



## **Graduate College Career Services Office**

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# **The Academic Job Search Process: Looking for Vacant Positions and Preparing Application Materials**

## **Introduction**

Searching for and landing an academic teaching job is somewhat different from looking for a job in the corporate or not-for-profit sectors. Available positions are posted in specialized scholarly periodicals, application materials are usually different and specific to academic disciplines, and the screening and interview process differs from those outside academe.

The Graduate College Career Services Office has developed online resources to aid graduate students with the academic job search process. These materials specifically address the quest for permanent, tenure track teaching positions in colleges and universities granting the bachelor's degree and higher. Individuals in search of postdoctoral fellowships or adjunct teaching positions may also benefit from this information, as many of the practices and procedures are the same. However, the information here cannot replace the expertise provided to graduate students by their individual departments and is intended only as a generalized overview of the academic job search process. Practices vary widely by discipline, and common protocols in one field of study may be unheard of within another. Students are urged to work closely with their departments when applying for academic jobs.

## **Before You Begin Your Job Search**

Prior to your job search, it is recommended that you take some time to assess your current progress toward degree completion, long-term career goals, and requirements for personal and career satisfaction. Thinking about these issues not only helps you plan for the future, but also will make you a stronger job candidate by allowing you to more persuasively express your interests and convictions in your cover letter, CV, and interview. Take some time to consider:

- What kinds of positions am I considering?
- What specializations am I comfortable teaching?
- Do I prefer to teach at a specific type or size of institution?
- What types of positions am I reasonably qualified for?
- Do I have geographic preferences?
- What personal issues and lifestyle requirements influence my search?
- When will I realistically be prepared to begin a full-time position?
- If I accept a position prior to completion of the dissertation, how will this affect my degree completion and progress toward tenure?

## **Getting Organized**

If you are applying for multiple positions, you will quickly find that it is easy to lose track of the status of each application. It is very important to organize your materials at the beginning of your search, as it will help you be sharp and prepared in the event that you are unexpectedly contacted via telephone for an interview. Maintain organized files of position announcements, materials submitted, and information about respective institutions. In addition, you should probably also

maintain a centralized record or logbook of dates associated with each position. This can help you prioritize applications, meet crucial deadlines, and better manage the process.

### **Managing Dates and Details**

When keeping track of relevant deadlines and actions on your job search, it is helpful to create an Excel spreadsheet or purchase a notebook or journal dedicated to this purpose. For each job posted, keep track of key information such as:

- Institution.
- Specialization sought.
- Contact information.
- Deadline for submission.
- Date materials were mailed.
- List of materials submitted.
- Date that acknowledgement letter was received.
- Date that search committee requested additional materials.
- List of any additional materials sent and date mailed.
- Did you have a conference interview? If so, list interviewers/contacts and date that you mailed a thank you letter.
- Did you have a telephone interview? If so, list interviewers/contacts and date that you mailed a thank you letter.
- Were you invited to an on-campus interview? If so, confirmation of travel arrangements/itinerary and date that you mailed thank you letter following on-site visit.
- Date you received offer or rejection letter.
- Deadline for your decision, if you received an offer.
- Date you sent acceptance/rejection letter.

A portion of a log might look something like this:

