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A RECRUIT'S GUIDE TO THE ON-CAMPUS
INTERVIEW PROCESS AND THE JOB TALK

*Danielle Conway-Jones**

You decided to become a law professor. You read *The Guide* to help you get ready. You prepared a fantastic resume for entry in the AALS Faculty Appointments Register, you received and accepted interviews at the Meat Market, and you dazzled faculty members during the 30-minute "meet and greet" sessions. Now you are ready to accept a tenure-track position with your school of choice, right? Not quite.

This article offers information about on-campus interviews and advice about preparing to give a job talk. The on-campus interview process may sound daunting, but it can also be rewarding. To ensure that the process is as rewarding as possible, there are three important things a law faculty candidate must do. First, you must investigate the interviewing law school, its faculty, and its hiring process. Second, you must develop points of contact at the interviewing law school. Third, and most important, you must persuade the law school faculty that you will be a great teacher, an enjoyable colleague, and a productive scholar.

Call Back Arrangements

When you receive a call back, do not rush to accept the first available interview date. Before you agree to a firm date you should consider how much time you will need to prepare an impressive job talk. Remember that preparing a job talk is labor intensive. Hopefully you will already have selected a topic and completed a considerable amount of research before the Meat Market.

If more than one school is interested in having you visit, try not to schedule interviews so close together that you do not have time to physically and mentally recuperate from the previous interview. Building down time into your interview schedule will also allow you to refine your job talk between presentations.

Unless an emergency arises, once your on-campus interview date is set, do not change it because there may not be another spot. Further, faculty members may have relied on your acceptance of a particular interview date and made arrangements to attend your talk.

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Do not lightly turn down interviews; there are many schools, including ones you have not previously considered, that are excellent places to teach. In addition, an offer from one school may help you get call backs and offers from other schools. Of course, if you would not seriously consider accepting an offer from a school, in fairness to the school and to other candidates, you should decline the call back visit.

The On-Campus Interview

On-campus interviews typically last for one or two days. They generally include a social component, individual or group interviews with faculty members, and some form of presentation or job talk. The extended interaction between you and the faculty is deliberate. The law school faculty is curious about your ability to teach and produce scholarship. They are eager to discover if your background, research agenda, personality, and interests compliment those of the current members of the faculty—they want to know whether there is a “fit” between you and the school.¹ The faculty also wants to know that you have given some thought to teaching, but most schools expect less sophistication in this area from candidates for entry-level positions.

Get ready for a long day of meeting with faculty individually and/or in small groups. Although details vary from school to school and interview to interview, interview sessions typically last 30–45 minutes. The subject may change with each faculty member or group. To prepare, obtain a copy of the law school catalog in advance and review the biographies of each faculty member. Ask the coordinator of your on-campus interview for a list of the faculty members with whom you will meet during your on-campus visit. Armed with your list and the catalog, you can research the personality and penchants of your interviewers.

Before your campus visit you should look for recent articles by faculty members. This information will help you find some common ground for conversation during the interviews, and will give you an opportunity to show that you are familiar with current scholarship. You should definitely read the work of the faculty members who teach in your field. Another way to gather information about faculty members is

1. Fit does not necessarily mean the candidate who is most qualified in the sense of having the most impressive paper credentials. At the call-back stage, virtually all candidates have substantial resumes. Rather, fit is a fluid, subjective concept that varies from school to school, year to year, and hire to hire. A law faculty may consider the current makeup of the faculty and the goals for the future makeup of the faculty; the institutional politics of the faculty; the substantive curricular needs of the law school; the law school culture; the caliber of the student body and the alumni; and the law school's location.

by using the internet. Many law faculty members have created web pages for their courses.²

In addition, you should expect to meet with the dean at some point during your campus visit. S/he is generally a member of the faculty, but also has a separate set of considerations, such as staffing the curriculum. Deans often ask what would be your ideal course package. You may meet with members of the central administration, such as a provost or president. You may also meet with non-faculty administrators, and many interviews include meetings with students. The importance of these non-faculty interviews in the determination of whether you get an offer varies from school to school, but it certainly will not hurt to put your best foot forward with each of them. Finally, you may meet with non-faculty administrators or secretaries. Be nice to them—they can help you or hurt you, now and in the future.

Preparing for the Job Talk

As with any type of presentation, advance preparation and confidence are the keys to success. Ask your contact person—either the head of the hiring committee or someone else you know or feel comfortable with on the faculty—what the job talk requirement is at your interviewing school. You must tailor your scholarly presentation to fit the school's format.

By the time you give your job talk, you should be comfortable with the oral presentation of your written analysis.³ The most effective confidence builder is conducting a dry run of your scholarly presentation—this mock job talk is tremendously important. Getting positive feedback on your oral presentation will stroke your ego, and critical feedback will help you to improve your presentation.

Call on colleagues at your present job, practitioners, or jurists to serve as the audience for your mock job talk. It takes nerve to decide to be a sacrificial lamb for salivating intellectual wolves, but the benefits of volunteering for such hazardous duty more than outweigh the temporary, personal discomfort of the initial criticism of your job talk.

Invite your audience to ask questions during your mock job talk so you can master the technique of returning to your discussion. Also, consider audio and video taping your talk.⁴ The videotaped mock job talk

2. You can find many of them on the Jurist website, located at <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu>.

3. If you have a published piece, consider using it as the subject of your job talk.

4. During one of my on-campus visits, I was told that the job talk would be presented in an informal gathering of faculty members. As I entered the room, I noticed a person setting up a video camera. At that moment, my faculty chaperone asked: "Are you comfortable being taped?" Practice using audio or video equipment to become truly comfortable with such a plausible scenario.

will give you insight into your responses to questions, your facial and tonal expressions, and the weaker areas of your presentation. Ask your participants for oral as well as written feedback. Armed with this information, you can re-analyze and rewrite the portions of your discussion that were unclear to your audience. Finally, take copious notes on the feedback you receive from your audience and incorporate this information into the rewrite of your mock job talk. With this early preparation and investment, you may find the mock job talk to be more daunting than the actual scholarly presentation at the on-campus interview!

