Preparing your academic job search

• Am I ready?

• Planning your strategy

• Preparing application materials

• Finding job openings

• Tailoring your application
Common excuses that may (but shouldn’t necessarily) keep you from applying

• I *like* being a postdoc, there are fewer hassles.
• I don’t have any results from my postdoctoral research
• I don’t have any publications from my postdoctoral research
• I don’t have my own grant
• I don’t know what kind of research I want to do
• There aren’t any good jobs out there
Consider this…

• You might not get a job (or job you like) in the first round--practice makes perfect
• You may be able to push off your start date by up to a year
• Postdoc publications will rarely all be done before you get a job
• A grant helps, but you can show promise in other ways
• Writing your research statement may help you clarify to yourself your own interests
• Jobs come up where you least expect them
Planning your strategy

• **What kind of department?**
  – Graduate / undergraduate

• **What kind of institution?**
  – The research / teaching split

• **Timeline of your search**
  – The interviewing season
    • Often in the fall, but can be anytime
  – How far in advance?
    • Up to 2 years before desired start date

• **Focused vs. shotgun approach**
  – You might get a similar number of “hits” by pick the institutions most likely to be interested in you.
Goals of a Research Statement

• This is a marketing tool, not a scientific document!
• Introduce your field to the lay scientific audience
• Explain your long term research interests
• Summarize your research accomplishments
  – Give your readers ammunition
• Summarize your research goals
  – Five year plan, leading to a career trajectory
Writing a research statement

– Start with a summary of what you are about—your overarching research theme
– Use the first person
– Avoid using jargon
– State clearly important questions in the field you have and will address
– Use succinct paragraphs and boldface important points:
  • Research question
  • Important finding
  • Implications
– Cite your own publications
– Provide specific statements about the importance of your research
  • This provides verbatim ammunition for a supportive committee member
– Stick to 2 pages max
Turning an abstract into a research statement

- Get rid of data, methodological details, and secondary questions.
- Details aren’t really important; impact is.
- Invert your usual order of presentation: start with the punchline
- Use the words “novel”, “innovative” and synonyms as much as possible. (pretend you are writing about an esteemed colleague if you are shy about self-promotion)
Teaching Statements

• Highlight your teaching experience, both formal and informal
• Address known teaching needs of the department
• Explain your teaching philosophy
• Remember:
  – Research institutions usually don’t ask for teaching statements
  – Few postdocs have taught a course
Recommendation Letters

– You may need anywhere from 3-5 letters of recommendation
– Make sure you will get good letters
– Give recommenders plenty of notice
– Provide a brief summary of your present and past research to help them remember why you are great.
– If possible, give recommenders specific details about each job that they can use to customize each letter.
Finding job openings

• **Science and Nature online**
  – Database search
  – Weekly email updates

• **Mailing lists**

• **Word of mouth**
  – Talk to people you know
  – Find out if people are moving or retiring from departments you are interested in
  – Send unsolicited applications to expanding departments.
Research each job you apply for

• Call the committee chair
• Call anyone you know who knows anything
• Ask:
  – Why is the position open?
  – What level of investigator are they looking for?
  – What kind of teaching/research areas are they interested in filling?
  – What kind of teaching/research resources are available?
Tailoring your application - Cover Letter

– The cover letter is a sorting tool for busy committee members
– Introduce your qualifications: degrees, postdocs, fields
– Explain why you would fit in the department
– Name specific resources you can use
– Name specific people you may collaborate with
– Include keywords from job announcements
Send in your application!

- Try to send things in by the deadline
- If you find an announcement whose deadline has past, send it anyway
- Tell people you know in the department that you have applied
- Give your recommenders specific instructions about deadlines, who and where to send applications to, what you want emphasized to the committee
- Keep track of your correspondence with different universities
- Start preparing for interviews...