

Have An Academic Career

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My advice: (Feel free to Disagree)

1. Academic Jobs are harder to find than they have been in the past. Figure on about 50-100 applications to get a tenure track job and it might take you two years. This is normal. Understand that the job market is different than it was even a decade ago. Many tenure track jobs were eliminated in the 2009 recession-the current crisis is anybody's guess. Then there is the demographic cliff (Grawe, 2018)—the number of high school graduates is predicted to decline significantly and fewer are going to college. This will be particularly problematic in the Northeast and the Midwest. Colleges are closing and merging. Adjuncts are a huge component of the higher education workforce. The expectations for Tenure and Promotion go up every year. Consider that there are lots of things, both inside and outside of higher education, that you can do with a Ph.D. Is the academic job market broken? Maybe. It depends on what you mean by that. People get hired, have careers and retire. No, the best people don't always get the job or promotion. That happens in every field. If you have a degree in an unmarketable field or are geographically constrained, you will have a harder time. While this was probably always true, in today's world, you need to stay informed about the world of higher education.

2. For most research-oriented institutions, there is an expectation of peer-reviewed publications published before graduation. Few places will hire ABDs. Considering how many people do not finish their degrees, this is reasonable.
3. Be flexible. The job you want might not be available when you need it. In many places, you earn the right to teach what you want.
4. Keep the momentum of your job search going. Don't slack off until you have an offer in hand.
5. Organize your job search with a spreadsheet.
6. Decide what kind of career you want.
 - a. If you want to teach, my suggestion is a community college. The research requirements are minimal and they value teaching. Many smaller colleges will have a 4:4 (Eight three-hour courses) teaching load plus significant internal service requirements (advising, committees). Small Colleges and Community colleges are going to want to see teaching evaluations and syllabi.
 - b. If you want research, aim for an R1 (a large state university or a large private). Most research universities want (1) publications, (2) research skills, and (3) funding potential. They will also be concerned about your research trajectory and research program.

7. Practice experience requirements vary from field to field. In some fields, you generally won't be hired without it. In others, it is not as clear. It is always a good idea to have some. Internships are generally not considered experience.
8. Networking is important. Build your network. Have business cards. Pass them out. Get a card from everyone you meet and send them an email (it was nice to meet you).
9. Conference attendance is important. I would tend to favor research conferences over professional gatherings. Smaller venues offer a better opportunity to network but the people are generally not that important. Some of this is going to depend on how much conference funding you can get. Smaller and poorer schools offer very little funding.
10. People will often promise things that they don't or can't deliver. Try hard to keep your promises. Making everybody happy is not possible and often damaging to your reputation. Fight for your friends.
11. Good universities often have some dreadful departments. While this is not new, we are beginning to see academic offerings that seem to be created solely for money. Stay away.
12. Be careful about building a career at a school that might be gone in a decade. Many schools that were once on solid ground are going out of business or dramatically cutting back on faculty positions. I would be very careful with small liberal arts colleges or regional state universities in the current situation. (See Resources at the end of this document)

13. Consider your first job as experience. Time to build a network and a track record. Try to get an article or two out of your dissertation. Move beyond your dissertation to a field that you can own. Publishing your dissertation as a book is nearly always a bad idea. They are difficult to publish and sometimes count for far less than other books.
14. The best jobs come out in early fall. This is followed by hiring in the mid and late spring.
15. What is a hot field changes relatively quickly. Today's great field is tomorrow's dead end. Also true for departments.
16. Have an idea of what research you plan to do and how that will build together into a research program. If you can tell them what the next five research projects are, you are golden. They have to fit together into a research program. Understand that, except for a small number of places, you will have to publish. Try to have at least half of the articles with either sole or lead authorship.
17. Learn to teach online. A lot of places are looking for online teaching experience as more of higher education moves in that direction. Anyone who tells you that this is a fad is in denial.
18. Departments would rather not have to terminate a new faculty member after three-year reviews. This is hard. Make sure that you don't present yourself as someone who might be in this situation.
19. Clean up your social media. Many employers check this. So do potential colleagues.
20. Be realistic about what you bring to the table. Take a hard look.

