep/Oct. More flyouts. If applying for post-docs, discuss with LOR writers about post-doc letters.	
Dec	Last few deadlines Dec 1 or Dec 15. Long waiting game, or spring market (if market concluded early, congratulations!)	If there is something you do not understand about a job ad, discuss with advisor(s)/ask around. But don't assume that you do not make the qualifications for a job---just apply. If you are not a good fit, that's for the search committee to decide, not you.
Information to send Laurel/placement director by Aug 15 as you write your statements:		
1. Field of specialization: political science, American politics, political methodology, ... 2. What are your research fields? 3. What are your teaching fields? 4. Description of dissertation research 5. Description of JMP		
Example of such pages: https://web.archive.org/web/20191214231405/https://www.hss.caltech.edu/academics/graduate-studies/job-market-candidates https://web.archive.org/web/20191214231022/https://politics.princeton.edu/graduate/job-placement		
Check Twitter e.g. John Holbein/Hans Noel for JMP circulation/advertising opportunities.		
If you wish to do a mock interview, must coordinate in advance with placement director/seminar chair. This is also currently geared only towards econ job market, so may be late.		
Visa timelines may be different and I do not know well about OPT.		

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Figure 1: Academic Job Market Timeline, Political Science

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1 First Steps

While much emphasis of this document has been placed on the actual job market process, many preparations should be done **well before the job market year**. For instance, networking with other scholars and students, building a personal website, and building a social media presence (if any) should start well before the job market year. Please keep those in mind.¹ The reason that much of this document is focused on the job market process is because I had not the time/energy to write more.

Please also note that I have not much experience applying to liberal arts colleges, teaching-specific positions, and postdoctoral positions. Caltech students find it difficult to convince teaching-oriented institutions that they are a good fit. I did not apply to industry jobs, and I think the non-academic job market deserves a separate section/document. I will update this document with tips if anyone is willing to share their experiences—just email me.

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1.1 The Third Year

The coursework has ended and you should focus on (if you have not done so yet) (1) finding a good primary advisor and another faculty who will eventually become your committee member (and potentially your defense committee chair), and (2) building up your third-year paper, which is presented in the third-year presentations.

Oftentimes, the third-year paper becomes your job market paper, or at the very least one chapter of your dissertation. Moreover, this is the first time that almost all faculty will be able to see the paper's presentation and give comments. This is an extremely valuable opportunity that should not be regarded lightly.

Jesse M. Shapiro's "[Four Steps to an Applied Micro Paper](#)" is a good guide, but you should frequently/regularly meet up with your advisor(s) to discuss the central question, the analysis, and so on. You should minimally at least meet biweekly, and optimally at least once a week.

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Third Year Presentation. This is essentially the **candidacy** in HSS. There have been several cases of failing the third year presentation and having to do it a second time, if the faculty decides that the presentation was inadequate (in terms of the direction of the research question, the depth of the analysis, presentation itself, and so on). Although I have not witnessed it myself, there have been students who did not make it past the second chance granted. In addition, you really do not want to waste the summer reworking on the third year presentation and worrying about not passing. So, no pressure...

Each student is usually granted 45 minutes. I recommend that your slides not exceed twenty slides, with two backup plans: (1) one for when time runs out, and (2) one for when there is ample time left. There will be many interruptions, and you are more likely to run out of time. I trust that you have seen two years' worth of third-year presentations by now. I believe a common mistake among HSS graduates in particular is that the slides/content are too technical and less focused on helping the audience follow the "story" and why it matters. Jesse M. Shapiro again has a good guide on

¹For a good thread on networking in conferences, see https://twitter.com/Sarah_Mojarad/status/1228554917490520067?s=20

how to make slides/give (applied micro) talks at “[How to Give an Applied Micro Talk.](#)” Theorists, please consult with Alex Hirsch even if he is not your advisor, as he has fantastic advice to give on structuring papers/presentations.

Practice well ahead with fellow students. This is very important, and you will learn much from your peers (and you yourself should give good feedback to fellow third years as well!) Practice twice or more with smaller groups if necessary, the second one after reflecting the feedback from the first. It may also help to create backup slides with the questions from your peers, so that if the same questions are brought up in the Q&A session, you can jump to these slides.

Kapauhi and the other staff will assist you in recording your third year presentation, but I suggest you have backup devices, in case you do not remember the audience questions/comments later on. It tremendously helps if another student jots down notes about what the central criticisms were.

If you do not think that the back and forth with the audience is going well, gently push the discussion to the end and ask that you finish the presentation. Do not let anyone hijack your presentation.

Follow-through the questions/comments. Set up time to meet the faculty that have given you insightful feedback. This is a great chance to improve upon the paper, even after you have successfully become a PhD candidate.

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1.2 The Fourth Year

Congratulations on passing the candidacy! In the fourth year, you will be asked to submit your dissertation prospectus, and to give its presentation to your committee—now four members. The third member is up to you, but the fourth member is decided by the department as an “external” member. Communicate with all of your committee, although your primary focus should be your advisor.

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The Two-Headed System: Advisor & Thesis Committee Chair. That the primary advisor cannot serve as your dissertation committee chair is a Caltech-wide, unique system. How this affects your interaction with the committee will differ by each student. Consult with both, and if the chair has not been decided, consult with the primary advisor on who should serve as the chair eventually.

Dissertation Prospectus. Note that in most schools, the prospectus seminar is equivalent to candidacy. In HSS your candidacy is already done, and the seminar may seem a simple formality, but it is an excellent chance to think about how to frame your research in a coherent framework.

