

Preparing for Academic Job Interviews

“Tell me about yourself”

Questions faculty/search committee may ask:

How big do you want your lab to be (students/postdocs/techs/undergrads)?

What kind of students do you want (their backgrounds)?

How/where will you get funding?

Have you ever written a grant or worked on a major grant? Was it funded?

What will be the specific aims of your first grant?

Which study section will you submit your grant to?

What are your research priorities?

What will your first student work on?

What will students in your lab learn?

Will you do all of this work yourself (in your lab) or will you collaborate with others, and what will their contributions be? Have you lined up these collaborations?

What kind of experience do you have supervising student researchers?

What is the biggest problem/question in your field?

Where do you want your research to be in 5/10 years?

How will you demonstrate independence from your advisor?

Have you agreed with your advisor on projects that you will take with you?

How will your expertise fit into our program (research and educational/teaching)?

What can you teach? What would you like to teach? Which textbook would you use?

What do you think is important for students to learn?

What have you taught?

What new courses might you want to develop?

Have you always wanted to be a professor at a research university, college professor, chemist, engineer, etc?

What other interests do you have/what do you do in your spare time?

Ideally you will meet with faculty at all ranks and you can get a sense of career progression and how well junior faculty are supported.

Department Chair might additionally ask:

What kinds of resources or specialized (i.e. expensive) equipment do you need?

Do you have other interviews? (they want to get a sense of timing and competition)

What would it take to persuade you to take this job? (this is the time to bring up a spouse/SO's career or other special issues)

How big do you want your lab to be (students AND square footage)?

Where do you want your research program to be in 5/10 years?

What salary do you want? (Conventional wisdom is do not give a specific number, say something like “I’m sure a potential offer would be competitive.”)

How much start-up funding do you need? (Do your homework; what are typical recent start-up requests for this type of institution. Be sure you can justify everything you request.)

You might want to ask specific questions about tenure process and expectations, teaching loads and courses, service commitments/expectations, joint appointments, whether start-up funds can be used for personnel, restrictions on use of start-up funds, etc, if they don't bring it up.

Dean/Provost/Other high level administrator additionally might ask:

What are the big gaps in understanding in your field?

How does your research complement the department/university?

Do you think you would be able to collaborate with Prof X?

Does your research use Y piece of equipment?

Do you think you could take advantage of the (biotech/engineering/hospital/etc) infrastructure in this (geographic) area?

Is there potential to commercialize your research? Is there a therapeutic potential?

What are your long-term research goals? Where do you want your research to be in 5/10 years?

You might ask them what kinds of programs their office has for new faculty or for faculty development, any new initiatives on the horizon, special funding opportunities, grad student fellowship programs, starter grants for new faculty or new projects, etc.

(Graduate) Students might ask:

How many students do you want?

What kinds of prelim/qualifying exam questions would you write/ask?

What kind of prelim/qual structure do you think is best?

How would you fit into the department?

What was your own PhD program like?

How would you support your students?

How would you run your group?

What kinds of projects would undergrad/MS/PhD students do in your lab?

You might ask them what they like and don't like about the program, why they chose this school over others, how they are supported financially, the prelim structure, their courses (that YOU might be teaching!), whose lab they are in, time to degree, how they were selected to meet with you, how they chose to join a lab, their career plans.

Predominantly undergraduate institutions will be especially interested in your experiences supervising undergrads and any undergrad research experience you had.