Enjoying the Job Market

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Main main points

- You can find ways to enjoy the job market.
- Read as many other research and teaching statements as you can.
- Let your application be an expression of who you are.

About this presentation

There are a myriad of documents about the academic job market, and about job markets more generally. This presentation doesn't even attempt to replace them.

This talk is written in response to my experience with the job market (only three times in four years).
The talk is:

- Highly personal
- Incomplete
- Experience-based

The talk focuses on
a few pieces of repeated advice I've found most helpful,
and a few things I discovered and hadn't heard from other sources.

Outline

Before the job market

Some things to think about the year (or more) before you go on the job market.

- Interact with people at conferences
- Interact with people at seminars and dinners
- Establish a website
- Keep your CV current
- Do amazing work!

I think these are all standard advice, so I'll just focus on one: the website.

Your website

Your website is one of the first things people will look for when they want to get to know you.

Be sure it includes:

- A useful picture of yourself
  – Help people remember whether they've met you
- Information about your work
- Things you would like to say to a potential colleague
- Visitor tracking (but don't obsess over it)
  e.g. Google Analytics

Preparing your mind

There is a huge psychological component to the job market. Taking this seriously and being intentional about *how* you think about your application can have a dramatic effect on how you're perceived.

Love your work

While working, it's natural to want to do more, have better results, be a better mathematician, etc.

Under the pressure of the job market, these can become feelings of inadequacy, irrelevance, insufficiency, ...
Such thoughts drain your energy and productivity.

Force yourself to think *realistically* but *positively* about your work.

- You have made contributions – list them
- Your work is exciting – say why
- You have good ideas for the future – list them

Yes, this feels a bit silly! But you will have to explain these things in your application and to interviewers. It makes sense to practice!

Be positive about the job market

Going on the job market presents a unique opportunity to reflect over your career, collect and refocus your ideas. Take advantage of this!

Other opportunities:

- Travel, meet up with friends
- Talk to people about things that interest you
- Wear your best clothes
- [*add your own idea here*]

Writing (and reading!) applications

Before you write your application materials, read lots of other application materials. Try a web search for "math research statement".

- Get a sense of the range of styles, formats
  – Read statements from the second and third pages of search results
- Be inspired (not daunted!) by research statements of mathematicians you admire.
- Imagine what it's like to read hundreds of applications
  – After reading a dozen applications or so, what bores you?
  – Try reading statements from different fields
  – Learn the balance between generalities and technical details.

Writing (and reading!) applications

- As you write, let your content shape the document format, not vice versa.
  The first times I tried to write research statements, I unconsciously imagined a generic statement that I should personalize to describe my work. Later, I enjoyed the process much more by thinking about my work as it is, and then trying to write a research statement that fit it's natural shape.
- Organize your thoughts and main points before you start writing.
  This might help you determine the "shape" of your research. Some might also think of their research in terms of a "storyline", or a "symphony". Choose a metaphor that works for you!
- If you're stuck, try describing your research to a friend in 10 minutes. Then try 2 minutes.

Your research statement

You are the leading expert on your research. Write about it so that other people can understand it and be excited about it.

- Get the main points across early.
- Write for non-specialists.
  – Practice by trying to give an overview of your work to friends in other areas
- Let your research program be an expression of who you are.

Your teaching statement

Teaching is an important part of a mathematician's career. Show that you take it seriously.

- Note whether the job ad asks for a teaching *statement* or a teaching *philosophy*, and think about the difference between these
- Focus on experience over ideals
  For example, everyone wants their students to understand concepts instead of memorize facts. It's not helpful to say this unless you can describe a particular success you've had in doing so.

Your teaching statement

Teaching is an important part of a mathematician's career. Show that you take it seriously.

- Specific examples are more useful and more memorable than generalities
  Instead of saying "I ask students questions during class to see if they're following" you might say "When I'm teaching the product rule for derivatives I ask different students to tell me the derivatives of functions involved."
- Take inspiration from standard interview questions you like or find challenging
  For example: "Describe a time that something went wrong in the classroom, and how you fixed it."
- Refine your content by talking to others about it.

Recommendation letters

- Identify people who have met you and who are well-known
  I have been told, and I believe, that the latter of these two is slightly more important than the former. A responsible writer will get to know your work before they write for you. Of course they are more likely to agree if they are already familiar with your work!
- Have as many senior people write for you as possible – their letters have more meaning because they've been in the profession longer
- Be aware that letter-writers outside the U.S. may be used to a very different hiring system and their letters may be hard to interpret
- Ask someone you trust for help identifying letter-writers who would be good for you

Applying for jobs

- Use MathJobs.Org and EIMS.ams.org
  – Check regularly, and apply for jobs in chunks
  – EIMS job ads have substantially smaller applicant pools
- Read the job ads, but don't take them too seriously
  – There may be unwritten exceptions that a department is willing to consider
- Every job you apply for will cost some time and energy
  – Minimize these costs and prioritize the jobs
- Everyone is looking for a good fit
  – Focus on jobs that fit you well (but be flexible!)

Cover letters

- Craft your cover letters carefully
  – Don't give overworked hiring committees an excuse to stop looking at your application
- Your cover letter can be an invitation to read the rest of your application.
- Customize your cover letters:
  - Opening ("Dear ...")
  - Address
  - Position name/type (VAP v.s. postdoc v.s. tenure-track)
  - School name
  - One-line description of your application
  - Research groups you would fit into
  - Other ways you would fit at the school
  - LaTeX macros for separate paragraphs
- The more of this you can automate, the better

Interviewing

- Dress nicely (and comfortably, and warmly)
  – Practice wearing your interview clothes in the Fall!
- Be your (BEST) self
  – Stay healthy, rested, focused
- Know the school
- Know the faculty
- Bring written notes, questions, talking points
  – Separate notes for each meeting so you don't loose track of your questions
- Have backup questions if there is leftover time
- Be clear on research expectations, teaching loads, salary, and anything else that's important to you

Negotiating

Administrators will want you to give verbal agreement to an offer before they send you something written. This reduces the number of times they have to get approval from other administrators, and also means you have to think on your feet during the offer phone call.

Before the call:

- Check salaries at public institutions
  – This is not enjoyable, but the information is valuable
- Check AMS annual survey of salary information
- Use a cost-of-living calculator
- Think about what you can reasonably ask for, and why

Negotiating

During the call:

- Take notes
  In your excitement, you may forget everything that was said!
- Be professional
  This can help contain your excitement and maintain negotiating focus
- Ask what is negotiable
- Ask for more money
- Say "Thank you, I need to think about this."
  You don't have to give a verbal agreement if you're not ready; or you can give a tentative verbal agreement, to be followed by an email.

Thank You!

The ideas here have been germinating for a few years, and have benefitted from a number of conversations with friends, colleagues, and interviewers. I'd like to thank them all, and thank the University of Georgia math department for inviting me to talk about this.

I'd like to mention John Drake in particular as the first person who told me there were things to like about being on the job market.

`http://www.nilesjohnson.net/job-market-advice.html`