Formally, this needs to be done by May 1 of the fourth year. Do it as early as you can (my seminar was mid April, but the prospectus itself I submitted in December) to get a sense of what comments/advice your committee may have for your dissertation and other projects. In my prospectus, I put down the plans for the chapters of the thesis, and then discussed other existing working papers, work in progress, and plans in the current and next academic years.

You need to tell the committee what the timeline for completing your thesis looks like. How much of each chapter is finished? What needs to be still done? What do you expect to be a significant bottleneck?

Your dissertation may not end up completely according to plan to the prospectus—and that is okay (mine also strayed *considerably*). But this still needs to convey who you are, what research you do, what you expect your job market paper to be, how it connects to the literature, ...

Once you are done with the prospectus seminar, hopefully you have had some good feedback and can lurch forward with your job market paper.

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1.3 The Job Market Paper

It is difficult to write advice for the job market paper—apologies for the brevity in this section, as I am still pondering what to write. Do not panic if yours is still fuzzy—panic will make things worse! If it is any consolation, mine only properly shaped up right before the prospectus seminar, but the mounting pressure was overwhelming, and I had to work many sleepless nights to catch up.

This is a time where your primary advisor should know how you are progressing and what your paper is about, through and through. **Do not disappear from the face of the earth even if you do not have the level of progress you want.** Be transparent and seek help.

Explain the paper again and again in various lengths (1) to those who have heard multiple versions of your paper, and (2) to those who have never heard about your paper. Is your audience still confused about the central questions and answers? Besides the robustness checks, sensitivity analysis, extensions, and essentially all the Appendices material, is your central point clear?

You should be exploiting all possible avenues to do early practice/mock talks. Sometimes, your paper or presentation may not be ready, and you may shy away from showing incomplete work. But in fact, presenting early versions of your paper will help you decide how to frame the story, what to take out of the presentation, and what to add.

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1.4 Some Miscellaneous Points

A few miscellaneous points before you enter your fifth year:²

- Sign up for the **Polmeth Listserv** at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/membership/spm/mailling-list>. ABSOLUTE. MUST. If relevant, also subscribe to VIM Listserv—see <http://visionsinmethodology.org/history/>.
- If you work on election sciences, sign up for Election Science listserv at <http://mailman.mit.edu/mailman/listinfo/ElectionSciences>.
- In 2019-2020, Sarah Shugars at Northeastern U and Hannah Lebovits at Cleveland State set up a Slack channel named *2019-2020 Job Market Board* at supportyourcohort.slack.com. This enabled candidates to share information and was hugely helpful. Search on Twitter whether similar resources are available.
- **Make friends at other institutions, hopefully also job market candidates in your year.** This will be very, very helpful in a number of ways!

²Also, look up this excellent article at <https://politicalsciencenow.com/youve-decided-to-go-on-the-job-market-what-might-your-next-year-look-like/>, titled “You’ve Decided to Go on the Job Market. What Might Your Next Year Look Like?”.

- Making your website is important/time-consuming. Do it early.
 - I set it up by forking a Beautiful Jekyll Theme from GitHub onto my GitHub Pages, and then hosted it on a domain of my name with Squarespace (20 USD/year).
 - I also had **Google Analytics** running on it. At the height of interviews/flyouts, I could see specific universities looking me up via ‘service provider’ and ‘metro.’ So make sure that your website has a Google tracker (but do not lose sleep over the numbers.)
- I also actively used Twitter to promote my work. I am not saying that everyone should do it. But there is a whole academic discourse going on and you are going to miss some important conversations. Of course, making mistakes there can do you harm.
 - This was my thread on my job market paper: <https://twitter.com/sysilviakim/status/1166119771911229440?s=20>, posted Aug 26, 2019, and another thread on my APR publication: <https://twitter.com/sysilviakim/status/1171512780161110017?s=20>, posted Sep 10, 2019.
 - It is naive to assume that this made a difference. But I want you to get an idea of how you can utilize Twitter to show the people in your field that you are out there. Plus, both threads were very carefully curated as Twitter does not allow ‘edits.’ It forced me to think about how to get the message across succinctly and clearly.
 - Dr. Hans Noel at Georgetown had a thread dedicated to advertising current job market candidates and their research: <https://twitter.com/ProfHansNoel/status/1172114385164296194?s=20>. In economics (for women), Dr. Jennifer Doleac provided a similar service: <https://twitter.com/jenniferdoleac/status/1187863251947806720?s=20>.
 - Dr. John B. Holbein at University of Virginia also dedicated his time to tweeting about job market research: <https://twitter.com/JohnHolbein1/status/1158386275432488960?s=20>. I messaged/emailed him and was grateful for his generosity.
 - For first-generation students, there is <https://twitter.com/1stGenScholars>.
- Is Dr. Karen Kelsky’s *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide To Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job* helpful? To some degree, sure! Not everything should be taken at face value, as things differ drastically by field. Consult recent graduates and junior faculty, as well as your committee.
- Sections of APSA: This is surprisingly important because it defines where you ‘belong,’ as well as determine your eligibility for Section awards. Choose wisely when you apply to APSA with your job market paper. I myself wanted to apply for the Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior Section’s John Sullivan Award with my job market paper (recognizing a paper delivered by a graduate student on an APSA 2019 EPOVB panel), but later discovered that I actually was assigned Division 8: Political Methodology, so that automatically is a disqualification.

2 Job-market Year's APSA

2.1 APSA: Some General Points

Here are some things that I feel that I have done well at APSA in my job market year.

