

# the academic work search process.

## For PhDs and Post Docs

[www.careers.utoronto.ca](http://www.careers.utoronto.ca)



University of Toronto Career Centre



@UofTCareerCtr



# Introduction

The academic work search process can often be time consuming, lengthy, and intense requiring proactive preparation, an organized action plan, and persistence in obtaining a position that will fit your academic career goals. The suggestions below will assist you in your academic work search and are recommended to be used in connection with departmental and disciplinary advice.

## Academic work search preparation

### 1. Identify your preferences

The first step in the academic work search process is to determine your academic focus and the type of position that is in line with your academic career goals. The following categories and questions can guide you in this process:

#### Position

What type of positions suit and interests you: post-doctoral; contractual; tenure stream; teaching stream; or research associate? Do you need additional research experience and more opportunities to publish? Do you like teaching more than research? Do you need to gain more teaching experience? The answers to these questions will help you determine your focus.

#### Academic institution

Is your focus a research intensive or teaching intensive institution? Are the values and mission of the academic institution in line with your own? Educate yourself on the institution before applying and be realistic about what you can do and where you can apply.

#### Geographical location

Are you comfortable in a small town or do you prefer the convenience of big cities? Do you prefer a region that welcomes diversity in religion, gender, and culture? You may have your preferred geographical areas, but as a beginning academic, you may need to be flexible so as to ensure you gain the necessary experience needed to build your academic career.

#### Personal circumstances

Do you need to consider employment opportunities for a partner or the distance from an aging relative or a family that can't relocate immediately? Would a contractual position work better for you instead of a tenure track position because of your professional goals or life circumstances?

### 2. Consult with your department

Consult with your department about where to look for academic work as well as to determine what is involved in the academic hiring process. This involves inquiring about best practices by division as they can vary widely, some things you might want to consider include common dossier materials, formats, research and teaching statement lengths and content for your field. Appendix A provides some best practices by division.

The following suggestions may be helpful in gaining departmental advice and knowledge:



### Find a mentor

It may be helpful to have more than one mentor to guide you through the academic work search process. In addition to your supervisor and or members of your committee, consider connecting with the last professor hired in your department to learn more about their work search process. Ask for their feedback on your application documents; find out how he/she got tenure; ask to see their dossier. Outside of your department's recent hires and junior faculty members, you may also find people in other departments or academic institutions that you have met during your studies that can also play the role of a mentor.

### Attend job talks

Attend job talks at your own department and pay attention to presentation styles that work. Look for evidence of how to engage an audience of graduate students and faculty, which may not be the group to whom you have had experience lecturing. Note the questions that were asked at the job talk and how well they were answered. If possible, follow up with senior faculty members who were also in attendance and find out what they thought. This will help you prepare for your own job talk.

### Participate on a search committee

Volunteer to be on the committee, or at the very least attend the events that are open to you, such as social functions and job talks where you can be exposed to the academic hiring process. Being a committee member is a lot of work, as you may spend many hours reading and reviewing dossiers and accompanying materials; however, it will be one of the best investments of time you can make in establishing your academic career.

## 3. Prepare your documents

Gather information about the different documents, and review samples to get ideas on how to create your own. Have your documents reviewed by mentors and supervisors.



# Strategies for finding academic positions

## 1. Websites

Refer to Appendix B: Work search resources

## 2. Conference Interviews

If universities in your discipline interview at large annual conventions, register for the conferences and arrange interviews.

## 3. Your immediate and broader academic community

### Who to connect with

- Speak with your supervisor and committee members to gain advice on how to navigate the job search. Connect with other professors in your department, particularly those recently hired as they would be able to inform you of their recent search. As well, connect with other professors from related disciplines (especially if you are in an interdisciplinary field of study). Build relationships with other graduate students in your department — they can be a great resource, as they might also be on the market and might know of opportunities. For your longer term networking, ensure you keep in contact with them. Lastly, ask the administrative staff in your department for suggestions of websites in your field and any listservs for job announcements.

- Attend events within the larger university academic community and consider participating in committees for a variety of academic purposes (e.g. interdisciplinary curriculum, search for professors or deans), in order to meet academics and become a presence within your immediate academic community. As well, joining and attending professional and/or graduate student associations will allow you to meet peers, make contacts and build academic relationships that may be valuable to your search.

### How to approach connecting

- Become an active member of your immediate academic community. Being proactive involves making the time to get to know administrative staff, professors, colleagues and peers within your department and adjacent areas of work.

