

Advice for the Political Science Job Market

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July 11, 2019*

Below are some general pieces of advice and tips for planning for, confronting, and wading through the Political Science job market based on my experiences and advice I received throughout the process. To caveat the advice and tips below, I should make clear that I am not an expert on the job market in Political Science, so take what follows with a grain of salt. Additionally, for a little background, I predominately applied for jobs with a focus in American Politics or Public Policy. At the end of my first job market (AY 2017-2018), I accepted a post-doc at the University of Virginia. At the conclusion of my second job market (AY 2018-2019), I accepted a tenure track position at the University of South Carolina. Comments about the document are welcome: [kelsey.shoub\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:kelsey.shoub[at]gmail.com).

This document is laid out quasi-sequentially as to what you should be doing (or at least considering doing) between the January before you go on the market and the September (or so) when your first market starts!

I hope some of this helps to demystify at least a portion of the process! Good luck!

Leading up to the fall you begin to be on the market...

Outside of the “normal” advice one gives when preparing for the market, such as ensuring you have the best publication record possible, here are a few other things to consider:

1. **Apply for and go to the “big” conferences for your subfield (e.g., PolMeth) and for the field generally (i.e., APSA).**
By the time you attend these conferences, you should have created a website that at least has an “about me” paragraph and your CV. Note that these deadlines are often very early so be aware of them. For example, APSA’s deadline is typically the first or second week in January.
2. **Have at least a (good) draft of your job market paper done by the May before you go on the market, and ask your letter writers whether they will write you a letter.**
Ideally you will have submitted the paper to a journal by this point. Barring that, you should have a good draft done by May and spend the next two months polishing it. Tell your letter writers you are planning to go on the market and ask whether they will write

you a recommendation letter. You should have a minimum of 3 letter writers, one of whom must be your adviser.

3. **Have your “generic” materials written by the end of July.**

Your letter writers should be sent these materials, and they should be given at least 6 weeks to write your letters. This means that your basic packet should be drafted by the end of July, and then they should be polished by the end of August. The components of this are discussed in the sections that follow.

4. **Build a good support system and pick up a fun new hobby!**

The job market is incredibly stressful. You need a good group of people around you and an activity to distract you and remind you that there is life outside of this process.

Application Materials

Although the specific components for each job you apply to may be different, there are standard components that many will ask for that you can prepare during the summer before applying. In addition to these formal components, you should create a personal website that presents your general materials, research, and teaching experience.

A Personal, Professional, and Public Website

You should make one and publish it by the August you are on the job market, if not before. This is because those you may reach out to for meetings and interviews at APSA may visit your website to quickly verify you are who you say you are and to learn more about you. However, you should never put anything up on your website that is not polished and that you would not want a potential employer or colleague to see (i.e., working papers). Here are a few questions and related tips that helped me to think through when I got started:

- **What platform should you use?**

Websites provided by your institution are typically free, which is really nice, but cannot travel with you. As a result, if you can afford it, I would suggest creating a website that can travel with you regardless of where you go. Create a website on Wix, WordPress, SquareSpace, or a similar platform that you can maintain throughout your career. Nearly all of these platforms offer student-based pricing.

- **What content should be included?**

Two essential pages for any academic website are: (1) an “about me” section that states what your research looks at, your teaching interests, where you’ve been published, and where you are in your career (e.g., I am PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina); and (2) a page that provides your basic job market materials (i.e., teaching portfolio, research statement, and writing sample). Additionally, on both pages, you should provide a link for those wanting to download your CV. That being said, ideally you will have 5 pages: the home page that includes your “about me” profile, your CV, your research interests and activities, your teaching interests and experience, and your job market materials. By APSA, you should have published at a minimum your “about me” page with your CV.

- **Once it's created, is there anything you should do?**

First, while the majority of people accessing your site will likely be on desktops, make sure that people using their cell phones will still be able to access and read your website. Second, make sure that if your name is googled in conjunction with the words “political science” or “polisci”, then your website is one of the first sites to be listed. To get it to do so, you may need to ask friends and family to Google your name or your name in conjunction with “political science” or “polisci”, find your website among the results, and then click it. Eventually, this should help your website be one of the first listed.

The Basic Components of the Application Packet

For each of the different documents that may be a part of the application, it is best to get examples from those who have recently been on the market and have your committee members read multiple drafts. Below is a list of the “standard” application components. These include:

- **Cover Letter or Letter of Interest**

This should be 1-2 pages, single spaced. It should introduce who you are, why you are interested in the position, what makes you a good fit for the institution/position, what your research and teaching credentials are, what your research and teaching potential is, and what is enclosed in your application packet.

- **CV**

The order in which you list things on your CV subtly signals how you prioritize different areas of your academic life. As a result, depending on whether you are predominately applying to teaching-oriented rather than research-oriented institutions, you should reorder the contents of you CV.

- **Research Statement**

A 2-4 page statement on your research agenda that signals where it has been and where it is going. For ABDs and PostDocs, there should be a section explicitly discussing your dissertation.

- **Teaching Statement**

A 2-3 page statement that addresses your teaching philosophy, your teaching experience, and what courses you could/would like to teach.

- **Teaching Evaluations**

A 1-3 page summary of your teaching evaluations that includes a summary of both your ratings and student comments. Make the raw teaching evaluations available upon request.

- **Writing Sample**

A solo-authored paper of 20-30 double spaced pages that stands alone and effectively demonstrates your research interest. For ABD and first year PostDocs, this should be a sample from your dissertation.

- **Diversity Statement**

A 1-2 page statement on how you would (and have) promote(d) diversity and inclusion in the department, on campus, and in the discipline.

