

# THE ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH: THE EXPERIENCES OF A NEW PHD IN THE JOB MARKET

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## ABSTRACT

This article describes the experiences of a new PhD seeking an academic job. The author's observations are drawn from job interviews with 12 psychology departments in Canada and the United States. Topics discussed include where to apply, who is invited for an interview, the importance of publications, receiving the interview invitation, the visit — the schedule of events, the pace, whom you see, questions you are asked and should ask, and the job talk — alternatives to a tenure track position, rejections, the elements of an ideal visit, what to do when you receive an offer, and how to make a decision. Recommendations are made that should benefit prospective applicants and prove useful to departments about to recruit new junior faculty.

Seeking an academic job can be a frustrating and demoralizing experience. Kiesler (1979) confirmed that positions in good U.S. departments are in especially high demand and that while 53% of graduating PhDs wanted academic appointments, at most 40% could hope to acquire one. The situation for new Canadian PhDs is undoubtedly worse because there are far fewer available positions; some departments receive as many as 100 applications for a single position. Moreover, while U.S. candidates may be readily considered for Canadian positions once the list of appropriate Canadian applicants is exhausted, the reverse relationship does not necessarily hold. U.S. departments are less familiar with the procedures for hiring foreign nationals and are reluctant to attempt to do so unless the applicant is truly unique and outstanding.

Scarcity is not the only problem. Some job descriptions are so specific they eliminate the majority of prospective candidates. Moreover, sometimes departments are not satisfied with any of their applicants and decide to try again next year. Job seekers are competing then, not only with each other, but with a department's idealistic conception of the type of assistant professor they would prefer to join their ranks.

An applicant may be asked to visit only one or two universities. Rarely is it possible to gain much advance practical knowledge of the interview process and one can hardly afford to

learn through trial and error. Several articles and comments (Madell & Madell, 1979; Mathews & Mathews, 1979; Perlman, 1976) have appeared in the literature that describe some of the problems new PhDs have securing employment. Darley and Zanna (1981) have described the hiring process from the employer's vantage point and have made many useful recommendations; and Petersdorf (1978) provides an entertaining account of faculty recruitment in a medical school setting. However, no one has provided detailed insight into the exacting academic job market from the candidate's perspective. This article summarizes my observations following a two-year search for a tenure track assistant professorship. Although my area of specialty is clinical, new PhDs in other areas of psychology may find my chronicle instructive. I also hope that departments will plan their interview procedures with some attention to the candidate's point of view.

I have no way of knowing how representative my experiences have been; however, my exposure to the job market was rather broad. I applied to over 40 schools and visited 12, including two Canadian universities and ten in the U.S. [four of which were ranked in the top 10 psychology departments in the recent Ladd and Lipsett study (quoted by Scully, 1979)]. I turned down four additional invitations for interviews and eventually chose from among seven job offers.

### **The Application**

While there is probably no point applying to a job you know you will not take under any circumstances, there should be few such jobs on your list. It is a buyer's market; applicants cannot afford to be choosy. Moreover, I found there was little correlation between my pre-interview expectations regarding a specific department and my post-visit impression. Departments about which I had the greatest expectations often were immediately ruled out following the visit. More importantly, several positions that had little initial appeal offered tantalizing opportunities that more than compensated for the aspects of the job I perceived as undesirable. Some of my peers have had similar experiences, adopting the attitude that invitations from such schools constituted occasions for practice interviews, but later finding these jobs among their top choices. I recommend that you apply quite unselectively and try to be very open-minded when a school about which you have reservations summons you for an interview.

Should you apply to departments specifying credentials very different from your own? I applied for several such positions because other features of the job (such as geography) were attractive but usually received immediate rejection letters or learned later that my application was never considered seriously. However, if the position announcement states individuals with certain qualifications are preferred but other "outstanding candidates" will also be considered; your chances, although probably still slim, are better. One such school to which I applied indicated at first that I would not be included on their "short list", but the group of applicants who had the specific type of background they desired proved disappointing and they eventually invited me for an interview.

