Experiences getting a faculty job

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Outline

- Wintery Economic Climate
- My path
- Application
- Interview goals & prep
- My Interview day
- Negotiation
- Startup money
- Wish I’d known/done...
Wintery Economic Climate

• Especially important to establish match between you and them
• From last faculty meeting: “who are people you know that we should be hiring?"
  • Depts like to hunt, rather than gather, because the local advocate is built in
• They’re looking for reasons NOT to interview you
• “Networking” is a vital ongoing process, start now
My path

- ’95 Cornell undergrad Math
- ’98 Cornell MS computer graphics (Greenberg)
- ’04 U of Utah PhD Computer Science (Johnson)
- ’08 Harvard Medical, Post-doc “Radiology” (Westin)
- Wanted to be a prof, but got used to preparing
- Had the luxury of possibly staying post-doc
  - Could cast a narrow net at first, wider next year
  - UCSD, Stanford, UT Austin, U Chicago, MIT, Harvard
- Lucked out: ’09 U of Chicago, Asst Prof CS
Application

• Now: figure out who’s going to be writing letters
  • Give them notice a month ahead of time
  • Give them a copy of your research statement

• Cover letter:
  • Needs to reflect that you know how you’d fit into the place
  • Important to highlight people inside who already know and can vouch for you
Application: research statement

• The hardest two pages of text ever
• Unlike any other paper you’ve written
• About four months of solid work
• Lots of iterations with former advisor(s), peers
• Should be finished in some form to give to people writing you letters
Interview Goals

• Demonstrate you’ll complement/build the dept
• Be yourself:  
  • Talk enthusiastically/pointedly about what you do  
  • They’ll either like you or not  
• “Can this person do their job and not be jerk?”  
• “Will I want to run into this person in the hall?”  
• “Can this person speak to their research and its broader context?”
Interview prep

• Before interview day is scheduled, be proactive about requesting what faculty you want to meet

• With schedule:
  • Learn about the people, their papers, to have more substantial conversations
Interview prep 2: basic autobiography

• What courses I could teach
• How will I teach?
• What’s important for me in a dept (or in this dept)
  • Tenure values collab outside CS
• My one minute pitch
• My five minute pitch
• Where else did I apply
• Who are the best people in my field
• What the basic contributions of your thesis?
Interview prep 3: ?s you might need to answer

• Basic:
  • Why did you use your approach and not something else or someone else’s?
  • Know the assumptions and limitations of your approach and solution.
  • What’s so interesting about your thesis research? What’s novel about your contribution? Why should I be interested in the problem or solution?
  • What’s the key insight to your solution? Your secret weapon?
  • What are the one or two most significant contributions you feel you have made to the field, to Computer Science?
  • What difference is your solution or approach going to make to someone who is outside of your field?

• Tougher:
  • What do you want to do next?
  • What do you see yourself doing in three, five years?
  • Where do you see the field being in five years? Ten? What are you going to do that will help us get there?
  • What do you think are the top two or three problems in Computer Science? What are you going to do that will help us solve them?
  • What do you think is the most significant advance in Computer Science (or in your field) in the past year? Past two-three years?
  • Do you know anything about X?
  • Be careful: “What do you think of X?”
Interview prep 4: things to learn about dept

• How does the promotion and tenure process work?
• Is it documented? What fraction get tenure? What matters (letters, grants, CV)?
• Teaching: how many classes, how big are classes how are TAs assigned
• How faculty/post-docs/grad students are in the department, and how many of them will understand your work?
• What is your vision for the future of the dept?
Interview prep 5: things to ask faculty

• Tell me about your work (how ambitious can research be, scope of activity, potential collab?)
• Students? What are they doing?
• Collaborators? How is that supported/encouraged?
• How are you funded?
• What courses are you teaching?
• How would you describe the students?
• What do perceive are the strengths and weaknesses of this department?
• How do you like working here?
• If you could change something about this dept, what would it be?
My interview day(s)

- (Look at Kindlmann2.pdf)
- Lots and lots of half-hour meetings
- Met with people from many different departments
- Minimal time to tweak talk prior to it starting
Negotiation

- A nice phrase to use: "It would make my decision easier if you could do X"
- Can’t think of anything that’s not negotiable
- Start date
- Salary (look at http://www.cra.org/statistics/)
  - may value salary over startup
- Teaching reductions (seminars vs classes)
- Moving expenses
- Access to space & computing resources
- Startup money
Startup money

- Grad students: benefits, summer pay, computers, hard drives, graphics cards, printers ...
- Equipment: projectors, commercial software, furniture, discretionary funds & academic enrichment, MRI scanner
- The more specific, the more thought out, the better:
  - “This is the size group I need to be self-sustaining"
- My research requires collabs, they take time to develop, grants take time to get approved/funded
- Demonstrate that you're a good investment
- “There's no point in them hiring me, spending money on me, and then 3 years from now not have enough to keep going”
Wish I’d ...

- Figured out start-up requests before I got the offer
- “understood the 9 month salary thing” (and taxes on summer pay)
- Wish I hadn’t told them I didn’t have other offers
- Wish I was more self-confident during the talk and the questions afterwards
  - How you handle questions demonstrate maturity
  - Patiently listen, think, pause, answer