- Being genuine and sincere requires that you create a professional and intellectual image of yourself so that you can be referred to opportunities that may come up such as participating in collaborative work in journals, research assistantships, or special department projects. Building professional academic relationships involves genuinely meeting and interacting with people because you want to be a part of the academic community.

- Become an active member of the larger academic community. Attend all job talks, department seminars and symposia even if unrelated to your field to get to know people and expand your intellectual network. This will give you the opportunity to meet with other graduate students, faculty members and visiting professors who may be in attendance. Interact with these individuals on an intellectual level; inquire about their research, presentations, and experience. Ensure that you follow-up on conversations that you initiate at these events.



- Outside of your department it is important to form relationships with others especially if your work is interdisciplinary. Attend conferences, become involved with professional associations, volunteer to organize conferences and academic events, become involved in editing journal articles. When you are considering how to create a presence, go beyond the obvious (e.g. events related to your immediate work). Be creative; participate in anything related to the department or university.

- It is important to maintain the relationships you make at all levels, so that if a position becomes available at a particular academic institution, you have someone there to connect with for advice. Remember however, that not all connections will lead to something.



# The application package

## How to customize

Customize all your application documents. Research the institution and department to which you are applying to and determine how your experience would fit in to their research, teaching and departmental strategic planning needs. A good understanding of the focus and mandate of the department will provide you with clues on how to demonstrate your fit and eligibility. Finding out the information and tailoring your documents to the needs of the department may be time consuming but may increase your likelihood of being short listed. For example, for teaching heavy positions committees will be concerned with your pedagogical approach and performance, and seek such evidence in your application. For research focused positions, they will be more concerned about your research potential, proposal and achievements including funding and grant experience, publications and/or publication potential.

Refer to Appendix A for best practices by division and consult with your department.

## The documents

### The curriculum vitae (cv)

A curriculum vitae, also known as a cv, is designed to present a complete profile of your academic and professional achievements, publications, and scholarly interests, as well as the skills developed through academic degrees and related teaching and or research experience. As your academic profile develops over time, your cv grows in length, serving as a comprehensive record of your scholarly progress and history.

### The cover letter

While the cv includes all the relevant information about your qualifications and achievements, the cover letter can enhance or detract from the impression you make and allows the committee to hear from you in a more direct manner. It can also help the members of the committee evaluate you on that extremely important but elusive criterion of “fit.” The cover letter demonstrates what you know about the academic institution and what you have learned from your research. It is important that your letter be tailored to the position and institution in question. The cover letter is also implicitly a writing sample, it can be as long as two pages.

### Thesis abstract

The abstract allows the committee to understand your thesis in more detail. Some departments may request an excerpt from the dissertation, others may ask for the entire document. If a chapter is included, it should be accompanied by some description of the significance of the work and its implications for your future research.

### Writing sample

An academic writing sample is a commonly requested component of the application package, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Reprints of published articles make excellent writing samples, since they demonstrate your writing ability, affirm that you are publishing, and highlight the significance of your research. An excerpt of your dissertation can also serve as a writing sample.

### Research statement

This statement may be requested as a separate document to be included as part of the application package or it may be in conjunction with the submission of a research dossier.



The research statement outlines your recent, current and future research initiatives, and can also include information on funding possibilities for future research projects. This is typically a 1- or 2-page document that is separate from your cover letter. It is important to research the academic institution and department you are applying to so that you tailor your statement appropriately and connect your research agenda to their needs.

### Statement of teaching philosophy

A teaching statement outlines your philosophy of teaching and learning; describes your teaching approach and provides proof of your teaching experience and methodologies. This statement also outlines your anticipated approaches to teaching, and just like the cover letter and research statement, the teaching statement should be tailored to the institution you are applying to.

When preparing a teaching statement, it is important to examine your teaching experience and articulate your commitment to teaching by including specific examples of teaching strategies, assignments, and discussions, as a way of helping your reader visualize the learning environment you are describing. There should be some connection between your research and your teaching statement, and how your research reflects, interacts and informs your teaching. As well, your statement should also include some information around the courses you would like to teach as well as what new courses you can offer the department. This information needs to be institution specific; therefore, research into the institution you are applying to is necessary. Typically the teaching statement is 1 or 2 pages in length, unless otherwise requested. There is no standard outline to follow when developing your statement, which can make it a challenge to write.

### Teaching dossier

A teaching dossier or portfolio is a professional document summarizing your teaching experience and accomplishments. The teaching dossier may include some or all of the following components:

- statement of teaching philosophy
- summary of teaching accomplishments and experience
- sample teaching materials (course materials, syllabi, curriculum development, web projects, grading information)
- evidence of teaching excellence (evaluations from students, peers, supervisors; letters of reference; teaching awards)
- professional development (seminars/conferences, training, mentoring)

Similar to the teaching statement, there is no standard format for the teaching dossier. There are variations across discipline areas, therefore it is necessary to familiarize yourself with the best practices in your field (see Appendix A) and consult with your department supervisor and or mentors.

