



## LANDING AN ACADEMIC JOB

### The process and the pitfalls

Jonathan A. Dantzig  
Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
1206 West Green Street  
Urbana, Illinois 61801

E-mail: [dantzig@illinois.edu](mailto:dantzig@illinois.edu)

©1995-2011 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois  
Last updated:

April 4, 2011

This document represents my observations and opinions about the faculty hiring process. Any suggestions for changes and corrections are welcome; please send them, to the above address. This document is viewable on the World-Wide Web at <http://mechse.illinois.edu/research/dantzig/ACAJOB>. HTML, PostScript and PDF versions are available. This document may be reproduced as long as the authorship and affiliation information is retained.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, the University of Illinois's Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering has been actively recruiting and hiring new faculty members. During the same period, a variety of factors have combined to make competition for faculty positions very stiff, so that even relatively small mistakes on the application or during the interviewing process can eliminate a candidate. Other institutions nationwide report similar experiences in their hiring processes.

As chairperson of the department's Faculty Recruiting Committee, I observed that potentially able candidates damage their chances through a lack of understanding of the recruitment and hiring process. I have written this document to help you — the new PhD or postdoc without faculty experience — to understand that process so that you will have a fair chance of success.

I am not trying to tell you how to prepare for an academic job, just how to apply and interview so that you may improve your chance of getting the job. I want to help you avoid making the simple mistakes that obscure your professional qualifications.

### Application Basics

Table I shows the usual steps in the application process, along with the written documents associated with each one. Each of these steps will be discussed in detail later, and sample documents are included in the Appendix.

<b>Table I: Steps and Documents</b>
-------------------------------------

Steps in the Application Process	Documents Required
Initial application	Letter of transmittal, curriculum vitae
Request for transcripts and references	Transcripts, list of references
Interview	Seminar abstract, brief bio, and follow-up letter
Offer	Accept/decline letter

**There should be no typographical or grammatical errors in any document you send in connection with a job application.** These kinds of errors cast your application in a poor light, and must be avoided at all cost! Run a spell checking program, get a friend to help you proofread — do whatever you have to do to get it right.

### What Professors Do

A few words are in order about the job that you are applying for. Professors are expected to —

- **Teach** undergraduate students and graduate students with enthusiasm and popularity
- Cheerfully **serve** on committees that further the aims of the institution (the more the merrier!)
- Write **proposals** which
- Bring in **external research funds** to
- Teach and **support graduate students**, who
- Perform **research**, which is then
- **Published** in refereed journals
- This leads professors to speak at
- And **organize** national and international meetings in their fields.
- **Consult** in their spare (??) time, to enhance contacts with the industrial world and broaden their knowledge

Different institutions place different weights on each of these tasks, and they expect faculty members to carry differing loads in each, as well. The **institution's** job in the hiring process is to try to find an individual who will achieve the expected results in each area, under the assigned loads. (Sounds a little like a statics problem.)

Your tasks in the interview process include determining whether the weights the institution puts on the various parts of the faculty member's job are consistent with your interests; convincing them that you can succeed; and deciding whether the loads they apply are consistent with the results they expect. This latter point cannot be overemphasized. No one is able to teach three courses per semester, manage a \$250,000/year research program, supervise seven graduate students, write four important papers per year, go to five national meetings per year, serve on six committees, and do an excellent job in every category. Nevertheless, there are institutions that expect this kind of performance. Do you want to work for one of these?

Enough preliminaries — on to the details.

## THE INITIAL APPLICATION

### Background

You see an ad in *Mechanical Engineering* that seems to fit you perfectly, and it's time to apply for the position. (See the sample advertisement in the Appendix.) Don't be deterred from applying even if the fit isn't perfect, however. The institution will let you know if you don't match its search criteria. Typically an institution will receive 150-200 applications for a position. (You didn't think you were the **only** one who read *ME*, did you?) You want to distinguish your application from the others. Forget about fancy stationery, colored resumes, etc. Only your credentials will help you here.