Giving the Job Talk

The job talk is often the make or break component of the hiring process. Even if you have several years of teaching experience, the job talk will be a school's mechanism to test the compatibility of your ideas, intellect and personality with those of the school's faculty. In your talk it is imperative that you demonstrate the strength of your research agenda and your ability to accomplish your teaching and scholarship goals.

Law schools use two general formats during on-campus interviews. Either the job talk takes the form of a roundtable discussion at which the candidate gives a presentation of his/her most recent scholarship or delivers a lecture on a topic chosen by the law school; or the interviewing school may not use the job talk format at all.

There are several variations on the roundtable job talk presentation, ranging from formal lectures to informal luncheons. For example, the lecture format may require the candidate to stand at a podium and deliver a lecture on a scholarly topic or a substantive course lecture to faculty and students. Interviewing schools may take this format one step further by audio or video taping the session. A less formal job-talk format may require the candidate to speak at a work-in-progress workshop, where the candidate will receive questions from faculty either supporting or challenging the thesis, analysis, or conclusions drawn by the candidate. Another informal job talk format may require the candidate to give a presentation during a luncheon. The luncheon presentation format is less unnerving, because it is usually more relaxed; however, it tends to last longer because faculty members have set a large block of time aside to spend at the luncheon.

You should be prepared for a range of faculty knowledge, from no concept of the topic to extensive background in your scholarly area. If you provide advance materials on the topic of your job talk expect to encounter some faculty members who have meticulously studied the materials and some who have only glanced at them. You should assume that there will be supporters and critics of each portion of your argument. Faculty members may interrupt with questions or hold them to the end. Expect the whole thing to last approximately an hour.

A small number of schools do not use the job talk format during the on-campus interview. At those schools the candidate does not have to give a formal presentation of a piece of scholarship; rather, the candidate gives 5–10 mini-presentations to small groups of faculty interviewers about scholarship, scholarly interests, and scholarly direction.

The On-Campus Interview Aftermath

You have survived 36–48 hours of tough scrutiny. But the process is not over yet. You should have a faculty picture book and a list of faculty interviewers. With this information, draft thank-you notes. Send notes to the faculty member who helped with your arrangements, the hiring committee chairperson, and the dean of the law school. In addition, if you promised to forward information, articles, or references to a faculty member, do so quickly. Finally, make copies of your receipts and send your reimbursement voucher to the school at the same time that you send the thank you notes. Remember not to ask the school to reimburse you for personal expenses unrelated to your visit.

Find out about how the hiring process will proceed after your visit. Typically, after candidates visit campus, the appointments committee meets to share impressions, report on references and evaluations of scholarship, and to prepare a recommendation to the faculty either in support of or in opposition to the candidate. The whole faculty then meets to discuss the committee's recommendation and decides which candidates will receive offers.

The Offer

After your return home, hopefully you will receive a call from the dean or hiring committee chairperson, telling you how impressed the faculty was with you, and that they want you to join them. It is appropriate to ask the basic terms of the offer, salary and course package, but do not ask about the nitty-gritty details at this point unless they are offered. In a follow-up conversation, you will want to discuss other important details, such as when you will be put on the payroll, whether you can get summer research funds the summer before you start teaching (and whether they are routinely available thereafter), whether a light load is available in your first term, whether moving expenses will be taken care of, and whether job search assistance is available for your significant other. In most cases, at least some of the terms are negotiable—while deans want to be fair, they do not always put their best offers on the table first.

As you decide whether to accept the school's offer, you will want to research the school. Ask for the law school's and the university's faculty handbooks, information from the school's human resource office,

financial benefits literature, relocation services, and information about the community in which the school is located. If you are really gutsy, you can ask for a copy of the self-study and site evaluation questionnaire from the most recent ABA/AALS accreditation visit, although this might be perceived as a bit direct.

Some schools will give you a second visit, this time with family, after they have made you an offer, to persuade you to take it. If you are seriously considering the offer, you should go. This visit is a chance for you to inspect the environment with your significant other and/or children, and to experience the school's intellectual atmosphere. Sit in on a few classes, and observe faculty and student behavior outside of the classroom. Your conclusions about the personality of the law school may be important factors to consider if you receive an offer from another school.

Another issue that might be relevant to your evaluation of whether to take the offer is the circumstances surrounding your offer of appointment. If, through delicate inquiry, you find that your appointment was controversial, you may want to consider whether that will make it more difficult for you to get promoted or tenured in the future.

If your offer is from a school that is not at the top of your list, call the other schools that you find preferable and at which you are still being considered. Tell them about your offer and deadline. One of the most difficult things to deal with is an offer from a school with a short deadline, which does not allow sufficient time for other schools to decide upon your candidacy. In practice, few law schools will give you an ultimatum because they understand the gravity of your decision. Instead, the schools will ask that you remain in contact with them so that they can provide you with current information to assist you in your decision-making. On the other hand, sometimes schools will enforce short deadlines, because while they want to hire you, they are likely to lose other desirable candidates through delay. There is no perfect answer to this dilemma.

Final Thoughts on the Hiring Process

There is no one right way to go about securing an appointment to teach at a law school or to convince a faculty that you will make a fine addition to their group. You should, however, use the time before the Meat Market to prepare a research agenda and develop a solid job talk in order to demonstrate your teaching and scholarly acumen. I wish you the best of luck in your search.