| Institution                       | Contact Information   | Deadline for submission | Materials sent   | Date submitted | Ackn. letter received | Additional materials sent  | Conference interview?  | Thank you letter sent |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|--|----------------|-----------------------|--|--|-----------------------|
| Illinois Wesleyan University      | June Williams, Chair<br>Dept. of History<br>IWU<br>PO Box 2900<br>Bloomington, IL<br>61702-2900               | 12/1/2003               | CV,<br>cover letter, letters<br>from Prof. Long,<br>Prof. Chin, & Prof.<br>Guthrie.  | 11/10/2003     | 11/17/2003            | 12/11/2003.<br>Sent<br>teaching<br>video,<br>conf. paper,<br>journal<br>article. | AHA-<br>1/9/2004.<br>Interviewed<br>with Prof.<br>James Winn<br>& Prof. June<br>Williams | 1/12/2003             |
| Universtiy of Nebraska at Kearney | Dr. William Potter<br>Chair of Search<br>Cmte,<br>History Dept.<br>UNK<br>Kearney, NE 68849<br>(308) 865-8509 | 11/24/2003              | CV, cover letter,<br>journal article,<br>statement of<br>teaching<br>philosophy, syllabi<br>from 113 & 114,<br>letters from Prof.<br>Long, Prof. Chin, &<br>Prof. Guthrie. | 11/12/2003     | 11/20/2003            | N/A  | AHA-<br>1/9/2004.<br>Interviewed<br>with Prof.<br>Potter &<br>Prof. Amy<br>Rodriguez     | 1/12/2003             |

An expanded MS Excel template is available online for download and use.

In addition to your spreadsheet or notebook, keep a dedicated file folder for each position to which you apply. This folder should archive:

- Position announcement.
- A copy of all application materials submitted.
- Acknowledgment letters received.
- Notes about any conversations with members of the search committee.
- Notes from interviews and relevant telephone conversations.
- Additional information gathered about that institution.
- Offer or rejection letters.
- A copy of your letter of acceptance or rejection.

You may wish to maintain an electronic folder for many of these materials (cover letter, CV, etc.). However, you will still need to retain hard copies of the materials you receive back from the institution, so some type of filing system is necessary. In addition, many students find that retaining hard copies of their application materials within each file helps them keep track of details and enables them to quickly respond appropriately when they are contacted by a potential employer.

## When to Look for Jobs

### Tenure Track Positions

Unlike corporate positions or even administrative positions within academe, there is a fairly standard calendar followed for most tenure track job searches. This is due to the academic calendar followed by most American institutions. The academic year begins in the fall, usually in

late August, and most permanent positions will begin at this time. Institutions that operate on quarters will start about a month later, in late September. The hiring process begins much earlier, and most vacancies are announced during the fall semester one year prior to the beginning of the appointment. Most institutions engage in national searches for tenure track positions. Job postings often begin to appear in August and swell during the autumn months. Search committees may begin to review applications as early as October or November. The internal review process is often timed to enable conference interviews at major meetings of national societies that occur during the winter months. Applicants may be contacted prior to a national meeting and asked to participate in a conference interview. Telephone and on-site interviews usually follow in the spring, although some even occur during the fall term. Following the interviews, institutions will generally extend offers in mid spring, and the search is usually complete by the end of the spring term.

### **Part-time and Visiting Positions**

Often institutions are searching for a candidate to teach one or two courses on short notice. The search time for these positions is often compressed, and hiring for part-time and/or temporary positions may take place only a few weeks (or days) before the position is set to begin. These positions are often never formally announced, and are often filled quietly, without a search. Candidates may be informally interviewed by telephone or at local or national conferences. Often candidates may be considered for part-time teaching positions because they previously contacted the department through an unsolicited letter of interest, indicating their availability to teach. Short-term, “visiting” positions of 1-3 years usually *are* posted, however, and these positions may follow the same search and hiring practices as a tenure track position.

## **Where to Look for Academic Jobs**

### **Posted advertisements**

The majority of tenure track positions are announced nationally, usually through more than one source.

#### **Chronicle of Higher Education: [chronicle.com/jobs/](http://chronicle.com/jobs/)**

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* is the most common resource used in the academic job search. An annual subscription is required in order to receive the weekly print version and/or online access to all articles and resources. However, the Chronicle Careers section of the *Chronicle* is available online to non-subscribers. The *Chronicle* also features a job alert service through which you may sign up to receive weekly e-mail messages when the *Chronicle* has posted jobs in the field or fields that interest you. Sign up at [chronicle.com/jobs/notify.htm](http://chronicle.com/jobs/notify.htm).