### Reference letters

Typically, there is a minimum of three reference letters required. It is not uncommon for institutions to now ask for four to six reference letters. When choosing referees, consider the following:

- who can discuss your work in a relevant way to the position;
- who has authority and can assess your work; and
- who can discuss your potential with enough depth and breadth.

People such as your advisor, committee member, or someone who has assisted you in teaching or research are good choices. It is best to solicit letters from those who know you well, however if your work has been widely published or especially significant, it may be valuable to have a letter from a specialist who doesn't necessarily know you but may speak on the importance of your work. The length, content and enthusiasm of a letter describing the breadth and depth of your research and/or teaching are crucial to being short listed. As well, your recent accomplishments and discoveries should be highlighted.



Approach referees by asking if they are able to provide you with a positive letter of reference and allow them to easily decline if they can't, or are not willing to do so. When someone has agreed to write a letter for you, offer them the posting you are applying to, your cv and letter (if possible), and potentially some ideas about what you would like them to focus on. Potentially, you could have a quick meeting to discuss your future goals such as the type of position you seek, institution you see yourself at, and goals for the next five years. Be prepared and give your referees as much advance notice as possible. Start coordinating letters in the summer if you are applying to positions in the fall. Allow your referee a minimum of two weeks to draft you a letter.





# Academic work search timeline and next steps

## Timeline

The hiring cycle for many universities recruiting for academic roles typically begins in the fall of every academic year and runs through to the spring of the following year. Given this, your search will probably be more intense in the fall and winter months where you will be spending time looking for work opportunities, researching and customizing your dossier, attending conference interviews and networking within your academic community. With interviews typically taking place in the late winter and early spring, the focus of your work search will shift to preparing for your interviews. This cycle differs by discipline and type of work sought, as recruiting for post-doctoral, research associate roles and contractual lecturing roles happens at all times.

## Next steps

The checklist below will assist you in determining the appropriate next steps in preparing for and beginning your academic work search.

- Begin working on a cv far in advance of any deadlines, and start researching universities and learning about their departments, philosophy, student demographics, campus size, etc.
- Work on cover letters and dossier materials for specific positions for which you intend to apply to.
- Attend a cv tutorial, as well as have someone in your department review your documents for content and accuracy of detail.
- Inform your supervisor, committee members, or other faculty with whom you are acquainted that you are beginning your search. Let them know of the academic post you are seeking. Let your referees know that you will need letters, giving them as much notice as possible. Offer them guidance on the type of positions you will be applying to, whether focused on teaching or research, and preferred subject areas.
- Register online with the Graduate Dossier Service (GDS) at the Career Centre which is a depository of reference letters and transcripts kept on file to be sent out to advertised positions in academic institutions.
- If your discipline interviews at large annual conventions, register for the conferences and arrange interviews.
- Once conference or campus interviews have been secured, consider making a counselling appointment at the Career Centre to discuss your academic interview strategies.
- Practice your job talk with mentors, supervisors, and peers, especially if they have been part of a hiring committee.
- Research, research and research some more. Focus on gathering information on the academic institutions you are considering or will be interviewed for. Also, read as much as you can in journals, publications, and articles that will prepare you for an academic career. Lack of preparation may be perceived as a reflection of your level of interest in the position.
- Once you have successfully accepted a position, inform and thank the people who have supported you, including your referees, any faculty or committee members who made phone calls on your behalf, and anyone else whose assistance you have drawn on.



# Appendix A: Best practices by division

Hiring practices in divisions and within the disciplines vary substantially. Practices in the sciences — both physical and life — operate on a set of assumptions and basic requirements about candidates' qualifications that are different from those in the humanities and social sciences. This section provides information on practices within the different disciplines of which students will need to be aware, in preparing their documents. Once again, it is recommended that you follow up directly with your department to confirm practices.

## Physical and life sciences

In the sciences, post-docs are a fact of life. The reason a post-doc weighs so heavily is that new faculty are expected to hit the ground running: they have to be able to set up their own lab and experiments, and post-docs provide would-be professors with this experience. The benefit of a post-doc to a graduate student is that it allows him or her to change fields slightly, or to work in a second area of specialization. Such work experiences should, therefore, figure prominently on your cv.

