How to Maximize the Impact Of Your Interview Seminar*

Rice ADVANCE

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Abstract

Panel discussion presented by Emilia Morosan at the 2010 NSF ADVANCE Workshop: Negotiating the Ideal Faculty Position, A Workshop for Underrepresented PhDs and Postdocs in Science, Engineering and Psychology September 19-21, 2010

1 Outline

- Strategy:
  - What is an interview?
  - How a hiring decision is made?
- The formal presentation –on campus visit
  - Before the visit:
    - Know institution
    - Know audience
  - During the visit
    - What you should talk about
    - What you should ask
    - Good technical presentation
- Questions and discussion

2 Strategy

You want to stand out in a positive way

- "Never alone and awake at the same time"
- The interview visit starts when host picks you up at the hotel and ends when host drops you off at the hotel
  - You are on even during dinner on the last day of visit

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- "Interview"= entire campus visit
  - One-on-one meetings
  - Formal presentation
  - Informal meetings and interactions

3 Strategy

How a hiring decision is made (at R1 university)

- Step 1: being invited for the interview
  - Application (anywhere from 50 to 150 applicants for *one* position)
  - 3-4 applicants selected for the interview
    - Recommendations from dissertation advisor, postdoc supervisor, others
    - Match between position requirements and applicants' research focus
    - Publication record: quantity, journal quality, impact (citations/year)
    - Formal application materials
      - Not a time to be modest–help search committee members identify your strengths on paper and want to learn more (bring you for a campus interview).
- Step 2: getting the offer
  - THE CAMPUS VISIT
    - you want to present yourself well (more in a minute)
    - you want to learn as much as possible
      - Don't forget: you too are "interviewing" the department and should not leave campus without knowing whether it is a fit for you
  - Decision on offer:
    - search committee members ⇒ vote by all faculty ⇒ dean (final say)

4 The formal presentation

- Homework before the visit
- Most important rules for interview presentation (and beyond):
  a. Who is the audience?
     - Listen to your host's instructions: "plan a department colloquium talk; our graduate and some undergraduate students routinely attend department colloquia"
  b. What is the context for the presentation?
     - You are the specialist, but almost nobody else in the audience is familiar with a lot of the "hot"research field you are about to discuss
- Practice your talk before coming to campus

5 Homework before the visit

- Read about the institution, the department and the research group you would belong to
- Ask ahead as many questions as necessary to prepare appropriate-level presentation
- Ask to meet with people you think will help you evaluate how good a fit the position is
  - Assistant profs in the department
  - Potential collaborators in the department and other departments

  - Female or minority faculty
  - Graduate students
  - Human resources staff
- How to get all this info?
  - Your contact person (usually search committee chair, person who contacted you with the invitation for interview)
  - Department assistant
- Think about all the information offered
  - They will really expect you to fulfill those tasks

    "The department has been running a very successful Professional Masters Program, and we currently only have two faculty teaching courses for the program. The newly hired faculty will have to get in on the rotations for a couple of the courses for this program."
- Think about questions you will want to ask:
  - What are the P&T criteria?
  - Expectations for research $$ and grad student support
  - Teaching load
  - Department strategic plan
- Find out what courses the department needs you to teach
- Find out department's priorities with regards to research areas
- KNOW EVERYBODY ON YOUR SCHEDULE
  - Know what their research area is
  - Have relevant questions during one-on-one meetings
  - Can suggest possible collaborations
  - Be aggressive!
    * One possible scenario: "this is easy, the faculty I'm meeting do most of the talking, I'm not being asked much about my research"...
    * STOP! You must thoughtfully get into the conversation:

      "I find your project very interesting, especially since last year I discovered the same effect in this other device. What I did was... I wonder what you think about applying your technique to my device."

