
Through the looking glass: What's next after a systems Ph.D.

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The job-search process

- My personal observations:
 - I've learned a lot about myself
 - I've made a boatload of personal connections
 - The process can be remarkably fun and low-stress
 - There are no disastrous, unrecoverable choices
 - Easy to forget the decision is about you:
 - If something feels wrong (or right), it probably is
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Outline

- Pre-interview
 - Where to apply?
 - When to apply?
 - Interview travel logistics
 - Interview
 - Post-interview
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Where to apply?

- Do you want to continue doing what you're doing?
 - Yes: post-doc, academic research
 - Maybe: corporate research, government lab
 - No: development, teaching, business, peace corps
 - "Where to apply" changed for me during the process
 - I wish I'd cast a wider net from the beginning
 - Choose your thesis committee with job search in mind
 - Useful to talk with folks across the spectrum of job types
 - Also folks from different groups within an organization
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When to apply?

- Have your materials ready before the winter break
 - Allow time for 4+ letter-of-reference writers to write
 - For publications: include reputation, acceptance rates
- Academic applications (pull-driven): January→February
- Corporate “applications” (push-driven): March→April
- Interview season: March→May (or →June...)
 - You set the deadline for when you want offers
- *Everything* has taken longer than I expected
 - But I could have aggressively pushed the schedule

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Interview travel logistics

- Making your own travel arrangements wastes your time
 - Use a travel agency or let interviewer handle details
 - No expectation to share costs among interviewers
- Avoid taking the last possible flight before your talk
- Make use of taxis or rental cars for ground transportation
- Recommended to wear a suit, and for “casual” wear a tie
- Bring a laptop for your presentation; theirs won’t work
- Make copies of your receipts before submitting them!

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Outline

- Pre-interview
- Interview
 - Things I did right during the interviews
 - Things I did wrong during the interviews
 - Questions I frequently answered
- Post-interview

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Things I did right during the interviews

- Don’t try to tell them what you think they want to hear
 - “What do you (dis)like about what you’ve seen here?”
- Show passion about your work and your future plans
 - Defend a position, but be flexible when appropriate
- Be confident about your expertise in your background
 - Most questions are interrogative; they want to learn
- Go slow: ≤ 2 interviews in one week; ≤ 3 in two weeks

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Things I did wrong during the interviews

- Take the time for thoughtful, well-structured answers
 - I have a tendency to ramble on without wrapping up
- Emphasize your contributions, not just the end result
 - Give specific examples of your project involvement
- Make the most of your one-on-one meetings
 - Sometimes it's up to you to steer the conversation
- Eat lightly at lunch, or else you'll feel bloated on day two

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Questions I frequently answered

- "I was unfortunately unable to attend your talk..."
- "What projects/areas do you want to work on next?"
 - "Where do you see your group/funding in Y years?"
- "Where else are you interviewing?"
 - "Why are you interested in our/their group?"
- "I've always wondered about this thing about storage..."
 - "Why is storage company C doing such-and-such?"

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Outline

- Pre-interview
- Interview
- Post-interview
 - What should I consider?
 - What's important to me?
 - Where are my choices?
 - So where will I go?

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What should I consider?

- The people
 - Officemates, management, company support
- The job
 - "Freedom": choosing projects/colleagues, funding
- The location
 - Office aesthetics, geography, commute, social life
- The compensation and benefits
 - "We'd like to make this a non-factor in your decision"

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What's important to me?

Realization: this isn't about finding my "ideal job"

- Will I enjoy being there as much as I enjoy being here?
 - Are the folks there excited about being there?
- What are my opportunities for visibility and mobility?
 - How is the organization viewed internally/externally?
- Will this job get me closer to my long-term goals?
 - Which doors are opened; which doors are closed?

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Where are my choices?

- Tenure-track faculty positions
 - 17 applications, 3 interviews, 1 offer (1 pending)
- Corporate research laboratories
 - 3 resumes sent, 2 interviews, 1 offer
- Corporate research and/or development
 - 7 resumes sent, 4 interviews, 0 offers (1 pending)
- Management consulting
 - 1 application, 1 interview, 0 offers

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So where will I go?

- Ask me again next week.

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Closing thoughts

- Don't rule out any opportunities too early
 - On-site visits will change your perception of a place
- Talk over your thoughts with anyone who'll listen
 - Lots of useful "insider" bits about places will surface
- It's reasonable to think in terms of the next 3-5 years
 - "Your interests & opportunities will continually evolve"

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