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

Outline

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

- Interview

- Post-interview

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
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

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!

Outline

• Pre-interview

  Interview
  • Things I did right during the interviews
  • Things I did wrong during the interviews
  • Questions I frequently answered

• Post-interview

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
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

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?”

Outline

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

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”
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?

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

So where will I go?

- Ask me again next week.

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”