

Applying for Jobs in Astronomy

Prof Bryan Gaensler

Director, Dunlap Institute for Astronomy and Astrophysics
University of Toronto

with material provided by Sarah Maddison



Cartoon by Kerry Soper, Assistant Professor of Humanities, Brigham Young University

Job Applications in Academia

- › Applying for an academic job is like performing at an open mic night
 - as soon as it's your turn, the clock is ticking
 - you have the audience's attention for 10-15 minutes
 - first impressions are vital
 - snap judgements are likely, so set the agenda

- › Don't pad, don't undersell
- › Make a (good) impression
- › Do your homework



What Jobs To Apply For?

- › Make contacts at conferences
 - it's not gauche to be upfront that you're looking for jobs
- › Very few positions look like the 'perfect job' at first glance
 - but don't apply for a job if you know enough to know you don't want it
- › Invite yourself to visit institutions
 - it's much easier to consider moving if you've actually been there
- › Wide variety of wordings in job ads
 - sometimes standard (but strange) format imposed by institute
- › Make contact with someone there; ask them for more info
 - if job says "applicants are encouraged to contact ...", then do it!
- › Don't leave things until the last second
 - most jobs now have online (but confusing, clunky) application process
 - deadlines almost always rigid (and factor in time zone difference)

Preparing Your Application

- › Choose your referees carefully, and give them 2-4 weeks advance notice
 - if you're not sure a referee will be unequivocally positive, ask them first
- › Cover letter is critical, even if they don't require it
 - in your own words: why you want the job & why they should want you
 - leave out anything personal at this stage
- › Spell check
- › Answer each selection criterion separately & explicitly
 - offer a positive/alternative view on criteria you don't think you meet
- › Don't pad your publication list
 - avoid papers "in prep"; separate out conference papers & abstracts
- › Tailor your research statement to your audience
 - will be obvious if it's recycled or generic
- › **SPELL CHECK!!!**

How To Interview

- › Find out who interview panel are, and how long interview is likely to be
 - knowing background & interests of panel can make big difference
- › Practice, practice, practice
 - brainstorm questions; have someone drill you until your answers are gold
- › Dress well, look presentable, speak clearly, make eye-contact
 - get a non-astronomer to give you the once-over beforehand
- › OK to bring notes or to jot down bullet points before answering
 - telegraph & structure your answer; don't ramble
- › Be ready for all the obvious questions
 - what about job most interests you? ; give an example of ... ;
how do you fix ...; knowledge of employer,
- › Have some insightful questions ready to ask of the panel at the end
 - show you've done your research; don't ask about salary
- › Sometimes will need to give a job talk
 - practice, polish, and don't run over time

Getting the Offer & Negotiating

- › If you're getting a bad vibe, pick up the phone or set up a meeting
- › Visit (again) if you can; everything will seem different with an offer in hand
- › Get clarity on decision date, and whether there's a waitlist
 - if inflexible, this indicates they don't really have your interests as a priority
 - disclose whether you have competing offers, especially if deadlines clash
 - if on waitlist, contact them before making any other decisions
- › Often they'll make informal offer first; proceed to contract when you ask for it
- › If it's not in writing, it's worth nothing
- › OK to negotiate, although accept that some things will not be negotiable.
 - salary, relocation, starting date, time for own research, research budget
- › Normally they will be enthusiastic & butter you up while an offer is pending
 - level of attention will drop once you accept; don't take this personally!

The Two-Body Problem

- > If the situation is clearly untenable, don't bother applying
 - e.g. same-sex couple emigrating to the USA
 - e.g. partner is a surgeon, would need to re-qualify overseas
- > Don't mention your partner until you've got an offer
- > Find out visa constraints on your partner's ability to work or study
- > Don't expect your potential employer to find a job for your partner
 - ask for contacts and advice, but don't expect too much
- > Determine how many salaries you'll need to support yourselves
- > Accept that your partner may not be able to look for work until you arrive
- > Pair wisely! 😊
 - life-scientist, engineer, programmer, sys admin, telecommuter, ...
 - astronomer, lawyer, doctor, ...