

Overview and disclaimers

- This document reflects my experience on the market for a tenure-track job in biology at R1 institutions in the 2019-2020 cycle. Take what is helpful, leave what is not!
- n = me, although in some cases I will share things I have heard from other people who were on the market with me. A lot of this document is regurgitating advice I received.
- Obviously, huge survivor bias here.
- I was extremely lucky and went through this process pre-COVID19 (I accepted my position about 3 weeks before San Francisco shutdown).

Acknowledgments

I received really essential feedback from a lot of wonderful people, and particularly would like to thank Seemay Chou, who supported me in this process beyond my wildest dreams, my graduate/lifetime mentor, Iain Cheeseman, as well as Ophir Klein, Holly Ingraham, Stephen Floor, Dyche Mullins, my postdoc PI, Ron Vale, and alumni of my grad/PD labs.

Time frame

- When I was a grad student, my sense was that the cycle was traditionally something like: submit applications around October, interviews Jan – March, offers and negotiation Feb – May. There was some flexibility in this, and also true off-cycle recruitments (soliciting applications in April, for example).
- My sense this year was that people were moving EARLY. This seems extremely smart for an institution, because you can essentially guarantee that your top candidates will be available for interview. One might imagine that this is a way for institutions to potentially try to snap-up applicants who might be a bit of a reach for them. This was not my experience - extremely competitive institutions moved early.
- As an applicant what this means is just to be aware that you may work outside of the traditional time frame.
- I started looking at ads in July. I would recommend June. The first deadline I saw was July 24 (I wasn't a good fit for this, but I saw it too late anyway). I had August 20, Sept 4 and Sept 15 deadlines. It's early! The latest deadline I had was November 15, although there were still several institutions that had later deadlines. This process is loooong.

Finding out who is hiring

- The rule, as I understand it, is that places cannot hire at the faculty level without posting an ad. There are *some* exceptions to this (I interviewed for one position that was not posted), but they are rare.
- Because of this rule, sometimes institutions will want to hire a specific person, but still have to post an ad. This can create ads that are *extremely* specific. I actually did not have any experience with these, but I knew if I encountered them to not have high hopes.
- Ads are generally posted on job boards such as Science Careers, Nature Careers, or Cell Careers. I set up an email alert at Science Careers (keywords: tenure track, assistant professor, biology) to stay on top of it. I also compared notes with my lab mate who was also on the market, which was helpful. Occasionally, I checked the websites of institutions

I was extremely interested in, and often these had information about when the ad would be posted.

- In general, job ads have information about what kind of research they are looking for (for example, I applied to a lot of ads looking for a stem cell or developmental biologist). Some are explicit about not having a particular focus.
- I followed a rule where I applied to jobs if I matched the ad description 33% or more. I was told to let them make the decision about whether you fit – don't make it for them! That said, in general I did not get interviews at places where I could tell I only *barely* fit the criteria or overall focus of the department/institution.
- Have some kind of organization to keep track of applications – a spreadsheet with deadlines/websites is helpful. Some institutions have their own application portal. Others use a common application portal e.g. Interfolio, Academic Jobs online.

Advice that is common to all stages of the search

- Throughout the whole job process, you need to occupy the mindset that **you are a PI**. The sub-claims of this are:
 - 1) You are thinking about your science in a way that is long-term, i.e. you have a Big Vision for how your lab will shape your field. Vision is probably the #1 buzzword of the job search. The vision is the unique perspective you bring to your field and how you expect to shape your field (or start a new field) on a 10 or 20-year time scale.
 - 2) You are thinking about science in a way that is much bigger than what one person can execute. You are thinking about how your lab, a team of people, will work to execute your big vision in realistic, practical ways. You have thought about how you will distribute projects to people, and how you will approach mentoring.
 - 3) You understand at least some of the basics about what you will need to do to run a lab, particularly about the funding process.
 - 4) You treat the faculty you interact with as colleagues. To the best of your ability, try to ignore power differential that exists (you want them to hire you! Some of them have had labs longer than you have been alive!). This means that you are respectful, courteous, and excited to talk science with them as **their peer** - you have agency in directing the conversation.
- Maybe there are people out there for whom occupying this space is natural. For me, it was not. This is a key “fake it ‘til you make it” moment. Avoid conditional phrases like “if I have a lab...”. Instead, it is “my lab will.” This takes practice!

Writing the application, overview

- Writing a job application is very time consuming, but on the whole I found that once I wrote one “boilerplate” document I was happy with, I could either use it or repurpose it for almost all of my applications. Truthfully, I decided not to apply to one institution because writing their application required so much additional work.

- In general, I found that there were 4 main components to the application, which I will discuss in more detail below.
 - 1) The cover letter. Summarizes your credentials and what's in the application. 1 page.
 - 2) The research statement. This talks about who you are, what you've done and what your lab will do. In my experience this was usually 3 pages, single spaced, although sometimes 2 or 4.
 - 3) CV. This is a normal CV – training, honors, publications/patents, teaching/mentoring experience, talks, service/outreach. Not an NIH biosketch – you don't want all of the long-form narrative stuff. Some people submit an “annotated” CV, which has a one-line summary of the significance of their papers. This seems like a reasonable move, although I did not do this.
 - If you have a paper that is anywhere short of in press at a specific journal (i.e. submitted, in review, in revision), do not list the journal name (e.g. no “submitted to Nature”). Many people do not care about this. But the people who hate it, HATE it. Best case scenario is to have a preprint on bioRxiv that you can link to. Do not list things “in prep” on your CV – all projects are “in prep.”
 - 4) Letters of recommendation. Most places asked for 3 letters but would take more, some places would only allow 3, and some asked for 4. In general, these will be your grad advisor, PD advisor, and then 1-2 other people who know you from your postdoc e.g. collaborators and mentors. I was told not to have people from your graduate life, other than your advisor (e.g. not someone on your thesis committee) as to some extent these letters should reflect your ability to integrate into a new community without the grad school community safety net.
 - Ask your letter writers well in advance of your first deadline – you want to give them time to write a thoughtful, detailed letter.
 - Some people may ask you to write a draft of your own letter. This may feel weird, but is relatively common and has some upsides – you can highlight things that you want to highlight, including things your letter writer may forget. There is a 99.9% chance you will under-sell yourself in writing your own letter. Ideally, your letter writer will add in appropriate superlatives. But you should also get a second set of eyes on your draft who can be more direct about how great you are. Depending on who your letter writer is, you can also see this as an opportunity to learn how to write a good letter (for your future trainees), and ask for feedback on your draft.
 - If you have a real, honest-to-god first-choice institution, your letter writer may want to tailor their letter to that institution to mention this fact (your cover letter can also include this). But expect minimal tailoring from your letter writers – you are one of many people asking them to submit 30-90 letters on your behalf.
 - 5) (Sometimes) The teaching statement. 1 page. This discusses your teaching philosophy, any past teaching experience, and includes something about what you would want to teach. It is OK, and quite normal, if you do not have a ton of

teaching experience (for an application to an R1). But demonstrate that you have thought about it, are willing to learn, and are aware that evidence-based teaching practices exist.

