

The Academic Job Interview: Questions to Help You Prepare

It's that time of year again! Many of you are planning for an academic job search, writing cover letters, updating your CV, and preparing for the campus interview. While there's no way to know specifically what a given search committee looks for when interviewing a potential faculty colleague, you'll feel more prepared if you can anticipate questions that you're likely to be asked. Generally, there are three areas they'll expect you to address: 1) your research/dissertation; 2) your teaching; and 3) your knowledge of, and interest in, the institution.

Here are some sample questions— organized by topic area—which will get you started. For additional questions, point your browser to our web site.

Questions about Research

- Describe your current research. Will you be continuing in this research track? Describe your future research plans.
- How would you involve graduate/undergraduate students in your research?
- What is the cutting edge in your field and how does your work extend it?
- How will you go about revising your dissertation for publication?
- Tell us how your research has influenced your teaching. In what ways have you been able to bring the insights of your research to your courses at the undergraduate level?

Questions about Teaching

- What is your philosophy of teaching?
- What classes could you teach in our program?
- How would you plan a course in such-and-such? What texts would you use? What topics would you cover?
- How would you evaluate student learning?
- How do you bring diversity into your day-to-day teaching?

Questions about Department and Community Involvement

- You've seen our mission statement. How would you see yourself contributing to our mission and campus atmosphere?
- What is your perception of the responsibilities of a full-time faculty member in a University/College? To the department? To the division? To the University/College as a whole?
- How will you fit in as a department member and what kind of contribution will you make to our community?
- Apart from the obvious financial reasons, why would you like to join the Faculty of Y at University X?
- Could you tell us about your long-range plans and commitment to this department?

Questions Employers Can't Ask

Employers can't legally ask you any questions that may lead to discrimination on the basis

of race, sex, age, religion, national origin, or disability. However, that doesn't mean you won't be asked to field an illegal question. It's not that someone is intentionally trying to break the law; some interviewers may ask such questions because they don't know they can't or shouldn't. Whatever the case, your best option is to remain calm and professional.

You're not required to provide any information about your marital or parental status, your ethnic background, or any disabilities you may have. However, some people may choose to reveal this information voluntarily, so they can assess whether a department is family-friendly or ethnically diverse, or if the appropriate accommodations for a disability will be provided.

So, what if you *are* asked an illegal question? For example, "Do you have children?" Here are three possible responses:

1. Answer directly, highlighting positives. "Actually, yes, and luckily my in-laws live here in town and would be happy to take care of them while I work."
2. Avoid the question, highlighting your qualifications. "If you are concerned about my commitment, I can assure you that my research plan is already up and running given the generous five-year grant I just received...."
3. Challenge the question, knowing the risks involved. "Can you tell me how this is relevant to my ability to perform as a faculty member?"

Adapted from *The Academic Job Search Survival Handbook Especially for Graduate Students*
Career Services Center, University of California, San Diego
Full text at <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/PDFArticles/GAcadJobSearchHandbook.pdf>