

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

Title: The Faculty Search: When to Begin and How to Organize

Date: Thursday, September 18, 2025

Time: 12:00 – 1:15

Description: Assistant professors share how they planned and organized their job searches for faculty positions.

This document compiles key advice and insights shared during the PREPP panel discussion, “The Faculty Search: When to Begin and How to Organize” (September 18, 2025). It is designed to help postdoctoral scholars understand when and how to begin applying, how to tailor materials, what to expect during interviews, and how to prepare for the transition into a faculty role.

When to Begin the Job Search

- Begin searching about a year before the anticipated end of a postdoc.
- Avoid starting too early - use postdoc time to publish and strengthen research output.
- Plan for at least two application cycles, in case the first round does not lead to an offer.
- Align with the faculty hiring season: most positions are posted in late summer and fall.

Where and How to Search

- Use major job search engines such as **HigherEdJobs.com**, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Indeed, or Google’s job alert tools.
- Take advantage of filters, email notifications, and multiple platforms for coverage.
- Review university websites to determine whether institutions emphasize teaching or research.
- Network actively - many openings are shared informally through colleagues, conferences, and field-specific listservs.
- Consider geographic and personal priorities: target regions near family, or align with research relevance (e.g., coastal institutions for certain research).
- Adjust expectations as needed - be open to both research-focused and teaching-focused institutions.

Applications and Tailoring Materials

- Tailor each application to the institution. Demonstrate fit with the department’s needs and mission.
- Highlight potential collaborators by referencing faculty research, even without prior conversations.
- Ask thoughtful questions of the search committee chair - it provides insights and shows genuine interest.

- Clarify details such as the expected audience for talks, structure of teaching/research demonstrations, and institutional priorities.
 - Reference how your teaching and research goals align with the department's stated direction.
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Applications, Interviews, and Offers

- Be prepared to submit many applications - 30 or more is not unusual.
 - Expect many rejections, a smaller number of phone interviews, and only a few on-site invitations.
 - Treat the process as highly competitive but manageable with persistence.
 - Recognize that universities can sometimes arrange spousal hires or other flexible solutions if they are motivated to bring you in.
 - Rejection is common; persistence and resilience are essential.
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Interview Preparation and Strategy

- Draft potential interview questions and practice answers daily to build confidence.
 - Prepare tailored questions for each group you meet (faculty, chair, dean, students).
 - Take notes during interviews to remember specifics, then follow up with personalized thank-you messages.
 - Anticipate communication or cultural challenges and prepare strategies to address them.
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Postdoc Experience and Publications

- A postdoc is not universally required:
 - In some fields (e.g., engineering), many transition directly from PhD to faculty.
 - In others (e.g., biology), a postdoc is almost always expected.
 - The length of a postdoc is less important than producing meaningful outcomes.
 - Demonstrate a strong publication record overall; ongoing postdoc work need not always be published before applying, as long as progress is clear.
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Postdoc Fellowships

- Fellowships such as NIH and NSF provide independence and research freedom.
 - They allow you to design and execute your own project, which builds strong preparation for leading a lab.
 - They also provide flexibility in aligning postdoc research with long-term career goals.
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Teaching and Mentoring

- Formal teaching experience is not always required, even at teaching-focused universities.
- Show enthusiasm and willingness to teach; departments often provide resources to develop teaching skills.
- Highlight mentoring experiences with undergraduate or graduate students as evidence of teaching potential.

- For primarily teaching roles, prior classroom experience is especially valuable.

Funding and Grant Writing

- Assistant professor hires rarely arrive with significant independent funding; most receive startup packages.
- Expectations differ by institution: research-intensive universities may tie tenure to external funding, while teaching-focused institutions may only require pursuit of funding opportunities.
- Even without grants, outline the types of funding you plan to pursue.
- Emphasize grant-writing experience, even if proposals were not funded.
- Begin proposal writing early, and expect multiple submission attempts.
- Frame proposals strategically to align with current funding priorities (e.g., highlighting economic rather than political benefits).

International Applicants

- Secure a stable visa or residency status whenever possible; permanent residency or a green card strengthens competitiveness.
- Most universities sponsor H-1B visas, but requirements vary - check job ads carefully.
- Applications may be disadvantaged if submitted from abroad without a U.S. address or contact information.
- Clarify visa sponsorship needs early in the process with potential employers.

Other Insights

- Career paths can shift - moving from industry to academia is possible.
- It is common to adjust job search targets over time (e.g., from research-intensive universities to teaching-focused institutions).
- Departments may show flexibility in hiring, including spousal hires or cross-departmental arrangements.