

Gender Board Workshop: **Life After EVAN**

Academic Careers and Interviews in Mainland Europe

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Overview

- The (chaotic) career structure in Europe
- Examples Austria and Germany
- To be or not to be a Postdoc
 - Why and what is a postdoc?
 - Preparing for the interview (with whomever)

The Career Structure in Europe

Structuring academic careers in Europe,
Chelsea Wald, *Science Careers* 2. May 2008

- “If we had a unified career structure, that would revolutionize European science. I would start to draw everybody in.”
- Major flaws: Each country has its own academic job titles and, unwritten, career paths, making an international job search thorny and opaque.

The Career Structure in Europe

- European universities offer junior positions without any consideration of whether there will be another position when it ends; researchers can be left jobless halfway through their careers even if they have done excellent work.
- Many of these cases at UNVI...
- Mainly a reaction to former times when people were tenured without evaluation, and blocked the positions forever.

The Career Structure in Europe



- A working group on academic career structures for the “Initiative for Science in Europe” headed by Tony Hyman
- “ a complete patchwork of career structures throughout Europe and sometimes even within some countries
 - Eg, the habilitation, essentially a second thesis, is necessary to join the faculty.
 - A research assistant is called junior professor, assistant professor, or lecturer in other countries and institutions
- Early career-positions between postdocs and professorships are almost always subservient to a senior researcher, so they “don’t have a chance to exploit their own ideas while they are still young.” These positions are not equivalent to that of an assistant professor in the U.S. where researchers direct their own research groups.

The Career Structure in Europe

The new system will address the “gap in the career structure” between junior and senior levels

In most sectors of the economy, Hyman says, “if you do a good job, you keep your job; if you don't, you get fired.” But in European academia, junior researchers often effectively get fired, even if they do a good job, because another position is not available for them either because of poor advanced planning and funding or because of a fixed junior-to-senior ratio within an institution.

It's no wonder, Hyman says, that in the face of this uncertainty, young people choose to go abroad or enter industry instead of staying at European universities. “People need to be able to plan their careers with an acceptable level of risk,” Schatz says. “Tenure track fulfills that goal.”

The Career Structure in Europe

“Most universities don’t understand what tenure track is,” and his experience suggests that their leaders don't necessarily see the need for change.

“I think we're not ready for one system,” Bjelke says.

Others, like Hyman, are optimistic. He says a simple first step toward a transparent Europe wide job market would be to standardize job titles and post jobs on a predictable schedule and in a common place, such as a central Web site. “No money’s required,” he says, just an agreement that he says is an obvious extension of the Bologna process, a mandate to standardize higher education in Europe to allow for student mobility.

“Europe has done quite well in standards,” he says, “so I think these things can work extremely quickly.”

Austria

- Säule 1: Assistant in PhD training, 4 yrs max.
- Säule 2: University assistant, max. 6 ys, 4 hrs teaching
- Säule 3: Contract professorship, can have tenure-option (max. 7 yrs)
- Säule 4: Professorship tenured

- UNVI as of 2009:

Tenure track system, where one can be tenured after six ys and positive review

Germany

- I've asked several friends at German universities, and they all didn't know...
- But what they have now is funding for many different junior professorships for very young researchers without habilitation

The Career Structure in Europe

- Formerly, no real equivalent to a postdoc position
- It usually goes between your PhD and your first faculty position
- Prerequisite for an academic career

To be or not to be a postdoc? Criteria

- A postdoctoral position is a period of apprenticeship for the purpose of gaining scientific technical skills that advance the career.
- Each type differs in sources of funding, salary, benefits, institutional standing, career development opportunities, and ability to take ownership of a project.
- Universities: Possibility of postdoc experience via soft money, either your own, or senior researchers' grants
- Full time research and scholarship
- Appointee is expected to publish (and receive credit for) research performed during that period

Responsibilities of a postdoc

- Dual
 - Acquire experience needed to advance your career
 - Contribute to program of your advisor through research accomplishments and interactions with others

Advantages of the postdoctoral experience

- Opportunity to enhance your research experience
- Work towards greater independence and self-direction
- Become known to the research community through publications and presenting at scientific meetings
- Advance career by networking colleagues
- Develop and/or enhance teaching, leadership and mentoring skills.