#### **Higher Ed Jobs: [www.higheredjobs.com/](http://www.higheredjobs.com/)**

Higher Ed Jobs has one of the largest job databases focused exclusively on open positions in higher education, and it usually has thousands of postings for positions for tenure track and adjunct faculty, staff, and administrators. It posts positions for four year colleges and universities as well as community colleges.

#### **Academic 360: [www.academic360.com/](http://www.academic360.com/)**

Academic 360 is much more than a job search tool. It is a compilation of a vast number of scholarly organizations, listserves, and other discipline-specific resources. Conveniently

organized by area of study, Academic 360 can help you identify numerous sites where academic jobs—and some relevant non-academic jobs—are posted.

**Education Week:** [www.edweek.org/](http://www.edweek.org/)

Education Week is a useful tool for individuals seeking jobs within various segments of education. Education Week posts relatively few higher education positions, instead featuring larger numbers of primary and secondary school postings. However, it is a comprehensive tool, providing information about a multitude of positions, and it may be particularly useful to administrators, curriculum designers, and consultants in primary/secondary education and not-for-profit organizations.

**Academic Position Network:** [apnjobs.com/index.html](http://apnjobs.com/index.html)

APN is an additional resource for the job search. While it does not feature as many postings as the *Chronicle*, it may be consulted to make your search more comprehensive.

**Academic Careers Online:** [www.academiccareers.com/](http://www.academiccareers.com/)

Academic Careers Online includes faculty, research, post doc, adjunct, administrative, and senior management positions at colleges, universities, and research institutes around the world.

Applicants may also sign up for free e-mail notification of new job postings.

**Individualized college and university sites:** [www.mit.edu:8001/people/cdemello/univ.html](http://www.mit.edu:8001/people/cdemello/univ.html)

This is a fairly comprehensive list of colleges and universities in the United States, Canada, and numerous other foreign countries, and it provides a link to each institution's home page. This list may be useful if you want to explore job opportunities at specific institutions. Many universities will post academic positions on their own Web sites.

**Other resources**

In addition, job candidates should pay close attention to the information networks within their discipline. Job postings are often announced in the newsletters and journals of scholarly organizations and made available online and even through regular e-mail alerts of major scholarly organizations. Check around. You should also check for postings at conferences. Sometimes the first notice about an available position is made at a national conference, and current faculty may be there to begin the candidate screening process.

Finally, you must look to resources within your department. Sometimes colleges and universities will notify your department of available positions, and individual faculty members may even learn about new positions through their personal network. Some departments will post these job announcements on a public bulletin board.

**The importance of networking**

In general, networking is the most successful means of finding a job. This is especially true outside academia where many positions are never advertised but instead are filled without a formal search. In the academic world, however, the majority of tenure track faculty positions are advertised nationally. So, while networking may not be as critical for helping you identify positions, it is still useful to help you secure a job. Your relationships with your adviser and faculty members in your department may help your application. Conference attendance is also an opportunity to meet other scholars who will be interested in your research and writing. You never know when someone you've met at a conference might end up on a search committee.

Many students raise objections to networking efforts, believing they should be able to stand on the merits of their work alone. Certainly, if the quality of your research and teaching are substandard, you will fare poorly on the job market. If you produce high-quality work, however, and are also well networked within your field, your chances of receiving a job increase. Employers generally prefer to hire someone about whom they already have positive information. If someone on a search committee can speak positively about you, it can potentially increase your chances of receiving an interview or job offer.

## **The Job Posting**

When you find a position announcement that may be a fit for you, examine it carefully. What information can you glean from this short announcement? Pay close attention to these issues:

### **Institution type**

Is this college or university focused on research or teaching? Is it a graduate or undergraduate institution? Does the ad emphasize specific elements of teaching (i.e., writing-intensive, educational technologies, etc.) or research?