A note concerning what materials to send with your application. All schools request a copy of your vita, and most instruct you to have letters of recommendation sent. Other items such as copies of your papers and teaching evaluations are sometimes solicited. Unless the instructions in a job advertisement were unusually specific, my approach, which had no discernable adverse consequences, was to send all these materials whether requested or not. Although only three references are

typically required, I asked all five of my letter writers to send recommendations to each job opening. Nevertheless, I almost lost one interview because the selection committee, with four recommendations in hand, regarded my application with suspicion because my advisor had forgotten to send a letter. It is ultimately your responsibility to make sure all your letters of reference have been sent.

### **Who is Interviewed?**

The ideal job candidate has strong letters of recommendation and teaching experience in both graduate and undergraduate courses; he or she will have completed the PhD, demonstrated ability to secure grants, and published papers in refereed journals. In addition, the outstanding applicant for a clinical position should have adequate professional training, including an APA approved internship and experience supervising junior students. How important are these various criteria? The first year I applied for jobs I had recommendations by internationally visible faculty, had taught seven courses, had a part-time clinical job and completed my internship, had co-authored three successful grants, was in possession of my degree, and was third author on one published paper. That year I was asked to visit two schools. For my second venture into the job market, my credentials differed in only one significant respect: I was senior author on four papers in press. That year I was invited to 14 schools, six of which had previously shown no interest in my application. Of these six, four had hired no one during the first year I applied, indicating that my change in fortune the second year could not be attributed simply to a change in the quality of my competition. The importance of publications cannot be overstated.

### **The Invitation**

The invitation for an interview consists of a phone call from the departmental or selection committee chairperson. I began receiving these calls in mid-December, well before application deadlines, with the majority coming during February and early March. I received a few invitations in April and May, after I had already accepted a position. The elapsed time between receiving an invitation and leaving for the interview varied substantially. Al-

though departments are generally compliant (more so early in the year), their schedules are often restricted by school vacations or key faculty being away during certain periods. Due to such constraints, one department I visited interviewed four candidates in four consecutive days. Hence, it is important that you be flexible; do not take on excessive teaching commitments or heavy clinical responsibilities. I was usually asked to visit a department within a week of receiving the initial phone call. My shortest advance notice was less than a day and the longest over a month. Once, while visiting one department, I received a call from another requesting that I visit the second school before I returned home.

There are two classes of visits: The "one day" and the "two day". The one day requires you to arrive in the evening with a full day of interviewing scheduled for the next day, followed by your departure late in the evening or the subsequent morning. The two day visit involves about twice as much person contact, requiring your arrival the morning of the first day and leaving the evening of the second. The one day interview is clearly to be preferred — it is usually more efficiently managed, much less exhausting, and still provides ample opportunity for both parties to achieve their goals. If you are among the fortunate few scheduling many interviews, it will often be advantageous to arrange two visits in a single trip. The two classes of interviews are especially convenient to arrange back to back for you can complete both in three days. I did this on three separate occasions and once visited three schools in five days. While such a time table is taxing, it is more efficient and less tiring than continually returning home for a day or so, especially if home base is distant from the places visited.

When you receive your call, ask the caller to send available information describing the department, including a list of current faculty and their research interests. The material typically sent to prospective graduate students will suffice. If there is insufficient time for you to receive these materials, seek out a local student who is applying to graduate schools and borrow the information. It is to your advantage to be as informed as possible since you will undoubtedly be meeting many psychologists about whom you know little or nothing. Many of my visits were not organized

so as to provide a systematic overview of the department before I began individual interviews. Consequently, I often began interviews "in the dark" with faculty who were more inclined to ask questions than conduct an orientation session. A reasonable working knowledge of the department will facilitate your asking more specific and appropriate questions, permit you to respond intelligently to queries that would otherwise be difficult to answer, and help you to avoid a faux pas. Should the need arise to telephone a school that has extended an invitation, always call collect. All departments expect this whether or not they specifically instruct you to do so.