- **Meet many scholars to discuss job opportunities.**
 - Compile from APSA eJobs where you want to apply. Show this to your advisor/committee members.
 - **Ask your advisor to contact people to meet.** These may include search committee (SC) members or other faculty that can tip off the SC. Be polite when reaching out.
- **Get an official conference hotel if you can afford it.**
 - I usually choose very, very cheap Airbnbs and I had booked similarly for my APSA. But last minute, I switched to an official hotel still available. Hands-on best decision I ever made for APSA! I would have been very tired if accommodations were far away.
 - Last-minute prices were better(!) than the official discounted prices. Still expensive, so you may not have the resources to do this—understandable. In my case, I had some travel fund from an APSA pre-conference that I was attending, as well as Caltech's institute-wide 500 USD travel fund from the Graduate Office (timeline for this is complicated so look it up and plan in advance).
 - If you are housed far away, pack lightly. If you can find a roommate from another university to share the official conference hotel, do so.
- **Do not go to any panels just because they sound mildly interesting. Be choosy.**
 - APSA for the job market year is all about setting up meetings/interviews, and most of all preparing for and delivering on your job market paper. If you are going to panels, pick panels based on the people, not the papers.
 - I had originally planned to go to many, but a junior faculty advised not to go to any other than my own panels. I ended up doing so and practiced presenting in my free time instead. For me it was the right decision, and it conserved my energy.
- **Never be late for meetings if you have no good excuse. (Of course.)** If you leave a bad impression not respecting their time, the word can travel about you as a person!
- **Have your own clicker and your USB.** Back up files everywhere.
- **Make friends.** They are your support group—you can share info and commiserate together.

Here are some things I wish I would have known before/at APSA.

- **Know that hotels may be actually far away. Leave ample time (30 min+) in-between the meetings.**
 - One hotel was 20 minutes away by walking, which jeopardized the schedule for individual meetings with (potential) search committee members. Some want to meet at nearby coffee shops, which can be some walk.

- If you do not do well in formal shoes, have comfortable shoes that you can quickly change into and walk. On the first day of the conference I walked 17k+ steps.
- **Carefully arrange the meetings.**
 - **Know that meetings can run over**, for you and for the faculty that will meet you. Is the faculty not showing up on time? Do not fret. It is possible that there is something urgent that happened (or they did not realize how far the hotel was!)
 - If you have exchanged phone numbers/emails and you do not see them right away, send them a text/email to say that you have arrived on the location and tell them precisely where you are e.g. “I am right inside the main doors on the gray sofa on your left side, wearing a gray jacket.”
 - Check with the hotel workers that you are at the right location. I was almost late to one occasion because I mistook which doors were the “front gate.”
 - While you are waiting, search again the face on the university or personal website. Try to memorize it to ensure that you catch the person. Of course, you should have read the person’s CV, the abstract of the most recent paper, and the abstract of the most highly cited paper. Knowing a couple ongoing working papers won’t hurt.
 - You can be ghosted. If this happened to you, I am very sorry. In my case, I did not have this faculty’s phone number nor could I message him/her over social media. It was both sad and frustrating, but do not lose sleep over such events. If you have made efforts to meet at the right place at the right time, you have done nothing wrong.
 - **Set up timers so that you will know when to hard-end the meeting.** The faculty will understand if you have to leave or at least have to send a rescheduling email/text to someone. If you think you would like to talk more if situation permits, leave free time afterwards so that you are not rushed.
- **Eat well, sleep well.** I was overly anxious about time differences (West coast folks have to wake up much earlier than usual) and had great trouble sleeping. Don’t.

2.2 APSA: Interviews

By APSA interviews, I mean the ones that happen in designated tables at a particular large room—also commonly known as the “**meat market**.” This is different from informal meetings that you set up with faculty. These institutions will specify at APSA eJobs that they will be at APSA (e.g. Friday and Saturday 8am to 5pm). There will be volunteers that will help you find the table.

Not all institutions do these interviews. A good number of them are selective liberal arts colleges (SLAC). Some R1s and R2s also come. A good number of faculty hate this form of interviewing and think it is very bad practice. I honestly am not very sure, but it is certainly different.

Some things to note:

- The venue looks like an enormous doctor’s appointment with curtains between job candidates and interviewers. The faculty will come out to find their candidate when the time comes. You

will follow them behind the curtains onto an array of tables.

- The number of faculty from an interviewing institution can wildly differ. Most of them are just one—but these are more like information sessions. If there is more than one faculty member sitting there, this is a more serious pre-screening interview.
- One specific quote is available at <https://twitter.com/UnlawfulEntries/status/955595652842455041?s=20>. In a nutshell: do not be a snob.
- If faculty do not come to find you on time, ask volunteers for help. The faculty may have narrowly missed you or the interview with the previous candidate may be running over. It will give you peace of mind to find out. The volunteers can run behind the curtains to check and inform you of what is happening.
- The sessions are short so you should make the best of them.

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What questions to ask: I am still not so sure about what are the right questions to ask. I will simply list here what I did ask. Note that some JMCs felt that these interviews did little to help and more to hurt e.g. by making mistakes. On the other hand, some institutions are rumored to have only looked at files of those they met at APSA, using it as a signal of interest.

- I asked if they were looking for any particular subfield within American Politics or Political Methodology. Are they filling in any gaps? Some schools do have open searches, but at some schools they are looking for something more specific e.g. Public Law.
- If some schools have already specified subfields they are looking for, say, someone to teach Women and Politics, do not go to these meat market interviews to ask if this is really true. It is true, and you may submit your application hoping that the situation changes, but you would be wasting your/their time by asking it there (and irk the interviewer(s)).
- I also asked what Institute-specific missions/goals were. This struck a chord for some schools, and landed flat with others.
- I asked about teaching needs (“which classes would best contribute to the department?”)

3 Applications

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The general consensus is that the political science job market is starting earlier and earlier every year—**schools are frontloading**. My earliest deadlines were **Aug 15**. Make sure that you have your packet and your letters of recommendation ready early.

