

The Academic Job Market

Summary of the job-market information session on Thursday, June 8, 2000, organized by Matthias Doepke, Andrea Eisfeldt, Enric Fernandez, Ed Vytlačil, and Sibel Yelten.

Things to get:

- Flu shot (get it at least two months before the interviews – the flu season coincides with the job market!)
- Vita package from previous years (Julie has copies. Useful for designing your own vita.)
- Ken McLaughlin's paper "The Job-Market for Ph.D. Economists," available in Social Sciences copy store (a complete overview of the job-market process from 1985 – little has changed since then)
- Cheap copy shop (in our year, we had a deal with Office Max on Broadway for 2 cents per copy for everyone on the market)
- Personal web page (often people will want to download your paper)
- Lots of credit cards (you will have to pay for all your tickets etc. long before you get reimbursed – a combined credit line of \$10,000 is not too much)
- Cheap calling card (you will permanently find yourself checking your e-mail and your answering machine – try IDT Global Call or something similarly cheap)
- Good carry-on luggage (never check anything!)
- A nice job-market outfit
- Novels (you will need a lot of distraction)
- Envelopes and mailing labels (Word, WordPerfect have templates for many types of mailing labels).
- Fax Software like Mightyfax (for sending faxes) and an account at a service like www.efax.com (you get a fax number for free, and faxes are forwarded to your e-mail address – very useful especially once those offers start coming in).

Time Line:

- August: Register for AEA meetings. The headquarter hotel (where most interviews take place) fills within days, so it a good idea to register early.
- By October
 - Finish job-market paper
- Early October
 - One-page vita to Julie (she sends a packet of vitas to hundreds of potential employers)
 - Ask advisors for references
- Early November
 - Talk to advisors about where to apply
 - Get addresses of potential employers from JOE, Inomics, etc.
 - Also apply to schools that do not advertise, get addresses from their web page

- Create mail-merge file, make sure references get sent out in time
 - Finish and duplicate packets (cover letter, longer vita, job-market paper)
- Before Thanksgiving
 - Send out packets (December 1 is the most common deadline)
- December
 - Wait for interviews
 - Talk advisors into making phone calls
 - Maybe early flyouts (IMF)
- Early January
 - Interviews at AEA meeting in New Orleans
- Mid-January until early March
 - Flyouts
- Mid-February until late March
 - Offers
- After accepting:
 - Send thank-you mails

Tips and Tricks:

In the fall:

- Make sure that you have a well-defined field, or at least, make it appear as if you had one. Many departments hire by field (a macro person, an empirical IO person and things like that), and if your field is not clearly defined, you will fit none of the profiles schools are looking for.
- Many of the faculty members who interview you at the AEA meetings will read your vita right before or even while interviewing you. Therefore you have to be prepared to talk about everything you put on the vita, especially working papers.
- Most of your interviews will not be generated by someone looking carefully at your packet, but by direct communication between professors (who is coming out of Chicago this year?). It is therefore extremely important that your advisors are ready to mention your name and have a clear idea what your thesis is about. They need to be reminded, so show up often to talk to them.
- The whole experience can be scary and stressful, and talking too much to other candidates can make it worse (especially if you are waiting for the first call and they tell you about the 25 interviews they got). Therefore many people feel that it is better not to discuss the market while it happens with other people on the market.
- On the academic market, it is completely unnecessary to use special expensive paper for the vita. This is different in the private market.
- Opinions differ on the optimal number of interviews. Everyone agrees, however, that it is essential to have at least 15 minutes between any two interviews if you want to have a chance to show up in time. To have more than seven or eight interviews on a given day is exhausting, but then, you need to do this only once. With breaks between the interviews, you can fit in up to about 30 interviews if you use all four days.

- Prepare the interviews well. Be able to talk about own research for 2, 5, 10, or 20 minutes. Be able to put your research into a broader perspective, have ideas for future projects. You also should prepare some questions (teaching, research support, seminar system etc.) to ask the interviewers.
- Practice interviews with other students, and sign up for interview practice with faculty members at Chicago.
- Practice your job-market talk. Flyouts can start right after the meetings, so you have to prepare in advance.
- Get as much information as possible about the schools you are talking to and the interviewers. Sometimes you can relate your own work to research one of the interviewers has done. Often you will find out who is doing the interviewing only at the meetings. It therefore helps to have a notebook computer with internet connection to do some research on this at night while at the meetings.

The interviews at the AEA meetings:

- Generally, the interviews are tiring, but the overall atmosphere is actually very nice – you are treated with respect, and most interviewers are genuinely interested in your work.
- You need to preserve energy during the day. Have food (power bars etc.) and water with you. Use anything that helps you to stay energized and focused.
- The general structure of an interview: After handshakes and some smalltalk, the first part of the interview is all about your research. You will start to give your prefabricated speech, at some point the interviewers will start to ask questions. Your job-market paper will be the focus of the discussion, but be prepared to say at least a little bit about other work or future projects. This part of the interview is the most important one and lasts anywhere from ten to thirty minutes. After that, you often get some other questions (what would you like to teach, why did you apply here – a frequent question at lower-ranked schools). Finally, the interviewers will start to tell you things about their school. Generally, the lower the ranking of the school, the more time will be spent on this, up to the point that it feels like the roles are reversed and you are interviewing them.
- Sometimes you may be asked about other students at Chicago. Use this as an opportunity to advertise other students, especially if you know who is going to be interviewed by the same school. This makes you look like a good colleague, and being familiar with the work of other students demonstrates that your interest in economics goes beyond your own research. Cross-promotion of other students is very helpful for students from Chicago as a whole, especially given the fact that Chicago does not rank its students and many schools are genuinely confused about the merits of students from Chicago.
- Take notes directly after the interviews, remember whom you talked to and who said what. This may come in handy once you meet the same people again at the flyout.
- Always appear cheerful and excited and enthusiastic. You will have to fake it at the end of each day, but you still have to try.
- Have some questions prepared. Teaching situation, workshop system, maybe have something specific about the department.

