

## VIII) Preparing for an Interview

Congratulations! You've been notified that you will have an interview. How do you prepare?

**A) Preparing for the Visit:** Do your homework and get a sense of who is in the department and what they do, and what the environment of the department might be (ask your committee members or other faculty members if they have any information on the department that might be useful). Don't wade into Department politics yourself during an interview, but knowledge of any particular divisions that may influence preferences for a job can be helpful for you to avoid stepping on toes. Sometimes if you meet with graduate students during an interview they may clue you in on such issues; it's generally not professional to ask yourself about department controversies, though can be acceptable to inquire during the interview "is the Department a collegial atmosphere"?

### **B) Professionalism and Ethics**

Dress professionally. You want to be comfortable rather than contribute yourself to being stiff and uncomfortable throughout the interview process, but you also want to project an image of being professional and even authoritative to potential colleagues and students.

It is not appropriate for Faculty at UBC and many places elsewhere to ask - and generally not appropriate for you to be asked - questions of a personal nature, such as whether you have a partner or not, whether your partner could work in the country / city you are interviewing in, what religion you are, whether you are expecting or want to have children and so on. However, if someone asks such a question, it is a delicate issue of how to deal with it, as you want to protect your rights since such information could be to your strategic disadvantage, but at the same time you don't want to alienate potential future colleagues by seeming unfriendly or prickly. You might say "my understanding is that in most jurisdictions / at most institutions questions concerning my personal life are not appropriate for interviews, and/or in any case they don't bear on my qualifications for the position which I'd love to talk more about..."

### **C) Questions to Ask in an Interview**

Be sure to ask questions when given the opportunity. You will project being engaged and engaging, motivated, interested and interesting, rather than apathetic and passive. You likely won't have time or desire to ask ALL of these questions, but they give a sense of relevant questions to consider.

Curriculum	What grad and undergrad courses do you expect the candidate for this position to teach?
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Promotion/Tenure	<p>Bases for promotion and tenure?</p> <p>By what methods are faculty evaluated?</p> <p>Schedule for faculty review?</p> <p>How many faculty members were tenured / denied tenure over the last five years?</p> <p>What % tenured and how long have they been tenured?</p> <p>What has been rate of and reasons for faculty turnover?</p>
Dean	<p>Long term plans for Faculty / Department?</p> <p>How does poli sci department fit into university's long term plans?</p> <p>Who applies, who accepted, where do they go after graduating?</p> <p>What sort of programs for new faculty? Formal mentoring?</p> <p>Orientation? Written handbook?</p> <p>What resources for student research?</p> <p>Competitive grants within university?</p> <p>Sabbaticals available? How do they work?</p> <p>Who would I be negotiating with?</p> <p>What is time frame for making a decision?</p>