All costs on these trips are eventually paid by the host school but you should determine which expenses will be your responsibility so you will know how much money or credit to have available. On my first job trip, which involved visits to two universities, I was told that the first school would take care of hotel arrangements. I left home with \$150 only to learn later that the "arrangements" consisted only of reservations at a hotel near the psychology building. After I paid for my meals, an exorbitant lodging bill, and unexpectedly large cab fares to and from the airport, I arrived at the second school with two dollars in my pocket. Job interviews are stressful enough without having to begin by asking for a loan! Money can become a significant problem. During my second year on the job market, I spent over \$2,000 for transportation alone. Credit cards were charged to the limit and savings depleted. Only one school provided a cash advance and it took from two weeks to over four months to receive reimbursement from the others. You may be able to speed this process along if you put your social insurance number on your vita. Most universities need it before they can issue a check and departments are often remiss in obtaining this piece of information during a visit.

If you plan to make any special requests, you should do so when you accept the interview invitation — but, do not be offended if they are not honoured. You may wish to meet a certain faculty member, tour special facilities, or talk to those in charge of resources (such as specific patient populations or equipment) you will need to carry out research. These requests are often resisted, especially if they require much effort to set up. This resistance reflects

the attitude "why be imposed upon when we may not want to hire this individual" and clearly indicates that the primary purpose of the interview is not to sell you on the department. Although there were welcome exceptions, my requests were generally so unsuccessful that I felt I would have had to return to most schools, had I received an offer, to ascertain the availability of essential resources. I actually did return to two at their expense.

In general, schools are quite inflexible about altering the interview time table. To give one example, due to bad weather my 1400 mile plane trip was deferred to an airport over 200 miles from my final destination. Two buses and eight hours later, I finally arrived at my hotel at 4:30 am. Although I received much sympathy for my predicament when I telephoned the host faculty member in the wee hours of the morning, I was still required to keep my first appointment at 8:00 am. Bad weather and plane delays occur frequently enough that you should plan to leave home at the earliest convenient time.

Sometimes, instead of a phone call inviting you for an interview, you may receive a call or a letter indicating that you are among the finalists for the opening and that you should telephone the department should your own status change. While I initially found such contacts reinforcing, these departments never did invite me for an interview. I assume these communications are provided to alternates to protect the department from losing back-up candidates while they interview their first choices.

### The Visit

A visit typically consists of numerous appointments with a variety of people, luncheons and suppers, a colloquium, and perhaps a party. Besides providing an opportunity to evaluate your academic potential, these various meetings and events provide an occasion to determine if you have the type of personality that will fit in well with the department. The pace of a visit can vary from hectic (the usual case) to somewhat relaxed. It was not unusual to find myself gulping down a bag lunch in a car or being interviewed in an airport cafeteria or bar. On one of my two-day visits, I left home for the airport at 6:00 am. Arriving at my destination late, my first interview began at the

airport and continued during the ride to the campus, which ended at 10:00. I proceeded to meet with a different person every half hour throughout the day (interrupted only by a stale vending machine lunch with a group of students), presented a colloquium at 4:00, and attended a reception at 5:30. Dinner, which lasted from 6:00 to 9:00, was followed immediately by a party. I checked into my hotel after midnight. The next morning I was met for breakfast at 8:00 and again interviewed every half hour until my departure at 5:00. During this visit, the only moments I had to myself were in the hotel or rest room. The second day my schedule was so heavy I was not able to keep all my appointments. By contrast, at another department 15 minutes free time was allocated between appointments and opportunities were provided for relaxed tours of the campus and city.

One of the problems with individual interviews is that they tend to run over their allotted time. As a consequence, you may not be able to meet someone you would like to see or you may lose some important time, such as that typically allocated for preparation prior to your colloquium. Feeling such pressure once, I tried to tactfully terminate an over-extended interview. A grunt and an obvious glance of displeasure confirmed that I had committed an egregious error, one not to be repeated. One school had an excellent system for handling this problem. An assertive graduate student was assigned as my hostess-guide and escorted me to and from appointments. Since the faculty was aware of her responsibility, they did not resent her attempts to keep a tight schedule.

A disquieting aspect of these visits is that there are no well defined or guaranteed "time out" periods during which you can feel that critical examination and scrutiny of you has ceased. For example, you might be taken out to dinner and just start to feel relaxed by convivial conversation when the topic of conversation shifts to psychology and your stomach knots as you are once again immersed in an aggressive oral exam.

