

The challenge for graduate teachers

Landing a Job in Academia

Graduate students who hope to teach in a postsecondary institution currently face a highly competitive job market. Though many graduate students do not realize that the process of preparing to enter the job market begins the moment they commence their graduate program, the key to a successful job search and application process is early preparation. Indeed, the bulk of an applicant's work occurs long before he or she enters the interview setting.

Preparing to Succeed

Postsecondary institutions hire teachers with strong teaching, research, and service records. Clearly, students' activities during graduate school affect their success on the job market. Graduate students need to understand that the record they establish helps to determine whether they are hired by a large major research institution or a smaller two- or four-year undergraduate college.

Although all universities expect applicants to have good teaching, research, and service skills, institutions emphasize each of the three differently. Graduate students should begin early in their careers to think about the kind of institution that is compatible with their teaching and research interests.

During graduate school, most students begin to learn to teach and to carry out research, and some serve the academic community. Each activity contributes to the final record that a candidate presents to the hiring institution when applying for a position.

A strong teaching record includes experience in a variety of course sections, recitations, or labs. Constant re-evaluating and training are vital to skilled teaching. Graduate teachers should participate in workshops, seminars, and other teacher training activities through both the Graduate Teacher Program and the home department.

As for the research side, producing a high quality dissertation is the most important task to be accomplished during graduate school. In part, this means selecting a respected, knowledgeable, and supportive advisor for the dissertation. Graduate students should be aware that their advisor's name may be a factor when they apply for scholarships, fellowships, grants, and tenure-track positions.

Academic service begins at the departmental level and extends to the international level. It may involve serving on a departmental committee or volunteering for a campus-wide body, such as the United Government of Graduate Students. Students can further expand their involvement by serving on a four-campus committee, participating in a regional body, or attending national and international conferences. Involvement on all levels allows students to gain exposure to new ideas and to expand professional contacts while developing a record of academic service.

Creating a Catchfile

A catchfile contains a record of anything that conveys the graduate student's activities and shows his or her

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ability to do professional quality work. It provides one central place in which to document the student's achievements as they occur. A well-prepared graduate student begins a catchfile as early as possible in the graduate career in order to "catch" the information as it happens. All items in the file should be dated as the accumulation spans several years.

Tooter's catchfile contains . . .

1. letters of recommendation
2. honors or awards
3. work history information relating to the major field of study
4. student evaluations rating teaching ability
5. samples of excellent written work and published articles
6. descriptions of specialized training

Graduate teachers should also keep a journal of professional and volunteer activities. This practice ensures that all important events are documented. Daily, weekly, and monthly activities may seem minor when they are happening, but the cumulative record establishes proof of the graduate teacher's development.

A cumulative catchfile is a handy resource when applying for graduate level scholarships and fellowships, creating a curriculum vitae, or producing a teaching or research portfolio.

The Curriculum Vitae:

A Resume for Postsecondary Positions

A curriculum vitae is similar to a resume. However, it contains information on work experiences and activities within academia or that relate directly to the applicant's academic discipline. For instance, a sociologist who studies poverty would list experience as a welfare intake worker on the vita because it shows direct knowledge of the specific field.

In addition to one's academic work history, a curriculum vitae includes information about the applicant's other scholarly achievements, such as publications, presentations and workshops, research grants, academic honors, and memberships in professional organizations. The applicant's country of citizenship and language skills are also included.

The Teaching Portfolio

A teaching portfolio is an organized collection of specific data that describes a teacher's major strengths and teaching achievements. Created from the information held in the catchfile, this special dossier is used in both the hiring, the promotion, and tenure process.

Peter Seldin first developed the concept of the

teaching portfolio for faculty usage in his book, *The Teaching Portfolio* (Bolton, Massachusetts: Anker Publishing Co., 1991). With appropriate modifications, his work can be adapted to the needs of the graduate teacher. Seldin recommends that every portfolio consist of certain basic materials that are developed into an individualized packet.

For the graduate teacher, a teaching portfolio should contain materials written by the graduate teacher, as well as documents from the teacher's supervisor, chair, and advisor illustrating the applicant's skillful teaching.

The newest trend in teaching portfolios is to attach a videotape of the teacher conducting a typical class. Several people should critique the teaching in the videotape to ensure that the content is illustrative of excellence in teaching. As with any other publication nearing completion, the entire portfolio should be submitted to trusted professors for review.

The Job Search

Graduate students need to begin their job search long before the actual teaching term begins. Most applicants enter the job market one year before they will be ready to start work. Locating potential jobs is a lengthy process, and the application and interview procedure alone may take several months.

Academics locate potential jobs by reading the job listings in the various professional journals in their field. Journals of professional organizations provide information on regional, national, and international openings. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a weekly journal, has a Bulletin Board section that lists available positions in all disciplines in the academy.

Candidates begin a detailed investigation process after locating specific job openings. In order to tailor an application packet to a specific opening, candidates should have a complete understanding of the needs and values of the institution.