### **Specialization and Rank**

What type of scholar is the institution looking for? Do you reasonably fit their requirements? Does the position title match your qualifications?

### **Credentials**

Do you meet the minimum educational requirements for the position? If the position requires a PhD “in hand,” and you are still finishing your dissertation, can you reasonably be done by their deadline? Institutions are increasingly advertising for positions between departments (for example, a joint appointment between anthropology and East Asian studies). If you are applying for such a position, do you meet the qualifications requested by each department?

### **Deadlines and Materials**

Does the announcement indicate the date that review by the search committee will begin? What specific materials are requested for application? Will the committee begin interviewing potential candidates at a conference? Does the ad indicate additional materials that may be requested later?

Two sample job postings are provided on the next page. Underlined passages indicate key information to which the applicant should pay special attention.

**Illinois Wesleyan University****Position: Assistant Professor of History****Date posted: 9/5/2003**

Colonial/Early National U.S. History. The history department at Illinois Wesleyan University invites applications for a tenure track position, pending approval, at the level of assistant professor beginning fall 2004. Candidates may specialize in either the colonial or early national periods, but must be able to teach in both areas, including a survey course up to 1877. Ph.D. should be in hand at the beginning of the appointment.

Illinois Wesleyan is a vital academic community of 2,000 students and 180 full-time faculty members and is fully accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities. Further information about the University can be found by visiting the University's web site (<http://www.iwu.edu>) and our jobs web page at: <http://www.iwu.edu/~iwujobs>.

The department will be interviewing candidates at AHA. Send letter of application, CV, and three recent letters of recommendation, along with a sample syllabus, to Professor June Williams, Chair, Department of History, Illinois Wesleyan University, P.O. Box 2900, Bloomington, IL 61702-2900. Supportive material (e.g., books, articles, and or papers and a non-returnable video cassette or DVD that demonstrates your teaching effectiveness) may be requested at a later date. Review of applications will begin December 1. Illinois Wesleyan University is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology****Position: Tenure Track Junior Faculty Position, Department of Chemical Engineering****Date posted: 10/27/2003**

The Department of Chemical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology invites applications and/or nominations for a tenure track junior faculty position in chemical engineering.

The ideal candidate will possess a doctorate (Ph.D., Sc.D., or equivalent) in chemical engineering or a closely related field by the beginning of the appointment period. The candidate should have demonstrated excellence in original research and a strong commitment to teaching, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Interested individuals should send a current curriculum vitae, a brief description of research plans and teaching interests, and at least three letters of assessment of a professional or academic nature. Applications must be received by January 1, 2004.

All correspondence should be directed to:

The Faculty Search Committee, Department of Chemical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, 66-350, Cambridge, MA 02139-4307.

Minority and women candidates are strongly encouraged to apply. <http://web.mit.edu/cheme/>

## Application Materials

### Core Materials

Most announcements request a standard set of materials from the applicant, usually comprised of a cover letter, curriculum vitae, and three letters of recommendation.

### Cover letter

Job announcements will often ask for a "letter of application," or "cover letter." Sometimes these announcements don't request anything, as in the MIT sample. You should send a cover letter anyway. This is your opportunity to expand upon your CV and make a first impression, impressing the reader/search committee member with your suitability for the job. Remember that first impressions in writing matter, too—make certain your letter is neat and impeccably written. A poorly written letter will almost immediately eliminate you from the list of viable candidates. Expanded information about academic cover letters is available on the GCCSO Web site.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

The *curriculum vitae*, also known as a “CV” or “vita,” is a comprehensive statement of your educational background and your teaching and research experience. It is the standard representation of credentials within academe, analogous to the résumé in the corporate sector. CVs should emphasize your strongest qualifications and should provide enough detail to stand up under intense scrutiny during a thorough reading. Detailed information about the format of the CV is available on this Web site.