21. Universities typically have aspirational statements that do not always reflect reality. My take is the really good universities are ranked in the top 50 and the best academic schools and departments are ranked in the top 20 (The first two tiers). Beyond that, ranking differences don't matter so much. Some rankings are based on hard indicators, while others are based on reputational rankings—basically, the opinions of a survey of academics. Reputational rankings are largely a function of the prestige of the university and how many stars are on the faculty. These factors lead to more publications and prestigious grants, better Ph.D. student placements, and other trappings of prestige—not the other way around. Nothing depresses rankings like internecine warfare. Lowering the rankings is not good for anyone.
22. Listen to your gut. If something doesn't feel right, figure out why it doesn't. Like everything else in life, if it seems too good to be true, it probably isn't true.
23. Things to stay away from (partial list): (1) Schools with Financial Problems or declining enrollments, (2) schools (or departments) that hire a lot of their own graduates (3) departments with a lot of former university administrators, (4) schools with a lot of administrative turnover and (5) programs that seem to have a lot of repurposed staff from other areas in the university.
24. Getting a job at your alma mater is often a bad idea. You will always be a student in the minds of some.

25.If your chosen field is having a bad year, there are always collateral fields that you can seek refuge.

Down the road, it might be a good idea to actively work on building a second or even a third place.

26.Try to get an assortment of perspectives. Over the past four decades, I have heard a variety of ideas about job searches that never seemed to square with reality.

27.There are no perfect jobs.

Vitae

1. It's a Vitae, not a resume.
2. Generally, the structure is (1) name and contact info, (2) Degrees (3) Experience (4) publications (5) Conference Presentations, and (6) Funding.
3. These are **never bullet points**. Pretty resumes are rarely seen. Never put your picture on your CV, Never.
4. Being a TA is a job. One job. No matter how many courses you taught.
5. Get a Google Scholar Page and an ORCID Account (<https://orcid.org/>) and put the links on your CV. LinkedIn is also helpful. If you have a website, it needs to look professional.
6. Spell check!
7. Be clear what has been published and what is under consideration.
8. You can include your teaching, research and diversity statements in the CV.

9. Do not leave jobs, particularly professional jobs off your CV. Many places have HR validate your experience and others have background checks. In most schools, this is considered a very serious matter. You can be fired for lying on your resume.

Cover Letter

1. Briefly tell us why you are perfect for the job
2. What can you do for us?
3. Be careful with spelling and punctuation. If you recycle the letters, make sure that you use the right university. Spell check!
4. Write for your audience.
5. Generally, these are two pages in length. Highlight your CV, but don't replace it.

Job Talk and Interview

1. Make sure that you have done your homework on the school, its challenges and the scholarly work of your future colleagues.
2. Pick something interesting/Slides should be attractive but not overwhelming.
3. Practice your approach & technology. Speak slower than you think. Watch your time.
4. Try to find out who is going to be interviewing you and be at least a little familiar with their work.
5. If they take you to dinner, order something you can eat neatly. Stay away from anything with alcohol.

6. Take everything you hear with a grain of salt. People aren't going to tell you why this is a lousy place to work.
7. Try to stay positive. Watch your temper. Try to smile a lot.
8. Dress conservatively. Try it on before you go. Wear something dark.
9. Try not to use an excessive amount of jargon and be careful about dropping a lot of names. This (1) makes you look like a jackass and (2) can very easily backfire on you. Neither one of these tactics makes you seem important or knowledgeable. Insecure and pathetic?
10. Be careful about what you say about your home department. It will get back.
11. When you talk to different people at different levels, understand that they will be interested in different issues.
12. Job interviews are like first dates. Everybody is lying.
13. Turn your phone off

If you get the offer

1. Be clear about what the offer is
2. Negotiate. The Chronicle has a yearly salary report.
3. Try to get a lighter teaching load for the first year and startup money

4. Things that aren't in writing don't exist.
5. There are nice people and those who just seem nice. Know the difference.
6. Make sure that relocation expenses are included.
7. If you have a spouse or partner who will need a job, make sure that they know that.