Another disagreeable aspect of your visit could be the party. Although I tended to look forward to parties, attendance frequently turned out more chore than pleasure. I was still "on the spot" and quite fatigued by a day that normally began with my early morning flight

from a different time zone and that would be followed by another full day of interviews and perhaps travel to another school.

### *The Interview*

The most common interview procedure involves a series of meeting with individual faculty. Less common but more efficient are meetings with pairs of faculty. These sessions typically last from 15 minutes to an hour depending upon the number of people to be seen, the importance of the interviewer to the selection process, and the time allotted for your visit. An alternative involves interviews by large groups of faculty with the composition of the group changing over a two hour period. I preferred the group interview over the others; it was more stimulating and less repetitious than one-to-one encounters. However, it does not preclude the need for at least a few meetings with individual faculty. Group interviews provide an efficient medium for the department to learn about you, but little opportunity for you to obtain candid information from them.

### *Types of Questions Asked*

The most common types of questions and probably those to which your answers are most important center on research, teaching, and clinical activities and how you plan to develop your interests. More specifically, interviewers will want to know how you will complement their department's graduate and clinical training, the degree to which your research ideas are original and not simply borrowed from your advisor, and the extent to which your research is programmatic and likely to pay off in publications and recognition. Everyone tends to ask the same questions. Although stress questions and those testing specific knowledge are very uncommon, some psychologists tend to be intellectually aggressive and challenging. Given the choice between "how do you see your research developing over the next five years?" and the same question preceded by "I don't believe research in your area will have any long range impact", some psychologists (often those with a national reputation) adopt the latter style. Some interviewers will ask you to preview or repeat your colloquium because they will or have missed it. Commonly, interviewers ask ques-

tions about your background and training and the institution from which you graduated. Some will try to sell you on their department. On several occasions I was asked about other schools I had visited (I found few people willing to reciprocate by discussing the other candidates they were interviewing). Quite often the interviewer has no questions at all and expects you to conduct the session.

As I suggested earlier, one of the most frustrating aspects of the interview is being asked questions that are difficult to answer without a working knowledge of the department. Questions of this sort fall into this general form: How will you meet the needs of the department? You may be asked what courses you plan to teach when you have no idea what the needs of the department are, whether two instructors can offer the same undergraduate course, whether you could create a new course, etc. A similar question concerned the commitment I would make to the psychology clinic. There is enough variation from one clinic to another to make it difficult to answer such a question without additional information. Is the clinic service oriented or does it have a teaching/research emphasis? Is supervision conducted on an individual basis or as a group practicum? What patient populations does it serve? How much time are faculty expected to spend in student supervision?

Although these reflections may give a general impression of the tone of the interview, it does not always follow so predictable a course. Some psychologists, especially clinicians, adopt a style of interviewing that is idiosyncratic and sometimes deliberately disconcerting. For example, having arrived on campus only hours earlier, I was told by one of the faculty that it was apparent I was not serious about the job (not true); and I was placed in the awkward position of defending my decision to visit the department (the wisdom of which I immediately began to ponder). On another occasion, I was interviewed by a small group of faculty. Once I was seated at the table with the group, the person who turned out to be the most frequent and aggressive questioner got up and sat down behind me!

### *Questions You Should Ask*

When I first began to visit schools, I found that by the second or third interview of the visit

I had usually exhausted my reservoir of questions and stopped interrogating people. This was a mistake. Asking the same questions repeatedly provides an invaluable opportunity for a reliability check. This tactic is especially useful in respect to subjective topics like the goals of the graduate program, impressions of key faculty, availability of resources, expectations from junior faculty, and departmental morale.

