The Job-Search Process

Kathleen Fisher
AT&T Labs Research
Grad Cohort 2007
You’re graduating!

- Exciting but nerve-wracking time:
  - finishing up thesis
  - looking for a job
- Don’t be too hard on yourself!
Finding your job

- Your application
- Preparing your job talk
- Preparing for an interview
- The big day!
- After the interview...
- Managing offers
- But that's a long way off!

September  May
What do you want?

What kind(s) of position are you looking for?
- Research university? Research lab?
  Teaching college? Post Doc? Development?

Where are you (and any significant other) willing to live?
- West coast? East coast? International?
  Urban? Rural? ...?

September-October
What’s available?

- Job market changes every year
- Information sources:
  - CRA web site
    - http://www.cra.org/highlights/student.html
  - Communications of the ACM
    - http://athena.systers.org/mailman/listinfo/phdjobhuntHers
  - Talk to your advisor, other mentors, ...
  - Post docs generally through word of mouth.

September–October
Tips

- With the help of your advisor, identify “stretch,” “eye-level,” and “safety” institutions.

- Don’t apply somewhere you are 100% sure you won’t go.

- But, keep an open mind! You might be surprised what you end up liking the best.

- Note due dates (November, December)!
Your application

- Cover Letter
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
  - Research and teaching experience, jobs held, talks given, papers published, refereeing, other service...
- Research Statement
  - What is your vision for your research?
- Teaching Statement (except for labs)
  - What is your vision for teaching?
- Letters of recommendation (3-5)
- Transcript (sometimes)

October
Tips

- Look at materials from friends from previous years (those who did well :-).
- Start drafting early!
- Show result to advisor and other faculty members.
- Revise, revise, revise!
- It is worth investing a lot of time.
Identifying letter writers

- With advisor, develop a list of candidates:
  - Familiar with your research
  - Respected in the academic community
- Possible sources (in addition to advisor):
  - Internship advisors
  - Members of your research community
  - Members of your reading committee
  - Other professors at your institution

Early November
Tips

- Ask letter-writers **way in advance** of deadlines. It takes a lot of work to write a good letter!
- If they say `no`, don’t press; find someone else.
- Give them a copy of your application materials.
- Ask them if they need any more information.
- Give them a list of the institutions/deadlines.
- Keep track of which schools have which letters; send gentle reminders if necessary.
- Thank them & tell them where you end up!
Wait...
Preparing a job talk

Remember that, while the goal of a conference talk is to inform a specialized audience about a particular research result, the goal of a job talk is to convince a broader audience that you have identified an important and difficult problem, that you have come up with an innovative and effective solution, that you have concrete ideas for a future research agenda, and that you will be a strong contributor to their scholarly community.

- Edward D. Lazowska

December/January
Tips

- Iterate with your advisor: outline and talk.
- Give practice talk to wide audience at your institution and incorporate feedback.
- Implore audience to ask questions, even weird ones.
- Assume questions being asked are easiest possible, rather than most difficult.
- Video your talk and (gulp!) watch it.
- Practice until you are comfortable but not bored.
Preparing for an Interview

Do your homework!

The web, your advisor, research colleagues, ...

Questions to find answers to:

What are faculty members doing?
What research projects are going on?
How might your work relate to theirs?
What is the curriculum like?
How would you fit into the department?

Before each interview
Questions to answer

Tell me about your thesis and other work you have done?

What do you want to work on next and why?

Why you are interested in this institution?

What courses would you like to teach and why?

Why are you interested in teaching?

What is your philosophy of teaching students?

Do you have questions for me?
Questions to ask

- What is like to work here?
- How are decisions made in the organization?
- Are professors/researchers encouraged to collaborate with each other?
- Does the organization have regular social events?
- How are students supported?
- How do students find advisors?
More questions to ask

- How are teaching assignments made?
- How are new courses introduced into the curriculum?
- What is the teaching load?
- What is the committee assignment process like?
- How does the department relate to the rest of the university?
- How will I be evaluated?
- What is the tenure process like?
Tips

- Make sure you get to talk to a woman professor or two; watch how women are treated in the department.
- Make sure you get to talk to a bunch of students to “see” the department from their perspective.
The big day(s)!

- Don’t book yourself into crazy travel!
- Get plenty of sleep & eat well.
- Enjoy and have fun (to the extent you can)
- Try to imagine yourself in the environment:
  - Do you have a good time?
  - Do you want these people as your colleagues potentially forever?
Tips

- Interpersonal skills are important.
- Do they want you as their colleague?
- Don't say negative things about other institutions or people. It can come back to haunt you!
- Consider when or whether to mention any two-body challenges.
- Make sure your host tells you what to expect in follow up.
After the interview

- Go home after first interview, to recover and get support.
- Schedule down time generally!
- Talk to advisor: may be getting feedback.
- Send notes thanking people you particularly enjoyed talking with.
- Follow up with anything you said you would do.
Wait...
Managing offers

- Celebrate success;
  Don't take rejection personally
- Evaluate strengths/weaknesses of each offer
- Negotiate!
- Talk openly to your significant other
- Imagine yourself in each place, how you feel

April/May
But that’s a long way from now...
In the mean time...

- Publish (good) papers!
- Network at conferences so people know you (letters!)
- Do internships at various kinds of institutions
- Watch professors around you
- TA, help write a grant proposal, serve on committees
- Pay attention to how your institution does hiring
  - Go to job talks!
  - Meet with speakers in student session
- Be able to talk knowledgeably about many areas of cs.
Questions?