Disadvantages of the postdoctoral experience

- Nebulous state, not quite student, not quite faculty or staff
- Work hours routinely 12 hrs/day, > 50 hrs/wk
- Little time for life outside the lab
- Strain on personal lives for both sexes -> starting and maintaining families
- Financial strain

The Interview: Preparation and Etiquette

Donna H. Korzick, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Physiology and Kinesiology
The Pennsylvania State University, San Francisco CA

I. Preparation

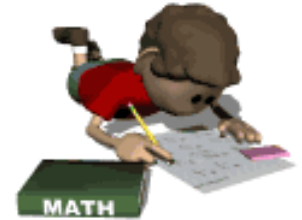
- A. Homework: know with whom you are meeting!
- B. During your visit: listen and ask questions (show you've done your homework)

II. Etiquette

- A. During your visit: KEEP YOUR GUARD UP!
- B. After your visit: more homework

III. The Seminar

Preparing for the Interview: Do Your Homework



- Get an **itinerary** beforehand (communicate with the secretary/administrative assistant)
- Do your **homework**
 - ☞ Become familiar with the individuals on your itinerary
 - ☞ Perform a literature search/know their research! Be able to ask one intelligent question in each area.
 - ☞ Download pictures of faculty from departmental websites to recognize faces.
 - ☞ Be familiar with core facilities and centers

Preparing for the Interview: Do Your Homework

- If you are asked to give a **seminar**
 - ☞ Obtain information on the type of room in which you will be presenting (large vs small group)
 - ☞ Know your audience and plan ahead
- Have a preliminary **start-up list** ready to go....
- Triple-check your **CV** for mistakes... you will be asked about them.
- You may be asked to give a “**chalk-talk**” or classroom lecture.

During Your Visit

- **Listen** carefully
 - To what is said and unsaid
 - Be attentive
- **Ask** questions of current faculty
 - examples
 - “What is the average teaching load?”
 - “With whom do you collaborate?”
 - “How many students do you mentor?”
 - “I read your recent paper in _____. While this is not my direct area, I found it interesting. Can you explain_____.”



Questions You Should Ask Any Potential Department Head

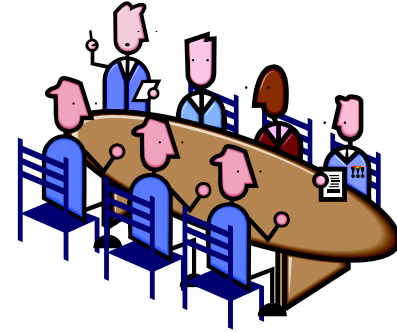
- Where will you **fit** in the general scheme of the department? What is the chair's **vision** for the department and new hires?
- What **type** of position is this? Research, Teaching, both? – make them articulate departmental expectations!
- Is it possible to **extend** the appointment ?



Questions You Should Ask Any Potential Department Head, cont.

- **Ask to see your laboratory space!** Will it require any renovations and what resources are available for this?
- What is the university policy on grant “**indirects**”?
- Is there departmental support for graduate students or post-docs? **Assistantships**?

Meeting With the Search Committee?



- Yet another opportunity to show you've done your **homework!**
- Be familiar with the undergraduate and graduate aspects of the department

Be prepared to **answer** questions like...

1. Tell me a little about yourself (i.e., about your background experiences that will position you to success in the new job).
2. What is the reason for your career move?
3. What attracts you to our institution?
4. What would your colleagues say are your research strengths and weaknesses?

The question seeks to provide insight into your ability to recognize problems, initiate corrective actions, or continued professional development.

