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## Essay on interview questions in academic job searches

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Whether you have been invited for a phone interview, an interview at a disciplinary meeting, or an on-campus interview, one can never be over-prepared. Carefully consider the questions listed below and how you would answer each question. It might be helpful to have a friend or colleague conduct a practice interview for you using these questions.

### Questions asked by an interviewer

While an exhaustive list of questions that could be presented to a candidate could never be compiled, below is a list of commonly asked questions.

#### Preliminary

- Why are you interested in our college (possibly in comparison to where you have been)?
- What is your ideal balance between teaching/research/service?

#### Teaching

- Can you describe your teaching style?
- What is your typical classroom like?
- What is something that you did in the classroom that didn't work as well as you might have liked? What did you learn from this? / How did you respond?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
- How could you use your skills to improve their curriculum?
- What classes are you willing/prepared to teach? Not willing?
- How are you going to adjust to teaching lower level students?

#### Research/Scholarship

- Can you describe your research?
- What are your future research goals?
- Are there possibilities for undergraduate research in your area?
- How do you plan to find a research community if you join our school?

#### Service/Other

- What kinds of service you might be interested in?
- What would be a good activity for a student club related to your field?
- How will working at the institution help you improve/grow?

## Questions asked to an interviewer

One thing will undoubtedly occur during an interview – the candidates will be asked if they have any questions for the interviewers. One should always have questions about the job and the institution in general. Here is a list of possible questions.

## Teaching

- What is the typical teaching load (for a junior faculty member)? How many preps?
- What courses might I teach in my first few years?
- When are courses scheduled (days of week, times of day)?
- What is the average class size?
- What is a typical class size (max/min)?
- What is the population in the upper level courses? Are they mostly majors? What is the breakdown of majors/non-majors? What about in lower level major courses?
- Is the college open to different styles of teaching?
- Would I get to teach upper level courses? What is considered "upper level" at your college?
- Will I have the opportunity to design my own class?
- What is the teaching load? What does that mean in terms of number of classes?
- How many office hours are faculty expected to have? Will I be expected to be on campus/in my office every day?
- Will I be able to/expected to teach courses in the summer?

## Service

- What is the service requirement for junior faculty?

## Research

- What are research expectations for tenure?
- How do current faculty find their research communities?
- Are current faculty active in research?
- What resources are in place to help me keep my research going?
- Do faculty receive travel funding?
- Are there summer funds available?
- Are there opportunities/expectations to work with undergraduates on thesis/research projects?
- Is it possible to get course releases for junior faculty?
- Are there opportunities to interact and possibly collaborate with faculty in other departments or with faculty in nearby colleges and universities?
- Do pedagogical articles count toward scholarly research? (Or articles co-authored with students?)
- What is included in your definition of scholarship?

## Life

- What are your daily schedules like?
- What is this region like? Where do faculty live?
- Are living expenses in line with salary? Is there on-campus housing for faculty?
- How are the local school systems/districts? (for your own family needs)
- Is there a daycare on campus?

## College/Department

- Can you describe a typical student?
- What technology/programs are available to me? For the students? In labs? In classrooms?
- Do you have active clubs in my field?
- Are the department faculty involved in the local sections of disciplinary associations?
- Where do your undergraduates go from here?
- Do faculty typically remain in the department? Have you had a lot of turnover?
- Has anyone in your department been denied tenure?
- What is your tenure process like? What sort of pre-tenure evaluation process is in place?
- Is there a publication quota for tenure?
- How do faculty use their sabbaticals? When are you eligible? How long are they? Do people usually get them when they are eligible?
- What are your expectations for grants?
- What do you like most about working here?

The above lists give you an idea of what might be asked of you. The lists also give you an idea about what to ask those individuals interviewing you. Clearly you would never ask a single individual all of the above questions. Be mindful of the scheduled length of the interview and compile a list of questions compatible with that time frame. You will have more time to ask questions on an on-campus interview than you will have in a phone interview or an interview at a disciplinary association conference.

There is a great deal of advice about interviewing on the internet and through other venues. Be prepared. Be as relaxed as possible. Be professional. Learn as much as you can about your potential position and place of employment. Your new job could be right around the corner!

## Author Bio:

*Sarah Ann Fleming teaches mathematics at Belmont University. These questions were developed in part at the 2012 Career Mentoring Workshop for Women in the Mathematical Sciences (CaMeW), where the author served as co-director.*

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