You **can** make sure that the people who read your application see those credentials, however. To this end, you send a letter of transmittal and your curriculum vitae (CV). Instead of a resume, academic positions require a CV, which is described below. Make sure your application is complete. If the advertisement asks for names of references or transcripts, include them. If official transcripts are required and they are to be sent directly from your university, then arrange for it and so state in your letter. Apply as soon as you see the ad. If you wait for the closing date, you could end up in the second group of applicants to be interviewed.

The letter of transmittal should be brief. Remember — whoever receives your letter will be receiving 199 others. Letters longer than one page will not be read carefully. The first paragraph should identify the position for which you are applying, how you learned of it, and that you are, in fact, making an application for it. The next two paragraphs (no more!) should identify salient points in your curriculum vitae that the reader should know about, because they make you the most appropriate candidate for the position. The final paragraph requests the next step in the process, i.e., an on-campus interview. See the sample letter in the Appendix.

A sample CV is also given in the Appendix. Your thesis research is very important to your application, so your thesis title and your advisor's name should appear on your curriculum vitae. Publications and presentations are also important, but don't try to pad your publication count! Several articles listed as 'in preparation' only means you tried to make the list look longer. However, if you have an article that has been **accepted** for publication, you should definitely include it, listed as "to appear."

Prepare written statements of your teaching and research goals. Some institutions ask for this, but even if they do not, the exercise is very beneficial. These should be one to two pages – no more! In the teaching statement, describe the courses you would like to teach, why you want to be a professor, and any experience you might have. In the research statement, include both short-term and

long-term goals. Try to make clear how you will use your existing skills, how you will expand them, and most important, how you will differentiate yourself from your advisor. Who cares about the research area you intend to pursue? What are potential sources of funding?

### **What to Expect**

You should receive an acknowledgment of your application letter within a few weeks after you mail it. If you have not heard anything by the end of three weeks, it is not unreasonable to call the department and ask if it has been received. However, phone calls should be kept to a minimum. Electronic mail may be more convenient than phone calls, but the same warning applies – keep these communications to a minimum. Understand that the process moves slowly because of the sheer number of applications that have to be dealt with, and the fact that people are busy. If you do end up calling, don't try to ask questions like "How does my application look?" Insecurity does not get you an interview. Besides, you will probably be speaking to a secretary who either doesn't know or is too smart to tell you anything.

Given the large number of candidates who apply, there are typically several cutting processes which take place. Usually, official transcripts and letters of reference are requested only for candidates who are on the first "short list." Thus, if you are asked for transcripts after a delay of several weeks (or even a few months), you can assume you have survived the first cut. Request your transcripts from your institution(s) right away. You should also contact your references to make sure they send their letters. It can happen that candidates will miss the early interview list if their letters of reference are late.

Reference letters are very important, and it is therefore necessary that you choose your writers carefully. Before you supply a name as a reference, you should ask the potential referee for permission. Ask people who know you well enough to comment on your technical expertise, experience and work style. Letters from non-technical "character witnesses" should be avoided. Make sure that your potential referees have an up-to-date CV and copies of publications so that their letters can resonate with these other materials. If a referee suggests that you write the letter and he/she sign it (yes, this actually happens!), gracefully decline. You should probably try to find someone to replace this referee, as any letter you would get is likely to be useless.

## **THE INTERVIEW**

### **Background**

A long time may pass between the transcript request and your next contact. This is neither a good nor a bad sign. Don't keep calling the department; if they had something to tell you, they would have done so. If you are to be invited for an interview, the invitation will likely come by a telephone call from a member of the search committee. Try not to act too excited. After all, you are the best candidate for the job, aren't you? You expected to be selected!

You should recognize that most places will interview fewer than five people, so your chance of receiving an offer is now much better. During the conversation, you and the faculty member will settle on the day(s) of your visit and other details. You will be asked to present a seminar, for which you will need to provide a title and an abstract. The best way to handle that is to say that you will mail or fax them. Do this right away. (You should have started working on your presentation as soon as you put your initial application in the mail.)