You will apply to about fifty positions. I applied to more because I also applied to Public Policy positions. (Some star candidates apply to one or two and then are hired right away, of course.)

Again, you may shy away from showing incomplete application materials. Don't! **Early feedback is vital in getting your packet into shape**, both in eloquence and accessibility to the general public. Communicate often with your advisors and peers.

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3.1 Applications Timeline

- **Finish all applications before your first flyout.** I cannot stress this enough! I assure you that you cannot concentrate on re-doing applications once you are at the flyout stage. Just do them all before the first flyout (or even better, *before* you get contacted with a flyout).
 - Major deadlines are Sep 1, Sep 15, Oct 1, Oct 15, Nov 1, and Nov 15. Mostly **Sep 15** (22 out of 70 positions) and **Oct 1** (16 out of 70). Receive ample feedback before these major deadlines.
 - For teaching-focused regional universities, see this Twitter thread: <https://twitter.com/1drandersen1/status/1161361516089659392?s=20>.
 - When you are creating a spreadsheet of places to apply, copy-paste or download as a pdf/png the actual ad. The ad can be taken down without any warning, even when the deadline has not passed.
 - **Do not assume you are unqualified.** That is for the search committee to decide. As long as your time and energy permit, apply to that job. Even when there are two jobs for the same institutions, you can apply with modified cover letters/materials—not phony! The search committee can be radically different.
 - **Submit the application the day before.** Honor the deadline and make it safe. Some say it is fine if the application is filed on the date, but I think it is better and gives you peace of mind to be on the safe side. Also remember that most institutions are on the East Coast and not on PST.
 - Look up <https://www.ryantmoore.org/software.murl.html> to create standardized/customizable letters from APSA eJobs pages.
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The following describes the job market “packet” element by element. **You should get them ready as early as possible, and work on them over time.** This will much improve the documents!

3.2 Letters of Recommendation (LORs)

- Talk to your letter writers as often as possible. Convey to them which points you would like highlighted.

- If you are applying for R1, R2, and SLACs, letters may need to be customized (e.g. R1 version, SLAC version, ...) Should they be customized to the institution? Mine were not—and I do not think most can afford to ask this.
- **Use a Dossier service (Interfolio) to send letters.** The received confidential letter can be used in both Interfolio applications, AcademicJobsOnline (see <https://academicjobsonline.org/ajo?forumFAQs-0--63>), ChronicleVitae, or just generic deliveries to specific email addresses or websites. It is very useful, and you get to know for sure if the letters were delivered. However, note that these should be processed a couple days *earlier* than the deadline to be safe (it is not real-time and there may be platforms in which Dossier deliveries are not possible).
- **In Caltech, sending out letters is often handled by relevant administrative assistants. Communicate with them about it.**
- LORs are usually signed and scanned. Some descriptions in job ads are explicit: “Applicants should also ask three referees to send letters (on letterhead, signed and scanned) directly to the Chair of the search committee in the Department of ... ”

3.3 Curriculum Vitae (CV)

- **This is a hugely important document** because oftentimes it is said that the long/shortlist of candidates are chosen simply by reading their CVs.
- **Keep things succinct** and order materials by importance. This is not a long, drawn-out list of details about your accomplishment.
- If there is an update to your papers or personal details, reflect it immediately. Most importantly, this includes revise and resubmits, and which journal it received R&R from.
- List your website and contact information clearly.
- Make sure that you show every one of your committee (and of course your letter writers) your CV and get their feedback.
- On your website, make sure that the Dropbox link to your CV is working well. **Best practice:** create a link in Dropbox, delete the “dl=0” (after the “?” sign), and type “raw=1” in its place.

3.4 Cover Letter

- This is also very important and you should communicate often about how it is written. The first couple paragraphs is particularly important, as search committee members may skip over the rest for initial screening purposes.
- **Make sure that there is no residue from previous institution’s applications!** Messing up school/faculty name can be disastrous. Because I was using Caltech letterhead, I did things in Word and obsessively read through every cover letter, but there must be a smarter way...
- Some job market advertisements say that cover letter is optional. **Submit cover letters, even if specified as optional.** The administrative assistant who puts out the ad could have made a mistake.

- **If you are applying to different types of institutions (R1 vs. teaching-focused), there is no single cover letter that can cover both.** If the position is teaching-oriented, put teaching first.
- If the ad does not ask for the research/teaching statement, the parts may have to be lengthened, depending on the type of the institution. I would still keep things under three pages.
- Should we customize it? There is no good/right answer to this. I am against an extensive tailoring/pandering, because it is very time-consuming/tiring and will not reflect who you are (and it may show), but people have different opinions on this. Do acknowledge that you have done minimal research about the institution, perhaps by mentioning classes you can teach from the department curriculum.
- Another good resource when researching institutions is **IPEDS Data Center** at <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/login.aspx?gotoReportId=6>. Dr. Alisa Hicklin Fryar created this short how-to video at https://www.dropbox.com/s/umpe07yaalde6o/institution_profile.MOV?dl=0. The website can show you student demographics, whether it is an R1 institution, and so on.
- I kept it strictly to 2 pages (12pt) by playing with paper margins. Some do 3 pages.
- There are certain formats you should respect for the cover letter. First of all, **it should absolutely be on Caltech letterhead.** It is available at <https://identity.caltech.edu/print>. I used the “Standard Letterhead.”
- Do not use the recipient institution’s logo/seal/letterhead.