- 6) (Sometimes) The diversity statement. 1-2 pages. What you write here will obviously be shaped by your own experiences. Sadly, I found that many places asked for these but did not read them (it was clear in my interview). However, at other places, the diversity statement is read early, and a sub-par diversity statement will mean you do not progress to the next round. Berkeley has been transparent about how they are assessing candidate commitment to DEI, and you can find their rubric here:

http://ofew.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/rubric_to_assess_candidate_contributions_to_diversity_equity_and_inclusion.pdf

Cover letter

- Written on your institutional letterhead.
- My understanding is that there is a formula for this, and that committee members want to be able to skim and digest it quickly, so deviation from the formula is discouraged.
- First paragraph: pleasantries – I am writing to apply for (details of the job). Remember that not all jobs will have the title “Assistant Professor” – some may be Assistant Member etc. Make sure you get this right. This paragraph also summarizes your credentials (PhD lab + institution, postdoc lab + institution, any funding if you have it).
- Second paragraph or two: summary of your vision for your lab and what you’ve done as a postdoc
- Final paragraph: the “fit” paragraph. Something that says: I will both fit into your department/institution and also bring an interesting new perspective. There is some debate about whether to include specific names of people with whom you might collaborate. My sense is that this is risky, unless you have an existing (positive) relationship with that person. There’s no guarantee a stranger wants to collaborate with you!
- You may want to include a paragraph about teaching/mentoring or DEI if those are things you are passionate about. Just make sure it at least somewhat recognizes the specifics of the institution (for example, if you are applying to a med school with no undergraduate teaching, do not mention your great desire to each undergrads).

Research statement

- It seems to me that key words throughout the job application process are **identity** and **advocacy**. I’ll talk a little bit about each in turn and then get to what to actually put in the research statement.

Identity

- Many, many people had to remind me over the course of this process that this is about hiring **you**. Yes, the science you do is (a big!) part of what you are selling to the search committees, and that needs to be in there. But you need to lead with who you are and how you think about problems. One way this was framed for me, which I found helpful,

is that much of the science you propose will fail in some way, so the search committee wants to know how you will think and shift when that happens.

- I was told (after making this mistake myself), that it is common for people who have written a career development award (e.g. a K99) to write job applications that lead with the science, rather than with you. I found it helpful to focus on starting sentences with “I” or “my” (I am X kind of scientist. I am interested in Y kinds of problems. I have developed Z. My vision is W. I will ABC.).
- Identity is tied to the key job market buzzword, vision (see above). A great challenge of the application is that you have to convey both this big-picture vision *and* the practical, 2ish-year steps you will take to get started (and get funded e.g. with an NIH R01-equivalent grant). Different institutions value the big vision vs. practicality/fundability differently, but both need to be in there.
- For many people (including me) one of the major challenges is making your Big Vision *big enough*. Here are some questions I found helpful for formulating this:
 - 1) Fill in the blanks: X and Y uniquely position me to Z
 - 2) What are the gaps in the field and what do you (specifically) bring to address them (aka why haven't people done this already)?
 - 3) What is your dream experiment and dream outcome?
 - 4) Given 5 years, 5 people, and \$5 million, what would you do?
 - 5) If everything you did worked, what would people say about you in 5 years: “She did X for the field”
 - 6) If nothing you planned to do worked, what would you be working on in 5 years that overlaps with your current plan?
- It is *very* important that your identity and vision be clearly distinct from your postdoc advisor. There are 2 issues here: the *reality* of overlap/competition, and the *appearance* of overlap/competition. Obviously, the ideal is that you have neither, and it is good to talk early and openly with your advisor about what you can take with you. You will not address this explicitly in your research statement (in fact, your research statement is about you as an independent individual and so your advisor's name should probably not be in there at all). But your vision/identity will need to clearly convey that you are off of your advisor's turf. The realities, which are 1) that some advisors will compete with their trainees even if they say they will not, but also, 2) even if you did start working on the same projects, you would likely diverge because you have different perspectives/environments etc., are not key here. The *appearance* of substantial overlap can hurt you. Once you make it to the face-to-face segments (phone interview, in person interview) people will ask you explicitly about how you are distinguishing yourself.

Advocacy

- You want your application to engage someone on the search committee who is willing to advocate for you *and* make their advocacy easy – make it easy for them to convince the other search committee members (and eventually other faculty) why they should try to recruit you.
- This means that the goal is for your application to be **easily digestible**, and the **impact of your research program to be easily apparent**. And then, for the document to have

enough **easy reminders** that they can glance down at it and remember, “Ah, this is the person who X” (where X = identity. So these are related).

- Gaining an advocate is hard (people have their own preferences!) but I think helping your advocate to advocate for you is easier. A big way is through figures. Most search committees have many hundreds of applications, so figures are key to break up the monotony of text. They also provide a quick reminder of who you are when they glance at the page. The recommendation I got was for at least 1 figure per page.
- Following other examples that I saw, I had
 - 1) an up-front summary figure on my first page (Big Vision),
 - 2) a more detailed summary figure (here are some specific steps and approaches we will take) on my last page.
 - 3) Figures that were specific to my past or proposed workI got what I think was a great suggestion, which was to have a part of my big vision summary figure include the very, very broad question I was asking (mine was: how do organs generate the right cells in the right places?). All of these things made it easier to read, and served as reminders that “I am the person who X”.

Content

- Generally, the research statement should cover
 - 1) Statements about the way you think about science, and how this builds to your Big Vision for your lab.
 - 2) The significance of your Big Vision and how it will provide a new and important perspective that the field needs.
 - 3) 2-4 concrete steps that you will take towards that vision in the first 2-5 years. These are somewhat like the aims of a grant, but with much less experimental detail. I was advised to call these “direction 1, 2” etc., rather than aims.
 - 4) A summary of what you have done as a postdoc and a briefer summary of what you have done as a grad student. Think of these as justifications for why you have the right tools/skills/knowledge to be able to execute your Big Vision. This is all **forward looking**, not backward looking. For some applications, this is in a separate document.
- Where the relative lengths of these were specified, the breakdown was usually ½ page-1 page max on past accomplishments, 2-3 pages vision/future.
- You should give each of these sections headings. I have seen suggestions for sections on research accomplishments, challenges and opportunities in the field (which should obviously be the ones that your research program will address), and then the research plan. This is a good framework for structuring it.
- The order in which you put these sections is largely up to you. However, I recommend leading with an overview of you and your vision, rather than e.g. past accomplishments. Make it easy for them to glance at the page and get a sense of who you are, in a way that is forward-looking.
- There are many opinions about how much you should tailor your research statement to specific institutions. I was advised not to, and I largely did not. The most I did was to add a sentence to my overview paragraph (e.g. to add something about cancer, for cancer

centers), and a passing mention if someone in the institution had done something very relevant to what I was proposing (just to avoid looking like I did not know about this relevant thing). It takes a lot of time to tailor them, and the truth is that you will not be fooling anyone once you get to the interview.