Two questions I feel it is important to ask each interviewer are "In what ways do you think I would be a welcome addition to the department?" and "What reservations do you have about my joining the faculty?" If you ask these questions early, you will be able to address more directly the hidden agenda contained in many subsequent questions and interviews. You should also inquire about tenure requirements and clinic responsibilities. There is considerable variability across schools in the sorts of obstacles one must overcome to attain tenure. Research productivity may open some doors but not others; I encountered two U.S. departments where assistant professors with more than 20 publications had been denied tenure on other grounds. The stock reply I received when inquiring about tenure was not to worry because I would not have been invited for an interview if I were not deemed a good bet for tenure. This assurance rings hollow when the department has not offered tenure to anyone in your area in twenty years. You should determine how many junior faculty have left the department over the last decade and why. While it is easy to explain away any single negative tenure decision, if assistant professors have been repeatedly denied tenure there is probably a setting main effect that needs to be explored. At one school I visited, senior faculty had withdrawn from clinical supervision, the burden of which together with clinic administration had fallen to the new appointees. Research productivity suffered with over-involvement in the clinic and unfavourable tenure recommendations were foregone conclusions.

Finally, there are great intra- and inter-departmental differences in interviewers' familiarity with you. Some schools distribute your vita to faculty and students who will review it carefully prior to a personal interview (I never met anyone who seemed to have read copies of my papers). Other departments do not circu-

late this material (or it is not read) and the interviewer may know little about you. While it may seem odd, it was not uncommon to be asked, once by a department chairperson, who I was, where I came from, who my advisor was, etc. My impression of a department was always more positive in the former than in the latter instance.

### *Whom Are You Apt To See?*

You will meet with various faculty including probably everyone in your specialty area as well as key faculty outside your area. Also in your program will be conferences with the department head; sometimes he or she is the person you will see first and last. This is the person who can best give you an overview of the department (although perhaps not of your area) and fill you in on details such as salary, cost of living increases and merit raises, teaching load, summer teaching, terms of appointment, availability of "seed" money for research, laboratory space, fringe benefits, etc. About a third of the department chairpersons I met did not have an agenda for the meeting and expected me to ask the questions. Those chairpersons with whom I met at the conclusion of my visit expected me to divulge my impressions of the department and to catalog items such as equipment, space, and money necessary to get my research off the ground. Usually there is a pro-forma meeting with a dean which offers an occasion to learn of the history and operation of the university. Meetings with graduate students are also included. You may not learn much from them because students are reluctant to give public testimony to anything controversial unless there is widespread discontent. If there is, graduate students may use the session to air their grievances or turn the meeting into a confrontation; e.g., indicating they strongly oppose your candidacy because they do not want another faculty member with your particular interests or because they would like the new appointee to be of the other sex.

Your most valuable source of information will be the assistant professors. They are likely to give you the best idea of the expectations of the department and the reception you would receive if you accepted the job. I found new junior faculty to be unbiased and straightforward in their assessment of the department.

They have not had time to be co-opted by the system so they tend to have the perspective of a well informed outsider. In these interviews, you should be asking all the questions. My meetings with recently appointed assistant professors were quite telling, and provided the following sorts of insights into different departments: the promise of a reduced teaching load for the first year was not kept, secretarial assistance was limited to four hours weekly, administrative responsibilities were excessive, there was no salary increase after the first year, a *sine qua non* for tenure is a publication in *Psychological Bulletin*, etc. Senior assistant professors are less satisfactory sources for this information, but may provide other valuable insights, especially if they are close themselves to the tenure decision.

### *The Colloquium*

The single most important part of your visit is your colloquium. Although you may have some choice, it is usually scheduled at noon or toward the end of your first day. If you are given a choice, you may wish to schedule your talk as soon after your arrival as possible. This will eliminate the need to divulge its contents during interviews that precede it. Also, if your colloquium goes well, it will set a positive tone for the remainder of your visit. A good presentation in no way ensures you a job offer, but a poor one will be fatal. Hence, your job talk should be well prepared and carefully thought out. Darley and Zanna (1981) give some excellent suggestions regarding the preparation of the colloquium.

You will be scrutinized very carefully as to how you conceptualize a research problem and how you handle data. It will be to your disadvantage to present simply a literature review or theoretical treatise. If you are in the midst of data collection for your thesis, try to obtain some preliminary results, or systematically present the findings of pilot studies or of investigations that preceded your thesis.