### **Before You Go**

Ask about the audio/visual equipment that will be available, so that you can plan your seminar presentation accordingly. Also, ask them to send you a copy of your itinerary before you arrive. You will want to look up each person on this list to find out what he or she does, and be in a position to have an intelligent discussion with each of them. Ask for a packet of information about the department and university to help you. Many departments maintain websites, and further links from there to individual professors can get you up-to-date information.

There are numerous sources where you can find salary information. If the university is a public institution, salaries are a matter of public record, and may be available through your library. Many professional societies also have information about average salaries at various institutions. This could be quite informative. If average salaries at the institution where you plan to interview are significantly different from the average for your discipline, you need to find out the explanation during your visit.

### **What to Expect**

The interview trip is obviously the most important part of the process. You will be there for at least one day, and often two. They will reimburse you for all expenses. Do not offer to pay for anything yourself, because it makes you look like a beginner. They will expect you to make your own travel arrangements, at least as far as their

local airport; you need to inform them of these arrangements. You will probably have to purchase your own airline ticket, and perhaps cover your hotel bill. You will be reimbursed for these later, of course, but you must save all receipts for airfare, hotel, taxis, etc. (This is a good time to apply for a credit card, if you don't already have one.)

Try to arrive the evening before your interview begins and arrange your departure for after 5:00 p.m. on the last day. If necessary, leave late in the evening or the next morning, as you may need the flexibility. Do not buy a first-class ticket, but don't take some inconvenient flight just to save a little air fare. The institution will invest several thousand dollars to find the right person; it won't quibble over reasonable expenses.

You can expect your hosts to make your hotel reservations, and to handle all of your transportation in town if you ask them to do so. Transportation to and from the airport is a grey zone — some hosts will pick you up and drop you off, others may ask you to take a taxi or limousine. Make sure you know what the arrangement is before leaving home, and make sure you have enough cash to cover unexpected minor expenses. Since your hosts may meet you, look professional on the flight: Obtain a briefcase and suitcase. You don't want to look like a vagabond with a backpack and dry-cleaners bag when you meet your hosts.

One more piece of advice — **always carry the slides for your seminar with you on the plane.** Maybe you can interview in your jeans and joke about your lost luggage, but you **NEED** those slides.

You will likely never be alone and awake at the same time during your interview trip. The institution will arrange a series of visits with individuals, or small groups of faculty members. (See the sample itinerary in the Appendix.) This was mentioned earlier, but it's important enough to bear repeating: Ask for a copy of your interview schedule before you go. Also ask that catalogs, research summaries, and other publications be sent to you so that you will know something about the people you are going to meet. Some places won't send this material unless you ask for it.

### **How to Dress**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Dallas Cowboys was America's Team and Tom Landry was the greatest coach on earth. A young receiver playing in his first game caught a touchdown pass. He then broke into a wild victory dance, spiked the ball, and generally carried on for several minutes. When he left the field, Landry motioned him over. "Son," he said, impassive as always, "This is the Dallas Cowboys. When you get to the end zone, I expect you to act like you've been there before."

The same rule applies to the clothes you wear during your interview: You should look like you belong there. You are hoping to become these people's colleague, and you should dress the way you would expect them to, if they came to your campus to give a seminar: businesslike but not overdressed. If your clothing is suitable for a formal wedding, it's too dressy for this purpose. Your clothes should not draw attention to themselves; this is not the time to demonstrate your fashion sense or your disdain for convention. Men should wear either a suit or jacket and trousers, a white shirt, and a conservative tie. Women should wear a businesslike suit (skirt or pants) or dress. Jewelry should be discreet.

Finally, remember that you will be on your feet, standing or walking, a great deal, and that generally you will be under stress throughout your interview. Be very careful that uncomfortable shoes or clothes do not undermine your well-being. Fidgeting with a tight collar or a skirt that rides up will distract from your professional image. If you buy new clothes for your interview, make sure they are truly comfortable and wear them — especially shoes — before the big event.