- One kind of tailoring you should *not* do is to make it a version that is understandable for a general biological audience for some institutions but not others. All versions should be understandable by a general biological audience that is only ½ paying attention. Get a lot of feedback.

Waiting for a response

- In many cases, there will be a posted deadline by which the institution plans to start considering applications. It is good to try to submit by this deadline, although I have been advised that if you miss a deadline you should still try to submit or at least inquire as to the status of the search.
- At some painfully unspecified point after the deadline, the institution will start inviting candidates to phone interview or in-person interview, usually by email or occasionally by phone.
- If an institution is not planning to proceed further with your application at this stage, there are two possible outcomes: 1) a rejection email or 2) no communication at all. In my experience, the latter (radio silence) was more common.

Phone (Skype) interview

- For some reason, I largely refer to these as phone interviews, but all of the ones I did were through some sort of videoconferencing software e.g. Skype or Zoom.
- Less than half of the places I interviewed had a Skype interview first. However, many institutions swear by them. They allow them to test the waters on a much larger number of applicants, so the stringency with which they offer them varies. Places that were explicit about numbers told me that they phone interviewed around 20 applicants, for 5ish in-person interviews. In other cases, it was 20 applicants for 11ish interviews. In any case, a phone interview is a sign that you have made it to the top part of a large pile. Awesome!
- These are awkward for everyone. In general, your face will be giant on a screen in a conference room, and they will be sitting around a table looking at this screen.
- Dress business casual for these e.g. a nice shirt/sweater.
- Mine were between 15 and 30 minutes. The committee usually has multiple back-to-back, and are stringent on timing.
- Book somewhere private where you can take these (a conference room, office etc). You do not want to be interrupted, or looking for somewhere to have it at the last minute. I can tell you from personal experience that you should pick somewhere that you know the lights are not on a motion sensor (I took the rest of the phone interview in the dark rather than dance around to get them to turn back on. It worked out OK).
- **Use wired internet** if at all possible. I did a few of these over wifi, and then had a “practice” phone interview with one institution to check out any A/V issues, where they

required me to use a wired connection. This was life-changing. These days it can be a pain to even find an Ethernet port, but it is infinitely faster/safer etc.

- Do at least one REAL practice, where you are Skyping with another person. They can tell you how good your eye contact is, the speed at which you speak, and whether you tend to lean forward so that the screen is mostly capturing your forehead.
- About half of my phone interviews asked for a 3-5 minute summary from me before they dove into questions. In some cases, they warned me about this ahead of time. In other cases, they did not. **I recommend you have a 30 s, 1 min, and 3-5 minute version of your research program ready.** Learn it. I really appreciated this structure, since it let me know that we were all on the same page once the questions started.
- A great challenge of the phone interview is knowing when to **stop talking**. It is really easy to go on and on, since they are mostly sitting there and staring at you, and often they are at a big table on your tiny screen, so it is hard to read facial expressions. Try to clearly and concisely answer the question, and then stop. You can try using some kind of wrap up sentence (even one that says something like “I’m happy to talk more about that”) to indicate that you are done. Some people are also very good at using a downward inflection of their voice to indicate that they are done speaking. It turns out that I am not, and I had to use the wrap up sentence.
- The potential to ramble is also related to the age-old issue of *advocacy*. You want the people in your phone interview to be able to go back to the committee and advocate for you. The more you fill your answers with various directions and tangents, the harder that is to do. Have 3-5 key things you want to hammer (**your talking points**) and keep using them as a home base to come back to (e.g. I have developed X cool technique, my lab will do Y cool thing, there is really a pressing need to do the things I am doing). Put them on a post-it on your screen if you have to.
- As I mentioned above, you need to project success here: “my lab will” “as a mentor I will” “I think I would fit in well in the department because.”
- Speak slowly, clearly, and breathe. I talk extremely fast when I am nervous, and had to work very consciously on this.
- Some places gave me a list of phone interview questions ahead of time. In most cases, this was a guide. In one case, they had to ask all of these questions (and no others) apparently for equity across the interviews. This was the hardest phone interview for me, as the conversation could not flow organically.
- Many of the questions I was asked were specific to my research. But here are the general ones (some of these are redundant, but I wrote them all down anyway)
 1. Tell me about your most exciting discovery.
 2. What is the first experiment you or your trainee/tech etc will do?
 3. Why do you want to come here?
 4. How big do you want your lab to be?
 5. How do you hope to have advanced the field in 5/10/20 years?
 6. What is the significance of the most important work you have done?
 7. What is the most important question/area that your own lab will focus on?

8. How will your research direction distinguish you from your PD advisor and the rest of the field?
9. What projects would your first two grad students or postdocs work on?
10. What are the key approaches that you will use?
11. What roles do you envision for yourself in teaching and mentoring students and what do you aim to achieve in that area?
12. In the context of [what this department specifically focuses on], please discuss your two most important findings from your previous and current research.
13. What is your future research agenda, and how will it synergize with and complement our research program at [our institution]?
14. What new innovations will you bring to [our institution]?
15. What is your dream experiment?
16. How will you fund your research?
17. What specific research question are you most excited about?
18. What are your strategies and plans to create inclusive teaching and research environments?
19. What is your teaching and mentorship philosophy and how will you fit into our department with respect to teaching? (have **specific** classes from their program that you are interested in teaching. This is a hard question, because who knows how they assign teaching responsibilities! But you need to show that you read the website).
- All of them concluded the interview by asking if I had questions. **Always have questions.** You can ask about how the grad program is structured, how new PIs get in front of the grad students, or how they mentor their junior faculty etc.