A lucid, well organized delivery is essential. It is advisable to practice your colloquium before a critical audience prior to your first job interview, e.g., volunteer to present it as part of your department's colloquia series, give guest lectures in appropriate classes or at a community agency or hospital. While you will probably want to use notes, avoid reading your

presentation. I used no notes in presenting my talk; that favourably impressed a number of people. Nor did I memorize my presentation: a pat speech lacks spontaneity and enthusiasm. Instead, I used slides as cues to remind me of what I wanted to discuss and the sequence of topics. If you use slides to summarize data, remember your presentation will be better understood and more appreciated if you highlight each slide before you begin to discuss it — identify axes, labels, and curves. Too often the audience loses track of the presentation while the speaker, assuming the slide to be understood, is discussing the significance of the results. While such mundane advice may seem self-evident and trivial, it is my belief that more job candidates are dismissed outright because their colloquium was uninterpretable or poorly delivered than for any other reason.

Regardless of the time allocated (usually from 60 to 90 minutes), be certain you can finish your remarks in 45 or 50 minutes. Nobody expects you to take longer than an hour, including time for questions. Class schedules run on an hourly basis and if it is the end of the day, no one wants to listen to a long lecture. Moreover, a 5 to 10 minute late start is generally unavoidable. While most departments allow you a half hour of free time prior to your colloquium, this time is rarely preserved intact because interviews tend to run over their allotted time, an extra person may be inserted into your schedule, you may have arrived late, etc. Hence, do not count on this time being available. If you have more than a few slides, bring your own tray. Finally, if you want to be certain everyone will be able to see your slides, request a projector with a zoom lens prior to your arrival.

Your audience can vary greatly from department to department. At one school my colloquium was presented informally in a seminar room. I was asked five questions in the first 10 minutes and a lively and reinforcing exchange ensued. At another, my presentation was delivered in a large lecture room with everyone sitting in the back rows and I received no questions even when I was finished. At some departments, the entire group appears to be with you, while at others, the audience seems cold, distant, and hostile, failing to even smile at a joke that elicited raucous laughter elsewhere. Some of my colloquia were well attended but at one only three faculty and a

small group of students were present. Oddly enough, you may not receive any feedback regarding your talk. Do not be disheartened: my colloquium was enthusiastically received at some schools but generated neither questions nor praise at others. Academic audiences are like that.

In addition to the research oriented colloquium, one department required a two-hour clinical case conference. This presentation was rather informal, and was intended to illustrate how I could conceptualize and handle a therapy case. Although a good idea in principle, since it is not a standard expectation of a job interview, it is difficult to adequately prepare for such a novel requirement without appreciable advance notice.

### **The Ideal Visit**

At this point, it is worthwhile to consider some of the elements that from the vantage point of the candidate would make for a better visit. Rather than having to find my own way to the psychology department or the hotel, I always appreciated being met at and later returned to the airport by a member of the faculty or by a student.

The first individual interview should be with someone who will orient you to the department (such as the chairperson) rather than try to evaluate you. It is also useful to see this person at the end of the visit. This provides a good opportunity for both parties to achieve a sense of closure. Most individual interviews should last no more than a half hour; whenever possible, group interviews should be arranged. Some departments require a candidate to be seen by a representative from every area within the department, sometimes as many as seven people. From the candidate's perspective, these interviews, which may consume the better part of a day, are often the least interesting or informative and quite tiring. Interviews with these persons were commonly the ones where the interviewer had no agenda. The purpose of these meetings could perhaps be served by a single, one hour meeting.

Care should be taken to see that the department is prepared for the colloquium and does not allow this presentation to be compromised. An effort should be made to preserve at least 15 minutes free time prior to the colloquium. Some problems with which I had to deal in-

cluded starting so late that many people left part way through the presentation, a slide projector with a burnt out bulb, and the audience not being able to see the slides because the screen was too small or the room not dark enough. Once, the department forgot to schedule the room for a sufficient period of time and I had to stop well before the end of my talk. Late starts are so common that 90 minutes should be allotted even for a 50-minute presentation.