### **When You're There**

While you are there, someone will be your host and will take you to dinner at least one night. Your host is **not** your friend. Don't ask how you are doing, and **do not** confide in your host. Do not drink alcoholic beverages while you are there, even if everyone else does. Your friends will forgive you for saying something stupid — your interviewers will just remember it!

You will have an itinerary which calls for you to meet many different people. Be sure to greet each person with a firm handshake and meet their eyes. There are many people who claim that the final impression is made within the first 10 seconds! Some of the people you meet will be knowledgeable in your research area, and you should therefore expect to have detailed technical discussions with them. For this reason, you should ask for your seminar to be scheduled early in the visit, if possible, so that you do not end up giving it individually fourteen times before you actually present it. There will also be people on your schedule who are not familiar with your research area. These people are probably in some position of influence in the department, perhaps on the recruiting committee, perhaps powerful faculty members, etc. Study the material that you requested to help you talk to these people. (See the Appendix for a sample "who's who" list.)

Invariably, there will be someone on your schedule with whom you have absolutely nothing to discuss. Ask these people for coffee, or ask about teaching loads, teaching assistants, graders, library facilities, the weather, what it's like to live in the town, how long have they been there, to visit the lavatory ... ! Everyone feels uncomfortable with long periods of silence, so have a couple of ideas for topics



ready for these moments.

Expect to be asked (often) about your plans for future research, and where you expect to receive funding. If you fumble this one, you will not get a job offer! People especially like to see some ideas which do not just continue your thesis work.

Someone may ask you about your marital or family status. They are not supposed to do this, but some people never seem to get the message. There are various responses to this question, ranging from a pointed reference to the law on this point, to a description of your family status. The person who asked the question almost certainly didn't mean to offend, and it is not going to help you to get a job if you become indignant. You are certainly within your rights to maintain your privacy, however. Unfortunately, once the question is asked, it isn't terribly easy to dodge it. Often, the point of this question is to find out if there may be an issue of spousal placement. If there is no such issue, and you don't want to discuss this topic, then you might say something like, "I don't have to worry about a spousal placement. Tell me about your research." In any case, decide before you go how you are going to respond to this question if it comes up.

### **The Seminar**

Your seminar is the single most important thing that you will do on the interview. It is also the only time during your visit when you will be in control of the situation. Some people in the audience will know very little about what you do, and some will know a lot. Make sure that everyone who attends your seminar learns something. The people who know very little about what you do will probably be trying to judge how good a teacher you are. The people who know a lot about what you do will be judging how deep your knowledge is. Your seminar should answer the following questions:

- What problem have I worked on?
- Why would anyone work on this problem?
- What is significant about what I have done?
- How has my work made progress on the problem?

Table II gives a suggested structure for your seminar, which allows you to address these questions.

Prepare carefully for your seminar by making appropriate visual aids. You should try to use the visual aids most common in your discipline. For example,

**Table II: Suggested Structure for the Interview Seminar**

Content	Time (min)	Target Audience	Detail Level / Purpose
Background	15	Everyone present	Your parents would understand it
Your approach	10	People in related fields	Show you know the field
Your results	10	People who work in your field	Show that you are the world expert on something
Summary	10	Everyone in the room	Relate your results to the big picture

most physicists and mathematicians seem to prefer hand-drawn transparencies using pens of various colors. Many engineers use computer-generated transparencies, while some disciplines use almost exclusively 35mm slides. In some disciplines, it is common to project your presentation from a laptop computer. (More on this in a moment.) In any case, the fundamental unit of your visual aids will be the slide, often with mixed text and figures.

Do not make word slides with sentences on them, because you will invariably turn your back to the audience and simply recite them. Instead, make each point with two or three words. These will mean something to you, but the audience will have to pay attention to find out their meaning. Try to have no more than three or four points per slide. If you make color word slides, make sure you use no more than four colors on any slide, lest they look like ransom notes. The slides should be consistent; i.e., the title on every slide should be in the same place, and the same size, font and color. If you use bullets to highlight your text items, they should all be the same color, perhaps different from the title. Do not use fancy or shaded backgrounds, or other meaningless adornments. They make the slides look overly produced and detract from the content.