First-round in-person interview overview

- In the pre-COVID times, this involved you, the candidate, traveling to the institution for 2 days (usually arriving the night before the interview). The institutions should cover the costs of your travel, lodging and meals while you are there.
- There are two basic structures of the interview. 1) Interview candidates individually or 2) interview many candidates together (“Symposium style”). I had 3 symposium-style interviews and the rest were individual.
- Generally, interviews are ~ 2 days, and include your seminar, chalk talk, 1-on-1 meetings with faculty, and a dinner. Some places don’t do a chalk talk, or invite candidates back for a follow-up interview where they do the chalk talk. In my experience these were unusual.
- For all individual candidate interviews, I also had a lunch with grad students and/or postdocs. For the symposium-style interviews, I either did not have a trainee lunch, or had it with the other interviewees.
- For 2/3 of my symposium-style interviews, we all watched each others’ talks. This is partly because they can’t schedule one-on-ones during, because all of the faculty are at the talks. In my experience, these institutions could offer multiple jobs that cycle, so it didn’t feel like a Hunger Games where only one of us could survive. I enjoyed these – I really liked meeting the other candidates and heard about some *awesome* work. But, caveat, I

already had an offer in-hand when I took these interviews, so the stakes were lower for me.

Clothes and things to bring

- Look, no one wants to talk about what to wear to an interview, and there a lot of prejudices that shape whose clothing we choose to care about. But, I present to you here how I thought about the process.
- If you are a person who uses their clothing/makeup etc. to express themselves, you should totally do it, and I saw many people at the symposium-style interviews that had non-boring outfits. For me, my goal with my clothes is “do not think about my clothes” so I wore boring outfits.
- The aim is to look business-casual professional (quoting a wonderful postdoc in my grad lab, Karen Gascoigne: “it never hurts to let people know that you are taking something seriously.”) But also, it is REALLY important to be comfortable. It is hard to convey how exhausting these days are. You will walk a lot – between buildings, up and down stairs, to the restaurant. And also, you will need to be giving everyone your all for back-to-back 45 minute one-on-ones. This is not a time to be uncomfortable.
- Also, when you ask to use the bathroom, often people will wait for you outside. This is very nice of them, so that you do not get lost and they can escort you to where you go next. But if you have decided to wear something with a complicated zipper, it can make your life more stressful than it needs to be. Learn from my mistakes!
- I had about 4 outfits I rotated through. These were all basically black pants, black shirt or grey pants, black shirt. I wore black flats (Rothy’s) every day. I did not wear heels. Usually I wear heels when I give talks at conferences, and I really intended to do the same for my interview. But I tried this for one interview, and there was no escape once my feet started to hurt.
- I was lucky and had very few interviews involving more than a sprinkling of snow, so I am not sure how one would navigate the snow boots problem.
- I am not generally a dress/skirt person, but those would be great choices if you are! The one thing to remember for any outfit is **you will need somewhere to hold the mic and mic pack when you give your seminar**. I took one interview wearing a shift dress – no waistband or pockets. I ended up having to clip the mic pack to my cardigan. Never again. Many women’s blouses are also made of a flimsy material that does not hold a heavy lav mic well.
- I wore a watch, which was helpful (I do not normally wear a watch). In general, people do a terrible job of keeping track of time in the one-on-ones and you need to keep a very discreet eye on this yourself. Also, it is helpful in the chalk talk! (more below)
- I carried a backpack, because I am a backpack person. I did buy a “grown up” backpack for this that looked professional.
- In my backpack I had:
 - 1) Laptop and charger
 - 2) Slide advancer/laser pointer and backup batteries for it
 - 3) Phone charger and backup phone battery

- 4) Notebook, pens
- 5) Refillable water bottle (critical!)
- 6) My own dry erase pens for the chalk talk. It's just one more thing to have control over – no need to be frantically looking through the dried out ones they give you.
- 7) Emergency kit: advil, band-aids (+ the ones specifically for blisters), deodorant, chapstick, nail file, safety pin. It is extremely unlikely you will go back to your hotel room at any point during the day.
- 8) Umbrella
- 9) A power/granola bar, although I could never find time to eat it
- 10) Some kind of candy, which helped counteract the adrenaline crash at the end of the day.

Seminar

- I think that time put into the seminar is time really well spent. It's something that is largely under your control, and my sense was that giving a good seminar sets a positive tone that can go a long way for the rest of your visit.
- If you can, I recommend trying to attend as many job talks at your institution as you can before you go on the market. First of all, this is some of the coolest, most cutting edge science, and the best, most polished talks you will ever see. But also it gives you a sense of what lands and what doesn't, and what the formula is.
- Get. Feedback.
- Save. Your. Presentation. In. The. Cloud.
- Generally, you have an hour, with the expectation that your talk will be about 40-45 minutes with 10ish minutes of questions. I had one seminar that was shorter, but this was unusual. I would aim for exactly what they tell you – if you have 45 minutes to speak, don't give a 35-minute seminar. Of course, do not go long.
- How you break down the 45 minutes is up to you. I gave almost exactly 30 minutes on my postdoc work, and 15 minutes on my future work. I am told this is relatively unusual, as most people give ~5 minutes on their future work, but it was well received. I might aim for 35/10 min split. In any case, my reasoning behind my decision was:
 - 1) I was aware that many places I was interviewing considered my proposed work a major driver of their interest in me. Some places told me this directly, and in other cases I could figure this out from the phone interview. So I considered this "putting my best foot forward."
 - 2) I am really, really excited about what I am proposing to do. I decided that having the opportunity to let that excitement shine through was a good thing.
 - 3) In a similar vein, I considered that one possible benefit of taking many interviews was the opportunity to get in front of a lot of trainees at great institutions, who may then be interested in joining your lab. For this to be true, they need to get a sense of what your lab will work on! And the seminar is the only time they will see this.
 - 4) People may argue that you do not need to put too much of your future research in your seminar, because that is going to be discussed in detail in your

chalk talk. However, attendance at the chalk talk is really varied. Some places I interviewed, the whole department came to the chalk talk. In other cases, only the search committee. Sometimes it was 3-5 people. So only those people get to see what you are proposing in detail, yet the whole department will likely have input on your candidacy. To me, it makes sense to show as many people as possible who you really are and what you will bring as a colleague.