Finally, I feel departments should attempt to provide candidates with personal feedback shortly after the visit. Nobody wants to tell someone they will not receive an offer, let alone the reasons why. However, having invested a lot of yourself in the job visit and with so much at stake, you do not deserve to be left in limbo for months and are entitled to know why you will not be hired. Certainly department chairpersons appreciate this courtesy when you turn an offer down. Candidates seem to receive this information through the "grapevine" anyway, usually from a peer or one of their references. I have no doubt that a number of bright, capable people never receive a job offer simply because they keep making the same mistake repeatedly from one interview to the next and because none of the schools they visited ever offered any constructive feedback.

### **Rejections**

Rejection letters are inevitable, remarkably uninformative, and sometimes insincere (see McRae, 1979). One letter, which was mimeographed so poorly that illegible words were typed over, assured me that I was "one of several outstanding candidates" who had to be turned down. I even received form letters of rejection from departments I declined to visit, as though they felt some need to have the last word. Rejection letters from places that interviewed you may come months after your visit; they rarely give any specific reasons why you were not hired. There remain some schools, including one I interviewed, that I have never heard from.

### **Alternatives to the Tenure Track Position**

It is possible that you will not be offered a job or that you will receive an offer that is unacceptable. Hence, one alternative every



job candidate should consider in a tight market is applying for a non-tenure track position. Ideally, this temporary job should make you more attractive to employers the following year. Positions you should consider include postdoctoral appointments, sabbatical replacements, or teaching jobs. Clinicians have the additional option of accepting professional placements; but unless the job involves some academic and research obligation, taking such a position will rule out rather than enhance future academic opportunities. While a number of factors bear on your obtaining a job, the two most important are publications and recommendations from respected and well known references. You should seek a short-term job that provides opportunities for research, allows you to rub shoulders with renowned psychologists who are interested in your research, and has relatively few teaching and administrative demands. A postdoctoral position is more likely to satisfy these requirements than a teaching appointment. If you accept a temporary placement, it should not last more than two years. Some departments are reluctant to hire assistant professors with more than two years postdoctoral experience because they cannot afford to pay the higher salary such experience demands. I can speak from experience; my first year on the job market ended with my accepting a one-year research position that led to my being a more attractive candidate the following year.

### The Offer

If you are fortunate, within a few weeks of your visit you will receive a phone call offering the job. It is quite difficult to predict this call. At two schools I visited I enjoyed an enthusiastic reception and was reinforced by expressions like "this department needs someone like you" and "we will do whatever is necessary to get you to come here". However, neither institution offered to hire me. A school that offered me a job my first year on the market also had an opening for which I applied the following year. Even though I sent several letters expressing my continued interest in the job, their only reply was a stenciled rejection letter. In contrast, one school which demonstrated no discernible interest in me during my visit subsequently made a formal offer of employment.

Once you receive an offer, you will be asked to decide within a couple of days to two weeks. It is to a school's advantage to have you decide as soon as possible. If they give you too much time, you may receive a more attractive offer and they may lose good candidates to other schools. On the other hand, you should not be coerced into acting too quickly, and for purposes of negotiation, it is to your advantage to have two offers simultaneously. When you receive an offer, call other departments you have visited and ask them for a decision or ask your advisor to telephone schools that have yet to contact you to see if there is any interest. In my experience, the more a department wants you and the more offers you receive, the longer you can take to make up your mind, the stronger your bargaining position, and the greater the likelihood requests for higher salary, laboratory space, etc., will be honored. Do not be reluctant to negotiate; it may be years before you get another chance. On the other hand, if a department has a strong second choice who is eager to accept the job, your options may be limited. When you negotiate the details of the offer, it is best to deal directly with the department head. Sometimes the chairperson of the selection committee may serve as an intermediary, an arrangement that I found unsatisfactory since this person did not have the authority to make decisions.

