

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia

ASLO, Feb 2013

Jim Yoder

*VP for Academic Programs and Dean
Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution*

jyoder@whoi.edu



Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



You want to negotiate from strength, so try to put yourself in the strongest position as possible starting with your application.

- Upbeat cover letter. Don't mention anything that could detract from your application, e.g. "I want to continue my postdoc for another year", "my spouse needs a job", etc. Summarize your strengths and interests.
- Research statement needs to be somewhat specific to each institution and department to which you're applying. Do your homework. One goal is to identify and mention potential collaborators, i.e. ALLIES who will support your application, although make it clear that you have your own ideas too.
- Teaching statement also needs to be very specific to each institution. Review their curriculum, so that you do not propose to teach a "new" course that is already on the books. Provide a (1-page) description or even a syllabus for any new courses you envision.
- See "The Rhetoric of the CV" in "Careers in Academe", page D6, in the winter/spring 2013 edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



Screening interview for top 5-10 candidates, by phone/SKYPE, sometimes in an airport, or at a scientific meeting

- Think beforehand of the messages that YOU want to convey about yourself and try to steer the conversation in that direction. Revisit your CV, research and teaching statements. Point out any changes in status, e.g. new pubs, new grant, your meeting session was selected by ASLO, etc.
- Keep in mind that you are probably not speaking with anyone having real authority, probably just a member (s) of the Search Committee. Answer the questions truthfully, but avoid giving out information that could limit your negotiating position with someone in authority that you meet later, e.g. avoid specific, detailed information on startup requirements, need for spousal position, personal information, timetable, etc.

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



Screening interview for top 5-10 candidates, cont.

- You can stall or dodge a question you don't yet want to answer by saying something like, "I haven't yet had a chance to think carefully about XXXX, but will certainly do so should I move forward in the search process and learn more about your institution".
- Be prepared for some standard interview questions like: "Where do you see yourself in 10 years?", "What do you consider your main strengths?", "Why are you interested in this particular job?", "What do you consider your major successes and mistakes or failures?" I wouldn't be too forthcoming about "failures".

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



On-site interview for top 2-3 candidates.

- Get organized, do your homework, know the department in detail.
- Ask to speak with faculty who you see as potential collaborators (allies!).
- Avoid giving too many details about your needs and requirements to members of the Search Committee, unless really pressed hard. In my opinion, you should only speak about details to your future boss (e.g. Dept. Chair). To others, it's fine to say something like "I need some time to digest the information I learned during the interview", as a way to politely dodge very specific questions. But if pressed hard..... you may have to say more.
- Try to speak one-on-one to recent hires about what they received as startup, starting salaries, space, teaching loads, teaching waivers, summer money, etc.
- Ask to speak with HR about benefits, but only speak to HR about benefits.

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



On-site interview for top 2-3 candidates.

- Talk in general to your future boss about startup. That person should also give you some indication of salary. Don't accept a conditional salary offer ("if we offer you the job would you accept \$XXK/year?"). Know the institution's salary scale in advance of your visit.
- Respond to questions, but don't offer too much information on your needs/ desires, except possibly to your future boss. You can try to dodge these types of questions if asked by someone else by responding "During my visit, I plan to discuss my needs/situation with [future boss, e.g. Dept Chair, Dean]."
- Don't waste time asking general questions about the tenure process. Just ask for the document that explains it.
- Be prepared for the dreaded "chalk talk", i.e. a logic model which is (from Wikipedia) "a graphical depiction of the logical relationships between the resources, activities, outputs and outcomes of a program – your program."

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



On-site interview for top 2-3 candidates.

Don't panic if you get asked an technically inappropriate question. This can happen at evening social events, ie. a spouse may ask if you have a family, or if you want children, etc. These are generally innocent questions that seem obvious to older people to ask of younger people. Someone may inquire about your interest in having children or if you have children, because they may want to promote their excellent school system to help sell you on the location. If you do not have children, a good answer might be "My spouse and I just haven't yet thought seriously about children".

I don't know what advice to give should you be pregnant. There are differences of opinion – ask around. There is also a difference of opinion as to when to mention the need for a job for your spouse – during the on-site or after a job offer?

Talk to students. If not scheduled, ask for a meeting with only students. Get the student perspective on the department and on the faculty.

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



You Get the Job Offer! First, do you want it? If so,

- A good “theme” to keep in mind as you negotiate is “I want to be successful in this job, and my success will also benefit my new institution”.
- To guide your request, you should have a good idea of the benefits, salary (most State universities publish their salaries somewhere), typical startup packages in the recent past, teaching loads, and whether other recent hires were offered student, postdoc, or technical support or teaching waivers their first semester or first year.
- You should be negotiating with your future boss, NOT the Search committee. With respect to salary, private institutions often have more flexibility than State universities, but everyone can move at least a little. Don’t be afraid to ask for more, although know how to justify your request.

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



Job Offer, cont.

Some universities will send you a draft letter of offer for comment. Once you receive a the final letter of offer, signed by a Dean or higher (Provost), it has the force of a contract. Pay attention to this draft letter!! If don't like it or don't understand something in it, ask questions or ask for changes. The letter should contain:

- Salary
- Nature of appointment – academic year? And if so, what are the options for summer salary?
- Start date. If you wish to finish your postdoc, ask if that is possible. But also worry a bit about future hiring freezes, department losing the position, etc.
- Moving costs and temporary housing? Financial assistance for buying a house?
- Laboratory startup funds, and you need to consider everything you will need to get started including supplies. In general, once you settle on an amount, it's difficult to get more funds from the university.

Tips for Negotiating a Job in Academia



Job Offer, cont.

You should also resolve, but this probably won't be in the letter:

- Access to special equipment (mass specs, etc.). Can you share? If so, what is your access? What is expected from you to help operate the facility?
- Lab and office space, and is it ready for occupancy? Think beyond immediate needs i.e. for future students and postdocs. Space is one of the most contentious issues on a university campus. Getting additional space will always be difficult.
- Teaching expectations and what about the first semester or year?
- Any funding for students, postdocs and/or technical assistants?
- Spouse job, and other more personal issues.
- Benefits – this is probably standard for everyone so generally not much to negotiate. However, some institutions (mostly private) offer a “signing bonus”. If so, you should get something in writing about it.

Good Luck!!