- There are often rumors about strange and hard questions that you might be asked in an interview (What were the five most interesting papers in field X that you read last year? What is your opinion on paper Y by Z?). In fact, questions of this kind almost never occur, so there is no point in preparing for them.
- The lower the rank of the school, the more the advertising shifts from you to them. Sometimes instead of talking about your work, you just get to listen what a great place they are. Since you will get tired of talking about your own work, such interviews are very pleasant.
- After interviews, send e-mails to your advisors with an update on your situation. Your advisors will continue to get phone calls and talk to faculty members from other schools, and it is essential that they always know how you are doing on the market.

Scheduling flyouts:

- When you get a call, set a preliminary date. After you get more calls, try to organize a workable schedule with interviews in the same area in the same week (just one trip to the West Coast, just one trip to Europe, etc.). The East Coast is still close enough for day trips from Chicago, so it is not as important to organize regional swings in that area.
- You can initiate contact when you are interested in a flyout, especially if you already have flyouts in the same area. Give them some time to move first, though.
- Always buy full-fare, fully refundable airline tickets. You get reimbursed anyway, and most likely you will need the flexibility at some point (change of schedule due to new flyouts, cancelled flights etc.). Without refundable tickets this is much more of a hassle, and it is hard to find someone to pay for all those exchange fees.
- Make sure to keep each and every receipt. Most of your expenses will be reimbursed by the schools you visit, and the rest you can take off your taxes.
- Don't take rejections personally – hiring involves a lot of departmental politics, therefore not being invited for a flyout can have many different reasons, many of which are unrelated to you and your work. Only if you don't get any flyouts at all ask your advisor to call people who interviewed you, in order to find out what is going wrong.

The flyouts:

- Travel light, use cabin luggage only. Take two presentable outfits with you. Often faculty members will give you some of their own papers or even books, so leave some extra space.
- The typical flyout: You arrive the night before. The day starts with a faculty member picking you up for breakfast. After that, there are half-hour interviews with faculty members all day until about 3 p.m. In between the interviews is a lunch break, usually you will go to the faculty club with faculty members. The seminar is usually from 3:30 to 5 p.m. After a little break, you have drinks at the faculty club, and then dinner at some nice local restaurant. Depending on the temperament of the department, that could be the end of the day, or you continue drinking in bars until late.

- The format of the interviews varies a lot. Some are like the AEA interviews. Some faculty members are more aggressive and try to test your knowledge. Often you have the chance to ask most of the questions and learn more about the department, especially when talking to junior faculty who are also relatively new at the place. Sometimes you can get someone to show you around campus. You have some control whether you want to talk about your own research, or ask questions about the research of the person you are talking to. Asking questions can be a good strategy, because most people enjoy talking about their own work. On the other hand, you want to look smart, and that can be easier if the discussion stays within the field that you are most familiar with.
- Be prepared for the interviewers. Often you get the schedule only the day before, so it is a good idea to have a laptop while traveling to do research on the web the night before. It makes a very good impression if you know about their research, or maybe even have a comment or question on a recent paper.
- The seminar is all important. Target it to a general audience, as most faculty members are not specialized in your field. Make sure everyone understands what the economic problem is and why it is interesting. After some flyouts, giving the seminar and answering the questions that can come up (there is only a finite number of them) becomes an almost automatic process. You should always be nice and polite, of course, but be sure to maintain control of the seminar. The amount of questions and talking done by the audience varies enormously from school to school. Therefore it is important that you design your talk such that you can add and subtract parts as needed. You want to be sure to get to the results, but it is also bad to finish early. There is a steep learning curve during the first flyouts, so try not to fly to your favorite school first.
- At dinner, the profession trades gossip. It is helpful to be informed about what is happening at Chicago (who is being hired, who is leaving, who is or is not getting tenure etc.). They will find that interesting, and you look like an insider.
- To relieve stress, try to enjoy the nice parts of the flyouts. You get to eat in nice restaurants, sample that single-malt Scotch you always wanted to try, and you get to see many interesting places. Sometimes you will spend a weekend on the road. You might want to rent a car and drive around to get familiar with the area.

Offers:

- Sometimes you can get an offer already at the flyout, but most often it will take longer as the school looks at more candidates. Most of the time you get a two-week deadline, but often the deadline can be extended. Never accept an offer right away, take your time to talk it over with your advisors, family, and friends.
- While the base salary is generally fixed, many other aspects of your contract are negotiable (teaching load, research budget, summer support etc.). Often schools will make the “basic” offer first, but are willing to give you more if you ask for it. Negotiating is especially effective if you have already other offers with better conditions.

Questions about this document? Send e-mail to:
Matthias Doepke <doepke@econ.ucla.edu>