The research group or school you come from can powerfully affect your chances of being hired. Some research groups have a certain cachet and are known for producing strong academics or for doing particularly good work. While the reputation of your research group or supervisor can be an asset, it is important that your research proposal is strong, relevant and realistic, and that it distinguishes you from your group or supervisor. Equally important is your ability to speak authoritatively about how much your proposed research program will cost and your thoughts on how to fund your study. The ability to raise funds through grants and fellowships, and a proven track record in this area, is an increasingly important factor when making hiring decisions, since a department wants faculty who are able to garner funding. A research dossier composed of a research proposal that outlines future directions and reprints of published articles is very valuable, and most applicants send this type of portfolio even though it is not strictly required.

Letters of reference are also a key component of the initial application. Because science departments do not tend to use annual disciplinary conventions as an initial screening stage and an opportunity to meet the candidates that have applied for the position, letters of reference provide a hiring committee with a sense of who you are. A certain amount of hiring, or at least interviewing, takes place through solicited applications and through direct faculty-to-faculty contact. Members of the hiring committee might contact faculty they know at other departments and ask them to recommend promising students. Good references are therefore very helpful.

The writing style of the teaching statement you choose (i.e. narrative, prose, quotes, question and answer) will be a reflection of your personal style as well as an indication of the advice you have received from your department colleagues around best practices in your field.

The dissertation is not a prominent element of an applicant's profile. It is important only to the extent that it has been published, and the general assumption is that you will have managed to get two to four publications out of your dissertation. In fact, the number of publications based on the PhD (as well as publications from the post-doc) is a key criterion for hiring. Though the debate between quantity of publications and quality, and where articles are published, rages on, even those who argue that quality is the focus emphasize the importance of publications and acknowledge that there is an expectation that an applicant has been productive with his or her research by publishing it.

When citing publications, follow the format used for most of the sciences. Since so much of the focus in the application is on degrees, research, publications and other information that is all contained within the cv, the cover letter may not be as detailed, as it can be in the humanities and social sciences, where it tends to incorporate teaching and research.



## Humanities and social sciences

At the University of Toronto, some of the humanities departments have services such as placement officers, seminars, and information packages designed to assist students in their job search. Take advantage of these services, because in addition to providing you with useful information, they also spread word of your search throughout your department. A certain amount of interviewing is initiated by word of mouth, when faculty tell faculty at other schools about their students, so ensuring that your supervisor and committee members know about your search and what you are seeking can be very helpful.

A strong dissertation is essential in the humanities and social sciences. It is important to highlight if and when you will be publishing your dissertation, and if your dissertation will be published as a book. Mention this information in the cover letter as well as on the cv. Some students publish several articles instead of a book, and if this is the method you have chosen, make clear that your dissertation is publishable.

While new hires in humanities and social sciences departments, at least at research-intensive institutions, generally have a few publications to their credit, expectations about publication are not as high as they are in the sciences. One professor emphasized that while publications help, the department is looking for research potential. If you are beginning the application process and are anxious about a lack of publications, one way to compensate and demonstrate that all-important potential is by doing other things that prove commitment to your discipline and participation in scholarly activities: conference presentations, for example, can help in this respect.

Scholarly conferences are significant not only academically but also as a networking opportunity, and some schools, particularly American ones, conduct preliminary interviews at annual conferences. Often schools will use suites in the hotel or conference centre where the conference itself is held. If you will be interviewed at an annual conference such as the MLA, ensure that you make clear and definite arrangements with the schools beforehand, so there is no confusion at the conference itself.

Be prepared to discuss your teaching experience or teaching potential with as much enthusiasm and authority as you bring to a discussion of your research interests. You will be asked questions about research during your job talk. While many applicants include information about their research directly in their cover letter and refrain from including a separate outline of their research interests, a statement of teaching interest or philosophy is very common, even if teaching is already mentioned in the cover letter.



## Tips for students graduating from interdisciplinary programs

The growing availability and popularity of inter-disciplinary programs mean that there are a substantial number of students who are graduating with degrees that might not fit neatly into one category. While this eclecticism can lend diversity and originality to your work and research, graduating from an interdisciplinary program also means that you have to know how to present your research so that you can find a fit within more traditional departments.

Key to finding that fit is deciding which area you intend to focus on and then attending conferences and submitting articles to the appropriate scholarly journals. Once you focus your efforts, you will share many of the qualifications and experience of students who have done their PhD in the discipline to which you intend to apply. When you can identify the discipline you wish to work in, you can direct your research accordingly and market yourself as a member of that discipline, not only through your research but also through networking.