5. Tell me something about your accomplishments and contributions in research.

The question tries to get at information not covered in the CV or cover letter, to assess predictors of success.

Be prepared to **answer** questions like...

6. What are your research plans for the next 2 to 5 years?
What are possible sources of funding to support your research? How soon do you anticipate submitting a grant application?
7. Do you envision any kind of collaborations with people at our institution?
8. How do you see yourself enhancing the research mission of the department?
9. What about teaching? Do you have any experience?
10. We may need someone to teach (name some topic).
Even though you have no experience, would you be willing to teach this topic?
11. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
12. What kind of startup package do you need?

The Seminar Presentation

Know your audience!

This may be the only interaction you have with future colleagues: highlight your **teaching** skills!

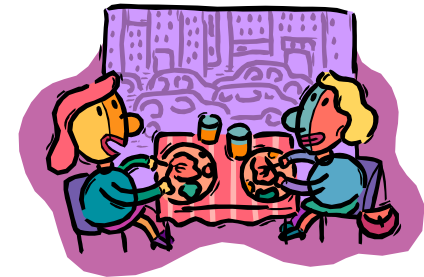
Distinguish yourself from your current mentor: demonstrate **independent** thinking, but don't take credit for that which is not yours!

Provide a direction for **future** studies.

Don't use "cutesy" fonts like comic sans!

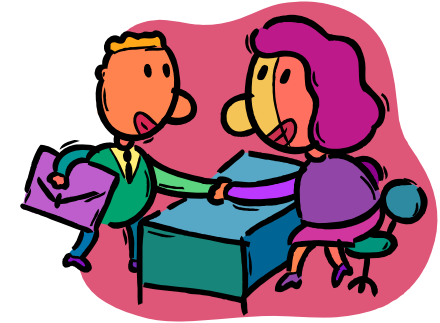


The Dinner: Social Do's and Don'ts



- **Keep your guard up!** Now is not the time to weigh in on departmental politics or share negative information about your current employer – **keep it positive.**
- If you consume alcohol, no more than one drink!
- Plan ahead to **ask** questions, silence is painful:
 - cost of living, quality of schools?
 - popular housing developments?
 - community recreational services
 - reflect on your day,
 - ask appropriate questions from prior interviews
 - listen**

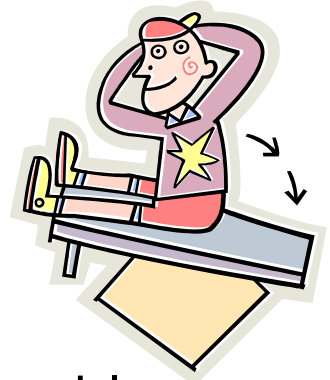
The Follow-Up: After Your Visit



- **Thank you** letter
 - avoid overly effusive language
 - express enthusiasm
 - emphasize the unique contributions you will make to the department
- Get **input** from senior investigators in the field about the chair/department to solidify your impression

Korzick's Words of Wisdom

- Be enthusiastic! Make sure the job is yours to turn down
- Have your start-up list ready to go....Don't be afraid to ask for what you need but don't make outrageous demands!
- You will be exhausted, make sure you train!
 - Practice your seminar!
- Get as much as you can in writing; save emails
- Let the chair offer information on:
 - Mechanisms for spousal hires
 - Salary (in public institutions this is a matter of public record)
 - P & T (clock stopping)



Useful webpages:

2008 Mentoring Symposium on “Gainfully Employed: From Launching a Job Search to Navigating Negotiations”

<http://the-aps.org/careers/careers1/mentor/workshop/o8wrkshp.htm>

EB 2006 Careers Symposium: “Navigating the Interview: How to Make It Work for You”

<http://www.the-aps.org/careers/careers1/ebsymposia/eb2006symposium.htm>

The Mentoring Forum

<http://www.the-aps.org/careers/careers1/mentor/info.htm>