- That said, I understand that many people do not include a lot of future detail in their seminars because they are public, whereas the chalk talk is confidential, and they are afraid someone will take their ideas. This is an extremely understandable reason.
- My understanding is that the job talk should focus on your postdoc and future, and have minimal graduate work. However, I have seen very effective job talks where the graduate work is tied in as a part of the person's overall trajectory (e.g. graduate approach + postdoc approach = new perspective on some important problem = the research program). If this is true for you, great! If not, I would stick with mostly postdoc. I did not include my graduate work, except a brief nod to the skillset it gave me at the end.
- As with the application, this is really about **identity and advocacy**. It is not a traditional seminar. It is about you. It could start with a big-picture view of your field and how you fit into it, along with your long-term vision. One recommendation I heard was that your first or second sentence should be an identity sentence: "I am interested in [define a field that is narrow enough that you would be a leader in it]". And then, because people are only sort of paying attention, give them a second reminder of who you are after you introduce the field. Then again at the end as you transition to your future plan.
- Most people, even if they are very engaged in your talk at the time, will still leave with only 1-2 take-home messages that they can remember 2 weeks later. Those may be "that is the person who X", and "that person gives a good talk and I would like them as a colleague and/or to teach our students". That is much more likely if you can stay "on message" and keep coming back to your message. Often, if you give too much information, people will retain less.
- I would aim to make the seminar as accessible as possible to a general biological audience. I applied to a wide variety of departments with differing levels of specificity (stem cell departments, basic cell biology departments, institutions that do not have departments etc.) and gave essentially the same talk at all of them (with relevant shout-outs to specific people in the department). I could imagine some situations where this might be different, but it is hard for me to imagine a department where everyone is specialized enough for you to back off of this goal significantly.
- 45 minutes is a long time! People's attention will wander, and you need to give them multiple opportunities to get back on the train. For what it's worth, for almost every practice talk (for job seminars or otherwise), my postdoc lab gives the same feedback: "you could use a home slide" – some central slide that you keep coming back to, or building on. It improves the talk 100% of the time. The home slide is not necessarily the same as an outline (lists on slide = bad), but it could be kind of a diagrammatic outline of the talk to help reorient the audience – it feels safe and familiar, and indicates to anyone you have lost "now is a time to get back on the train."

- Normal talk rules apply: look at the audience not the screen, vary the tone of your voice, aim to make the audience feel smart not show them how smart you are.
- One of many challenges of life on the market is that, if you are lucky and have many interviews, you will give the same talk over, and over, and over again. **Every audience still needs to get a sense of whatever excitement you felt when you made X discovery.** So the goal is to be practiced, but not feel too practiced. Easy huh!?!? I did practice the first few minutes of my seminar (including the “thank you so much for the introduction and the invitation”) the night before I gave it each time, just for reassurance.
- There is some debate about whether to list your publications on the slides when you talk about them (e.g. in the bottom right corner). I ultimately decided to do this, but without the journal name (e.g. McKinley et al., 2018). I received explicit positive feedback about not listing the journal name.
- In my experience, almost every institution made a video recording of my job talk (and sometimes my chalk talk). Different places made more or less of a show about getting my consent for this. In most places, this is only internal and for the faculty who cannot attend your talk in person.

Chalk talk

- In general these are 1 hour, or somewhere from 45 min – 1.5 hr. I did have one that was 15 minutes! But this was unusual and is a different ballgame in general.
- People will often tell you to practice. For me, I was in the extremely lucky position where a faculty member was willing to do a demonstration of their chalk talk for me. If you can find a way to do this, I really recommend it. You can do it in a big group! UCSF does this – lots of postdocs watching one recent hire do a demo chalk talk. We have stolen this idea for the Leading Edge Symposium. Practice is great, particularly to give you a chance to think about how to answer as many potential questions about your research program as possible. But most people have never seen a chalk talk before, and will not generate the “correct” structure and behavior out of thin air. Seeing someone else structure it and also respond to questions will make everything I am about to write make a lot more sense.
- If you do a practice, the audience you want for this is faculty – people who have been through chalk talks on either side of the table. Your lab mates are excellent sources of feedback about ideas and the science (and their feedback is essential at all other stages), but they will not have all of the information you need about strategy or the kinds of questions that will be asked. Consider inviting them, but it may be more for their own benefit than yours.
- Some institutions allow trainees (especially senior postdocs) to sit in on “live” chalk talks from their faculty candidates. I love this idea! But the institutions where I trained did not do this, so I do not have any experience with it. If you are lucky enough to have this, make sure you debrief with faculty who were in the room at some point after the fact about how the candidate did and what they suggest you take away from the experience. It may be hard to tell if the candidate did well, and/or what their strengths and weaknesses were. Also, be aware that you may be at an institution that handles the chalk talk in an unusual way.

- The main things I had to learn that were not immediately clear from the way people talk about chalk talks are
 - 1) **It is a conversation, not a battle**
 - 2) **You are in control**

The conversation

- As I understand it, the goals of the chalk talk for the department are:
 - 1) To be able to dive into the details of your future research program and ask questions to determine if you've really thought it through
 - 2) To assess what you will be like as a colleague
- The chalk talk is also an opportunity for you to:
 - 1) Get feedback and ideas on your research program
 - 2) To assess what the people in this department will be like as colleagues
- So, although there is a lot of lore about how scary chalk talks can be, they can also have huge upsides – basically free consulting on your research program with some of the smartest and most established scientists in the world! My chalk talk experiences were almost uniformly positive, and really helped to shape my research program, both in terms of suggestions people made, and seeing what people latched on to (or did not). I learned that many departments have a chalk talk built into their normal faculty life, e.g. as a way to help faculty brainstorm ideas. So it is not necessarily a hazing ritual that you have to go through, but a normal part of how they interact.
- It is totally fine and normal to say things like “I do not know”, “let me think about that for a second” and “yes that is a good point, thank you.” I at one point said something like “that is a fair criticism, and I don't have an alternative right now but I'll think about it more.” Obviously the goal is for these kinds of moments to be relatively rare, but they will happen in basically every chalk talk, and taking them as helpful feedback will go down much more easily than getting defensive. Try to consider comments as suggestions and curiosity rather than criticisms.
- This does not mean you have to be a doormat to everyone's suggestions. You are an expert, and a colleague, and these people want to hear what you have to say about things.
- All of this being said, the truth is that, in some places, the chalk talk is more of a “test” than others. Some people are pushing you not because they have a serious concern, but because they want to see how you react to being pushed. I personally think that this is dumb, and not a way to treat a future colleague. I was much more positively disposed towards places where the chalk talk was designed to help me build my best research program, rather than poke at me to see what happened. But it's the truth, and you have to be prepared for both. But whether it is a “build up” chalk talk or a “tear down”, it is always safe for *you* to aim for calm, thoughtful and collegial (and excited to talk science with your peers).
- Also, sometimes, people are jerks, and they just want to be jerks! A workshop I took at UCSF laid out a framework for Q&A where you consider whether someone is a) well intentioned vs not well intentioned, and b) well informed vs not well informed. If someone is picking a fight just to pick a fight, or because of something related to their

own ego, everyone in the room probably knows and is rolling their eyes in their heads. You have nothing to gain by going at it with them. Deflect and move on. I had almost no jerk experiences, but I found it comforting to feel like I had a plan going in.

