

# Academic Interviews

## Questions

*The kinds of questions you will be asked fall into a few categories—scholarly potential (research), undergraduate teaching, graduate teaching and supervision, participation in the academic community (service).*

*This handout is a guide for both the kinds of questions that you can expect to be asked (including the questions that shouldn't be asked but you should prepare for) as well as some questions you should think about asking.*

## Possible questions asked by Deans, Chairs, and other faculty

### *General*

What do they want to know?

- Does this person bring the level of scholarship and teaching skills needed in the department?
- Does this person have the potential to enhance the reputation of the department?
- Would this person fit into the department and be a good colleague?

What might they ask?

1. Tell us about your background (education, experiences, and interests).
2. Tell us about your dissertation.
3. Tell us why you think that X is an effective theory/technique.
4. What/who influenced you to pursue your field of study?
5. What direction do you think our field should be moving in over the next 20 years?
6. What do you think are some of the critical advances in our field in the past 50 years?
7. Who do you think is the most overrated and/or underrated theorist/research/professional in our field?
8. What have you learned from watching other junior faculty succeed/fail?
9. What would your supervisor/colleagues/students say is your greatest strength/weakness?
10. How long are you planning on staying at our institution?
11. What courses have you enjoyed teaching the most/the least? What do you like the most/least about working with undergraduate students?
12. What is your experience managing conflict with supervisors/colleagues/students?
13. Tell us about your most recent failure. Why did you fail? What did you learn?

### *Research*

What do they want to know?

- Will this person be a good scholar with a program of research that will enhance the department's reputation?
- Will this person be able to get started on a research program quickly?
- Does this person have a range of scholarly interests and skills consistent with general department and area goals?
- Based on the presentation of the research, how well does this person convey their ideas orally, and how well does s/he answer questions?

What might they ask?

1. Tell us about your current work, area of study/research, referred publications.
2. How does your work contribute to the field or society/community/university?
3. Why and how did you choose your dissertation/thesis topic?
4. What theoretical framework did you use when developing your research?
5. How did you conduct your research and interpret your data?
6. What is your experience working with funding sources and other research stakeholders?
7. What do you think about other researchers in your field, their journals/research/books? What is your opinion of their work? Who is leading edge? With whom do you disagree?
8. What have you learned from your research and how, if at all, could you have approached your research differently?
9. What are your current and future publication, presentation, and conference plans?
10. Tell us about your second/current project.
11. What are your research plans for the next 3 to 5 years?
12. Discuss past and future funding sources and how you have/would acquire/d funding.
13. What equipment and resources (facilities, equipment, staffing, etc.) will you need to pursue your research agenda?
14. Outside of academia, who do you think is interested in your research and why?
15. In what journals do you hope to see your work published?
16. What is more important, the work itself or the application of the work?
17. Your subject area is obscure/limited. What relevance does it have to our institution and why would we allocate resources towards it?

## *Teaching and classroom*

What do they want to know?

- Does this person have the competencies to cover courses at the undergraduate level that we need to teach?
- Does this person have a good range of teaching skills outside the research area?
- Is there any evidence to indicate how effective this person would be as an undergraduate instructor?
- Can this person teach large classes/small classes/seminars/laboratory sections equally well?
- Does this person have the competencies and skills to meet the graduate teaching needs in her/his area?
- Would this person's research area be seen as attractive to graduate students?
- Will this person be a good team player?
- Does this person have graduate teaching skills beyond her/his special area of research?

What might they ask?

## *General*

1. What is your teaching philosophy? How does it influence your approach in the classroom?
2. Tell us about your teaching experience, what did you like/not like? How did you deal with problems? What did student evaluations say? What have you learned from your teaching experiences?
3. How have you managed difficult or ethical issues while teaching (cheating, inappropriate student behaviours, etc.)?
4. What is the proper balance between classroom instruction and professional life?
5. What do you think is the fairest way to evaluate students—straight scales, curves, exams, or papers? What do you think about supervising undergraduate/graduate students?
6. Tell us about your best/worst teaching experience.
7. What are some techniques you use to motivate students and connect them to your material?
8. How do you feel about establishing ongoing relationships with students? Do you enjoy mentoring and advising? What do you see as the challenges?

