

Interview Questions

Compiled by Isla Myers-Smith, 2012

Including contributions from her colleagues in advance of her first job interview

List 1:

1. Describe your experiences in applying for funding.
2. Where will you get your first three grants?
3. What are the most important factors in preparing and presenting a paper?
4. What international experience have you had?
5. What is your international standing? (this is an Imperial College one!!!)
6. Why do you want to carry out your research and teach?
7. What is your greatest contribution to science thus far?

Teaching

8. Why do you want to become a lecturer?
9. What contribution would you be able to make to undergraduate teaching?
10. What ideas do you have about developing an MSc course and how would you go about it?
11. What experiences have you of course development and what was your contribution?
12. How would you handle the conflict of teaching and research?
13. What experiences have you of supervising students – either undergraduate or postgraduate?
14. How do you approach a student who is experiencing problems?
15. Give an example of a laboratory experiment and tell me what you think the students gained from it?

Professional Activities

16. What can you contribute to the Department/University?
17. What contribution do you make to any departmental committees?
18. What makes a successful seminar?
19. When you are involved in organizing a conference, what is your contribution to the team and the activity?

University / Department

20. Why apply to University X at this point in your career?
21. What do you think you can contribute to the Department of X/University?
22. What are the advantages of a Faculty system?
23. How do you see your career developing at the University of X?
24. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
25. Why do you want this job?
26. What does their institution have to offer to you?
27. How do you see yourself fitting in/complimenting the current faculty?
28. What kinds of specific collaborations can you envision?
29. What's your 5-10 year plan and what's your strategy to achieve it?
30. What will be your strategy to ensure you get grants funded?
31. What are the big issues in your field (other than the things you work on)?
32. What's your philosophy in graduate student advising (usually with respect to degree of independence) and teaching in general? If you are quite flexible on this issue, try to get a sense beforehand of what approach would work best in this department, and go with that.
33. How would you deal with a graduate student that wasn't meeting your expectations, or with adversity in general? How have you done so in the past?

Your Questions to the panel

34. Stipends for graduate students – are there university-level funding for students?
35. What are the teaching loads for this position, does it change over time?
36. What are the laboratory, office and student space provided?
37. What facilities exist for ecological research? i.e., Greenhouses, growth chambers, etc.
38. What are the research priorities for future recruitment into the Department?

List 2:

1. Sources of funding?
2. What are the primary sources of funding available to you in country X?
3. How will you divide up your proposed research areas to different granting agencies?
4. Discuss how you will fund large equipment purchases? (if applicable)
5. What happens with funding you currently have in xxxx (country of origin)? (if applicable)
6. Do you envisage the ability to obtain funding from sources outside of country X?

7. What size and types of facilities would you deem necessary to conduct your research?
8. What do you think of the infrastructure currently established in our Department and service labs?
9. Do you require any specialized equipment that is not in our current service labs?
10. How do you feel about sharing equipment in service labs?
11. What type of personnel support do you typically have to run your laboratory?

12. Collaborations in the department and on campus.
13. Collaborations outside the university.

14. Ability to obtain funds from industrial sources.
15. Your thoughts (e.g. limitations) on collaborating and obtaining funding from industry?

16. What is the optimal lab size (number of graduate students) for your research program?
17. In the past, have you had a mentor that you will use a paradigm to model yourself after as a supervisor? Describe your style of mentoring.
18. In terms of graduate student recruitment, what qualities or characteristics do you look for in a graduate student? Where do you find graduate students to include in your research program?
19. Do you feel that it is important that graduate students gain experience teaching during their degrees (i.e., TAing)?

Questions about Undergraduate teaching (rationale for question in parentheses)

20. Which courses (undergrad and graduate) do you think you could teach in this Department? (have they looked at our calendar to see how they would fit in?)
21. Are there courses that you would like to develop and teach that are not currently offered in the department? (thinking ahead to their teaching profile and grad student recruitment)
22. What is your experience with teaching large classes (more than 50 students)? If no prior experience, what do you anticipate your approach would be? (classroom management experience, realistic view of having to take on large classes)
23. What is your lecture style? Powerpoint presentations, lecture (didactic), enquiry-based, problem-based, web-based instruction, etc. Do you have methods (or plans) to incorporate writing into courses that you teach? (up-to-date methods of delivery, potential fit with Writing-to-Learn initiative on campus, even though they may not be aware of it)
24. Have you taken any courses or instruction on effective teaching? Who was your best teacher when you were an undergrad? (self-improvement and awareness of importance of teaching; ability to model effective teaching)
25. What do you see as the role of undergraduates in research? How would you involve undergrads in your lab? (extending trainee awareness beyond just grad student recruitment)
26. Scenario: you are teaching a module dealing with evolutionary processes in microbial adaptation to an environmental niche, and a couple of students who are avowed Creationists challenge you about the concept of evolution. What would you do? (thinking on their feet when faced with a sticky pedagogical situation: how to handle confrontation in a large class?)
27. What was attractive about the position description in the ad that convinced you to apply for the job?
28. How do you see yourself developing as a departmental citizen during your career?
29. Given the increased complexity of demands on your time as a young faculty member, what are your strategies for maximizing your scientific productivity and managing stress?

30. In a few years' time, you are likely to serve on search committees yourself, interviewing young and energetic applicants. Where do you see the field of xxxxx heading? Or put another way, what areas are likely to be 'hot' in the 5-10 year time-frame? Which topics will have fallen out of favour?

List 3:

1. What are the top 5 important research topics in ecology/biogeography/etc.?
2. What are the top 5 topics that should be covered in an ecology course?
3. How would you structure the biogeography course in geography?
4. How would you teach that differently if you were in a biology/geography department?
5. What courses would you teach (existing and new)?
6. What upper level course would you teach that would provide your potential grad students with the skills/knowledge they need?
7. What skills/experience will your grad students require?
8. What are the advantages of you being in geography?
9. What are the disadvantages of being in geography?
10. How will you fund your research beyond primary funding agency X?
11. One of your references said you were an excellent mentor. Explain how you have acted as a mentor.
12. What methods would you use to effectively teach to and engage students taking your courses as filler or because they fit their schedule?
13. What are your space and equipment needs?
15. How do you see yourself integrating into geography/how will you add to the department?
16. How many of your in prep papers on your CV are submitted now?
17. How have you been involved in collaborative research?