Head	<p>Vision for department? 5 years? 10 years?</p> <p>When was last planning exercise? Can I get copy?</p> <p>How does this position fit into planning exercise?</p> <p>Is the department growing/shrinking? What areas?</p> <p>Plans for future hires?</p> <p>Programs for new faculty?</p> <p>Legislative atmosphere regarding funding?</p> <p>Strongest departments at the University? Place of your department?</p> <p>How big is department?</p> <p>Much cross sub-field interaction? Is department unified/split across disciplinary borders?</p> <p>How often does department meet?</p> <p>How is chair determined?</p> <p>What kind of students do you attract? Where do they go when finished? Enrollment trends?</p> <p>Do students have role in decisions about hiring?</p> <p>Student role in department decisions?</p> <p>How many undergrad majors come through the program each year?</p> <p>What is available research money?</p> <p>How many courses? Which courses?</p> <p>What are the teaching expectations for this position? What is the usual number of courses taught, according to what annual schedule (often expressed as 2-2, 2-1, 3-2, etc)? Is there a start-up period with a reduced teaching load?</p> <p>How big are classes?</p> <p>Are TAs available?</p> <p>How do new ideas for courses get processed?</p> <p>What are non-teaching expectations?</p> <p>How does undergraduate and graduate advising work?</p> <p>Annual reviews for tenure?</p> <p>Who decides on tenure?</p> <p>What % tenured? Are likely to be tenured in future? Up for tenure?</p> <p>Sabbatical policy?</p> <p>What is anticipated salary? What non-salary benefits exist with position?</p> <p>How is salary determined after year 1?</p> <p>Is there collective bargaining?</p> <p>Moving expenses?</p> <p>When will decision be made?</p>
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Faculty	<p>What research is being conducted?</p> <p>What interdepartmental and intradepartmental collaboration exists?</p> <p>What support for research? Including in-house funding?</p> <p>What major funded research projects are under way now?</p> <p>What do you like best? Least?</p> <p>What are you looking for in this new position?</p> <p>Hiring priorities for department?</p> <p>Your experience as new faculty?</p> <p>Have you received sufficient mentoring by senior colleagues? What did it include?</p> <p>What do you wish you had known?</p> <p>How is higher administration?</p> <p>How often does department meet? How are decisions made?</p> <p>Students: motivated? Placements? Support for graduate and undergraduate students? Funding?</p> <p>Library?</p> <p>Collegial?</p> <p>Collaboration with department and university members?</p> <p>What do you teach?</p> <p>What would you like this position to teach?</p> <p>Size of classes?</p> <p>TA's?</p> <p>Ideas for new courses – how they get processed?</p> <p>Secretarial support?</p> <p>How is advising allocated?</p> <p>Admin responsibilities?</p> <p>How much time do you spend on teaching, research, advising?</p> <p>Annual review before tenure? Who decides about tenure? What criteria? What is unwritten criteria?</p> <p>The city – housing, crime rates, locations, cultural events?</p>
School and community	<p>What are admission requirements for grads and undergrads?</p> <p>Characterize student pop'n in terms of geographic, economic, ethnic and scholarship range. Where do students tend to come from (local/ across country/ international/ what kind of past education?)</p> <p>Cost of living?</p> <p>Childcare availability (if you're comfortable asking about it; can ask after offer if you prefer)?</p>
Search Committee	<p>What do you expect from the ideal candidate?</p> <p>Where is committee in selection process? How many candidates are being brought in for interviews? When is a decision being made?</p> <p>Work load in terms of courses, advisees, case load?</p>

## **D) Questions You May be Asked**

### **1) Teaching**

What undergraduate and graduate courses would you want to teach?

Among the courses you might teach at UBC would be undergraduate courses in (interview field) and a future course in (interview field). How would you go about teaching those courses?

Have you successfully employed any innovative teaching methods that you would bring to the department?

What is a problem you have encountered in past teaching/ TA duties, and how did you address it?

Imagine that a student in one of your classes approached you outside of class and told you that she thought your course was racist. How would you respond? (Or similar questions about negotiating diversity among students.)

How would you teach course X? In some interviews the candidate has been asked if they have a syllabus for a prospective course or course already taught.

What have been the most successful and most challenging experiences you have had teaching students?

### **2) Research**

Status and completion of dissertation

What are your plans for publishing the dissertation: book or articles? Where?

What conferences will you be attending this year?

What is your next project?

If I wanted to get a good sense of field/ topic X (something related to your research), which scholars/ books would you recommend I look at?

### **3) Miscellaneous**

What is best / most important book / article you have read (in Political Science / your field) in the last year / 10 years?

What are the major influences on your life that made you want to study political science?

Why have you always been interested in studying X?

What is your ideological orientation? What assumptions do you bring to your work?

Why does (University of xyz) interest you?

Do you see yourself as engaging with the policy community on applied policy questions in the future? If so, how? Any concerns about tensions between role as scholar and activist (or consultant)?

### **5) Inappropriate questions:**

It is illegal for potential employers to ask about your marital status or family plans. You should feel empowered to decline to answer if such questions are asked. In the vast majority of cases, a good-natured “That’s not really an appropriate question, is it?” will stop the line of questioning. If you feel like answering questions along these lines or volunteering information because you think it will not hurt or could help your candidacy (e.g., assuring with “my partner grew up in this area/ has relatives in this area”), feel free to do so.

## **IX) The Job Talk**

Most positions depend on the job talk more than any other single element. Faculty are looking to assess your work (most won’t read it), see how well you communicate (thus likely teach), what kind of colleague you might be (don’t want to seem combative/ obnoxious, not confident enough, etc.).

- **Practice:** contact the Grad Director or your supervisor (or in future, new Professional Development Director) to set up a practice job talk. Usually about 30-40 minute talk followed by questions. Then, revise in response to feedback, and...
- Practice again.
- Biggest mistake = trying to put too much into talk and rushing to squeeze it all in. You can’t say everything in the talk, so narrow it down to the best elements of your project (your best case study, e.g., not all of them) and have a good but not frenetic pace to the talk. Be clear to the audience that you are only including detail on certain parts of your dissertation research and are leaving others (happy to answer in question and answer) aside for this presentation.
- Choose parts of your project you are most confident about. Remember you are likely to have the most expertise on your topic of anyone in the room, so run with your advantage.