9. How will you deal with students who are less talented or interested than others?
10. What do you think the challenges would be when working with older students/students with learning challenges?
11. How do you feel about teaching evening courses?

### ***Course delivery/development***

1. How would you structure a course on X? (often a required or introductory course, but it could be any course you have indicated you could teach)
2. What texts/resources would you use in your classes or seminars?
3. How would you teach a course on X (Intro course/Methods course/Core Theory seminar)?
4. How will you use technology to enhance your students' learning experience?
5. How does technology expand/limit teaching effectiveness?
6. What would be your dream course to teach (topic, style, student population)? How would you teach it? What texts/assessments would you offer?
7. Name two courses you would develop for our department.

### ***Service (participating in the academic community)***

What do they want to know?

- How much of a team player will this person be in terms of committee work and shouldering the supervision load of the department?
- Where are some of this person's strengths/weaknesses in terms of service?

What might they ask?

1. What do you think are the challenges and the pros/cons of working in this environment/location/community (larger, smaller, rural, urban)?
2. Why are you interested in our type of school in general, and our school in particular?
3. What kind of service/support do you expect to do when you arrive?
4. We encourage close connections between faculty and students. How important do you think this is, and how would you find the balance between close relationships and professional distance?
5. Why do you think you are suited to this kind of environment?
6. Have you been actively involved in committee work in the past?
7. How well do you interact with others in your field? How well do you get along with those who have very different opinions and/or whose work you do not respect?
8. How do you manage criticism from colleagues and supervisors?
9. How important is being part of a community to your survival in your career?
10. Tell us about your administrative skills.
11. Have you supervised TAs and RAs before? How have you managed these relationships?
12. How would you mentor graduate students?
13. Describe any disputes you have had with supervisors/colleagues. How have you managed these?
14. What are you looking for in a supervisor, department chair, or department?
15. What would you do to recruit top students to our program?

## **Possible questions asked by students**

In some departments, students, especially grad students, can make or break your candidacy, and they can be a tough audience. Take them and their questions seriously. Take interest in their research work, and listen carefully to what they say about the department.

What do they want to know?

- How well does this person fit into the department?
- Can I see this person supervising me/my colleagues? What will this person be like to work with/for?
- Is this person approachable? What is their attitude towards students?

What might they ask?

1. What opportunities would you create for graduate/undergraduate students to participate in your research?
2. How will you help graduate students with the development of ideas or to get involved in research?
3. What meetings/journals/conferences have you been involved in? What would you recommend to graduate, or undergraduate students?
4. How active do you plan to be at the university – committee work, working with graduate students, conducting research, etc.? Will you offer to supervise graduate students?
5. How much input do you think students should have in faculty reviews and tenure?
6. How valuable have you found student evaluations? What is the best/worst comment you have received on a student evaluation? What was the most accurate/unfair comment?
7. What do you think contributes to graduate students failing? What would you do if you were working with a student who was failing or was contemplating dropping out?
8. Have you ever worked with a student in crisis?
9. Have you worked with students with special needs? How much are you willing to accommodate students with special needs? How would you modify your teaching style/requirements?
10. Describe your best/worst experience with a mentor.
11. What surprised you most about the graduate student experience?
12. What have you learned from the students you have taught? What surprised you most about teaching?
13. What is your approach to teaching? Do you prefer to lecture or facilitate discussions?
14. How much freedom do you allow your students to be creative with their assignments and presentations? How much direction do you like to provide?

## Questions they shouldn't ask, but might (it's best to be prepared)

1. How old are you?
2. How do you handle your (physical) disability?
3. Do you have a partner? Will your partner be looking for a job? Is your taking this job contingent on your partner being hired?
4. Do you have children? Do you plan on having children?
5. What childcare arrangements will you make?
6. What does your family think about moving here? How do they feel about all the time you will spend focused on your work?
7. What salary do you want?
8. If we offered you the job, would you take it?
9. Here's our offer. Do you accept it?
10. What other schools have invited you for a campus interview?

