

## **Interviewing for Faculty Jobs: Advice from Alan Tessier**

October 2004, slightly edited

*Note: This document originates from advice offered to me by Alan as I prepared to interview for faculty positions during the '04-'05 job season. While it is written with me in mind, not as a document to be widely disseminated to others, I think it contains valuable and universally applicable advice.*

*-- Spencer Hall*

You are now about to shift to the interview stage of getting a job and hope you will bear with me if I offer some advice. I started getting job interviews 3 years before I got my first offer (KBS), and I learned the hard way (missed jobs I really wanted) that the interview strategy involves a lot of rather superficial issues. In short, some traits that will make you a good faculty member are the same ones that can prevent you from getting the job. It is simply a recognition that human psychology matters and some of it, in hindsight makes sense.

### (1). Socio-Intellectual Interactions

First and foremost, you will be judged on how well you engage and interact with both students and faculty, especially those whose science interests are far from yours. You need to stay highly focused throughout what will be very long days. It takes incredible stamina. In a job interview you have to constantly be thinking at two levels: (1) on the focused interaction, but always, (2) on a higher plane, you need to be thinking about the big picture AND your social presentation (e.g., how are you sitting or standing, what are your hands doing, where is this conversation going, is there an agenda emerging, in a group setting is there another level of judging going on besides the actual science being discussed). For example, in a group discussion with faculty and students, you need to be thinking about the actual discussion topic (science) and simultaneously be thinking about your behavior with respect to drawing out student participants while not ignoring faculty direction, are you engaging only one gender, are you assuming a leadership role when you should not or not assuming one where it is needed on your part. If you let your guard down (one level thinking) you can quickly get into trouble.

Some people just don't have the interpersonal skills and two-level thinking to do this. However, few can do it if they are tired. GET a LOT of sleep before going for the job interview. You will not get a good night sleep for several days during the interview so you need to have a few days of >8 h before you go. This is not trivial -- it is critical.

### (2). Appearances

Second, faculty will judge you on appearance first and your mind second. Sorry, but that is the way it is, and is that way for a reason. The most important concern by many faculty will be whether the candidate will play nicely in faculty politics. It IS politics, so the ability to compromise is a key trait that other faculty will judge you on. If a person is not willing to compromise on something as superficial as appearance by demonstrating conformity to the formality of a job interview, then the faculty will assume that you will be unable to compromise on other issues such as teaching assignments, committee service, and departmental policies.

In short, get spruced up and dress nicely. If you can't bring yourself to wearing a tie fine, but consider wearing a jacket, nice shirt, etc.

### (3). Organization

Third, you are an organized guy, but there is a natural tendency to assume that, on an interview, others around you will be planning ahead for the fact that you may need to, e.g., go to the bathroom, upload your you powerpoint talk to the local computer (or even have a local computer and projector turned on and hooked up), etc. Keep an eye on time don't let yourself get way behind the schedule for talking with people. Keep your agenda with you at all times and politely ask if you are supposed to be moving on when it gets to be a minute or two past time. Make sure you have time to prepare for your talk. Upload the file to the desktop on the computer, check the fonts on the slides, know how the lights work in the room, check for cables that might trip you up, do you need water available, need a pointer, etc. YOU will be judged by how smoothly things go not the person who was supposed to do this for you.

### (4). Hidden messages, enthusiasm

Next, beware of hidden messages you might be sending. The job interview is the time for you to SELL yourself. No matter what you think is going on, you should always be enthusiastic about wanting this job. No one wants to offer a job to someone that they are not convinced will accept the job. Everything is negotiable AFTER you get a job offer. Don't suggest you need a lot of start up dollars, avoid any dollar figures - you should, instead, be honest about the type of research you do, and can address startup questions by saying you need to do x and y activities. Again, startup is negotiable AFTER you get an offer. You are likely to meet with the chair or head of the search committee at the end of your interview. This is the time to be very positive about everything.

### (5). Do your homework

Finally, know the department. Devote a few evenings to investigating each faculty member in the department read their own web sites but also do a literature search on each and read the most recent papers they published, and NOT just ecology faculty. Know the department in terms of who teaches what, who has tenure, etc.