- A successful talk should have the following:
  1. Clear statement of the question / puzzle (not, “I’m going to talk about this issue...”).
  2. Set up its importance: practical / theoretical (situate it in the literature).
  3. Give a brief roadmap of where the talk will go, including your answers. “In this talk, I’m going to first situate this project within the broader literature and show why that literature doesn’t explain..... Second, I’ll give a brief overview of how I conducted my study. Third, I’ll demonstrate the findings of one of my case studies..... before ending the talk with my chief conclusions.”
  4. Make clear your contribution.
- Be careful of getting into small details, getting too technical, using jargon. Your audience will typically span the gamut from political theorists to quantitative scholars – you do want to connect with faculty in your subfield as often (though not always) have the most say in hiring, but you must be able to speak to the vast majority of the audience and them to you.
- **Powerpoint:** Don’t put everything you want to say on powerpoint slides so the audience has to read. They should just be bullets to help guide them through by highlighting the **structure** of your argument, not the content. You want them to listen to you, and you want to engage them. You should not have 30 PP slides - perhaps 10, maybe 15. You don’t want to provide a substitute for your talk with PP – use it only to do things you can’t do with your talk (present data, show graphics, etc.). Don’t talk if the audience is giving something on a slide they do have to read (which they shouldn’t!).
- Look audience members in the eye, change the intonation of your voice to emphasize important arguments etc.
- Set up questions by the way you structure your talk. You may lead the logic of the analysis to naturally raise an issue you don’t speak to, but that you have a lot to say about. Or you may lead the audience and give audience members a question who might not have one otherwise as they might not know your field at all: “This is an important issue, but I can’t go into it here in any detail, so I’d be happy to discuss it further in the question period...”
- When handling questions, don’t dig in defensively, but don’t back down so much that you give away the store. Don’t bull#\$%, avoid long rambling responses. Be crisp.

Complement your questioners (but don’t obviously pander to them), especially if they give you a tough question you don’t have a ready answer to. “That’s a great question that I hadn’t thought of yet. I’m not sure I’m able to give a convincing

answer right now, but I'd go in this direction to try to answer it / I'd want to do additional research to find out abc in order to answer it" etc.

If you get a question that is off-topic, confrontational, or doesn't make sense, try to reconstruct the question in a constructive way. "I hadn't thought of that before, and while it might not answer your question directly, it brings to mind the related issue that abcd...., which similarly....." Or, ask for clarification if you're not sure you understand the question: "Am I correct in interpreting your question as asking whether....?"

Remember: NO ONE has the perfect, complete comprehensive project that does all things, so just reinforce the contribution you do make, and perhaps suggest many things left unanswered are indeed what you'd like to do (or hope others will do) for further research, which shows what a productive research program you are embarking on.

## **X) The Offer**

Congratulations – you have received an offer. Now you need to negotiate – don't do this alone! Consult with your supervisor and our Department Head to get advice on:

- What a good offer looks like: is anything missing, like start-up research funds, details on teaching load, moving expenses, and so on.
- What things you may have room to negotiate on. Typically you have little room to bargain with a first job, but if you have other offers, then that changes the situation. Often one-time or short-term costs are more negotiable than ongoing concessions (e.g., short-term teaching reduction, delay of start date, start-up research fund, moving costs, temporary position for partner, timely access to childcare facilities).
- If you have a partner, ONLY raise the issue of their relocation AFTER you have received an offer, unless for some reason it could actually play to your strategic advantage beforehand (e.g., "just so you know, my partner is of a particular nationality / profession such that they could easily move here should we be offered a position, so we don't pose any headaches for you in that department"). In some cases it can be part of the negotiation process to ask if the Department / University where you have an offer to see if they can find a position for your partner.



- If you are already in a job and are on the market looking for another position, use your discretion regarding informing your existing Department of your being on the market – sometimes that does not help your existing situation, at other times it may be assumed say with a limited term position so isn't problematic at all. Similarly, use discretion on whether you would be in a position to ask your existing Department Head or colleagues to write letters on your behalf for other positions elsewhere – sometimes those can be extremely helpful, sometimes such a colleague may not want to write such a letter on your behalf, so just be diplomatic and use your judgement.