

Getting an Academic Job

Why, what, when and how?

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GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – WHY?

- ▶ *First ask yourself “WHY?” What is your motivation?*
 - ▶ *Some WRONG answers...*
 - ▶ *“It’s what comes next”*
 - ▶ *“I don’t know what else to do”*
 - ▶ *Some RIGHT answers...*
 - ▶ *“I love doing research and have some really exciting plans!”*
 - ▶ *“I really enjoy teaching and supervising students!”*
- ▶ *Bottom line: you should only become an academic if you are passionate about research and/or teaching – otherwise, find a job you enjoy and that pays better!*

GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – WHAT?

- ▶ *What sort of academic job do you want?*
- ▶ *Different types of academic jobs...*
 - ▶ *University academics: research and teaching*
 - ▶ *Non-university academics (e.g. CSIRO, AAO): research and functional duties (wide variety of these)*
- ▶ *Pros and cons for both types...*
 - ▶ *Trade-offs between teaching (undergraduate and graduate) and functional duties (e.g. observatory support)*
 - ▶ *Talk to people doing both sorts of jobs to get their experience*
 - ▶ *Match up the nature of the job with your interests*

GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – WHERE?

▶ *Where do you want a job?*

▶ *Big question...*

▶ *Go to a smaller/less prestigious institution? 'Big fish in a small pond' can be a very good strategy for growing a career*

▶ *Aim for a bigger/more prestigious institution? Kudos counts for your career and for getting resources (grants, students)*

▶ *Other factors...*

▶ *Work with particular person? Access to particular facilities?*

▶ *Willing to live long-term overseas? Or want to be in Oz?*

▶ *What about family commitments? (partner's job, kids' schools)*

GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – WHEN?

▶ *When is the best time to take an academic job?*

▶ *Too early in your career and...*

- ▶ *Not enough experience, contacts/networks, publications, etc.*
- ▶ *May have to settle for less than your ideal job & become stuck because opportunities are limited (e.g. too much teaching)*

▶ *Too late in your career...*

- ▶ *If you wait for the perfect job or are unwilling to teach, or to work at a less prestigious institution, you can miss out*
- ▶ *After a certain point you become less marketable and may end up a perpetual postdoc or taking a job outside academia*

▶ *Finding the ‘Goldilocks’ moment...*

- ▶ *Strong track record and plenty of potential; high-impact achievement(s)*
- ▶ *Get your ideal position (or at least a good base camp for the ascent!)*

GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – HOW?

- ▶ *Basic requirement: a strong research track record*
 - ▶ *No substitute for research achievement, though the details can vary considerably – usually this means a good long-term publication/citation record, but it can be a single ‘hit’ publication or discovery, or expertise valued by a particular institution...*
- ▶ *Other valuable qualities...*
 - ▶ *Teaching experience – get some, somehow; both lecturing and supervision experience are important (even a qualification)*
 - ▶ *Functional skills – for non-university jobs, specialist skills may be critical (e.g. instrument scientist, project manager, etc.)*
 - ▶ *Grants, awards, networks, cross-disciplinary expertise, etc.*

GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – HOW?

- ▶ *Presentation counts for more than it should!*
 - ▶ *Make sure your CV presents you in the best (truthful!) light – include everything that might be relevant*
 - ▶ *Develop an imaginative and well-thought-out research plan – get your colleagues to critique it and revise it until it's great*
 - ▶ *Eminent international referees are good, but best are referees who are really knowledgeable & enthusiastic about your work*
 - ▶ *If you get an interview, prepare for it! Think about how you will answer the questions (which are usually pretty standard); be informed about the institution; have a positive plan*
 - ▶ *Above all, sell yourself – give them reasons to hire you!*

GETTING AN ACADEMIC JOB – HOW?

▶ *Other tips...*

- ▶ *Use your supervisor's, advisors' and mentors' networks – there are more active ways of finding a job than responding to advertisements; sometimes you can even create a job...*
 - ▶ *Optimism is a far more efficacious attitude than realism: apply for jobs you privately think you are not quite qualified for*
 - ▶ *Only apply for jobs that you want – but be open-minded about what is interesting and acceptable*
- ▶ *Keep in mind that getting a job is a stochastic process, so adopt Darwin's motto: "it's dogged as does it!"*