

# HOW TO STAND OUT IN AN INTERVIEW\*

## Rice ADVANCE

This work is produced by OpenStax-CNX and licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License 2.0<sup>†</sup>

### Abstract

This is a conversion of a presentation given at the Negotiating the Ideal Faculty Position Workshop given on October 14-16, 2007. The presentation was compiled by Rebecca Richards-Kortum and Sherry Woods.

## 1 Assumptions

“**Interview**” = entire campus visit

- Formal presentations/seminars
- One-on-one meetings
- Informal gatherings and interactions
- Sample schedule

“**Standing Out**” = Positive & Negative

- You want to be remembered...for the right reasons
- You are **always** “on”...

## 2 Components of a Hiring Decision for a Research 1 Institution

- Step One: Getting an interview
  - Recommendations from dissertation advisor and others
  - Publication record: quantity and journal quality
  - Match between institutional needs and applicant’s research focus
  - The “Hot” factor of research area
  - Formal application materials:
    - \* CV
    - \* Statement of research interests
    - \* Statement of teaching interests
    - \* Start up needs
- Step Two: Getting an offer
  - All of the previous (and more...)

---

\*Version 1.2: Feb 1, 2009 9:28 pm -0600

<sup>†</sup><http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

- **THE CAMPUS VISIT**

- Who Decides if an Offer Is Made?Varies from campus to campus
  - Full professors
  - All faculty
- Dean has the “**final**” say

### 3 Today’s Focus

- The formal presentation
  - Practice talks on Tuesday afternoon
- One-on-one meetings and interactions with:
  - Faculty
  - Administrators
  - Students
- Strategies for success and for avoiding common pitfalls

### 4 TOP RULES #’s 1 & 2:

#### 4.1 Continually ask yourself these two questions:

1. Who is my **AUDIENCE**?
2. What is the **CONTEXT/SETTING**?

### 5 BEFORE the Campus Visit...

- **INVESTIGATE THE INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES, CULTURE AND NEEDS**
- Find out what you are doing and who your audiences will be...**AND PREPARE ACCORDINGLY!**
- Don’t be afraid to ask for 30 min of prep time before your seminar
- Ask for meetings that will help **YOU** determine if position is a good fit
  - Assistant professors in the department
  - Potential collaborators in other departments
  - Graduate students in your area
  - Female faculty from other departments
- Know who everyone on your schedule is and what their area is
- Find out what research areas the department is emphasizing
- Find out what courses the department needs you to teach
- How to get this info?

### 6 Things to Ask Everyone on Your Schedule

- What are the P&T criteria?
- What is the teaching load?
- What are the strategic directions of the department?
- If you could change anything about the department, what would it be?

## 7 DURING the Campus Visit...Words of Advice

- Presenting oneself as confident and competent is a **balancing act**
- The difference between: “I don’t know” and “I don’t know...”
- “Knowing your stuff” is **NOT** the same as “Knowing how to talk about the stuff you know...”

## 8 Elevator Speech Activity

You are visiting for a two-day faculty interview at your number one school. In the elevator on the way to a meeting, someone introduces you to Dr. Clark, the Associate Dean for Research. She is not in your area. After shaking hands, she asks, “So, what do you do?” Your assignment is to prepare a 1-minute elevator speech that:

–**Describes your research interest in a compelling way to someone outside your area**

Ideally, you want her to walk back to her office and call the chair of the search committee to say how impressed she is with you as a potential colleague.

### 8.1 Round One

- Take one-minute to prepare
- Find one other person you **DO NOT** know...
- At signal, begin (and end...)
- Start with the handshake...

Remember...it’s not a very tall building...

#### 8.1.1 Round One: Review

As Associate Dean, give feedback:

- Name 2 – 3 key things you heard
  - Could you explain to some else her area of research?
- Rate confidence level
- Rate enthusiasm level
- Rate hand shake
  - The art of confident handshakes...

Rating Scale:

- 3 = Great!
- 2 = Okay
- 1 = Needs work!
- Could be better

### 8.2 Round Two

- Jot down 2 – 3 key messages you want to communicate
- Repeat process with new person
- Still not a very tall building...

For example...

[RRK does her elevator speech with 2 to 3 key points]

### 8.2.1 Round Two: Review

As Associate Dean, give feedback:

- Name 2 – 3 key things you heard
  - Could you explain to some else her area of research?
- Rate confidence level
- Rate enthusiasm level
- Rate hand shake
  - The art of confident handshakes...

Rating Scale:

- 3 = Great!
- 2 = Okay,
- 1 = Needs work!
- Could be better

## 9 DURING the Campus Visit...More Words of Advice

- When gender matters and when it doesn't...
- What to wear and how to wear it!
- When to ask questions and what questions to ask...
- Giving a technical presentation vs. teaching a class

## 10 Anatomy of a Good Technical Presentation (1)

Introduction - 10 Minutes

- Get them excited
- Why is your work important?
- Background to understand it

## 11 Anatomy of a Good Technical Presentation (2)

The **MEAT** – 25 minutes

- What you did (OK to sacrifice detail for clarity, not too simplistic)
- What it means
- Summarize as you go
- Only the experts should follow the last 10 minutes of this part of the talk

## 12 Anatomy of a Good Technical Presentation (3)

The Implications – 10 minutes

- What does this mean for the future of your field?
- What direction will you take the work?
- Leave everyone with a feeling of excitement about the future

## 13 Important Details

- Clean slides, No typos, Large font
- Outline easy to follow – help people stay with your talk
- Rehearse for knowledgeable audience
- Not too long or too short
- Reference work of others in the field, especially if they will be in the audience
- Practice answering questions
- Don't get defensive
- Check out the room and projector ahead of time
- Have a backup of your presentation!!
- Begin by saying, "Good Morning! It's such a pleasure to be here."
- At the end, say, "Thank You, I'd be happy to take any questions."

## 14 Questioning Activity

### 14.1 Expect the Unexpected: "Hard" Questions

1. I don't think you've accounted for the research of Barnes and Bailey. Aren't you familiar with their model? I think it invalidates your main hypothesis.
2. Unpublished research in my lab shows exactly the opposite effect. You must not have done the proper controls.
3. I believe a simple non linear equation explains all your data. Why have you wasted your time on such a complex model?
4. (To the candidate) Well you didn't even account for phenomena x. (Aside to the audience) How can all this research be valid if she didn't account for x?
5. How does this differ from the basic model that we teach in sophomore transport?
6. It looks like you've done some interesting modeling. Is there an application of this work?
7. What a wonderful little application. Is there any theoretical support?
8. Those results are clearly unattainable. You must have falsified your data.
9. You've done some interesting work, but I don't see how it could be considered engineering. Why do you think you are qualified to teach engineering?
10. Your work appears to be a complete replication of Fujimoto's work. Just what is really new here?

### 14.2 Good Responses to Hard Questions

- "That's a really good question...thank you for asking it."
- "You make a very good point...I have a couple responses..."
- "We've discussed this question a lot in our research group and here's what I think..."

## 15 Final thoughts...

### Strategies for Avoiding Interviewing Pitfalls

- Being too collaborative
- Being too "easy" ("Rice is my first choice!")
- Failing to ask questions about the work of your host
- Focusing too much on social aspects of department/city

## 16 Preparing Tuesday's Talk

- Who's your audience?
- How long?
- What's the setting? (AV needs?)
- What kind of feedback will be given?
- What if you **bomb**?

## 17 Questions?

Rebecca Richards-Kortum, Ph.D. Professor, Bioengineering Rice University

Sherry E. Woods, Ed.D. Director of Special Projects University of Texas at Austin