

Key Insights from the Panel

Faculty Interview Preparation

Initial Preparation for the Faculty Interview

- If possible, **participate in faculty hiring processes** in any way you can, such as attending job talks and meeting with candidates, to gain insight from the other side.
- **Think through each part of the interview process** and anticipate potential questions and questions you would like to ask.
- Utilize your research skills to **learn about the institution and department** you are interviewing with.
- Recognize that the interview process in the United States may differ from other countries, with a **focus on being a team player and securing funding**, in addition to scientific knowledge.
- **Research the department**, college, and its culture, as well as the other labs and their work.
- **Be prepared to explain how you will fund your lab**, including short-term, mid-term (3-5 years), and long-term plans, and the specific grants, agencies, and programs you will target.
- Prepare **thoughtful questions to ask** the search committee to demonstrate commitment and engagement.
- **Write down answers to common interview questions** and discuss them with your postdoc advisor or others with experience.

Highlighting Your Work During the Interview

- Highlight how your work **adds to the department** and has the potential for **collaboration** with existing faculty.
- Emphasize your work's **impact** (e.g., significant publications, interesting techniques) and its **collaborative nature** (e.g., projects with many people, community involvement).
- Connect your work to the **department's or college's mission statement or five-year plan**.
- Highlight not only the important questions you address but also the **methods you use and how those might benefit the department, grad students, and undergraduates** (e.g., teaching a class on a specific skill like advanced statistics).

General Expectations During the Faculty Interview

- **Avoid saying anything negative** about past collaborators or your current department.
- Approach the interview with the mindset that you can primarily **lose points** by being nervous, not expressing yourself well, being late, or failing to research the department. Focus on being yourself, truthful, honest, polite, on time, and having done your homework.
- Try to remain **calm and centered**.
- **Pay attention to how you feel** during the interview; if you consistently feel uncomfortable, it might not be the right fit. Remember you are also interviewing them.
- Be prepared for a **packed schedule** with many meetings. It is **okay to ask for breaks**, such as bathroom breaks, if needed.

Setting Yourself Apart as a Postdoctoral Candidate

- **Be very upfront and honest** about who you are, what you have done, and your research interests.
- Recognize that search committees understand you will not have the same level of grants as established professors.
- Highlight your **potential for future funding and collaborations**.
- Some search committees may use metrics like the number of publications divided by years since graduation, which can sometimes benefit recent postdocs.
- Demonstrate **engagement and energy**, showing you are genuinely willing and interested in the job. Search committees prefer candidates who seem very interested.
- Be aware that more established researchers may be using the interview process for leverage at their current institution, so don't be discouraged if an offer goes to them first.

Delivering Effective Job Talks

- Aim to sound like a faculty member. Focus on your **dissertation and postdoctoral research**, but talk about it as the research you *did*, avoiding too much emphasis on being a "PhD student" or "postdoc".
- Generally, **avoid personal journey details** like your undergraduate institution at the start of the talk, unless there's a strong connection to the university.
- Recognize that your job talk is also evaluating your **teaching potential**, so ensure it is **accessible** to everyone in the room.
- Keep in mind that your **history is already known** from your application materials, so don't spend too much time on it during the talk.
- Understand there are **multiple ways to give a good job talk**.

- Be aware of the difference between a **research seminar** (past research and interests) and a **chalk talk** (funding plans, short/mid/long-term strategies) if both are required.
- **Be mindful of technical glitches** with animations and videos; consider having a static PDF version as a backup.
- Use **consistent and clear visuals**, even if you are not a graphic designer. Focus on the content being engaging and interesting.
- Aim to be a **storyteller**, creating a narrative with some drama and a clear resolution (e.g., the "baby werewolf silver bullet method") to keep the audience engaged.
- If you are not giving a chalk talk, **incorporate your future research plans and funding strategies** into your seminar.
- **Be sure to sound passionate and interested** in your research, even if you have practiced the talk many times.

Securing Funding Beyond a Mentor's Interests

- Make it clear during the interview that your future plans involve **independent research**, not just continued collaboration with your postdoc mentor.
- Do your **legwork in identifying grants** you are eligible for and ideally mention this in your application materials.
- Research potential **collaborators within the department and university** and mention these possibilities cautiously, avoiding assumptions about specific collaborations.
- Explore **non-federal funding resources** by reviewing the funding acknowledgements in papers in your field.
- Research funding sources mentioned on faculty webpages within the department you are interviewing with.
- In North Carolina, consider resources like **NC Biotech and NC IDEA** for translational research and product development.

Navigating One-on-One Interviews

- Prepare a big list of genuine and thoughtful questions to ask everyone on your schedule.
- Approach one-on-ones as an opportunity to be **nice, polite, and engaging**, and to ask questions.
- Realize that these conversations are **important for evaluation**, and faculty will discuss their impressions afterward.
- Have a **list of genuine questions** you are interested in asking faculty. It's okay to ask similar questions to different people to get varied perspectives.

- Consider asking open-ended questions like "What's your favorite thing about being here?" or about recent interesting lab findings.
- Focus on **listening** as much as talking.
- Faculty are mostly splitting hairs between candidates – do your best to show that you did some background research and demonstrate enthusiasm. Again, avoid saying anything negative about someone you have worked with.

Demonstrating Teaching Abilities with Limited Experience

- **Do your homework** on the existing courses in the program and be able to name classes you believe you could teach. Avoid naming courses that don't exist.
- Be **mindful and not presumptuous** when suggesting courses you could teach. Phrase suggestions tentatively based on curriculum needs.
- If you have limited teaching experience, **ask about resources available for new teachers**, such as teaching certificates or workshops.
- If a teaching talk is required, prepare thoroughly. Your job talk also demonstrates your ability to teach.
- **Avoid asking questions that imply a lack of interest in teaching** or a desire to minimize teaching responsibilities (e.g., "Can I buy out my teaching?").
- Consider taking the **initiative to develop a syllabus** for a course you are passionate about and that you believe could fit within the department.
- Be prepared to answer questions about your **teaching philosophy**, how you would incorporate active learning, or integrate your research into the classroom.

Standing Out During CV Screening

- Understand your audience and the type of institution you are applying to.
- For many R1 universities (not top-tier elite), **not having Science or Nature papers is not necessarily a barrier**.
- Focus on having a **solid background of consistent publications** in good journals within your field.
- Highlight any **awards or funding applications**, even if unsuccessful, to demonstrate your proactive approach to securing funding.

Navigating Offers and Negotiations

- **Avoid any negotiation-type discussions during the interview process.** Focus on collecting information.

- If you receive an offer from one university and are waiting to hear from others, it is **okay to reach out to the search chair** of the other institutions to inquire about their timeline. However, understand that the search committee often has limited control over the overall hiring timeline.
- During the interview, you might be asked about equipment or lab space needs. Have some general thoughts prepared and you can ask clarifying questions about existing resources.
- Negotiations regarding startup packages, salary, etc., should occur after you have received a formal offer.

Mentioning Spousal/Partner Hiring

- It is generally advisable to **wait until after the initial interview stages** (committee or chair interview) to bring up the possibility of a spousal/partner hire.
- Tactfully mentioning that you have a spouse who is also looking may be appropriate later in the process.
- Be aware that if your partner is in a different field, it may involve a different department or college and could take more time.

Handling Unexpected Interview Questions

- Do your best to **genuinely answer the question asked**, rather than what you think they might be implying.
- It is okay to **take a strategic pause** to collect your thoughts.
- **Ask clarifying questions** if you are unsure what the interviewer is asking.
- Try to maintain an **attitude of curiosity** rather than defensiveness when faced with unexpected or intense questions.