Applying for an Academic Position: Researching the Institution

When you begin applying for academic jobs, it's important to research the university and the department (or laboratory) to which you're applying. Doing a little research can help you figure out whether the institution fits with your own career plans, and it can also help you narrow your job search. If teaching is your passion, then perhaps that high-powered research university isn't for you – perhaps that little-known liberal arts college is just what you're looking for.

Having done a little research on an institution also pays big dividends when it comes to writing cover letters, since it can help you tailor your cover letters and supporting documents to a particular institution. Demonstrate your knowledge of an institution and the department to which you're applying and then connect it to your abilities as a researcher, teacher, and scholar. The additional knowledge you glean by researching institutions can only help you in interviews and campus visits, as it will demonstrate your enthusiasm for, and interest in, the institution. For advice on how to quickly get information about an institution that will be useful when deciding whether or not to apply, see the suggestions offered by Gene C. Fant Jr at: http://chronicle.com/article/What-If-Ive-Never-Heard-o/45565/.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The goal of researching an institution is to find out what its departmental structure is like and what defines its curriculum so that you can make a case for how your talents address the needs of that particular department. The following questions are intended as a starting point for researching an institution. Your dissertation director and other faculty members in your department can offer more specific tips on issues you should consider when applying to particular institutions.

● What is the institution's personality? How does it imagine itself? Is the school a large university with an emphasis on research, or is it a smaller liberal arts school with an emphasis on teaching? Or, does it envision itself as some combination of these?
● Who's in the department? What are their areas of specialization and preferred methodologies? How might my areas of specialization add to the department?
● What is the department's size? How large is it relative to other university departments? What kind of funding does it get from the university?
● How many undergraduate majors does it instruct? Is it a popular major among undergraduates?
● What role does the department play in the overall undergraduate curriculum? What kinds of courses do non-majors in the department take?
● What is the nature of an undergraduate course of study in the department? What kinds of survey courses might you be asked to teach given the nature of its curriculum?
● Does it have graduate degree programs? What kinds of graduate courses might you be asked to teach? What kinds of courses could you teach to enhance or expand its graduate course offerings?
● Is the department affiliated with any interdisciplinary majors or research centers?
● What are the department's research objectives? How would your research complement or expand this research program?

WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

● The institution's website
401-863-3326
167 Angell Street, Hemisphere Building, Providence, RI
brown.edu/careerlab
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Learn about the history of the school, see who's on the faculty, peruse course offerings, and learn about the undergraduate curriculum. A great way to figure out how the institution views itself, its culture, and its place in academia.

- **Department brochures and catalogs**
  Call the department or school you're applying to and ask for the information they give to prospective students. Many departments also have their own website with specific information on curricula, special programs, and individual faculty.

  Provides school rankings, class sizes, number of faculty, and other useful information.

- **Advisors and Faculty Members**
  Talk to faculty in your department – chances are, if they don't know a particular department, they know other scholars who do and might be able to offer you an insider's scoop on what's going on in a particular department.

- **The Chronicle of Higher Education**
  Posts information on salary surveys for faculty members at most institutions. For subscribers, The Chronicle offers a searchable database of faculty salaries at more than 1,700 institutions.