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Job Market Memoirs

Where faculty and postdocs provide insight into the job market by telling us about their recent experiences. Tune in for personal tales, acquired wisdom, and general job market advice.

By: Joey Cheng, PhD



This past fall I was fortunate to join a fantastic department in a terrific location as an assistant professor. As academic job-seekers (and those who foresee themselves in this position soon), I hope you'll find my reflection on my job market experience to have some relevance.

I was a freshly minted PhD and had only begun a two-year postdoc for a few weeks when I had sent out my job applications. At that time, with two years of funding and really exciting research opportunities ahead of me at a place that I liked, I applied very selectively and only to places that I considered to be 'dream jobs', in terms of research fit and location. I did not feel compelled to apply to more places, nor did I feel too anxious or worried over how my applications would play out, because I was really enjoying my postdoc and, in fact, would have loved to complete the two full years of my fellowship. I thought that, even if my applications were not successful this year, I would at the very least have a nice draft of my application materials to build on for the following year's job search. On the other hand, I knew that if I delayed my job search to the next year, the pressing need to find a new position that begins immediately after the postdoc would certainly lead to far more stress and anxiety about the outcome. For all these reasons, it felt right to apply to the dream schools during the first year of my postdoc and let the chips fall where they may. Luckily for me, one of my applications was successful and brought me to my current position.

On afterthought, I am very grateful for the short but very beneficial postdoc. Among other things, it gave me the time and liberty to think about and plan the direction of my future program of research, without being simultaneously confronted with teaching duties and other responsibilities associated with being a faculty member. I can say with certainty that the time spent in a postdoc position is helping me tremendously in my current transition to the faculty job. If I could go back in time, I would still have chosen and hoped for the same path.

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