3.5 Writing Sample

- The first of these is of course your job market paper, presumably single-authored. Or with another student, who is not using it as a job market paper.
- **If you can only submit one writing sample, single-authored manuscript seems preferable to a coauthored publication/forthcoming paper.** The latter can be shown in your CV and written in your cover letter. The general consensus seems to be that you need to convey the ability to perform research on your own.
- **Have at least three more papers that you are willing to show as near-complete works and that speaks to your research agenda.** I realize this is tough, but hear me out—some schools do require more than one writing sample to be submitted, even up to three required submissions.
- Some have particular requirements e.g. one school wanted the papers redacted without any personal identifiers. Some schools have page limits (under 35 pages or 50 pages). Adhere to them.
- Some schools would like to see all chapters of your dissertation after your application passes the initial screening. I am guessing that means you should be ready to send at least three papers out—I do not think that “I need to still think about what I want to do with my last chapter” will sell well.

3.6 Research Statement

- According to who you talk to, and according to who you are, the advice on research statements can be highly heterogeneous—there is no single answer. In my case, initially I wrote it in the “Dissertation Work” vs. “Other Work” frame. In the next phase, I received advice to organize things by topic, so re-hashed everything.
 - An executive summary or a summary paragraph is recommended. Reading other people’s research statement is hard. Specify a shortcut for your readers.
 - **The advice that I received about various statements is that they should ‘talk’ to each other.** That is, they should all be interrelated and displaying your field and strength. I can teach class A because I work on the field and have a paper on it (so that it is not cheap talk).
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3.7 Teaching Statement/Portfolio

- Pay attention to how this document is worded. Is it a “teaching statement,” “teaching portfolio,” “teaching evaluations,” or something else? In my teaching statement, I put teaching philosophy, summary of teaching evaluations, quotes from students, teaching portfolio (course offerings), and so on. Some schools require that you break these down into separate documents. Adhere to the guidelines.
 - Mention mentoring students—how you would approach it/what have you done?
 - Take a look at the following link to help customize the teaching portfolio document: <https://github.com/jayrobwilliams/Job-Market>.
-

3.8 Diversity Statement

- This was jarring to write at first because I had no idea what to write. Was it about me and proving that I am a diversity hire?
 - Answer is... not really. **This is about how you would foster diversity as an academic, and how you would contribute to the Institution’s diversity mission.**
 - Some schools have specific guidelines on the diversity statement. See https://diversity.ucsf.edu/sites/diversity.ucsf.edu/files/Contributions_to_Diversity_Statement_Examples.pdf for instance.
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3.9 Other Documents

- **Research Proposal:** So this would probably be for a postdoctoral position. Post-docs are so heterogeneous that I cannot provide a single answer to how things should be written. Discuss with search committee/your advisors—they are crucially instrumental in securing post-doc positions.
- **Unofficial/Official Transcript:** Some schools require you submit Caltech’s transcripts, which are available via access.caltech.edu’s REGIS. Have it downloaded. Some schools even

want your undergraduate transcripts. I am sure that you have it somewhere in your emails/Dropbox when you were applying for grad school, but have it ready.

- **Sample Syllabi:** In Caltech we do not have PhDs teach classes, and internationals are not allowed to teach at any other institutions—so this may throw you off. But if you want to apply for more teaching-oriented positions, these are a must, and some other positions may also require multiple syllabi. In my year, Pomona College requested three sample syllabi and these were *not optional*.
 - Relatively less important, but you may want to put some time into compiling them. This will help you get a concrete idea of what you can teach and how as well.
 - But importantly, **do not waste your time making ones that you are not willing to teach!** Make ones that you actually want to teach, wherever you end up.
- **Names and Contacts of References:** straightforward. Have their office phone numbers as well as their emails.
- **Others:** In desperate attempt to convince schools that I can teach, I submitted a set of sample lecture slides and also slides for a public talk (Los Angeles R Group). Not sure if they did anything!

3.10 Miscellaneous Points

- **Job market candidates, communicate with each other! You should depend on each other, even when going into separate disciplines.**
- Disregard application checkboxes for salary. These are not intended for academic job applicants.
- Are you receiving completely conflicting advice from your committee/mentors? Yes, this happens. Explain/discuss with the advice-givers. The best wording I saw so far: “you gave me this advice, but so-and-so gave me conflicting advice. Can you tell me more about why you gave the advice you did?”
 - In the end, choose what you think is right. After all, your packet is about you. It also may be a signal that the improvements to the current packet are not very obvious.
 - *However*, if any, have a good, concrete, persuadable reason for disregarding a main advisor’s advice, and be transparent about it.
- How should you answer “For purposes of compliance with The Immigration Reform and Control Act, are you legally eligible for employment in the United States?” if you are on an F-1 visa? My idea was that technically it is a No if OPT is not rolling, but other people heard that this question is asking only whether anything prevents you from working in the States (e.g. criminal history). I am still not sure but I answered “Yes” and also “Yes” to the question of whether I would require visa sponsorship.
- Applying through Chronicle Vitae can be a bit tricky. Clear your caches or try another browser (Opera, Chrome, Firefox, ...) if something does not work.

4 Skype Interviews

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Once the applications are in, the market starts rolling very, very fast. In two weeks, earliest known phone calls/flyout scheduling will occur. Skype interview requests may come in and ask to talk in three days. Persevere and keep yourself ready to do these interviews!

The followings are some informative threads on Twitter:

- ✓ <https://twitter.com/CindyBVeldhuis/status/1172123997376589824>
- ✓ <https://twitter.com/CindyBVeldhuis/status/1175155382039302144>

Note that many points are copy-pastes from the web with emphasis my own, and original sources hyperlinked.