Why Didn't I get the job?

1. You were less well-qualified than the other people who were interviewed.
2. Your research wasn't interesting to anyone.
3. You blew the interview
4. There was an internal candidate with pull.
5. Somebody had a friend or their advisor had a friend.
6. You threatened someone with influence or someone who had a lot of energy and didn't want you hired.
7. Any number of additional possibilities. No way to know and not worth worrying about.
8. It is always possible that you can get a job there at a later point.
9. Many years ago, there were two jobs I really wanted. I didn't get either of them. It always irritated me.
One morning I opened the Chronicle and found that both of those places had closed or planned to close. Gee, I don't feel so bad anymore.
10. It's their loss. You'll make history somewhere else.

The Job

1. At the end of the day, this is a job. You have to do your work and be productive. While there are people who will get by on politics, that isn't all that different from other types of jobs. It also doesn't always last forever. Though there is a lot less structure, getting your work done is important. This is not an easy job and the challenges change as your career progresses. On balance, you have freedom, you have autonomy and the ability to pursue the most important questions in the universe.
2. Expect that your first years will be both busy and hard. Teaching is a lot of work and new preparations take a lot of time and effort. Down the road, things get easier as you learn the system. This is normal.
3. Learn to automate and manage your workload. New technology makes doing this easier and more productive.
4. Academic egos are easy to damage and the impact can be frighteningly direct. Be careful. Everybody has friends and sometimes they have important friends. Many academics have long memories. Be careful who you irritate. If you were raised by wolves, try not to let the rest of us know it. Fight for your friends. If you don't, you won't have any.
5. Don't take it on faith that someone or something is prestigious unless there is proof—ideally, written proof. Every school is the Harvard of wherever it is and lots of minor lights are willing to tell you how wonderful they are. Awards are sometimes given out of pity or politics and some association elections are decided by less than 10% of the membership or even by the nominating committee. Odd

administrative positions are sometimes created for people who are problematic in their current role. Association “Stars” are occasionally people who are far better at politics than scholarship and aren’t always equal academic stars.

6. Be careful who you trust. The nicest people will screw you over and not think about it. This includes people whom you’ve done things (even major things) for. Academia isn’t really a zero-sum game, but there are many people who think that it is and act accordingly.
7. You need to do something on the national stage. Being influential in a small subgroup isn’t that useful. The key to prominence is to be known for something. Eventually, you need a brand. Try to be able to describe yourself in a single sentence (it’s hard).
8. Mentors are important. Give and get. Pay your dues.
9. Tenure typically happens at 6-7 years and represents a major hurdle. It generally includes the development of a dossier, external reviewers and a faculty vote. What counts for tenure varies from place to place. Tenure does not guarantee you a job for life. You can still be fired and laid off.
10. Publication expectations are usually tied to teaching loads. If you teach 9 hours, it’s generally a publication a year, while 3–6-hour loads have much higher (2-3 articles a year or more) expectations.
11. Try to stay away from administration until after you get tenure. Being the boss is hard work, even if you do it badly. You can make lots of enemies even if you do a good job.
12. Learn to recognize destructive people. Stay away from them.

