

University of Utah Econ PhD Job Market Guide
September 2003

Below you will find the comments of a small number of recent University of Utah economics PhD students regarding their experience in the job market. Each person's experiences will be a little unique. As a result, you may find that some of the responses below contradict others. Nonetheless, we hope that this document will give you a little bit of insight into what to expect this year.

Please consider contributing to this document once you have been through the job market experience yourself. You can send your comments to maloney@economics.utah.edu.

(1) Suppose it's August or September, and a current PhD student is trying to decide whether or not to go on the market. What's the one piece of advice you'd give them for making this decision?

I'm not good at advice, but I think it depends on where the candidate is in their degree and the type of school the candidate is applying for. If they want a "teaching" school, go on the market as soon as possible because jobs are not easy to find. The sooner they are on the market, the greater their chance of landing the job. If they want a "research" or "teaching & research" school, it may be better to stick around the U until they have at least one quality job market paper that is close to submission.

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Don't go on the job market unless you are really close to being done with your dissertation. My results were so much better once I had finished. I felt like I wasted a lot of time sending out job packets when I wasn't yet finished which put me even farther from being finished.

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I think whether you have done your final defense or not matters at this point. Schools seem to prefer those who have done their final defenses. Although, I have heard at least one case in our department of a student who not only got interviews but also a job offer [without a final defense]. However, I should mention that successful networking seems to have played a major role in that case.

(2) What's the best way to carry out the initial stage of the process - gathering job postings, deciding where to apply, and getting your packet (letters, cvs, references, etc) together?

- A. Internet for the JOE and Chronicle.
- B. I think applying to as many places as possible is almost necessary.
- C. Speak with faculty members about how they did their job packets.
- D. Find a good CV outline. Depending on how much they have accomplished, AACSB [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business] has a nice, well-accepted

outline. And if they are applying at a business school, an AACSB based CV may also be beneficial.

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I found it helpful to have a few different versions of my CV. One for mainstream jobs, heterodox jobs, women's studies jobs, non-teaching jobs. I also had different versions of my letter for each of these categories. But I did alter the letter slightly for each job posting, making sure that I emphasized what they were looking for. Have lots of people read your letter. My letter kept getting better with each reader.

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Gathering job postings: JOE.

Deciding where to apply: Look at the fields they are requesting and all the information they have provided in their postings. Those who post jobs have no incentive whatsoever to be dishonest, vague or implicit about the qualifications they are asking for. They mean what they say. For instance, if they say, we need an “international trade economist” who can teach “business economics to MBA students”, that is what they are looking for.

Getting your packet together: Do it before the [October] JOE comes out. Applying as soon as possible will be to your advantage. No one will really consider applications as it gets closer to Christmas or the end of the semester. Make sure that you have your raw CV and cover letter ready to be “tailored” according to what the departments are looking for (e.g., in the case mentioned above you might want to add “business economics” [to your list of teaching interests]).

I have been told by a friend in a hiring committee in another school that some faculty are particular about spelling; most are particular about whether your cover letter is too short to make them think that you are genuinely interested in the job etc. Your cover letter is the first chance to build a good enough impression [so] that they give you an interview. Check out samples. Make sure to emphasize teaching experience and how you care about teaching if it is a small liberal arts college.

You might have already read this elsewhere: do not joke around e.g. “I hear you’ve been looking for me, now you’ve found me.” I hear that really reflects poorly on people. Again, I think having many samples in front of you might help. Make sure that you write your CV, cover letter etc. long before the application deadlines [so] that you can send them to your advisors as they would help correct any mistakes.

Ask for references also long before the deadlines. People will be too busy to write a good reference letter for you in a couple of days. When you ask for one, make sure you provide them with a CV, your teaching portfolio (as some schools ask for at least one reference letter that speaks to your teaching abilities), abstract of your dissertation and anything that you think might help you (e.g. volunteer work etc.).

(3) When did schools call you to schedule interviews? Do you have any advice about how to handle that stage of the process?

Depends if students are going to ASSA. Late December if going to ASSA. March if not going to ASSA. I got calls as late as May.

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I think schools called in early December. But a couple called days before. No advice on this stage, it is pretty straight forward. Find out who will be in the interview so you can research their interests and get a sense of what to expect.

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I was contacted by all schools from which I got an interview 3 weeks before the ASSA meetings (mid-December). You probably will not hear from any schools after that.

There is learning-by-doing when it comes to interviews. So, try to schedule your most important interviews not on the first day. But, also, you do not want to schedule important interviews on the third day of the conference or late in the afternoon in any day as the hiring committee by then will be too tired and too fed up with having interviewed 20 people that day. I think early in the second day might be a good option. Try to schedule all of them earlier in the day and earlier in the conference. That also helps to avoid being asked annoying questions like “so, tell me about yourself, “so sell yourself to me”.

(4) What were you asked in your initial interviews? How much emphasis was there on your research interests and on your teaching? What's the best way to prepare for initial interviews? Were you asked anything that really surprised you? Do you have any general advice about how to handle the stress of the ASSA meetings?

