

Things to Know before You Go: Some Unexpected Challenges

As the final paper on a panel on “Assembling a Teaching Portfolio for the Job Market,” this paper takes a broad, retrospective look (though not without tips on matters of detail) at how the teaching portfolio and other matters of pedagogy fit into a candidate’s job search and subsequent early career at a college or university. I begin with an overview of the timeline of the job market: that is, when the first advertisements start to be posted, when applications are due, and when the cycle ends for the year. This is important for laying out the scope of my talk, which proceeds chronologically, highlighting a few things that a candidate should be aware of before the application season starts and while it progresses through various phases; at the end, I discuss the relevance of this process to reappointment and tenure after an academic position has been secured.

The first part of this talk focuses on a pair of beneficial steps that might be taken even a year or more before the candidate goes on the market. First is the importance of teaching a variety of classes, if possible, over the course of one’s time as a graduate student or lecturer. This experience not only shows a candidate to be appealingly versatile but also equips him to speak and write more comfortably about his own teaching style and preferred courses – skills which are critical to the teaching statement and to interviews of all types. Second, it is advisable to ask colleagues and mentors (especially those not writing letters of recommendation) to sit in on one or more class periods and write up a short report of that experience. These observation reports provide search committees with an inside look at the candidate’s teaching and show that he has the support of more than just his dissertation committee.

The next part of the talk addresses a few apparently minor but potentially very aggravating technical issues that may arise over the course of a year on the market. In particular,

I will suggest some ways to anticipate potentially time-consuming idiosyncrasies of Interfolio and other online applications as they bear on the teaching portfolio. A candidate who applies for thirty or more positions in one semester will not care to spend more time than necessary on technology rather than substance.

I turn then to interviews (at the SCS and elsewhere), which can be expected to spend significant time on the candidate's teaching preferences and plans for various standard or more unusual courses. Since many of these courses will be new even to experienced teachers, it is important to devote some energy to researching common textbooks, thinking about potential material to cover, and even observing others' courses. Similarly, some advertisements (especially those for post-doctoral positions) will ask for innovative course proposals, which a candidate should at least have thought about before the beginning of the application season.

Finally, I conclude with a glance ahead at the processes of reappointment and tenure. Though institutional and departmental practices vary, a regular feature of such processes is the candidate's submission of statements on his teaching, research, and service. These are items, then, that are neither confined to the job market nor located there arbitrarily but actually give the candidate a chance to think about his academic identity in the broadest sense as he begins his career. It is often a special challenge for new professors to determine how these three categories fit together into a coherent whole, but the application process enables candidates to get a head start on the problem.