You are in control

- This one was a big surprise to me, because several people told me that the closest analog to a chalk talk is your qualifying exam. I did not find this to be the case at all. My qualifying exam was clearly a test (not a conversation), was not among equals, and the directions it took were almost entirely out of my control.
- Easily some of the most helpful chalk talk advice I received was to have a plan for what you will say, and to generally work to execute it. This is obviously a much more general plan than for a seminar – more of a sense of, if you have 3 aims and 60 minutes, you should plan to move on to aim 2 after the first 20 minutes. It is extremely easy to get derailed on something by questions, and never get through the rest of your aims. **You do not need permission to move on.** It is completely OK to say “I am really enjoying this discussion, but I’m really excited about aim 2 and just want to make sure we have time to talk about that too”. It is up to you to do this.
- Very occasionally, I was informed ahead of time that someone in the chalk talk had been designated as my “advocate.” This was very nice and reassuring, and I imagine that they would have tried to move me on to my next aim if anything had gotten out of hand. And it felt like good protection against possible jerks derailing everything. But in principle you do not need an advocate, because it is a conversation and you are in control!

OK, so what do I actually do?

- I always had a whiteboard, never a chalk board. Usually I got anywhere from 30 minutes to 5 minutes to put anything I wanted up on the board before the committee showed up. Very, very occasionally, I was offered the use of a small number of powerpoint/keynote slides ahead of time. I never used these – I felt that using the board helped it feel interactive and distinct from the seminar. Slides are probably helpful to, for example, structural biologists. If you would do better with slides for any reason, *ask for them* even if they do not offer.
- Again, the goal is to communicate both big picture vision, and practical steps. You’ll spend more time on the practical steps here than in any other stage, but you still need both. In this case, practical steps generally = a fundable R01-style grant.
- And, again, the big-picture vs grant balance will be different at different institutions. This is something you can ask in the phone call you will likely have with the search committee chair ahead of your visit. But generally it is safe and desirable to try to convey both.
- You want to be able to convey that you are ready for the big leagues i.e. that you are thinking as a PI, not a postdoc. You will need to have a sense of how you will distribute projects to personnel (e.g. initially, I will work on this together with a technician. My first graduate student will work on this. These aims would be a good fit for my first R01, which I will target to X or Y NIH institute/center). Show that your plan is **impactful, thoughtful, and realistic.**

- I almost never knew who was going to be in my chalk talk ahead of time, although I have heard of this happening. It helps to have a general sense of who is in the department going in, so that you are ready for any strong opinions that may come your way. You will need this for the one-on-ones anyway.
- As I mentioned above, in some places, trainees were allowed in my chalk talk to observe but not ask questions (sometimes I was asked if this was OK, and sometimes I was not).
- You want to use the board as a visual support, and a way to help someone who has zoned out to get back in. I used primarily diagrams and few words. My handwriting is also appalling. In my 5-30 min prep time, I drew diagrams that were deliberately incomplete, and then filled them in as I got to specific stages. This is an easy way to telegraph – here is a gap in the field! Now, watch as I fill this gap! I did not erase the board until the end.
- You will likely get 5 or so uninterrupted minutes at the beginning to speak. You can use this time to
 - 1) Get everyone on the same page about who you are by briefly, 3-4 sentences, summarizing what you told them in your job seminar (many people may have missed your job seminar, or just forgotten)
 - 2) Give a sense of big-picture vision
 - 3) **Lay out an outline of what you are going to tell them**Everything is a little bit easier if you tell people where you are going ahead of time. If you start big, but have already told them that soon you will soon get to how this breaks up into grants and specific projects for specific trainees, they will be much less likely to leap in to ask you... how this breaks up into grants and specific projects for specific trainees.
- At the end, you will likely be given a minute or two to wrap up. This is another good time to sum up your identity, and also possibly make a pitch for why you think that you would fit well in the department.

One-on-ones

- Most of the rest of your visit is spent in one-on-one visits with faculty. In my experience these were usually 45 minutes, sometimes 30. Some places built in time for you to get from one to the next, but in general I was perpetually late (and it was outside of my control).
- Usually this is a chance to chat about their research or experience in the department/institution, especially if they have already been to the chalk talk and therefore asked plenty of questions about yours. Even if they talk a lot about your work, **try very hard to ask them questions that get them to talk about their work.** People love talking about their own work/themselves, and are likely to feel favorably disposed towards you if you show them you are interested in them. This is pretty normal human behavior, but can be more extreme for some people than others *and* they may not naturally give you a chance to do this unless you actively work for it. What you *don't* want is to have the person constantly direct questions at you about your work for the whole meeting, only to later complain to their colleagues “well, they didn't seem interested in what I do.”

- The normal rules apply here too – be engaged, be curious, work to keep the conversation going (sometimes easier said than done).
- This is also a chance to ask *some* questions you genuinely want to know the answer to, including “what drew you to [this place]?” “what do you teach?”. A very, very wonderful question that was presented to me to have in your back pocket is “what did you pitch when you were in my position? Did it turn out like you expected?” People can talk forever about that.
- Save the tough questions (I heard that X did not get tenure. What’s up with that? How much space will I get? What would you change about this place?) for the second visit. Broadly, at this point they are evaluating you and not the other way around (yet).
- There is a lot of discussion about how much you should prepare for the one-on-ones – read whole papers? Abstracts? I took a lot of interviews back-to-back (sometimes 0 days between interviews), so I was limited by practicality – I just could not do more than look at their website to identify a few relevant words (now YOU get to define them as “the person who X.”). My sense is that this is fine. If they are extremely in your field, or extremely famous, you should know who they are and have a few general ideas on hand (so that you don’t end up saying “so what do you work on?”). But for basically every department I interviewed in (even the specialized ones!) there was just no way I was going to be able to immerse myself in their field well enough to be confident asking a highly specialized question. I did not encounter anyone who was upset that I asked a question that they had answered in a paper in 2017. Also, most people want to talk about unpublished work, so how prepared could you really be?
- You will probably have one or maybe 2 meetings with the department chair/head etc. This is usually less about their research, and more about how the department runs. The easiest questions here are things about departmental logistics (how long have you been the chair? How do chair appointments work here e.g. are they rotating? Essentially permanent? What is your vision for the department?). These are questions you want to know the answers to anyway.

Meals

- You will likely have at least 3 meals over the course of your visit: a lunch with trainees, a dinner with a few faculty, and a second lunch the next day with a few faculty. Sometimes they will squeeze in a breakfast or coffee in the morning.
- Everything is part of the interview, so you can relax a little, but do not let your guard down.
- I found the trainee lunches to be extremely fun, and met some wonderful people this way. And they often asked me questions about things I care about (diversity, mentoring philosophy etc.) that no one else ever asked. Sometimes the trainees are actively included in the decision making process for faculty hires, and sometimes they are not, but their opinions do usually make it back to the committee. The big challenge of these lunches is finding the time to eat, but you should really try because it is also hard to find a time to secretly snarf down a granola bar later.