The standard starting salary for a new PhD at Canadian and American universities in 1979 was \$18,000 and \$15,000, respectively, with each year of postdoctoral experience being worth, respectively, \$500 and \$1,500. Although chairpersons convey the impression that salaries are fixed, if they really want you, the initial offer can usually be improved upon, particularly if the department carries some influence with the appropriate dean. While some universities will match offers from other schools, they may only do so if they believe the other department to be of comparable or better quality. In any case, you should clarify and settle such matters as salary, office and laboratory space, equipment, seed money, teaching load, how many courses and which ones, and removal expenses. When you accept an offer, be *certain* to specify the details of these arrangements in your acceptance letter. For a variety of administrative reasons, some departments do not send a formal letter offering the position until you agree in writing to accept

it. In these instances, you should be especially careful to plainly outline the conditions of your acceptance. Bernstein (1978) provides a useful overview of points to consider when accepting a job offer.

### The Decision

Just as there are no ideal job applicants, there is no ideal job. The most stressful aspect of the search, for me, centered on making a decision. I had worked long and hard to reach this point; I wanted to be certain I chose correctly. Decision making is not easy. You may be offered a job about which you have many reservations and be given a limited period in which to make up your mind. With no other offers in hand, are you willing to turn it down and accept the risk that another offer may not be forthcoming? Offered several jobs simultaneously, you will want to make a careful analysis to compare one job to another. I found this process quite difficult. Talking with advisors and friends is very constructive. This will force you to articulate and rationally evaluate the pros and cons of each offer. You may list factors that are of concern to you and assign weights to aid in coming to a final conclusion. However, it is not possible to quantify all aspects that go into a successful

job match. Your final decision must be based in part on instinct. I never felt comfortable when I refused an offer, nor did I feel confident about my final decision until weeks after it was consummated.

### Concluding Remarks

Applying for jobs is a lengthy, effortful, demanding process. From the time you start screening job advertisements to the final decision, a great quantity of psychological energy is expended. Considerable time is spent seeking advice, planning strategy, contemplating options, and simply waiting for events to unfold. This process exacts a heavy toll on your personal and ongoing professional life. Your efficiency level is low; at times it seems impossible to accomplish anything. To my surprise, I spent a good deal of time questioning values concerning my personal life and career, values which I thought were clear and fixed long ago.

For those of you in graduate school planning an academic career, I hope my thoughts and reactions have captured the flavour of the interview experience and will allay some anxieties and help preserve self-confidence along the way. It is my further hope that this article will help to better job recruitment procedures for both applicants and hiring departments.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit les expériences d'un jeune gradué (PhD) à la recherche d'un emploi en milieu académique. Les observations de l'auteur sont tirées d'entrevues dans 12 départements de psychologie du Canada et des États Unis. Les sujets abordés comprennent les endroits où les demandes sont soumises, qui est invité pour une entrevue, l'importance des publications, la réception de l'invitation pour l'entrevue, la visite — l'horaire des réunions, le rythme de leur déroulement, qui l'on rencontre, les questions posées au candidat et celles qu'il devrait poser lui-même, et les discussions touchant l'emploi proprement dit — les alternatives à un poste régulier, les rejets, les éléments d'une entrevue idéale, ce qu'il convient de faire lorsqu'une offre est faite, et enfin, comment prendre une décision. Les recommandations formulées devraient s'avérer utiles aux futurs candidats ainsi qu'aux départements qui sont sur le point de recruter des jeunes professeurs.

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# PSYCHOLOGIST

## SAULT STE. MARIE GENERAL HOSPITAL

The General Hospital, a 245-bed active treatment hospital, has received approval from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to provide a Development Assessment Program for the District of Algoma. The Psychologist will report to the Administrator and coordinate the Program.

The purpose of the Program is to provide developmental assessments and appropriate follow-ups to individuals who are mentally retarded or suspected of having developmental delays by insuring the placement of the persons in the correct program(s) and by converting the assessment data into Individual Program Plan (I.P.P.). This service is intended to become the screening intake for services for the developmentally handicapped.

Qualifications: Registered as a Psychologist in Ontario specializing in assessment and/or diagnosis with emphasis on working with developmentally delayed or mentally retarded individuals.

Salary: Salary commensurate with qualifications and experience, excellent benefits.

Resumes indicating salary expectations should be forwarded in confidence to:

Director of Personnel  
General Hospital  
941 Queen St. E.  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.  
P6A 2B8