# Questions you should ask during an academic interview

## *Topic areas:*

- big picture (future planning)
- university community
- community life, teaching experiences
- research (environment, support, and opportunities)
- professional development opportunities/advancements
- industry partnerships
- students and colleagues

## *General questions for the interviewers by the interviewee*

1. What is the reputation of the university with the local community/educational community/students/faculty/business partners?
2. What areas of this institution would you like to see changed or improved?
3. What do you look for in a new hire?
4. Where are the majority of funds being allocated at this institution? Where do you think they need to be spent? Where would you allocate funding?
5. How modern are the facilities and equipment? Is this changing/keeping pace with need?
6. Is the faculty/student ration appropriate? Is this expected to change?
7. How has class size affected teaching experience and effectiveness/student experiences and effectiveness/funding/business partnerships, etc.?
8. What is the relationship between the administration, faculty, and students?
9. What is the greatest challenge facing the university in the next 5 years?
10. What is the local community like? Note: If you have not worked in a 'small town' or 'large city,' you may want to find out about the local community and if it will meet your needs.

## *Questions to ask Chairs/Deans*

1. I have read the university's strategic plan. What is the current strategic/development plan for the department? (If you can gather this information ahead of time, ask a specific question based on what you read in the plan)
2. Based on my research, I think there are several courses I could teach immediately and a few I would be interested in developing. What courses would you see me teaching?
3. I am interested in X. What opportunities are provided for new faculty to X?
4. How will recent changes in industry/field/funding/students impact the direction the department/institution is moving?
5. What types of teachers/researchers does the institution usually hire?
6. I understand that the institution has several international connections in terms of study abroad programs for students. How can new staff become involved in this?
7. I see that X department is working on Y. I am interested in cross-disciplinary connections. What is the departmental plan for interdisciplinary relationships?
8. In the future I would like to X. What is the process for establishing new courses or new areas of research?
9. I know your department is looking to recruit more students/increase funding dollars/increase corporate partnerships. What role would new faculty have in this process?
10. What proportion of new hires obtains tenure with the university and in what timeline? What is the retention rate of new hires?
11. How many/ which courses does a new faculty teach in the first 1-2 years?
12. What ratio of graduate students successfully complete their degrees at this institution? How many of these go into business?

## Questions to ask faculty

1. What types of support and mentoring opportunities are there for new hires?
2. What is the working atmosphere/colleague support/workload like here?
3. How have you had to change your teaching style as a result of larger/smaller class sizes?
4. What strategies/technologies have you found particularly useful with students?
5. How much emphasis is there on bringing in research partners and funding versus teaching?
6. Is compensation in this department appropriate when compared with other departments?
7. Is your research supported? How is new research introduced and supported?
8. How involved are faculty in recruiting students? Are there always enough high quality students to act as TAs/RAs or graduate students to support your research?
9. What committees are available for faculty to join? Do these committees have influence on decisions made in the department/on campus?

## Questions to ask students

1. How have you found the faculty as mentors/teachers? Are they approachable and supportive?
2. Why did you choose to attend this university? Was it your first choice?
3. How does the university support your experiences? What services are provided and where are they lacking?
4. Were there enough TA/RA positions and grants to support most students?
5. What courses did you find the most valuable? What faculty were the most informative?
6. Would you recommend other students make this institution/department their first choice? Why or why not?
7. What type of training did you receive as a TA/RA? Was it sufficient?
8. How much do you interact with students from other faculties?
9. Is there enough diversity of people and ideas to encourage and support students with diverse or unique areas of interest?
10. What input do students have in course development, selection, and introducing new courses? Do you think students have enough input? Is the university responsive to changes in the field or in the marketplace outside academia in terms of proper training and opportunities?
11. Have you noticed tension among faculty? Is there a division based on theory, politics, or people?

## Resources

Formo, D. M. & Reed, C. (2011). *Job search in academe, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Hume, K. (2005). *Surviving your academic job hunt: Advice for humanities PhDs.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kelsky, K. (2014). *The quick and relatively painless guide to your academic job search.* Vitae.

Semenza, G. C. (2010). *Graduate study for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: How to build an academic career in the Humanities.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Centre for Teaching Excellence. *The academic job interview handout.* University of Waterloo.

Wilfrid Laurier Career Centre. *Sample academic interview questions handout.* Wilfrid Laurier University.