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4.1 Goals of Skype/Phone Interviews

- The search committee is looking for (1) someone who will be a good faculty colleague, and (2) someone who will “interview well” if they are invited for the on-campus interview. Show that you can be somewhat **relaxed and collegial** even in this high-pressure, high-stakes situation.³
 - SC wants to see how you interact **spontaneously** with other academics:
 - **SC is absolutely not interested in a canned presentation.** In fact, they would prefer that your answers do not sound too well “rehearsed” or “coached.”⁴
 - This does not mean that you are doing things on the fly. **Think comedians—the routine is tightly planned, yet the show does feel spontaneous and is funny.**
 - Interviews are heterogeneous and unpredictable, but generally, the SC is looking to see if (1) you are real/eloquent as your packet suggests (i.e., did you write the application yourself), (2) you can speak English well enough to teach, (3) you have good people skills enough not to show arrogance, that you listen well, and am able to lead an engaging conversation, and so on. Sometimes, SC would like you to expand on some details that would act as a deal-breaker, e.g. whether you can teach a certain class that really needs to be taught in the next semester.⁵
 - This is a two-way conversation. Do not recite a list of the information that is on your CV or a prolonged explanation of your papers. **This is probably the single biggest mistake that candidates make in Skype interviews—trying to impress the committee with a long, verbal listing of accomplishments.**⁶
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4.2 General Dos and Don'ts

- Make answers to questions **succinct and compelling**.

³<http://williamcurrie.net/2018/12/21/faculty-candidates-tips-for-a-successful-skype-interview/>

⁴<https://academia.stackexchange.com/questions/127906/slides-for-30-min-1-hr-skype-tenure-track-application-inter>

⁵https://www.reddit.com/r/AskAcademia/comments/2pemuv/what_to_expect_from_short_phone_interviews_for/

⁶<http://williamcurrie.net/2018/12/21/faculty-candidates-tips-for-a-successful-skype-interview/>

- **Do your homework about the interviewing department/faculty.** Understand the disciplinary nature of the position. Universities hire junior faculty, in part, to be representatives of their fields.
- Do: Listen carefully, make sure you heard the question right, and then respond thoughtfully and succinctly to each question. **Stop talking after a minute or two and ask the questioner if they want you to continue, or if you should stop there.** (They probably have several more questions to ask, and time is dear. A half hour goes by very fast.) Candidates that cannot shut up doom themselves. It happens with every pool, at least one who doesn't really listen and mostly just rattles on about themselves at length. I'd recommend no answer longer than 2-3 minutes max. Practice the standard bits (i.e. research and teaching).
- It is of critical importance that you give your interviewers the chance to absorb what you've said (remember how hard it must be for THEM to keep track of difficult academic topics on the end of a phone call!), and to have the chance to formulate a response.
- **Be sure that your questions allow the search committee to save face.** Don't ask questions that might necessitate a negative, embarrassing answer.
- Talking about your intellectual contribution to your field is different from talking about your methods or what your data showed (which is a mistake that many candidates make). It is a good idea to think about higher-level topics and practice some succinct responses to such questions.

4.3 (Physical) Preparations

- Dress well and check the background and lighting. **Have a backup laptop ready.**
- **Don't go into the interview with newly-installed teleconference software or untested equipment, or use a poor webcam or microphone.** Members of the search committee are eager to meet you and talk with you and eager to begin the interview on schedule. It really takes the wind out of the sails when the first 5 minutes are spent trying to troubleshoot audio problems so everyone can hear you. (Still, if technical problems do occur, deal with them in a cool and professional manner; don't allow it to make you flustered.)
- While we don't care too much about background (even on Skype) it is critical that you have a good connection, be it audio or video. I've seen a lot of Skype interviews go wrong simply because the candidate is someplace with a crappy connection, camera, or mic and we can't hear their responses—that's really frustrating to the committee, especially if we're giving up 10-12 hours of our evenings to make the calls.
- Have a tablet and pen next to you to take shorthand notes as questions are asked. **You may be given a compound question**, such as "Tell us about your dissertation, how you got interested in the topic, and what you see as its primary contribution." Make a note of each part of the question to be able to address each in your response.
- Have your CV and application packet in front of you, pause before answering! Have some follow up questions for the committee!
- Mostly maintain fixation at your webcam. It will look like you're making eye contact with the committee. If you actually make eye contact with the committee, it will look like you're looking away or down.

- **Very importantly:** remember to turn off cell phone sounds, alarms, landline phone ringers, and other potential device noises. **Always do a dry run ahead of time**, preferably a week in advance at the same time and day (especially take notice of background noises, like your neighbor's lawn mower, or loud construction, or anything else that could distract you and them.

4.4 Questions That May Be Asked

See thread on <https://twitter.com/CindyBVeldhuis/status/1181977448575111170>.

Major Questions:

- Why are you interested in this position? / Why did you apply for the job?
- What sorts of research projects/topics could you pursue here? / What do you contribute/bring to the department? / How will the university benefit from your research?
- What courses could you teach here?
- Tell us about your research and how it relates to current scholarship in your field.

Questions on Research/Fit

- What are your post-dissertation research plans? What is your research program for the next two years? Five years? Ten years? / What are your immediate/long-term publication plans?
- How does your dissertation intervene in the field of XXX?
- Name 2 specialty courses you would teach, one undergraduate and one graduate.
- How do you see your work intersecting with the other emphases in the department?
- We are hoping to build a strength in XXX. How would you participate in that effort?
- Our campus is very student-focused. You come from an R1. How do you see yourself fitting in?
- Our campus has high expectations for publication for tenure. How do you see yourself handling the expectations?
- Do you have plans to apply for any major grants? If so, which ones?
- How do you integrate your secondary field in your teaching?
- What steps are you going to take to ensure future publications?
- How will you balance research, teaching, and service?
- What was the most challenging moment in your teaching or research?
- What do you think will be the biggest roadblocks/challenges that your research would face?
- If you will get multiple offers, what will incite you to come to our university instead of another?
- What kinds of facilities would you need to conduct your research and teaching here?
- What do you see as your greatest accomplishments in your career to date? What short-comings have you dealt with?
- How would you describe your interactions with students?

