

Perspectives on Academic Careers: A Panel Discussion  
Notes

*These notes are taken and listed according to panel participant. Audience questions are noted at the end and recorded via participant.*

- Vacher
  - Ph.D. pedigree of USF is getting better since USF is now Research 1 status, and our program is now somewhat older and more established
  - Good news in terms of prospective employers knowing our department and the caliber of students here
- Roman
  - Starting with a MS degree is a good idea
    - New ideas, new research, more experience, and a chance to explore what really fascinates you
  - Develop/define your own ideas and a research program as you go to make yourself unique and gain independence
    - Post docs are a good way to do this
  - Her experience
    - Applied for post-docs and university positions in her final year of the doctoral degree in order to get exposure to the process...but don't expect to get a tenure-track position right out of the degree
  - The better your science and research, the more your options will be when you're ready to hit the job market
- Connor
  - Cover letters are the first line of defense on your university position application...hard to recover if they're bad
    - First paragraph explains why you want the job...show you've done the research know you want that job
    - Second paragraph is to explain why you're right for that department
      - Explain what you want to do...market yourself. How will you work with grads? What about undergrads? What classes will you be capable of teaching?
    - Wrap up by reiterating why you want that job
    - Whole thing should be around 1.5 pages.
  - Have a good research/teaching statement
    - What you've done
    - What you want to teach and how it fits with the department
    - For research statement, say what you want, how it fits, and who funds (or will fund) it. Good to mention NSF somewhere along the lines, it always looks good
  - Be excited and forward-thinking in the interview. Don't focus on what you've done, talk about what you want to do and be enthusiastic about it
  - Start working on projects now to write up later
- Kruse

- Strong selling for some universities is the research opportunities for undergrads (particularly lib arts colleges that are not Research 1)
- Be excited in the interview and when you're there...don't be apathetic
- Herbert
  - History
    - He built projects into his dissertation and fostered collaborative research since it was tough to find post docs in paleo
    - Know your audience when interviewing...he interviewed at a college that focused more on education than research but wound up talking more research in the interview. Probably why he didn't get hired.
  - Researched teaching colleges and recognized candidates still had at least 6 publications, some were still top tier journals
    - 3-4 of 7 went through post-docs or teaching visitor before they got their tenure job
- Wetmore
  - By going on to a post-doc, he feels he priced himself out of a job at a teaching college
  - Good advice he got was to consider the audience when putting talk together...make it accessible to wide audience
  - Read up on the work of the faculty at the place you interview so you can talk them up and see what you have in common
- Wynn
  - History
    - Wanted to create his own isotope lab, but probably wasn't ready when he finished his doctoral degree...not enough experience
    - Got two offers for a position, but went and did a post-doc in an isotope lab that gave him the background he needed to run his own lab
      - Had he gone right into the tenure-track position, he wouldn't have had this experience, which he is sure is crucial for being able to do what he wants to do
- Onac
  - History
    - In Romania, you needed 3 years of research experience before you could go on to your doctoral degree
    - Went right into a job at the same school as he got his Ph.D.
    - Did a Fulbright post-doc, then went back to Romania. There was no research money there anymore, so he did another post-doc and published like hell, which gave him the edge in getting a tenured job
  - Do a good cover letter for papers too and tell journal why it's good
- Stewart
  - The power of the chair to hire varies by university
    - Some chairs have ultimate say, but some are trumped by a faculty vote (as in our department)

- Some departments still require candidates to have a good fit for teaching. Show how you can fit their curriculum
- Like it or not, you need to show you can write and get grants
  - Tenure relies on publications and their citations, and grants
- Teaching institutions are just as demanding
  - Say you can teach an intro course and you've got experience in the interview...deans love it
- Ryan
  - GSA employment service was super helpful
  - SERC website...Teach the Earth
    - Resource for geoscience education
    - Workshop "On the Cutting Edge"
      - Series of workshops for faculty and pre-faculty
    - Also a workshop entitled "Preparing for an Academic Career in Geosciences"
      - Broad swath of info for colleges of all types
    - Many workshops have room and board paid, you just have to get you there
- Questions
  - What's daily life like as a professor?
    - Ryan
      - Not paid a lot, but you get some great fun and travel experience, and you can get excited about inspiring others
    - Stewart
      - You get paid to learn a lot and tell stuff about it...what's better?
    - Roman
      - Can't draw a line between this job and your life, but she loves her lifestyle and the experience. Be in it for its own sake.
    - Onac
      - Works a ton but enjoys it. Loves the fact that he doesn't watch the clock, waiting for 5pm to roll around everyday
    - Vacher
      - You get to be a student for the rest of your life. If you like to learn, then you're great for it.
      - You also get to be kept young by the students around you
  - How do you manage family and kids?
    - Kruse
      - NY Times article spawning a big blog about this. Women fall out of academia at all levels. These women aren't choosing to do work that becomes your life, and it's a tough choice. That said, the flexibility is great and there's a lot of change to keep it interesting
    - Connor

- Over half of grads are women, so he doesn't see how gender issues won't be changing. But no doubt, tenure system is male-dominated, factoring in time and commitment. You don't have to accept the rules as they are now, it will change. And you can negotiate this when you apply for a job. If the employer doesn't like it, do you really want to work for them in the first place?
  - Ryan
    - Things are more negotiable now, especially in smaller departments. The discipline must be welcoming for people to be inspired and join up
  - Kruse
    - If the department doesn't respond well to this negotiation, it tells you a lot about them
  - Vacher
    - This topic is discussed a lot in the Chronicle of Higher Education
    - This journal is written well too...good resource for a forum
- What was gender ratio of applicants in geology?
  - Connor
    - Depends on the field
- In the hiring process, what was your gender competition?
  - Roman
    - Was often the only woman
- What is the professional service recommendation (i.e., public service, academic service, etc.)
  - Ryan
    - Exterior service only (outside the university), gets looked at and is an added bonus, but not always the clincher in whether or not you get the job
  - Connor
    - Good to mention, but not vital
  - Vacher
    - Your benefit from that experience is more valuable. Did you learn to interact with others and be social? Teaching is a social skill
- How much is too much in talking yourself up in a cover letter?
  - Connor
    - Judgment call, but have someone read it and be an editor
- How does it look when you apply as a Professional Geologist?
  - Ryan
    - Depends on the field. Doesn't always indicate how well you work in the academic environment. Are you capable of adjusting?
- When are post-docs not good to do?
  - Stewart

- When you have too many of them...shows you're either unfocused, or doing something wrong to not get hired as a professor
- Don't use it to tread water
- Vacher
  - When it's at the same place as your post-doc
- Kruse
  - They're a good place to get experience
- Ryan
  - Also a good place to get independence
- Roman
  - Don't rule out going overseas. Not many post-docs here allow you to write your own ticket since funding is low (you need to post-doc on someone else's project)
  - International experience also gives you an edge
- Vacher
  - Pre-docs are good too. Get high level research experience and networking benefits
- Connor
  - You never know, so talk to folks at meetings
- Ryan
  - As a student, you have free reign to meet folks and they have to be nice to you since you're a student (they're often not as nice to professionals since supposedly professionals can be perceived as threats)