- Dinner. This is often at a very nice restaurant, and usually pretty fun for the faculty. It is harder for the interviewee, because this can be when things get more informal. There are lots of personal decisions to make for yourself about this ahead of time. Will you have a drink with dinner (obviously, do not get drunk)? Will you talk about your personal life? These decisions felt like live wires to me, especially as a woman. Some people choose to disclose that they have a child/children. Some choose to keep personal information to themselves until an offer has been made. For what it's worth, I am married, no kids, and chose to wear a wedding ring but not mention my spouse in the first visit. The reason I tell you this is that I had not realized that this can make dinner conversation harder than expected! Not because I need to talk about my spouse all the time, but often at dinner the faculty will talk about their families, presumably in part because that is a normal thing, and I think in some cases to also convey that families are welcome and supported there. I ended up talking a lot about my parents.
- Just so that you can go into this process with your eyes open: I had an inappropriate experience at almost every institution I interviewed. Mostly it related to asking me if I had children or when I planned to have children (!). This is illegal, and people *love* to pretend that it doesn't happen any more. But for me, it was the rule rather than exception, and I would rather you be prepared. Sometimes, I do think it comes from a sincere place- a desire to express how supportive the department will be. Still illegal and uncomfortable. I don't know what to say about this, other than that it happens and I hope it doesn't happen to you.

After the visit

- You should send thank you emails to everyone who met with you one-on-one. My impression is that a faculty search is a huge drain on people's time, even if they are not on the search committee. Some people will come to your seminar, chalk talk, a meal, and have a one-on-one with you. It's a lot.
- Send them as soon as possible so you still remember one or two nuggets of specific detail that you can include.

Final comments about the first visit

- I found these fun, but truly exhausting. I am an introvert, and you are NEVER alone (remember what I said about people waiting outside the bathroom). You also need to use your brain A LOT, and you will jump across a lot of different fields in the one-on-ones. Also there are a lot of adrenaline peaks/crashes throughout the day, and probably some weird eating habits. Sometimes you will have the added challenge of travel stress and jet lag, or a weird hotel bed (although the hotels are usually very nice). It is more than OK to be doing the barest minimum the rest of the time (do not expect to get good work done).
- Submit your reimbursements as soon as you can, so that you can keep track of them.
- Always be nice to administrators!

Next steps

- You may get some kind of timeline for when the committee will expect to reach out to you with a decision (basically, when they have finished all of the interviews and had time to have a meeting).
- If you are “the candidate” i.e. their first choice to hire, you will likely get a phone call or email from someone telling you the good news and giving you information on arranging a second visit. At this stage you have a “verbal offer.”
- If you are not the candidate, you may get some kind of email telling you this. Send a nice email back thanking them for their consideration and move on – there are a million reasons behind the decision, many of which have nothing to do with you, and there is no point in trying to dissect it.

What to do once they want to make you a verbal offer

- Celebrate!
- Celebrate... cautiously. Even in the pre-COVID times, there were more than enough stories of verbal offers that failed to materialize into written/final offers. In general, the written offer is the point at which the institution has really committed to you.
- That said, it seems to take a lot of consensus-building to get to a “choice,” and, once the committee has chosen you, they would really like to hire you. So now you can start to ask tougher questions and really try to evaluate whether you would like to start your independent career at this institution.
- They may also ask you for a “wish list” initially. This is a list of equipment and personnel costs that you expect for about the first 3 years in your lab, and will form the basis for a starting conversation about what your startup will include. It may be helpful to get (from the chair or someone else) a ballpark number that you might expect to receive, so that you don’t send in a wishlist that looks ridiculous in either direction.
- It was helpful for me to ask other people for their wish lists, since I didn’t really know where to start. These include big equipment like microscopes, down to small equipment like pipets. But I was generally allowed to have some larger groupings like “consumables” or “bench top equipment.” I didn’t have to put anything like “NaCl, \$21.50”.
- I followed advice to include the existence of my spouse in the conversation at this point. It did not initially occur to me to do this, because he is not a scientist and so it was not a “spousal hire” situation. But it does make sense at this point to let them know what the factors will be in this decision making process for you. They know you are a package deal. I do not have any wisdom about doing a normal 2-scientist spousal hire process.
- There may be some back-and-forth about the details of the offer before you see a draft letter (commonly, this is: I see you need X expensive equipment. Could you share it with someone? Could we put it in a core and you have priority on it?). Phone calls become a big part of your life at this point.

Negotiating/deciding

- Even on a purely scientific level, there are a lot of variables that go into choosing a job (med school vs. university, teaching, departmental leadership and overall structure, support for junior faculty, scientific community in the area, commitment to things you

care about e.g. diversity etc.). I did not really appreciate how big these differences could be, and did not know how I felt about them until I really visited these institutions. The interview process helped me understand what I really wanted from the job. “Fit” is a real thing!

- Then there is all the other stuff! Location, family considerations, cost-of-living etc.
- Finally, there are the terms of the offer.
- People say to make this decision with your gut, and there may be some places where your gut feeling is “hard no” or “yes, this one.” Great! Beyond that, I was advised not to focus too much on the details of the offer as a determinant – your colleagues and environment being far more important to your success than an extra \$100,000. If an offer is *genuinely* less than what you need to be successful (or to live the life you want to live), it makes sense that it should come into play as a determining factor. I considered all offers above that number on essentially a level playing field. I still negotiated, but the final numbers were not determinants. This is actually quite freeing!
- But, you *should* negotiate, and should not feel shy/selfish/any number of other things about this. Soon, you will get grants and they will be making money off of you (from your indirects) that swamps what they offer you as a startup.
- In general, you will negotiate with the chair/head, and they are your advocate at this point with the higher-ups e.g. the dean. You can be (relatively) honest with them. They want to hire you.
- Handle negotiations on the phone, and continue to express your excitement about the position. Try to work together with your chair, and be willing/eager to look for alternative solutions to your concerns (e.g. if your salary is lower than you want, they may be unable to alter it because of equity with other hires. But there may be flexibility in housing allowance, startup bonus etc. Be creative, and give the chair space to consider alternatives).
- Offers are often wildly different, and present all of their content in different ways, such that putting together an apples-to-apples comparison takes a lot of work. They usually contain most of the following pieces:
 - 1) Startup funds. A sum of money that you can use to buy equipment, pay people in your lab etc. They may have restrictions on this e.g. how much you can take out per year, or an expiration date. Once, I was warned that an institution would take indirects out of this money, because otherwise they do not earn any indirects on you in these first years. So the startup may be smaller than it appears. I did not actually have this experience, but after hearing this I asked explicitly whether it would be the case everywhere I had offers.
 - 2) Sometimes, a separate pot of money for you to buy a specific piece of equipment
 - 3) Salary. In general, the institution will cover your salary for the first 2-3 years. What happens after that varies from institution to institution. Generally, institutions with undergraduate teaching cover more of the salary (in my experience, often 75%, corresponding to the school year). Institutions without (e.g. med schools) often cover less (in my experience, often 50%). There are exceptions. You are expected to pay the rest of your salary from grants. Often, if you can recover more

of your salary from grants than the institution requires, they will give part of that money back to you in a discretionary fund.