Be sure to let the institution know ahead of time what audio/visual equipment you will need. If you have special needs, such as a movie or computer projector, let them know. Often seminars are given in large rooms. If you think you may need a microphone, ask for one to be provided.

Practice your seminar before you go. Practice in front of your adviser, some fellow graduate students, and at least one person who knows nothing about what you are doing. Get their comments, and practice it again. Make sure that your seminar is at a level where each of these people comes away with a good under-

standing of the issues and the approach that you took. Practice it again with a different audience, if possible. Make sure that your seminar lasts no more than forty-five minutes, because it may take longer when you present it for real. Practice it again. Figure out which slide corresponds to halfway through, and learn to notice the time when that slide appears. That way, you can tell whether you are going too slowly or too quickly — while you still have time to do something about it! Have a few slides that can be put in or left out, according to how your time is going. Don't plan to tell jokes; you never know who might be offended.

Shortly before you give your seminar, ask to go to the room where it will be presented. Make sure that the audio/visual equipment that you need is there, that it works and that you know how to use it. Run through some of your slides to see how they work in the room; make sure there is a pointer; and stand where you will stand to give your presentation so that it will not feel foreign to you when you actually begin. If they haven't provided a time for you to do this, ask for it. If you use 35mm slides, make sure they are loaded properly in the carousel before you begin.

Projecting your seminar from a laptop computer warrants further discussion. There are some advantages to using this medium. When it is done well, the laptop presentation has a smooth, professional feel to it. Certain features, such as animations, can be added in a seamless fashion. You can also modify your slides right up to the last moment. However, there are several important disadvantages that you should weigh carefully before electing to go this route. It is much easier to lose your place in a laptop presentation, because the next slide isn't sitting on the table in front of you to remind you of what is coming next. This can be ameliorated to some extent if you make a printed outline of the slides that you keep nearby to help you segue smoothly from one slide to the next, or if your presentation software provides this on your laptop screen while projecting just the presentation. In a laptop presentation, it's also more difficult to skip slides if you are running short of time, and more difficult to retrieve a slide to answer a question at the end of your presentation. Note that these disadvantages also apply to 35mm slide presentations, as well.

There are several potential pitfalls unique to a laptop presentation. Foremost among these is that it increases the probability that something will go wrong with the mechanics of the presentation — incompatible hardware and software are more common than most people realize. Be sure to check ahead of time to ensure that your hosts will have the necessary equipment to connect to your laptop. Consider sending your presentation by email before you arrive, allowing your hosts time to ensure that it displays properly. You should also bring a disk or (better) a memory stick, so that you can easily transfer your presentation from one machine to another if hardware problems arise. **Always** bring a backup hard copy of your presentation

in case something goes wrong. If you can't get the projection system to work, you still have to give a seminar!

One thing to be aware of is that in some commonly used, poorly designed presentation software (not named here to protect the guilty), certain fonts do not display properly on different platforms. Having all of your symbols turn to empty boxes, for example, is an unpleasant experience to say the least! For this reason, I recommend that you stick to basic fonts, such as Times, that should be universally available. Equations can be more a more complicated problem. Fortunately, there is a way to guarantee that fonts will not be an issue for your equations: generate them separately, display them as pdf images, then select, drop and drag them into the presentation. Some applications make this very easy to do, by typesetting the equations in a window, from which they can be dragged and dropped. Finally, if you do have to export your presentation for display on another computer, use pdf or QuickTime formats, which adhere to the same standards on different platforms.

With most presentation software, it is easy to lose the distinction between what you can do and what you should do. Resist the temptation to use special effects, like cute transition effects between slides. Above all, **never** use sound effects to accompany the appearance of text on the screen. By the third slide, this "feature" becomes amazingly annoying to the audience. Also resist the temptation to add one line of text at a time to your slides. You'll end up paying more attention to the laptop than to the audience. This approach also gives you a lot more slides to skip through if you need to shorten your talk, and makes it more difficult to go backwards.