It is probably trivial, but having an idea about what interviewers can LEGALLY ask [is useful]. The department chair at [my eventual employer asked] "Are you Mormon?" That is totally illegal and has nothing to do with my ability to do my job, yet I could tell that the question was innocuous, that the man was merely trying to establish common ground. So, no harm, no foul. That may be good advice for the interviewing process. You can't afford to get hypersensitive.

[There was] lots of interest on my research. Even at a school that is only mildly interested in research, candidates need a quality job paper. However, after I got the job, I was told by one of the folks on the search committee that my favorable teaching evaluations were what got me the interview.

Presenting your job market paper to a qualified audience [is the best way to prepare]. I know that my presentation to the U's faculty before I interviewed was terrible, but it

prepared me for my interview I was also very relaxed socially, so I suppose that counts.

[My experience at ASSA] wasn't stressful, but then again, I had a [visiting job] for the next few years ...if I did not get something at ASSA.

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Questions were fairly typical. Strengths, weaknesses, research plans, dissertation synopsis, best teaching moment, essential elements of econ curriculum. The main impression that I was left with was that you can never really tell how an interview is going. I have walked out of interviews thinking "they loved me" and never heard another word. I have also walked out of an interview thinking "boy did I blow that" and gotten a job offer.

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In four of the 5 interviews, the hiring committee first told about themselves (e.g. what the school is like, what they are looking for). Then, they started asking questions about the qualifications they asked for in their postings. For instance, if they needed someone to teach introductory principles courses, they asked how you would go about it. Now, this is why the postings are important. They really are not lying when they ask for what they ask for. Know the answers e.g. what textbook you would use, if you have thought the course before how you went about it.

My understanding is that no one really cared about my research. I also was told this by someone in a hiring committee. When they ask about your research keep it short. If they ask more questions, then go ahead and give more information.

I cannot emphasize this enough. They really mean it when they say "we are looking for someone who can..." Check out their web pages. If you haven't taught the courses before, make a search, ask your friends... Talk to your professors who might know something about that particular department and/or faculty.

At the interview stage, I think it's safe to assume that your basic qualifications – whatever they may be – are good enough for them. They are also looking at if you are someone they would like to see for the next twenty years. Be friendly. As it is a horribly intimidating and disturbing environment where people are judging you, it is hard to look friendly, but try to do it anyway. The best advice I got was from [someone] who said "you have to get the energy in the room going". Be upbeat, friendly, try not to show your resentment to them for putting you through that horrible experience. If you have been teaching, do what you do when you walk into a classroom for the first time.

People are right when they say "there is no way of telling how the interview went". First of all, there are lots of things that are out of your control. These include discrimination based on race, gender, nationality etc. You really do not want to work with such people anyway. However, give it your best shot and do not assume that you don't really fit. There is not exactly an inverse relationship between doing well in an interview and

integrity, but there is some. Tone it down if you have the feeling that you are too far on the left (or right) to fit in. Allow yourself the luxury of saying no later – when you get an offer. You might subconsciously sabotage your interviews. The best way to avoid that is practice. Know what you will say. Otherwise, the default answer may be too honest.

The worst interview I had was with a department I got a call back from. Do not assume that an interview went badly (or well for that matter). They kept asking questions one after another. I felt like I was back in High School again. They are not necessarily asking those questions to find out the “correct” answer. I was later told that they were interested in finding out “my” answer, to get to know me a little better. Also, how you appear (friendly, stiff) while you are answering the questions is important. They almost did not call me back because I appeared too stiff. Yes, it is unfair that they create an intimidating environment if they want to bring out the friendly person in you. But, that is the way they do it, and they have jobs, you don’t.

(5) If you got some flyouts, when did schools call you to schedule them?

February and April.

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Schools called within a month (maybe two months)

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Mid-January.

Here is something I didn’t know before I applied for jobs. If you receive a letter telling you that they’ve received your application and/or demanding affirmative action info, you did NOT get an interview. If you got an interview you receive an e-mail (or maybe a phone call). I think the rule of thumb is, if they reject you, they choose a more distant form of communication and, if they have good news, they are willing to give it to you in person.

(6) Again, if you got some flyouts: What happened on your flyouts? Did you teach a class or give a seminar? What's the best way to prepare for a flyout? What should you ask the potential employer at this time? What shouldn't you ask them?

I threw up on the plane. [I neither taught a class nor gave a seminar.]
[The best preparation is a] class presentation prepared before hand and a quality research presentation of a paper that reflects the future direction of your research. Also, ask before the flyout what they want you to do. I was told after I was hired [that] one of the primary reasons [I was hired] was because they could tell that I had an active research agenda.

There are a mountain of questions [you might ask them], many personal that are different for each individual. But I asked a lot of resource questions. How much is there for research travel? How much is there for teaching travel? Are there sabbaticals and when are they offered? Access to computer software and how hard is it to get software the department doesn't currently have? Tenure questions. Teaching load questions. How stable is the dean? Will they expect a change in department leadership? Publications for tenure? For a person who has screwy health like mine, ask insurance questions. I spent many hours before my flyout thinking about the questions to ask. I wrote them down and took them with me to my interview. I put them in my suit pocket and marked them off after I asked them when I was alone during the interview process.