- With whom in the department do you envision interacting the most? Outside the department?
- How much money do you think you'll need to get your equipment and group up and running?
/ We do not have a lot of funding for the kind of equipment/travel that you require for your research. How would you work with this?
- Is your PI's work closely related to your research focus, or are you fairly independent?

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Questions on Teaching/Mentoring

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- What textbooks would you use for Introduction to XXX?
- How would you teach a large, general education class for non-majors?
- What is your approach to undergraduate advising? / How will you foster research in your undergraduates? / How would you incorporate undergraduates into your research?
- How do you address diversity in the classroom? How will I deal with the fact that there are students with different backgrounds and knowledge?
- How would you teach our Introductory XXX course? Which text would you use? What kinds of assignments would you use?
- How would you teach our XXX Seminar? Who would you have them read?
- How would you teach our Methods course?
- What's your approach to grading?
- Why are you interested in joining non-PhD institutions?
- You will have students in your classes with a range of abilities. How do you keep them all interested and learning, supporting the weaker students and challenging the stronger?

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Minor/Surprise Questions

- Have you spoken with a publisher about your book? Where do you stand in negotiations?
- What you've said is all very interesting, but doesn't some of the work in your field really border on the far-fetched?
- What meetings do you attend? What societies do you belong to?
- What do you know about city X?
- What is the most influential book you've read in the field of XXX recently?
- When could you start in the position?
- Would you take this job if it were offered to you?
- What makes you better than the other candidates?
- What do you see as the major challenges of teaching at a large (small) university?
- What would you do if you lost your funding?
- (Illegal questions) Will anything need to be done for your spouse/partner/children?
- How would you cope with an exceptionally high failure rate in a written exam in one of your courses?

- What kind of leadership experiences do you have?
 - Describe a situation in which you had to confront a research assistant (grad or undergrad) about not meeting expectations, how did you handle it?
 - How does your research matter to the community/public? (Outreach questions)
-

4.5 Questions that the Candidate May Ask

The following will always come up: **“Do you have any questions for me/us?”** This is a very important question and you have to prove yourself that you are interested in the job. The more school-specific, the better.

- What are some of the strengths that the department is building upon recently? Where do you see this department in the next five years, as well as the next 10 years?
 - What do you like about working in the department?
 - ~~What resources for high performance computations does the department have?~~
-

4.6 Personal Experiences

In my Skype interview at A University (October 3), I was asked the following:

- **Why do you want to work at A University?**
- **What will your research look like in the next 5 years?**
- **How do you plan to advance your career from here on, such as in research/teaching?** (I was a bit thrown off, but said that I would work to (1) acquire new exciting administrative data and build relationships with providers, and (2) I would work to apply to grants and mentioned a few different grants. I think the latter really made the committee nod and it felt like I had struck the right cord. I did not mention teaching here, because I felt I have talked sufficiently.)
- **Do you have any questions for us?**
 - “I believe you have a Data Science initiative. Do you require this position to be able to teach courses there as well, because I can?”
 - (Committee member follow-up) **But what can/would you teach in substantive American politics?** (I think I misread the signal, really. The advertisement said they were looking for someone strong in methods, so I assumed that main teaching expectations were substantially methods—in reality they were looking for AP teaching.)
 - “What are the opportunities at the C Center and what do the fellows there do?”
- (Committee member) **Coming back to your research, can you specifically tell me what your research is on small donors?** (Perhaps I was a bit vague in explaining the research agenda.)

This was 7:30am the day after the in-house practice job talk so I was exhausted. Make sure that you are living by East Coast time zone if you are a late night owl, too.

5 Flyouts

See thread on <https://twitter.com/CindyBVeldhuis/status/1181277581036777474>.

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5.1 Goals of Campus Visits

- The goal of campus visits is to measure you up—are you capable of performing research on your own? Can you be an amicable colleague? Would you be a good department citizen? Do you know what you are talking about? **Are you actually interested in accepting an offer from the department?**
 - You can be reached by email and by phone. Be prepared to receive unknown phone numbers, although I am sure that if you do not pick it up, they will reach back by email.
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5.2 General Dos and Don'ts

- You can ask for a few minutes' break to use the restroom or drink water.
 - Be prepared to ask many questions.
 - Do not mention your spouse/children. These are illegal questions to ask of you, and you need not mention those points voluntarily either. Just focus on displaying who you are.
 - You will have a lot of meals (and coffee). Do not stuff yourself (but keep backup chocolates too!) or over-caffeinate.
 - Send a thank you email (succinct) after the flyout. I only received this advice after two flyouts, so regretted not having sent anything the first two times.
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5.3 Job Market Slides

The same principles apply as written in the third-year presentation. Again, note that this is to some degree a *performance*. The routine should be tightly planned and you should be able to adapt to a few 'scenarios' (running out of time, having too much time left, typical questions asked at various stages, ...).

One feedback that I had from my flyouts was that some really liked my presentation in that (1) I did not treat the audience like morons, but (2) sufficiently boiled down the technical details enough for the unfamiliar audience to grasp what was going on.

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5.4 Questions That May Be Asked

- **Where else are you interviewing?** → This is a central question that will be asked for sure, as schools need to prepare for a contingent plan (1) if their preferred candidate turns down the offer and you are next in line, and (2) if you are the preferred candidate, whether you would end up accepting the job at another institution, delaying the hiring process and potentially making the department lose another good candidate.