If you do choose to give a laptop presentation, plan to practice your talk enough that the mechanics of using the medium become second nature for you. Learn how to export the display from your laptop to an external projector. If you use a Mac, learn the difference between the primary and secondary displays, and how to mirror the displays if necessary. Be sure to place the computer someplace where you can change slides without stepping into the path of the projector. This is distracting both to you and to the audience. Become facile with the software you are using, so that you can easily find a particular slide in response to a question.

I strongly recommend that you carry a set of overhead slides in case disaster strikes. At a conference, when computer problems arise, the schedule can be revised to accommodate them. In the case of an interview, your audience is made up of busy people who might well have other commitments following the seminar. You need to be able to make your impression in the allotted time.

During the presentation, be sure to maintain eye contact with the audience. Choose people at various locations in the room, and systematically sweep your eyes around to be sure that you engage the entire audience. Avoid standing right at the overhead projector and pointing at it with a pencil. You may obstruct the

projected image, or the view of people near the front, and you also will be partially blinded by staring into the bright light. If you use a wooden or metal pointer, keep it by your side except when you are pointing at the screen, otherwise you may look like one of the Three Musketeers. If you use a laser pointer, use both hands to steady the light when you point with it, and then let go of the button! Most laser pointers won't last more than 20 minutes, or so, if you overuse them.

During your talk, if you are interrupted with questions, try to answer them as directly as possible. If the questions become too frequent, ask the audience to hold them until you finish, otherwise you may run out of time. If a question isn't clear, rephrase it to be sure you understood it. A phrase like, "I'm sorry, do you mean ..." can be very helpful. Never argue with the questioner. If the discussion on some point seems to be going in circles, suggest that you and the questioner meet afterwards to discuss it further, then go on to another question.

### **Your Responsibilities in the Interview**

You should recognize that, while you are selling yourself on the interview, you are also buying. You need to find out whether this is a place you would like to work. Ask to meet some young untenured faculty members and some graduate students. Ask for a laboratory tour. Ask someone (in a tactful way) early in the interview what the problems are in the department. Every place has some problems. Ask what percentage of the assistant professors have been getting tenure. If this number is 100%, they are probably not very discriminating; if this number is 10%, this is probably an uncomfortable place to work.

Except in rare instances you will visit the dean or associate dean sometime during your stay. This conversation is important because deans always have veto power, even though they usually do not have the power to force your being hired. Some deans are more technically oriented than others, so be prepared for anything. When you go to the dean's office, there are two possible settings — the "official" one, where you sit in a chair in front of the dean's desk and the dean sits behind it, and the "colleague" position, where you both sit on a sofa or chairs arrayed around a coffee table. The latter may be more common during an interview, but don't take that to mean that what you are doing is informal.

You will want to show the dean your intellectual abilities and excitement for your work. However, some deans are more technically oriented than others, and this may not fill your time. If the conversation lags, the dean will probably ask you if you have any questions. Think of something beforehand for this eventuality. Samples of questions you could ask the dean:

1. Where is the institution headed (under your steady hand and brilliant leader-

ship)?

2. What, in the dean's view, characterizes the contributions of an outstanding faculty member? This is a good question to ask the department head, as well. Compare their answers! A big difference could mean big problems for you.
3. How does the tenure process work here?
4. What is the role of the department in your scheme of things?

Do not ask the dean or department head about benefits such as health care or retirement. You want to look like a go-getter, not someone who is going to retire in place. Both of these are nonnegotiable anyway, and may have been included in the packet of information about the institution.

### **Negotiating the Startup Package**

Universities tend to use one of two administrative structures for their departments. In one structure, departments have chairpersons who are elected by faculty members, usually on a two-to-three-year rotating basis. In this structure, the dean usually has more financial control than the chairperson, and you will likely negotiate the startup package with both of them. In the other structure, departments are administered by heads appointed by the dean, and the department head usually has a great deal of autonomy. In this case, you might negotiate your startup package with the department head only.