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On fly outs, I have been asked to teach a class or present my research to students. It was usually a seminar outside of the regular schedule, but attendance was quite good. Your presentation should be practiced many times in front of anyone who will listen. The days were fairly fast paced: interviews every half hour or 45 minutes moving up and down the econ hallway. I always met with the Dean and VP of academic affairs (or someone like that who was not an economist). I think the important thing to remember is you are interviewing them also. You are trying to decide if you would like to work there. This attitude makes you seem much less desperate.

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They will ask you to present to the faculty and/or to the students. Make sure you choose something with which you are comfortable (i.e. what you know best, and noone else knows nothing about). Your research in its most simplified form (not the data collection, not the regression coefficients) might be a good choice. Present it to friends, faculty before you go if you can. Practice helps.

Here are some practical concerns: Especially in small towns, you will not necessarily stay in a hotel. Therefore, you will not necessarily have the amenities that comes with staying at a hotel. Do not assume that there will be an ironing board, a hairdryer, even shampoo in that horrible guest house they put you in. Pack light as you do not want to check your bag. I barely made my connections, if I had had a bag checked, it would not have made it.

They will make you run from one office to the other all day. The best advice I got about office-to-office visits is "small talk as long as you can". You don't really want to give them a chance to ask "so, tell me about your research". It is boring to them. Also, it creates an unfriendly environment. Smile. Be friendly. Start talking... and not about you... about them. If you have checked their webpages and saw some family pictures, ask them about those. Bottomline, make them talk. It's always more fun for people to talk about themselves than to listen to you talk about yourself. They will forget what you said, they will not forget how you made them feel. As there is little chance that after you leave, they will be sharing the small talk info with one another, feel free to small talk about the same stuff over and over again. Do not be intimidated. At this stage, you are there because you are qualified. They want to see if they would like to work with you for the next twenty years. Be nice. Your back might be hurting, and you might be tired because they have

scheduled breakfast at 6AM. Be nice, anyway. Look interested in the job. You can always say no when you get the offer.

I had two fly-outs. One with a small liberal arts college. They asked to present to students. It was not someone else's class. It was to a group of students after the classes were over. It's hard as you have no idea as to what the students know or do not know. So, I picked my research... in its most simplified version. I felt comfortable about something that I knew a lot about and noone else knew nothing about. I presented in a way that I usually try to in my own classes... Interaction in the form of Q&A; stupid jokes etc. Again, they do forget what you said, they will not forget having been bored to death.

You have to be "on" all day 'till they drop you back to your room. Do so, even if it hurts. One thing that wasn't necessarily surprising that happened is that there was this sexist guy who asked the most potentially offensive questions. There is nothing you can do about such stuff. Try not to look mad or anything like that. Give your best answer.

I practically asked nothing that related to the job. I asked a lot of questions about them, as people love talking about themselves. Try not to look bored to death.

Wear comfortable shoes. It is quite unlikely that whether you get the job or not will depend on your shoes, make sure you are comfortable. You will be running around.

(7) If you got an offer: How long did you have to wait, post-flyout, to get an offer? Do you have advice about how to handle this stage?

I got my best offer at the interview.

Don't respond immediately, but let them know you are interested.

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I waited about two-three weeks. You can ask them when they are going to finish interviewing and when they plan to make a decision after that when you are at the interview. My only advice is negotiate, don't accept their first offer. Don't go crazy. Just make sure that you get a new computer and the software that you need. Maybe talk about moving money or an increase in salary. The faculty at one school was still laughing about a job offer made where the candidate asked them to make a down payment on a home for him. He wasn't there.

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1 week for one. 2 weeks for the other. I have yet to have any experience in handling this stage as I haven't heard back yet.

(8) If you got a job in a different way (post-December postings, for instance), what would you tell a student about that kind of job search?

Be flexible and be prepared for options you were not expecting.

(9) Was there anything that surprised you about your job after you started working - anything that would be useful to a student applying for jobs or considering an offer?

Yes, prepare for the unexpected.

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Make sure that you will be able to teach and do the research that you want. Think carefully on what you are willing to put up with to get tenure. I ended up in a department in a business school with one tenured woman out of 20 tenured faculty. They were very unsympathetic to heterodox approaches. Even though the job was in a great location, I would have been much better off not taking the job. My job was a two year visiting position and when they posted a tenure track position I was not given real consideration despite my excellent teaching evaluations and pretty good research.

(10) Any additional thoughts or advice?

1) Talk to people who have been there. That includes your professors and friends. I think that helped me a lot. 2) See if there is anything that would make you stand out among all the other hundred people that applied for the job i.e. a faculty member who knows someone there; someone you've met before etc. It's hard to believe how unprofessional the decisions might be. 3) I spent some time with the two candidates we had in our department. What I thought they did right was to look personable and nice. Try to give others a chance to talk. Do not keep talking about you or stuff that interests you.