- **What is your research agenda for the next five years?** What are the next 3 papers you will write? → In my case, it was a very thoughtful variant of “Who do you want to be known as, when you go up for tenure?”
- Where do you think your field is headed towards?
- Why is this an interesting question? Why should we care about your results?
- How did you get the idea for this paper?
- To what journal will you send it? What journals do you consider to be the appropriate outlets for your work?
- **When will you finish your dissertation?** → This is to check that you will actually get your PhD in time so that you will not be fired after your first year. Trust me, these cases happen.
- Questions about any papers listed in your vita.
- Do you plan to continue collaborating with your co-authors/advisors? What are some of the single-authored projects planned or ongoing?
- Why are you interested in our school? Do you think you will be happy in a department/city like ours?
- What is your teaching experience?
- What would you like to teach? What text or articles would you use to teach those courses?
- How would you teach? What is your teaching philosophy?
- Is the location of our school a problem? Do you have any location preferences?

5.5 Questions that the Candidate May Ask

- What is the department’s approach for mentoring?
- What is the tenure/promotion process like?
- What are the mechanisms for covering start-up costs?
- What kind of support is there available on campus for conference travel?
- What kind of support is available on campus for summer research?
- What kind of graduate student support is available? Is there an active undergraduate/ graduate student association? What kinds of activities do they do?

Some additional resources are David Laibson’s tips for economics students at https://economics.harvard.edu/files/economics/files/david_laibson_tips_0.pdf.

So that is all for now. Again, please reach out if you feel that parts of this document can be improved.

6 Recommendations for Division-Level Support

While Caltech has been a great experience for me and I have successfully landed an R1 career, I believe there are certain things that can be in place to help a future potential job candidate. These will prevent them (1) fall through the crack, or (2) be in an ill-prepared position to tackle the academic job market.

The following are relatively more major points. Please note that my intention is to facilitate a conversation. I understand that there can be different/contrasting opinions about some of the points, or that there can be feasibility issues.

6.1 Interacting with the Placement Director

A **regular interaction between the candidates and the placement director** will be very beneficial, before and throughout the job market season. These meetings can as a consistent assistance in

1. Reminding the candidates about their timeline (are they ready?);
2. Reviewing/developing the packet;
3. Asking questions about the job market process;
4. Share materials between the job market candidates, both political science and economics.

Such support (to varying degree, such as lunches, workshops, or office hours) is available in institutions such as the University of Iowa, Georgia State University, University of Toronto, University of Texas-Austin, University of North Carolina, and so on.

6.2 Administrative Assistants as Reference Letter Clearinghouse

This is a great support provided by Caltech, but is currently split up by each faculty's administrative assistant. I believe that a central clearinghouse for each student/discipline may be more helpful.

6.3 Practice Job Talks and Mock Interviews

My practice job talk was on October 2, and this was the only department-level practice talk that I had. **If there are systematic problems that must be fixed, this is absolutely too late to do anything.** In addition, I do not believe that many were aware that my talk was a practice job talk, because it does not fit the economics job market timeline.

- **There must be a department-level spring-term practice job talk *before the summer starts*, so that any big problems can be addressed during the summer.**
- **Afterwards, there must be a department-level (two, preferably) job market talk again in the fall.** This can address fluency, cosmetics, short pitches, questions/answers, and so on.

The difference between two disciplines (political science vs. economics) makes things difficult, but this is crucial in preparing the candidate for the market. If it is a practice job talk, all faculty must be made aware of this, and the talk should be well attended.

As to mock interviews, I had none available, but this should also be available for political science students in both Skype/phone interviews and on-site interviews.

6.4 Gearing the Fourth Years into Shape

While our third-year presentations serve as the first of mock job talks (and effectively candidacy), there is no hard timeline specified for fourth years. However, the fourth years are actually going through a more critical period, in which they should be developing their job market papers and thinking about what “stories” they would be pitching when describing who they are. I had my prospectus meeting on April 18 of my fourth year and no department-wide presentations in my fourth year. I believe the committee should interact with the candidate-to-be a little earlier.

6.5 Annual Review Workshop of the Job Market

All students who have navigated the market, both academic and non-academic, should be asked to give a short **workshop about their experiences on the market**. Because Caltech is so small, every hands-on experience counts. **All students should be able to and must attend this workshop, because it helps plan things in the future—even for the lower years, as it puts their immediate timeline in a perspective.** Of all the written recommendations, this is the most straightforward to implement.

6.6 Involving the Alumni

It would be incredibly beneficial to invite the alumni—especially recent graduates—to give a presentation or provide some mentoring for the job market candidates. I had Skype calls with two of our alumni in tenure-track, which were extremely helpful in figuring out how to navigate the market and interviews. I would recommend an online (or on-site, if possible) half-day workshop with alumni doing roundtables and looking over the candidates’ materials.

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Some minor points:

- **The division can fund the Interfolio Dossier delivery.** This is only 48 USD per person/year, as of Feb 2020: see <https://www.interfolio.com/dossier/>.
- The link to job market candidates should be also in the ‘People’ tab. Currently it is on <https://www.hss.caltech.edu/academics/graduate-studies/job-market-candidates> only, and is difficult to find when a newcomer navigates our website.
- The recording tools for job market talks should be updated. Currently the camera batteries do not last enough to record the talk in full.
- It would be nice to differentiate SDN job opportunities from social sciences—there were more than twenty emails forwarded explicitly for psychology/neuroscience jobs to me and the rest of the social science students, which was overwhelming.
- **When there is a division-level mock job market talk, I recommend the classes be finished on time so that the lower-years also get to see those talks,** for both political science and economics. With very few students, these are very rare learning opportunities for the lower years, and they should be able to sit in the talks from start to finish.