- 4) Sometimes, some amount of personnel support to cover the salaries/benefits of people you hire (e.g. we will cover the cost of your first graduate student).
 - 5) Sometimes, other ways of helping you cover the costs of things e.g. discounted cage costs, core fees.
 - 6) Usually, some details about what lab space you will have (the specifics of this may be arranged during the second visit) and whether it will be renovated. If so, pay attention to whether the institution will pay for the renovation or it will come out of your startup.
 - 7) Sometimes, some support for renting or purchasing a house, particularly in high-cost areas. These can include subsidized housing, loans, or money towards a deposit.
 - 8) Sometimes, tuition support for any children you may have, e.g. towards college tuition.
 - 9) Sometimes, relief from your teaching responsibilities for some amount of time. Usually this is the first year.
 - 10) Other things that might be specific to your circumstances e.g. a guaranteed spot for your child in daycare, funds or other support for a diversity initiative etc.
 - 11) A start date. The amount of flexibility in this can vary – some institutions let you start whenever you want. Some places, you can only start at specific times of year e.g. July/January. If they are expecting you to teach a course, they may not be willing to be flexible about your start date. **Be aware of the impact your start date will have on your tenure clock.** Some places, the tenure clock starts in e.g. September, such that if you start in January you will have 5 months less on your clock. Other places, the tenure clock starts e.g. September, such that if you start in January your clock will not start until the *following* September i.e. you get 8 “free” months.
 - 12) The specifics of your appointment and the promotion process. This varies a lot from institution to institution – some are 6 years to tenure, some 10-12. This is not negotiable, but something you will need to be aware of and may factor into your decision making.
- Often the institutions will add up these costs in some way or another to land at a final number of what they will offer you. Do not get distracted by this number! It can be totally different between institutions depending on how they calculate it.
 - The overall question of negotiating is: what do I need to be successful (i.e. get tenure at that institution). You are asking for things you *need* – it is not greedy! So, think about what you need to be successful and go from there – this is also the way to formulate the requests you will make.
 - There is some debate about to what extent you need to/should use competing offers as leverage. This varies from institution to institution, but in general a competing offer should not be the determinant of you getting “what you need to succeed”. For things like salary, this may be more of a factor. That said, I did ask for (and receive) a salary increase without leveraging other offers at all – just, is there any flexibility in the salary, perhaps

[number]. As you might imagine, I got [something less than number]. But more than what they initially offered.

- If you have a career development award *this should not decrease the amount of your startup*. The NIH is very clear about this for the K99, and when you transition to R00, the department will need to include language that explicitly says your offer is the same as it would be without a K99. You can and probably should get your PO involved during this period (I did not).
- The one exception to this is that most institutions offer to cover 100% of your salary for the first few years. However, if you put salary on your R00 the institution will be paying you less than 100% of your salary. So, in this way your startup would be a slightly smaller amount of money than if you did not have the K99/R00. I had one offer that would refund me 100% of what salary I put on my R00 into a discretionary fund. But this was unusual, and most places offered me the usual % recovery into my discretionary fund that they would on any other grant.

Second visit

- The second visit is your chance to really evaluate what your life would look like if you accepted the offer at X institution. The institution covers the costs of this as well.
- At this point, they are recruiting you and you should be free to ask tough questions. Just remember that these people are your future colleagues.
- It can be a good time to ask for meetings with junior faculty, even if you already met them, so that you can now get a more unvarnished opinion on their experience. These can now include things like “what kind of person doesn’t do well here?” “how well do you feel you understand the expectations for tenure?” “how is X as a chair?” “what is one thing you would improve here if you could?” “who do you go to for advice?” “what’s up with Y?”
- I also took many, many Skype/Zoom calls independently of the second visit to get people’s unvarnished opinions, so you don’t need to feel that you need to squeeze them all in.
- In general, second visits involve meeting with people you want to meet (people you did not meet who would be important e.g. in other departments, or who were traveling), sometimes meetings with directors of cores, a nice dinner, and often a housing tour. If there is something that matters to you, ask! Want to meet some undergrads? Meet with X core director? Ask. Usually they will try to accommodate (they are recruiting!).
- They will usually show you the space they expect you to occupy. Again, you can ask for what you need. I was told to pay close attention to who my neighbors would be, both in terms of lab space and as your office neighbors – these are not only the people you will see a lot (and possibly share equipment), they will be a first point of contact for your trainees.
- If you can, you usually bring your partner if you have one and potentially children at this point, so that they can also get a sense of the city. Sometimes, people do a second visit and then return for a third visit with their partner/family. There is flexibility here.

Decision

- Again, there is a lot that goes into this, and it is hard. Maybe your heart is really set on one place – great! If not, I was given 2 great pieces of advice.
 - 1) Coin flip test. Consider assigning one institution to the head of a coin, and one as tails. Pretend that you will have to take whichever job the coin decides. Flip the coin in your mind and see what decision it has made for you. Suddenly feel uneasy, and want to go for 2 out of 3? Then you have an answer!
 - 2) Try envisioning that you have taken a job, and sleep on it. How do you feel the next morning?
- I also found it helpful to try to consider how I would feel if the offer were suddenly off the table. If the answer was “meh,” then I was ready to let it go.
- Obviously, conversations with your family also happen here.
- Once you have decided, you may sit on it for a few days to be sure. Then, you need to accept one offer and decline the others.
- This involves a lot of phone calls – one of which is fun, and the rest which are not. But I was advised to go with the phone instead of email.
- Once you have signed somewhere, it is time to decline the rest. You may spend a lot of time thinking about what you will say at the beginning. I recommend you *also* think about how you will end the call, because that is also an awkward moment.
- Call the chair, and then, if other people were heavily involved in your recruitment, call them too (in some cases, email may be correct for these). These are hard in general, but in my experience everyone was disappointed but extremely understanding, and I did not feel that any relationships were damaged.

Good luck! If you have questions or feedback, feel free to email me:

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