

PREPP: POSTDOC READINESS to ENTER the PROFESSORSHIP PROGRAM (PREPP)

The Faculty Interview Panel Summary

Date: Thursday, November 20, 2025

Time: 12:00–1:15

Faculty explained how to prepare for faculty interviews, outlined typical interview structures and questions, and offered guidance on effective preparation, committee expectations, and assessing departmental fit. Panelists included Dr. Kimberly Sellers (Department Head, Statistics, NC State University), Dr. Alon Greenbaum (Assistant Professor, Biomedical Engineering, UNC-Chapel Hill and NC State University), and Dr. Mohammad Salehin (Assistant Professor, Biology, NC A&T State University).

Key Takeaway Messages

- Faculty interviews require significant preparation and familiarity with the department, faculty, curriculum, and research directions.
 - Every interaction is part of the interview, including informal conversations and meals.
 - Strong candidates tell a clear, compelling story about why their research matters and how it contributes to the department's mission.
 - Teaching readiness is essential, and candidates must be prepared to discuss courses they can teach or develop.
 - For in-person visits, adaptability is important because schedules shift and interviews move quickly.
 - Fit is mutual: candidates should evaluate departmental culture, mentoring, expectations, and student experience.
 - Professionalism, courtesy, and thoughtful follow-up communications leave lasting positive impressions.
 - Networking and visibility in the field significantly strengthen long-term candidacy.
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Overview of Typical Faculty Interview Structure

Initial Screening (Often Zoom)

- Shorter, standardized interviews with the search committee.
- Focuses on communication clarity, basic fit, and verifying the promise shown in the application materials.
- Includes common questions about research, teaching, and potential contributions.
- May include questions about undergraduate courses the candidate can teach.
- Usually ends with time for candidates to ask questions.

In-Person Visit (One or Two Days)

- Multiple one-on-one meetings with faculty, often thirty minutes each.
- Scheduled meetings with department head, dean, and senior leadership.
- Observation of departmental interactions is important for evaluating cultural fit.
- Includes formal presentations:
 - **Research-focused positions:** research seminar and chalk talk on future plans.
 - **Teaching-focused positions:** teaching demonstration evaluated for presence, clarity, pacing, and engagement.
- Meals, breaks, and tours are all evaluative interactions.

Post-Visit Follow-Up

- Commitment to send timely thank-you notes to all faculty and staff.
 - Reasonable follow-up after extended silence is appropriate.
 - Departments may move slowly due to logistical and administrative constraints.
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1. Foundational Preparation and First Steps

- Candidates should view the interview invitation as an achievement.
 - Conduct extensive research using departmental webpages, course catalogs, faculty bios, strategic plans, and external or archived sources to understand departmental identity.
 - Learn faculty names, research areas, and possible collaborations.
 - Revisit application documents, as not all faculty will have read them.
 - Deep preparation lays the groundwork for a strong interview.
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2. Common Mistakes Candidates Make

- Arriving underprepared or not knowing faculty research areas.
 - Treating informal moments as non-evaluative.
 - Failing to communicate the broader significance of their work.
 - Struggling with unexpected questions or thinking on their feet.
 - Dominating the conversation instead of listening actively.
 - Not being ready to discuss teaching responsibilities and course contributions.
 - Giving overly technical or disjointed presentations.
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3. What Makes a Standout Interview

- Presentations with a clear narrative structure that explain why the work matters.
- Accessibility for non-specialists, especially in the first five minutes.
- Finishing early enough to allow for questions.
- Demonstrating collegiality, confidence, humility, and enthusiasm.

- Creating meaningful connections by referencing faculty interests.
 - Asking thoughtful questions that show understanding of the department.
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4. Zoom Interview Structure and Expectations

- Committees often use standardized questions covering research, teaching, interdisciplinary work, and curriculum development.
 - Candidates may be asked which undergraduate courses they can teach or propose.
 - The final portion usually allows candidates to ask questions that demonstrate preparation and insight.
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5. In-Person Interviews: Structure and Expectations

- Visits may last one to two days with numerous short meetings.
 - Candidates should remain flexible as schedules shift.
 - Meetings with the department head, dean, and senior faculty are standard.
 - **Research-focused roles:** include a public seminar and a chalk talk focused on future research.
 - **Teaching-focused roles:** include a teaching demonstration evaluated for clarity, pacing, engagement, and communication.
 - Showing respect to staff and administrators reflects well on the candidate.
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6. Assessing Fit and Department Culture

- Candidates should ask about mentoring, expectations, workload, and the support offered to new faculty.
 - Useful questions include:
 - “What does success look like for someone at my career stage?”
 - “What support exists for launching new research or teaching initiatives?”
 - Junior faculty often provide candid insight.
 - Candidates should observe faculty interactions for signs of collegiality, openness, or strain.
 - When meeting students, ask what they enjoy, what challenges them, and how they experience the major.
 - External colleagues may offer additional perspective on departmental culture.
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7. Preparing for Teaching-Focused and Research-Focused Roles

Teaching-Focused Positions

- Review course catalogs and identify courses they can teach or develop.
- Understand how their teaching interests align with existing departmental responsibilities.
- Emphasize pacing, engagement, and communication in teaching demonstrations.

Research-Focused Positions

- Outline clear, compelling future research plans.
- Explain how their work complements departmental strengths.
- Use storytelling and accessible framing to reach a broad audience.

Shared Expectations

- Show alignment with departmental needs, enthusiasm, and strong communication skills.
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8. Navigating the Job Market Strategically

- Apply broadly, even when the match is not perfect.
 - It is acceptable to email departments before applying to ask about alignment with departmental priorities.
 - Conferences are important for networking and visibility.
 - Developing relationships in the field strengthens candidacy over time.
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9. Professional Etiquette, Follow-Up, and Communication

- Send prompt thank-you notes to faculty and staff.
 - Email is appropriate
 - Following up after delays is reasonable and demonstrates continued interest.
 - Departments may require time to reach decisions; patience and professionalism are important.
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