## **Letters of Recommendation**

Most job postings request at least three letters of recommendation. Carefully consider whom you will ask to recommend you. You should ask your dissertation adviser as well as other faculty members with whom you have worked closely—either as a researcher or in classroom instruction. All of your recommenders should know you and some element of your work fairly well. When asking someone to serve as a recommender, phrase your request so that the individual may decline if she does not feel comfortable recommending you—either because they do not know you well enough or do not feel the quality of your work merits a strong recommendation. You might say “I’d like for you to serve as a reference on my behalf. Do you feel you know me and my work well enough to serve as a positive reference?”

While you probably wish to ask your recommender in person, you should also follow up with a written letter or e-mail message confirming the faculty member’s willingness to serve as a reference. Your letter should also indicate that you wish for the recommender to discuss your educational performance with potential employers. Your explicit consent on this matter is important—and necessary—because some legal experts view letters of recommendation, and the information they provide about a student’s educational record, as a violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Your request letter is basically a formal waiver of your right to privacy.

Supply your references with a recent copy of your CV and any other materials that might help them comment positively on your work, such as a writing sample, dissertation chapter, or statement of research goals. This will allow them to potentially comment on your suitability for particular positions. Keep your recommenders apprised of the positions for which you are applying.

When requesting a letter of recommendation from faculty members, be certain to give them plenty of lead time and consider the time necessary for mail delivery. Keep in mind that they are very busy and may not be able to respond to a last minute request. Many students worry that they are imposing upon the faculty members they ask for recommendations. Don’t let this worry you too much. It is in the best interest of members of your department to recommend you, as the department’s continued esteem is dependent in part upon its ability to place its graduates in permanent positions.

## **Credentials Files**

Students applying for numerous positions may wish to establish a credentials file, also sometimes known as a “dossier,” “placement file,” or “electronic portfolio.” A credentials file is

a centralized collection of supporting materials for your job search, and it usually includes several letters of recommendation written on your behalf. The organization supporting a credentials file mails out copies of specific materials at your request. Reliance upon credentials files is standard practice in several disciplines, and a few University of Illinois departments even support credentials files for their doctoral students. In addition, the Educational Career Services Office (ECSO), through the College of Education, supports credentials files for UIUC graduate students from all disciplines, provided they are seeking employment in higher education. Some humanities disciplines are now using an independent online resource called Interfolio. Both ECSO and Interfolio charge an annual membership fee as well as a delivery fee per item.

Establishing a credentials file will simplify the letter-writing process for your recommenders—they only need to write one letter which then may be distributed numerous times. It also can be of benefit to you if you are concerned about the reliability of a reference—it can allow you to regain some control over when letters are mailed. However, a personalized letter will almost always seem more powerful than a standard form letter addressed “to whom it may concern.” If the volume of your applications necessitates a credentials file, consider requesting specialized recommendations for a few choice positions.

## **Less Common Materials**

### **Academic Transcripts**

Some faculty searches require academic transcripts, most commonly in performing arts disciplines. Official transcripts are mailed directly from the registrar’s office and may take several days to process. You may be expected to submit official transcripts from your undergraduate and master’s degree institutions as well. Most universities require a hard copy of a signed letter in order to process a transcript request, and processing may require several days. Make transcript requests at the earliest possible moment. University of Illinois transcripts may be requested from the Office of Admissions and Records (OAR) at the following Web site: [www.oar.uiuc.edu/current/transcripts/index.html](http://www.oar.uiuc.edu/current/transcripts/index.html).

### **Dissertation Abstract**

Some search committees will request a brief description of your dissertation. Standards vary somewhat by discipline, but in general, a dissertation abstract is usually a brief 1-2 page essay. You may wish to begin your abstract by placing it within the context of existing literature and research. It must be clear, easy to understand, and should adequately convey the scope and meaning of your work. The abstract should convey an appropriate authorial voice, helping you establish your role as expert as well as communicate that your research is important and interesting. The dissertation abstract is not only a significant document for the job search, it is also an important part of your pre-interview preparation, forcing you to describe and discuss your research in a brief, succinct way. As you prepare this document, work with your adviser and possibly others in your department in order to observe disciplinary customs.