13. People who gossip with you will also gossip about you.
14. What I said about social media goes double. Besides the fact that many schools monitor their staff's social media output, other people are going to see this. Then there's the legal system and law enforcement. People get sued for libel and go to jail for cyberbullying. Before you make allegations, make sure that you can back them up.
15. Use Facebook and Twitter instead to keep up with research and news of the field and promote your accomplishments.
16. External Funding is important at research institutions. Be careful what you apply for and make sure there is enough money in the grant to do the project. Get written confirmation that the resources that you need to do the project are available. Keep good records, especially where money is concerned. Get to know the business office and the grants and contracts office.
17. If you do human subjects research, understand the rules and get IRB approval early in the process. Many of these rules are non-negotiable.
18. Again, limit the jargon and the name-dropping—such a bad idea.
19. Be nice to the Department Staff. Also, the people who take care of the building. Treat them with respect. Always.
20. Someday, you are going to come up for a promotion or tenure and people will be asked to write letters for you. If they aren't willing or write negative letters, it may greatly affect the outcome. Consider.

21. Librarians are your friends—make sure of that. You will be amazed at what they can do for you.
22. Students can be difficult. Treat them professionally and don't make their problems your problem. Be generous. Be careful about discussing them. Enrollment is important. Letting them fight your battles is unethical and dangerous.
23. Service generally counts for very little at most institutions. Make sure it is worth it. Consider that tenure is like a jar with 100 coins. You need 80 coins to get tenure. Fifty of those coins are gold for scholarship, 40 are red for teaching and ten are green for service. They are generally not interchangeable, although more research might compensate for less teaching or less service. Once you get the 10 coins for service, whatever else you do doesn't count for anything. In the past, departments used to protect younger faculty from heavy service responsibilities. Some places still do. Thoughtless academic organizations that dump service work on junior faculty under the idea of "Getting the young people involved" should consider that this can come at a real cost for them. Not to mention what it does for the organization's credibility.
24. Community service can be important if it relates to your publications and research. This can be a significant opportunity for research funding. Real-world impact is vital today and funding agencies are beginning to make it a priority.
25. You can accomplish a lot if you don't care who gets the credit.
26. Pick your battles. Some things are worth fighting for.

27. Don't expect that everything positive that you accomplish will be appreciated by your organization and your colleagues. In some cases, it will be resented or even attacked. The wrong lesson from this is to stop trying.
28. The culture wars are dangerous. Stay away.
29. There are people on college faculties who are (1) not very bright, (2) lazy and/or (3) deeply disturbed. Act accordingly.
30. Know when to leave. You stay too long and you are trapped. I am always amazed by people who could never be hired at another institution but criticize those who can and do move on.
31. Having another source of income can be helpful. While it shouldn't detract from your primary focus, it can give you freedom.
32. No one likes to be criticized, but it's part of academia. Libel and Slander are something else. Opinions are not facts, and impugning someone's integrity is a very serious matter.
33. Work hard, be generous, show up, and take pride in getting your profession to advance. All those things your mom told you, she was right. Be polite and be professional.
34. Go to Commencement. You owe it to your students and their families.
35. Take the long view. It's a marathon, not a sprint. There is no such thing as a perfect job.

36.Be sure to remember that there has to be a life in your academic life. Self-care is important.

Have a hobby. Don't sacrifice your family. Reward yourself!

37.You may find that, as you grow and develop, your dreams may change. This is good.

38.What is true today might not be true tomorrow. Higher Education is in flux. Universities change and so do departments.

39. This can be the best job in the world, despite any drawbacks. Treat it like the honor that it is.

How to Publish

1.Publishing is critically important. More is always better but it matters how you do it. A critical element is a reasonably well articulated research program. This means becoming an expert. This is critical for two reasons. First, it meets university expectations. Being well-rounded is great for college applications, but deadly for faculty. Second, it is efficient. If you have to start at square one for every project, you won't accomplish very much. There are two things that you don't want to be (1) a dilatant and (2) a professional coauthor. You want to be building something.

2.Publish your work. Collaborate, but a substantial number of articles (Usually at least half) *need to be clearly your own work*. Many schools divide the weight of an article by the number of co-authors (e.g.: 1 article/10 coauthors=you get 10% of an article).