Finally, keep in mind that although there are challenges that go along with working in an interdisciplinary program, there are also substantial benefits. If you are able to convincingly highlight, through your cv and cover letter, why you are qualified to work within a particular department or discipline, then your interdisciplinary work gives you an edge and adds diversity and richness to your qualifications and the type and number of things that you can do.



# Appendix B: Work search resources

## Work search sites

**Academic360** ► [www.academic360.com](http://www.academic360.com)

A list of job search sites indexed by study specialty with links to websites.

**Academic Keys** ► [www.AcademicKeys.com](http://www.AcademicKeys.com)

Academic Keys provides academic job postings for a variety of disciplines.

**Academic Careers Online** ► [www.AcademicCareers.com](http://www.AcademicCareers.com)

Positions include faculty, research, post doc, adjunct, administrative, and senior management positions at (community) colleges, universities, and research institutes around the world.

**Academic Jobs Wiki** ► [academicjobs.wikia.com/wiki/Academic\\_Jobs\\_Wiki](http://academicjobs.wikia.com/wiki/Academic_Jobs_Wiki)

Centralizes information about the academic job search using user-submitted job postings from around the world. An academic job-posting aggregator.

**The Chronicle of Higher Education** ► [www.chroniclevitae.com/](http://www.chroniclevitae.com/)

Positions in many disciplines of both academic and non-academic nature are posted here, praised as the number one news source for those in higher education, especially for career advice.

**University Affairs** ► [www.universityaffairs.ca](http://www.universityaffairs.ca)

Canadian career ads and advice for PhDs on the academic job search.

**HigherEdJobs.com** ► [www.higheredjobs.com](http://www.higheredjobs.com)

Search and apply for positions in higher education from over 800 different American colleges and universities.

**AcademicWork.ca** ► [www.academicwork.ca](http://www.academicwork.ca)

This site is part of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and is a great source for academic careers in Canada and abroad.

**Science Jobs** ► [www.jobs.newscientist.com](http://www.jobs.newscientist.com)

From New Scientist Magazine, search for the latest jobs in science in Canada, United States, and Europe.

**Science, Math, and Engineering Career Resources** ► [www.phds.org](http://www.phds.org)

This site allows you to search for academic and non-academic positions in science, math, and engineering. It also provides useful tips on searching for work and salary information.

**Science Careers** ► [www.sciencecareers.sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencecareers.sciencemag.org)

Faculty and post-doctoral positions listed, primarily for USA.

**University Job Bank** ► [www.UniversityJobs.com](http://www.UniversityJobs.com)

Search for faculty jobs as well as postdocs and science jobs.



**American Association of Community Colleges Careerline** ► [www.aacc.nche.edu](http://www.aacc.nche.edu)

Faculty and administrative job listings at two-year institutions. Under Resources, select Career Center and Job Bank.

**Jobs.ac.uk** ► [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)

Features academic job listings in Great Britain and around the world.

## Post-doctoral fellowships for PhDs

**Post Doc Jobs** ► [www.postdocjobs.com](http://www.postdocjobs.com)

Find post-doctoral jobs across multiple disciplines, mainly in the United States.

**Nature Jobs and Nature Jobs Graduate Channel** ► [www.naturejobs.com](http://www.naturejobs.com)

Here you will find the latest graduate and post-doc opportunities plus fellowships and PhD Studentships from top global organizations.

**Science Magazine** ► <http://recruit.sciencemag.org/>

Access post-doctoral position listings in the sciences, receive job alerts, post your CV/ résumé, browse through employer profiles and links, and read articles of advice.

**University Job Bank** ► [www.UjobBank.com](http://www.UjobBank.com)

Search for post-doctoral positions from hundreds of American higher education institutions and other organizations. Post 'Private' résumés and apply for jobs online.

**The Scientist** ► [www.the-scientist.com](http://www.the-scientist.com)

You can view listings of post-doctoral positions in the sciences.

## Additional online resources

**Assembling your Application Materials** by Carleton College, Science Education Resource Center with advice applicable to multiple disciplines (while of course verifying it with your field) ► <http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/careerprep/jobsearch/application.html>

The Teaching Dossier" by University of Toronto, Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation ► <http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/topics/documenting-teaching/teaching-dossier.htm>

Preparing for an Academic Career in the Geosciences" by Carleton College, Science Education Resource Center ► <http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/careerprep/index.html>

The Hiring Process From the Other Side" by University of California Berkeley, Career Center ► <http://career.berkeley.edu/Phds/PhDhiring.stm>

A list of Career Centre services, resources, workshops, and tutorials can be found on the Career Centre website ► <http://www.careers.utoronto.ca>.