### **Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

A statement of teaching philosophy is often requested with the initial applicant package, although sometimes it is solicited later. This document is a brief 1-2 page essay that captures your commitment to education and describes your approach to teaching. It may include comments on the goals you have for your students, the ways in which you facilitate learning, and your perspective on the role of the professor in the learning process. It is fine to make general

statements, but be certain to support them with specific examples, preferably of things you've already done. In addition to comments about your philosophy, commitment, and style, you should also indicate the courses you are qualified to teach as well as courses you might like to design in the future. Like all application materials, the statement of teaching philosophy also serves as a sample of your writing, so it must be written well. Education specialists at the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) are available to help you develop your statement of teaching philosophy.

### **Statement of Research Interests**

Many search committees request some sort of statement of "research plans," "research interests," or just "research." Like the statement of teaching philosophy, your statement of research interests should be a 1-2 page essay written in the first person. The scope of this statement varies by discipline, so be certain to talk with faculty within your department. In general, however, you will probably wish to describe your dissertation research, as well as any plans you might have for this research post-deposit (i.e., revise into a book, publish as multiple journal articles, etc.). Additionally, it is advantageous in most disciplines to discuss future research plans beyond the specifics of the dissertation. Indicate any fresh areas in which you would like to take your research, and attempt to convey what is interesting and important about this work. Place this work in brief context and, if considerable resources are necessary for your research, indicate specific facilities, equipment needs, and possible sources of funding.

### **Teaching Portfolio**

A teaching portfolio is a collection of additional materials about teaching that may be requested after an initial review of the applicant pool. A portfolio is not simply an inventory of all artifacts collected during the course of teaching, but it is a thoughtfully prepared compilation of facts and materials that illustrate your teaching accomplishments. It is commonly requested in some disciplines and rare in others. Typical items within a teaching portfolio include:

- A list of courses taught (including course titles and a brief description).
- A copy of your statement of teaching philosophy.
- An inventory of any teaching awards or certificates earned.
- Sample syllabi for each course taught.
- Sample course materials for one or two courses. This might include course assignments, handouts, reading lists, and exams.
- An evaluation of your teaching by a faculty member.
- Sample student evaluations.
- List of sample courses you are prepared to develop. Include brief descriptions, which might include a proposed course title, a paragraph or two on the content of the course, proposed readings, and a brief statement on how student progress would be evaluated. Note the target audience of the course.

You may wish to organize the portfolio with a table of contents and place it in a three-ring binder. Education specialists are available on campus to help you with your teaching portfolio. For more information, see the Center for Teaching Excellence.

Additional details about developing a teaching portfolio are also available online at:

- [http://ftad.osu.edu/selected\\_links/teaching\\_portfolio/](http://ftad.osu.edu/selected_links/teaching_portfolio/)
- [www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/teachfolio.html](http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/teachfolio.html).

**Writing Sample or Dissertation Chapter**

After the initial screening of candidates, some search committees will request a writing sample—usually a journal article or a dissertation chapter. Send a document that represents the quality and content of your work. Be prepared to discuss this work during an interview or on-campus visit.

**Videotape of Teaching**

Sometimes institutions will request a short sample of your classroom teaching, either on videocassette or DVD. Such teaching samples will usually be requested after the applicant pool has been reduced to a more manageable number, and they are most commonly requested by smaller institutions that emphasize quality classroom instruction. Search committees do not usually wish to view an entire 50-minute lecture, and a shorter, 20-minute presentation is more commonly requested. You may be asked to provide a teaching sample on short notice. Education specialists at the Center for Teaching Excellence work with graduate students to enhance their classroom teaching skills, and you may wish to solicit their advice before preparing your video. Call (217) 333-3370 to make an appointment.