The Academic Job Market for Geographers
Notes from the panel discussion at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the
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Moderator: Joy K. Adams, Association of American Geographers

Introductory comments

• Graduate school has traditionally been perceived as academic training for future faculty
• There is a large (and continuously growing) number of PhDs competing for a small number of academic jobs
  o Specialties in high demand during the 2011-12 academic year include GIS/geovisualization/geoinformatics; human-environment interaction; and physical geography
  o There appears to be an oversupply of human geographers relative to demand
• Early optimism among faculty often quickly turns to stress, and job seekers can get discouraged and burn out
• When on the market or between appointments, publishing as an independent scholar can build your credentials, increase your visibility within the academic community, and maintain your skills

How can I find and apply for openings for faculty and research positions?

• The AAG’s monthly newsletter typically includes numerous academic job postings
  o Listings are also posted online at: http://www.aag.org/membership/members_only/jobs_in_geography (requires current AAG membership and log-in)
  o Some positions (such as emergency hires or adjunct positions) are not widely advertised, so keep an eye on job announcements on university websites and reach out to departments of interest
• Fit is an important consideration
  o Decide on your personal and career goals in advance and target your applications accordingly
  o Departments might cancel a search if they cannot find a suitable candidate for a position
  o Customize your application materials for each position for which you apply; use your interdisciplinary background to your advantage
  o Look at the CVs of people in similar positions to see if you have similar qualifications that you could emphasize

Notes compiled by Joy Adams, Niem Huynh, and Mark Revell, Association of American Geographers
Available online at: www.aag.org/careers
• Cast a wide net and be prepared to apply for many positions
  o For various reasons, job ads might not include all relevant information about desired qualifications, so it's good practice to apply if you're a reasonably good -- but not perfect -- fit with the description
  o Consider interdisciplinary positions and joint appointments: if you can teach in more than one department, you are a good value for the institution
  o Post-docs and adjunct positions are on the rise, but they tend to offer lower salaries and less job security than tenure-track positions
  o If circumstances permit, consider international opportunities

Is a degree from a university outside the United States a disadvantage in the U.S. academic job market?

• Many faculty with international degrees work in U.S. academic institutions
• Internationalization is a trend within academia and within the field of geography specifically, so having international background is often regarded as a strength
• Be aware that there are differences between countries in terms of academic credentials, and be prepared to explain these in your application and/or interview (for example, a score of 75% in Canada is a good grade whereas in the U.S. it is a low grade)
• Network, attend conferences, and pursue other opportunities to become “socialized” into the U.S. system
• Consider having your international degrees articulated into the U.S. system

What can I expect in the interview process and how can I prepare for my job interview?

• Conduct research in advance to prepare for the interview
  o Connect your experience and expertise to specific information about the position, department, and institution in order to impress potential employers
  o Plan ahead for questions that you think you will be asked
  o When you are invited to interview, it does not hurt to ask if there is anything you should prepare for
  o Do some research on your home institution to gain insights into how your preparation and training might be perceived
  o When possible, use your networks to get inside information about the department prior to the interview
• A phone or Skype interview is typically conducted at some point during the hiring process
  o Because you cannot see the other parties, interviewing by phone is a “strange, unnerving process”; do not be afraid to pause to reflect on questions before answering
- When doing a phone interview, make sure that you are in a spot where you get good reception and you can hear and be heard clearly
- One advantage of a phone interview is that you can assemble and refer to materials that you would not have at hand during an in-person interview
- Dress professionally and take time to position the camera and microphone correctly for Skype interviews

- Take your time and be honest when answering questions
  - If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification
  - Never hide information or lie about your academic credentials
  - Never misrepresent your personal information (such as marriage or family status); use your discretion to decide if you will disclose information or decline inappropriate questions
- Be prepared for cultural differences -- in the U.S., job interviews are relatively informal; outside the U.S., they tend to be very formal
- Be careful about the presence you project through social networking and other online activities
- The "interview" starts as soon as you are picked up at the airport and does not end until you are by yourself
- Your potential employers already know your credentials -- interviews are primarily an opportunity for them to observe your interpersonal skills

**How should I negotiate when I receive a job offer?**

- The teaching load should be disclosed at the interview, including the number of courses per term, class sizes, rotation of courses, and other details
- Salaries are typically not discussed during a job interview and candidates are advised not to bring up this topic until an offer is made
- It is a violation of U.S. employment law to ask a job candidate about his/her family or marital status, but be prepared to be asked these kinds of questions anyway (directly or indirectly)
- Prepare for negotiating by researching what other faculty are paid at your rank in similar departments/programs
  - At public institutions, salaries are public record and this information is often published online or in the newspaper
  - Understand that union agreements and state hiring policies might limit the salary you can be offered
  - For other types of institutions, you can get a sense of the median and range of salaries using a variety of online sources and publications
  - Research the cost of living in the place where the position is located and take this into consideration when deciding whether to accept an offer
What are some of the barriers to getting a tenure-track position?

- If you are an older applicant or transitioning from an adjunct appointment or non-academic position, consider addressing this issue upfront in your application materials
  - Frame your experience as an asset -- many smaller schools and community colleges like to hire faculty who have professional experience outside the academic sector
- Enhance your employability by publishing and by diversifying your teaching and research across specialties
- Women should be aware of and prepared to address assumptions and concerns about their "biological clock"
- If you are having trouble finding a tenure-track position, consider the wide variety of careers for PhDs in other sectors, such as private industry, nonprofit organizations, and government

What is your single best piece of advice for geographers seeking an academic career?

- Pursue as many professional development opportunities as possible
  - Departments like candidates who have a wide range of skills and who can fill multiple roles
  - A great opportunity is the Geography Faculty Development Alliance summer workshop (info available at: www.aag.org/gfda)
- Balance teaching and research
  - Find creative ways to combine these activities (e.g., field research abroad with students)
  - Graduate students can get teaching experience as a TA; doctoral candidates can consider an adjunct position after reaching ABD ("all but dissertation") status
  - Be sure to publish and pursue grants, even if you're in a teaching-intensive position
  - Teaching a course is a great way for international students to demonstrate their capabilities
- Interdisciplinary opportunities are expanding, so connect with other departments and fields
- Networking is critical
  - Have business cards (even if you’re a student) and share them freely with new contacts
  - Develop a positive professional image and enhance your visibility by participating in online blogs and discussions and/or creating a website to showcase your research
  - Conference presentations are great for making contacts and to use as a springboard for publishing -- consider bringing a few hard copies of your paper to share with interested audience members or to ask advice
- Identify your personal and professional goals and target your job search accordingly