Using this knowledge, the applicant can emphasize those areas of interest to the particular institution. Each application packet includes a cover letter, a curriculum vitae, a portfolio that emphasizes teaching and/or research skills, and a videotape of an actual class. The final contents and format of the portfolio should be reviewed by a faculty mentor or TA supervisor before the application packet is mailed.

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The Interview

With careful preparation, credentials that match the job description, and a little bit of luck, the applicant will receive an interview invitation. Institutions commonly pay for interviewees to fly to the campus for the interview process. Some institutions also pay for meals and lodging.

Applicants need to prepare extensively for each interview. This involves learning the names of the interview committee members and the department chair, and reading at least one publication by each faculty member.

The applicant should prepare a list of specific questions to ask while at the institution. These questions should address such issues as the department's expectations of the person hired; the percentage of total time expected to be used for research, teaching, and publishing; the availability of labs, facilities, and equipment; and the process of teacher evaluation.

If the job offer is a tenure-track position, the applicant should seek information about the process for being promoted and obtaining tenure. If the job opening offers a yearly contract, the applicant should find out if the department generally rehires contractees or if the position is temporary.

Words from the Wise



"What office is there which involves more responsibility, which requires more qualifications, and which ought, therefore, to be more honourable, than that of teaching?"

Harriet Martineau [1802-1876]
"Women," *Society in America*, Vol.III 1837

"Knowledge and fame are not gained by surprise.
He that would win must labor for the prize.
Tis thus a youth from lispings A B C
Attains at last a master's high degree."

Noah Webster's Speller 1820

"Everything I've ever done is easier than research or writing."

Fawn M. Brodie [1915-1981]
Los Angeles Times Home Magazine

"No bubble is so iridescent or floats longer than that blown by the successful teacher."

Sir William Osler [1849-1919]

Tooter's Jobs Tips

1. Locate job openings that match your specific credentials.
2. Seek out institutions that are compatible with your teaching and research interests.
3. Tailor each application packet to the needs and values of the particular institution.
4. Learn as much as possible about an institution before your interview.
5. Ask your mentors and peers if they have any knowledge of the faculty's work or the department's academic reputation.
6. Practice the lectures and lesson plans that you will deliver and polish your presentation skills.
7. Take care of details early so that you can be calm and assured during your interview.

An applicant may ask to observe a class and to talk with a recently tenured faculty member. In addition to seeking information about the position and promoting personal skills and talents, an applicant should ascertain if he or she would actually like to work in that particular department and community. Information from the chamber of commerce about the locale of the visited institution can help make the applicant further aware of the community in which he or she would live.

The interview process lasts from an afternoon to several days. Applicants are usually interviewed by a committee, requested to teach one or two sessions, and asked to provide copies of their publications. Frequently, applicants are given a tour of the campus and the city.

The types of social situations that applicants may be asked to attend are unpredictable. Applicants should pack a varied wardrobe and be prepared for any event from a formal dinner to a departmental picnic. They may be invited to converse with various faculty members and administrators, or to attend a social or other campus activity. Most of the people who attend these functions have not read the applicant's packet or vita so applicants may talk about their areas of research and professional interests.

Applicants should display only their best social behavior at all times because they will continually be under scrutiny. They are observed in a variety of settings to see if they will "fit in." Every institution is interested in hiring a person who will be easily integrated into their department, and the social situations serve to reveal mutual compatibility.

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Immediately after returning home from an interview trip the applicant should send out thank-you cards. This will be easier if applicants record the names of the people they meet in a small notebook. During the interview process the applicant interacts with many people and the notebook ensures that all the faces are associated with names. Cards should be sent to the department chair, interview committee members, helpful office support staff, and faculty or administrators who talked to or escorted the applicant. Through the cards the applicant reinforces a good impression at the institution and creates further good will.

Receiving a Job Offer

While awaiting the job offer the applicant should research the salary and benefit packages of comparable institutions, as well as those for new teachers at the same institution. This information is public knowledge and can be obtained by contacting the administration of the institution. Understanding these monetary and benefit details provides the applicant leverage in the negotiation process and may even enable the applicant to secure a higher starting salary than the institution's initial offer.

In addition to salary and benefit figures, the job offer should contain written commitments from the institution concerning the tenure-track time frame, equipment and facility use, and the likelihood of summer session work.

A Commitment to Success

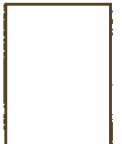
Despite the complicated procedure, graduate teachers can negotiate the job market with proficiency and success. Graduate students who early in their graduate careers make a commitment to understanding the demands of the academic hiring process will be prepared to market themselves. If graduate students are attentive to their own teaching and research interests, constantly seek out information about opportunities in the profession, and carefully record their progress, they will be successful in their job search. ■

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Graduate Teacher Program Newsletter

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TO ALL:
Graduate Part-Time Instructors
Graduate Teaching Assistants
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