6 During the campus visit

- Present yourself as confident and competent
- When and how much can you use "I don't know"
- What (not) to wear
- When to ask questions and what questions to ask (see "homework" before)
- The presentation
  - "Elevator speech"
  - The departmental talk
- "Elevator speech"

  In the elevator on you way to your next appointment, you are introduced to Dr. Smith, Associate Dean for Research. Dr. Smith is not in your area so after shaking hands he asks: "So, what do you do?"

  must have a short speech that describes your research interest in a compelling way to someone outside your area

- Must prepare for this: find someone outside your research area, practice
  - Start with the handshake
  - Remember it is not a very tall building (key: 1-minute but compelling)
  - Review: figure out what messages you want to convey

7 The departmental talk

- Good technical presentation:
  - Well organized, clear
  - Outline, Introduction, Main presentation, Conclusions and Outlook
  - Keep time

8 Good technical presentation

- Introduction – 10 minutes
  - Get the audience interested and excited:
    - Why is the topic important?
    - What is the background and context?
- Main presentation – 30 minutes
  - What you did:
    - Give enough details to make point, show how important your work is
    - Keep it simple – OK to leave some details out for clarity
  - Most important results
    - What they mean
    - Only experts may follow the last 10 minutes of this part
    - Plan on some flexibility: Watch time and be prepared to skip or add slides to keep time – decide beforehand what to skip or add
- Conclusions and Outlook – 10 minutes
  - What are the implications
    - "the new technique I developed could be applied to reinvestigate this decades-old question"
    - "the long-lasting prediction is confirmed by this new material I developed"
  - Where is the field going as a result of your work?
  - What direction is your work going to take from here?

9 Important details

- Clean slides, no typos, large font
- Outline easy to follow
- Appropriately cite other's related work, especially if in the audience
- Practice talk in front of varied audience (if possible your lab mates, your supervisor, family or friends outside area, undergraduate students)
  - It may be very helpful (and sometimes painful) to record your talk and then review
- Practice answering questions
- Don't get defensive

10 The good...

10.1 Specific heat

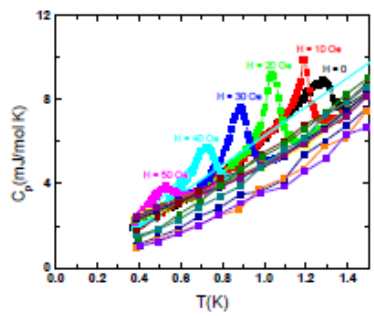

Figure 1

- Superconducting transition at Tc = 1.4 K
- Transition moves down in temperature with applied field

11 the bad...

11.1 Specific heat

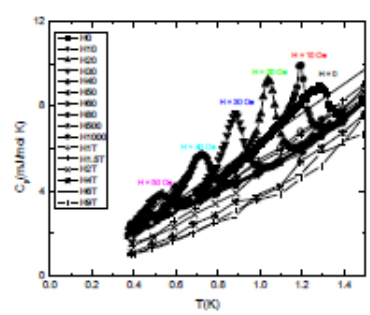

Figure 2

- Superconducting transition at Tc = 1.4 K
- Transition moves down in temperature with applied field

12 ...and the ugly

12.1 Specific heat

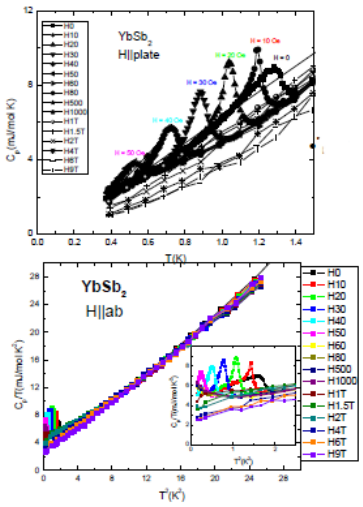

Figure 3

- Superconducting transition at Tc = 1.4 K
- Transition moves down in temperature with applied field

C/T for YbSb2
$\gamma \sim 4$ mJ/mol K2
Morosan et al. (unpublished)

13 Other important details

- Have backup of your presentation
- If possible check out the room and AV equipment before talk
- Face the audience as much as possible
- Don't read off slides
- Beware of "wandering laser pointer"

14 "Hard" questions

- 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.
- You acknowledge all these collaborators –what exactly did you do?
- This is a project you started working on as a postdoc in Prof. X's group. Will you be continuing this work? How will your work be distinct from that of your postdoc supervisor?

- (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?
- It looks like you've done some interesting modeling. Is there an application of this work?
- What a wonderful little application. Is there any theoretical support?

15 "Harder" questions

- I believe a simple non linear equation explains all your data. Why have you wasted your time on such a complex model?
- How does this differ from the basic model that we teach in sophomore transport?
- Those results are clearly unattainable. You must have falsified your data.
- 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?
- Your work appears to be a complete replication of Fujimoto's work. Just what is really new here?

Good luck!