Answers to General Topics from Speaker Discussions

Applying to Faculty Positions

- **When did you start to apply:** I started applying to faculty positions in the last 6 months of graduate school. I took the time to prepare a faculty application package and tweaked it for positions as they became available. I did this throughout my postdoc as well and learned from interviews / discussions what people were looking for and how I needed to round out my cv.

- **How did you know you were ready:** I wasn’t really sure if I was going to like being a faculty member, but you don’t know until you try. You can always leave academia, it is much harder to re-enter after leaving for industry.

- **Always apply to multiple positions if possible even if there is one you really want or think is likely to come through. Positions can fall through at the last minute due to a lack of funding. You can always call up someone you turned down (faculty positions or postdocs) and try to find out if a position is still open.**

- **Application prep:** Start writing things really early (more than 3 weeks) and make sure everything makes logical sense and doesn’t have typos. You want to really develop your ideas in your teaching/research statements (particularly if a university asks for a long statement).

Research

- I’m in a competitive field and have a policy of not talking about what I’m doing with other people until my projects are submitted or in review. I try to also teach this to my research lab members. I’ve been scooped once from a loose comment and hope to avoid it in the future.

- I try to balance projects that are low hanging fruit and can product quick papers with those that require more time / research development. It’s important to have a mix of these to both continue the momentum of your publication record (while a postdoc / pre-tenure) and develop major new advances that my require a lot more thought.

- **How to come up with research ideas:** I keep a lot of notes and like to go back to ideas I jot down and reread my notes from past months. I also keep a folder of interesting articles / notes for new ideas. I also spend time talking to people at conferences / departmental speakers. When I get an idea, I summarize it and put it into my folder if I can’t look at it right away.

How do you deal with rejection?

- It can be difficult to maintain optimism after receiving rejection letters for positions or grants. I usually read the criticism / letter once, and then go back to it. If there isn’t sufficient feedback, I try to find feedback of how I should improve my cv and make myself a better candidate in the future.

- **Grants:** I tend to go back and ask the program manager directly if I should resubmit a fellowship or not and if they have any pointers for why I was unsuccessful (if I can’t figure it out in the reviews). Depending on if you are applying to NASA or NSF however, some program managers ask that you don’t
re-submit. Also, never resubmit without responding to reviewer comments / improving upon your original draft. You may get the exact same proposal reviewer and they will not be pleased that you’ve ignored their comments.

Summarize the differences between positions at a government lab vs. faculty member at a research university

- At a government lab, my research was dictated by grant calls for the agency. As a faculty member, I can now apply for grants at any agency. It’s given me more freedom to explore various ideas that my previous agency might not have been interested in.
- Government labs can be safer places (if you have a hard-money position) to develop your grant writing and research skills. As a faculty member, I now have to write grants to maintain a research group (with postdocs/students) and to provide myself with 3 months salary. I’m glad I had the time to improve my grant-writing abilities.
- At the government lab I was at, it was a 100% soft money research position. Some people thrive in that environment however (I did) and found it made me a better researcher/grant writer to constantly feel the pressure to bring in grants. You constantly need to apply and get lots of feedback, which I needed at that stage in my career. I ultimately left for a faculty position however as I wanted to mentor students and teach and found that lacking in my 100% research position as I became more senior. I still bring in grants however to support students/postdocs. The main difference is now I feel pressure to support them and minimally myself.

Time Management

- Teaching: I find that being organized is the key to staying on top of managing time for teaching vs. research. Teaching is a daily/weekly deadline-driven act whereas research is ongoing; you can fall into the trap of spending all of your time on teaching and ignoring your research if you are not careful. I try to organize my classes by topics and readings before the start of the semester and put everything in a syllabus with very clear policies. That way, I stay on track and only a lot a shorter amount of time to class prep during the semester.
- Outside work: I don’t have as full of a social life as I would like, but that is because I am managing my faculty position with two young children at home. I’ve simplified my weekends by trying to spend time with my family. During the week I focus on work.
- Outside work: For all early career researchers, they should realize that you can choose who you marry and to set boundaries from the beginning of what each of you wants to do. My partner and I are supportive of each other and try to synch time when we are both working on weekends/nights or taking time off. We also seek to make our home lives easier by outsourcing tasks we don’t want to do (e.g. housecleaning and eating takeout).

Role Models
I was lucky and had a female graduate thesis advisor who to this day I still see as my greatest female role model and seek advise from. However, I’ve developed various role models for different characteristics I admire, not specifically for their gender. It is important to have various role models; no one is perfect, you can build the perfect role model from more than one person.

Miscellaneous Advice

- “Feuds”: Each field is different, but most people don’t hear this advice until they’ve gotten into a sticky situation. Try to avoid getting into feuds with people or being outright mean (e.g. in paper reviews, questions at conference, comments to the press). It can be time draining and emotionally taxing and really can be avoided with proper behavior. Some people have a way of speaking that can also be more abrupt / confrontational than you are used to, so try to emotionally detach yourself from criticism and assess whether it is warranted or perhaps emotionally charged. Talk to the person and seek advice from mentors in your field to avoid escalation. As you go through your career, you’ll bump into the same people over and over; you will develop a reputation and you want to make sure it is a positive one.

- Dealing with Gender Diversity: Something to keep in mind is that people are much more interested in asking female faculty members if they have children and what their husbands do for a living. Since women are a minority, we’re often asked these questions and I answer to try to be a role model of balancing work and family life. I’m also asked a lot about how I manage my time outside of work. In talking with my male colleagues, we tend to spend our time the same way; people are just more interested in my schedule. I feel as though we’re treated the same way and have similar backgrounds, but I get asked a lot more how life outside of work is going.