- **3+ Letters of Recommendation**

In addition to these, search committees may also ask for:

- A course syllabus (or two)
- A statement on how you understand or relate to the goals and mission of the university
- A one page statement on your dissertation

Now that you have your materials, when & how do you apply?

- **When is the “the market?”**
Jobs begin to be posted in June and continue to be posted throughout the academic year. Most tenure track jobs are posted between June and January, while most postdocs and visiting positions are posted between January and June. However, the first deadlines for turning in applications tend to be the last weekend in August. Additionally, not all jobs that are posted in the fall are filled in the fall, and searches can continue until they have filled a position.
- **Where can you find job postings?**
Universities can post job openings in many places. Most post job openings on APSA’s eJobs board and/or the Chronicle of HigherEd. In addition to this, some will promote open positions on related listservs, more general higher education job websites, and/or on Twitter. This means that you should be on the relevant listservs for you before you hit the market and that you should identify what higher education job websites you should be looking at.
- **How do you apply?**
Essentially all applications are now online and increasing numbers are doing them on either AcademicJobs or Interfolio. Both websites store your materials, which makes applying for the second job on their websites very easy. Additionally, many schools use an internal application system, which is unique to that university. Make sure to apply to a position between 1 and 2 weeks before the deadline.

Interviewing

Interviews can take on many different forms and come at different times. Below are some things to consider at each stage.

To (in)formally interview at APSA or not?

Based on my experience, I would suggest participating in them. They give you the opportunity to learn about different positions and begin to be comfortable with the interviewing process. While they will not get you a job, they can help get your foot in the door.

- **What are “APSA interviews?”**
While some APSA interviews serve as informational interviews, where the person or persons conducting them simply give you information, many are conducted in the same manner and serve a similar purpose of a phone or Skype interview. Further, in addition

to “official” APSA interviews, you may set up or be e-mailed to “informally” interview at APSA. These informal interviews are conversations with one or more professors from an institution about the position, the area surrounding the university, your research, and what courses you might want to teach.

- **How do you set up an APSA interview?**

You need to reach out to schools or individual members of search committees to set up an interview. To know whether a school is doing APSA interviews, you should start checking job postings in July. Within the posting, schools typically indicate whether or not they are doing interviews or are available to meet at APSA. They may also list what you need to send them when you ask for an interview. Typically, this is either or both a CV and/or a cover letter (i.e., a letter of interest). Additionally, on related listservs or on twitter, individuals may advertise that they will be at APSA and happy to discuss and answer questions about the department and position. Set these up as you see them posted, and be cognizant that “deadlines” for setting these up may be early.

- **What should you prepare for the interview itself?**

Regardless of whether it is a formal or informal interview, you should bring a few copies of your CV with you, have looked over any materials you sent them beforehand, and prepared—or at least thought about—answers to a number of standard questions (i.e., questions about why you want the position, your research, and your teaching). Additionally, you need to have questions for them about the position and school. If you are meeting with multiple schools, you may consider bringing a notebook in which you have already prepared “cheat sheets” for each position and in which you can take notes.

Video and Phone Interviews

While not all institutions do video or phone interviews, many do. Throughout this process, remember that it is highly variable and random. There may be a very short or very large gap between when the application window closes and they contact you for a video or phone interview, and then another variably sized span of time after the interview to let you know whether or not you have a campus interview.

Below are a few tips that I found useful when preparing for and doing video and phone interviews.

What should you do to prepare?

- Do a fake interview with a friend and a friend of a friend to make sure everything is working on your computer or phone and to you get comfortable with the format.
- Make a “cheat sheet” with bullet point answers, notes, and a summary of the position to quickly look over before the interview begins.
- Make an “overview” syllabus if there is a course you *know* they will ask you about.
- Look over your materials for that position and become more familiar with the school, department, and position.

What about for the interview itself?

- Dress like it’s an in-person interview regardless of whether it is via phone or video.

- Do it in a quiet place with a stable connection. This may mean reserving a conference room in your department that has a landline rather than conducting the interview on your cell phone or in your apartment.

Finally, here is a non-exhaustive, example list of questions that you may be asked:

- Why did you apply? Why do you want this job?
- Tell us about your current research. How do you think this will develop over five years?
- What is your teaching style and/or philosophy?
- What classes would you want to or could teach? (How would you teach class X?)
- What is your mentoring style?
- How would you incorporate undergraduates into your research agenda?
- How would you create an inclusive environment?
- What questions do you have for us?

The Campus Interview (aka a Fly-Out)

Every campus interview is different. However, there are common elements, and a few common formats based on the type of institution with which you are interviewing. On almost any interview, you will have dinner with a small group of faculty, meet with the department chair or head, meet with a dean or provost, meet with faculty members either in groups or one on one, and meet with students. In addition to this, you will have to do at least one presentation and possibly two: a research talk and/or a teaching demonstration.

- **Your Research Talk, aka “the job talk:”** Typically the talk itself should be 30-45 minutes in length with 15-45 minutes of question and answer to follow. While this is a “standard” research presentation, it is likely much longer than other talks you have given, so practice it many times in front of different crowds. Additionally, this format changes very little between schools, so you can and should prepare for it well in advance.
- **Teaching Demonstrations:** Teaching demonstrations are unique to the school and position. As a result, each demonstration should be unique. Take time to tailor the presentation for the interview and environment.
- **Misc., practical advice:**
 - If flying, do not check a bag; only pack and bring a carryon bag.
 - If you don’t already have a credit card, apply for one. While some schools purchase your plane tickets upfront, many will only reimburse you.
 - Take quick, clean, and easy to eat snacks. You’ll likely be talking during most of your meals, so you may not eat much in the moment.