

Getting a Faculty Job

Sarah Maddison & Bryan Gaensler



Cartoon by Kerry Soper, Assistant Professor of Humanities, Brigham Young University



CAASTRO
ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL-SKY ASTROPHYSICS

What You Wanted To Hear

- › Which jobs should you apply for?
- › Preparing your application materials
- › How to interview
- › How to negotiate an offer
- › The two-body problem



CAASTRO
ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL-SKY ASTROPHYSICS

What Jobs To Apply For?

- › Make contacts at conferences
 - it's not gauche to be upfront that you're looking for jobs
- › Very few positions look like the 'perfect job' at first glance
 - but don't apply for a job if you know enough to know you don't want it
- › Invite yourself to visit institutions
 - it's much easier to consider moving if you've actually been there
- › Wide variety of wordings in job ads
 - sometimes standard (but strange) format imposed by institute
- › Make contact with someone there; ask them for more info
 - if job says "applicants are encouraged to contact ...", then do it!
- › Don't leave things until the last second
 - most jobs now have online (but confusing, clunky) application process
 - deadlines almost always rigid (and factor in time zone difference)



CAASTRO
ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL-SKY ASTROPHYSICS

Preparing Your Application

- › Choose your referees carefully, and give them 2-4 weeks advance notice
 - if you're not sure a referee will be unequivocally positive, ask them first
- › Cover letter is critical, even if they don't require it
 - in your own words: why you want the job & why they should want you
 - leave out anything personal at this stage
- › Spell check
- › Answer each selection criterion separately & explicitly
 - offer a positive/alternative view on criteria you don't think you meet
- › Don't pad your publication list
 - avoid papers "in prep"; separate out conference papers & abstracts
- › Tailor your research & teaching statements to your audience
 - will be obvious if it's recycled or generic
- › **SPELL CHECK!!!**



How To Interview

- › Find out who interview panel are, and how long interview is likely to be
 - knowing background & interests of panel can make big difference
- › Practice, practice, practice
 - brainstorm questions; have someone drill you until your answers are gold
- › Dress well, look presentable, speak clearly, make eye-contact
 - get a non-astronomer to give you the once-over beforehand
- › OK to bring notes or to jot down bullet points before answering
 - telegraph & structure your answer; don't ramble
- › Be ready for all the obvious questions
 - greatest strength/weakness; knowledge of employer; difficult conversations
- › Have some insightful questions ready to ask of the panel at the end
 - show you've done your research; don't ask about salary
- › May have to give a colloquium and/or lecture
 - practice, polish, and don't run over time



Getting the Offer & Negotiating

- › If you're getting a bad vibe, pick up the phone or set up a meeting
- › Visit again; everything will seem different with an offer in hand
- › Get clarity on decision date, and whether there's a waitlist
 - if inflexible, this indicates they don't really have your interests as a priority
 - disclose whether you have competing offers, especially if deadlines clash
- › Often they'll make informal offer first; proceed to contract when you ask for it
- › If it's not in writing, it's worth nothing
- › OK to negotiate or ask for almost anything
 - salary, parking, start-up package, starting date, initial teaching relief
 - don't expect they can meet you halfway; some things may be impossible
 - identify your core demands, and develop strong justifications
- › Normally they will be enthusiastic & butter you up while an offer is pending
 - level of attention will drop once you accept; don't take this personally!



CAASTRO
ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL-SKY ASTROPHYSICS

The Two-Body Problem

- › If the situation is clearly untenable, don't bother applying
 - e.g. same-sex couple emigrating to the USA
 - e.g. partner is a surgeon, would need to re-qualify overseas
- › Don't mention your partner until you've got an offer
- › Find out visa constraints on your partner's ability to work or study
- › Don't expect your potential employer to find a job for your partner
 - ask for contacts and advice, but don't expect too much
- › Determine how many salaries you'll need to support yourselves
- › Accept that your partner may not be able to look for work until you arrive
- › Pair wisely! 😊
 - life-scientist, engineer, programmer, sys admin, telecommuter, ...
 - astronomer, lawyer, doctor, ...