3. Promote your work. Understand that you are building something, not accumulating a pile of citations and line items. A mass of unrelated work does not make you a scholar.
4. Be wary of unknown journals.
5. Document your work. Get an ORCID account and a Google Scholar Page. Check your profiles in other places. Report mistakes and oversights.
6. Create a pipeline for your publications. Have a series of publication projects in different stages of development. Have a spreadsheet or project management system to track your progress.
7. Do a little research and submit to a venue that is appropriate for your work. If it isn't, you are wasting the editor's and possibly the reviewer's time. If you are unsure, ask.
8. Almost all journals and quite a few other venues use editorial managers. These can be tricky.
9. The editor will either reject your paper (called a desk reject) or send it out to reviewers.
10. The reviews will be provided to you, usually with a summary from the editor. Read them carefully. Some reviews are unfair or biased. If the reviewer doesn't understand the paper, it often means that you didn't explain it properly. I find it helpful to read the manuscript to myself out loud. A good editor can be useful.
11. Based on the reviewer's comments, the editor can accept it, ask for revisions or reject it. If the editor asks for revisions, carefully describe what you did to meet every point.
12. If they don't accept it, read the comments carefully and make whatever changes are needed. Resubmit the revised article to another source. Be honest with yourself—is this good enough to publish?

13. Make sure that you keep copies of everything.

14. Open access means that an article is free to anyone. Many journals offer open access for a fee. In some journals, open access is a norm or even a requirement. Funders are beginning to require open access for funded research.

15. I won't publish anything until I'm sure that everything is done properly and I can document that it is done properly.

Final Thoughts

What was true for my generation of academics won't necessarily be true for yours. Building the new higher education is your job. This could be exciting and it could be terrifying or both. Take the leap!

Terminology

American Association of Universities (AAU): This is a highly selective group of universities with high levels of research activity (<https://www.aau.edu/>).

Carnegie Classification: This is a system for classifying universities based on the type of work they do (https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php).

Citations: A citation is a mention of one document in another. They are one measure of publication impact. Citations are collected by systems such as Web of Science, Google Scholar and Scopus. While more is better, the H and H10 indexes are important ways to evaluate the contribution of citations.

Endowment: Most academic institutions have an endowment. This consists of money or other valuables set aside to insure the viability of the institution. Cabril (2023) provides a nice introduction (<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/what-is-an-endowment-for-a-college>).

Head Count: This means the number of students or faculty who participate in a program. It is often divided into Full Time Head Count and Part time head count. FTE or Full Time Equivalent tells you how head count translates into a hypothetical full-time student or faculty member.

Line Items: Generally, books, articles, book chapters, monographs and other things on your CV.

Regional Accreditors: These are geographically defined organizations that are the primary accreditors for most of the colleges in their domain. The ability to participate in federal financial aid depends on regional accreditation. There are also a large number of specialty accreditation organizations. While accreditation is important, it means that you met minimum standards.

Tenure: Tenure is granted after a period of time and is a right to continued employment. Tenured faculty can still be laid off or fired, but the institution must go through specific steps to remove a tenured faculty member.

Job Resources

Chronicle of Higher Education https://chroniclevitae.com/job_search/new

HERC <https://www.hercjobs.org/>

Higher Education Jobs <https://www.higheredjobs.com/>

Inside Higher Education <https://careers.insidehighered.com/>

Times/Higher Education Jobs

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/en-us/>

Helpful Resources

AAUP Salary Study <https://www.aaup.org/2019-20-faculty-compensation-survey-results>

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College Finance Trackers

<https://hechingerreport.org/analysis-hundreds-of-colleges-and-universities-show-financial-warning-signs/>

<https://www.bain.com/insights/how-financially-stable-is-your-college-interactive/>

Nonprofit organizations will generally file a Form 990 with the IRS. There are several places that you can get a copy and it might provide you with an understanding of where the organization is going.