You should expect that, when they hire you, the institution will want you to succeed. Ask for the things you will need to do so. Remember — you get what you negotiate, not what you deserve. You should be able to get most of the following:

1. A reduced teaching load for the first year or two.
2. Support for at least one graduate student for at least one year.
3. Paid attendance at a meeting in the first year.
4. Summer salary for at least the first summer, or a guarantee that they will pay your summer salary if you don't have a grant by then.
5. Funds to start up your laboratory. Beware of packages that require you to get external funds that the institution matches only if you get them. There may be a board at the institution where you apply for funds that departments match. Success rates there should be high, but ask about recent history for other candidates.

6. Laboratory space of your own.
7. An office computer.
8. A return trip to find housing — usually available only if you accept the job.

A typical startup package should be worth at least \$50,000. If you do experimental work, it may need to be higher. Be suspicious if the package is much smaller than that.

Before you leave, make sure that you ask when the hiring decision will be made. If there are two more candidates to be interviewed, you probably will not hear anything for four to six weeks. Telephone calls do not help now, either.

### **After the Interview**

When you get home, think about the interview for a day or two. Then write a letter to your host and/or the department head thanking them. If you want the job, ask for it. If you don't want the job, tell them. Mention a couple of things that you saw while you were there which make the place desirable. You should do this even if you are telling them you are not interested.

### **The Worst Case**

The worst case scenario would be receiving a letter that states “Best of luck in your future endeavors” or “I am sure someone with your qualifications will be able to find a suitable appointment elsewhere.” Although you will feel bad, remember that at least you made it to the short list, and resolve to do better on your next interview. Write a letter to your host and/or department head thanking them for considering you.

Note that not being offered a job does not necessarily mean that you did anything wrong. Many departments are looking for very specific research and/or teaching specialties, even if the ad doesn't say so. You may just not have been a perfect fit.

### **The Best Case**

You receive a phone call, either from the department head or dean, saying that they want to offer you a job. **Do not immediately say yes.** You need to find out the particulars of the offer. Refer to your notes about the negotiation session you had with the dean or department head (you did make these notes, didn't you?) and ask specifically about each one of the key points. Your negotiating position will never

be stronger than it is in this phone call. There is usually little room for negotiation on salary, but all of the issues related to the startup package (teaching load, lab space, startup funds, research assistants, summer salary, etc.) are negotiable. These items must be spelled out in an offer letter. Until you have the letter, you do not have an offer. If the offer letter does not include the things you negotiated, you do not have them. This discussion can become somewhat delicate, because the caller may feel that you are questioning his/her honesty by asking for these items in writing. Try to say you feel most comfortable doing it this way so that there will be no misunderstanding later about what was agreed to. He/she may ask you to write the letter yourself. Always accept such an offer.

The letter may take a few weeks to arrive, since many approvals are needed, so ask when you should expect the letter. When you receive the letter, check it carefully against your notes from the call. You may need to clarify any omissions. (See the sample offer letter in Appendix.)

### **What to Do If You Are Entertaining Several Offers**

This is a highly personal decision, of course, and your decision process should be one that fits your personality. However, you may find it worthwhile to make a list of attributes important to you, and to compare the institutions in each area. Some things to consider:

- Reputation of the institution
- Time derivative of this reputation (are they going up or down?)
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Quality of students
- Teaching loads
- Facilities
- Salary
- Startup package
- Geography
- Quality of life in the area
- Your overall impression



Do not neglect this last one; it often represents your subconscious integration of the rest.

Once the department makes you an offer, they expect an answer within a few weeks. If you have several things going and this is not your first choice, then try to delay their formal offer. This will usually work for about one month, but you need a good excuse (your spouse needs to find a job in the area, etc.). Once you receive the offer letter, you can ask for a month or so before replying, but usually not more. Imagine the situation from their point of view. They need to fill this position, so they cannot wait forever for you to decide.

### **What to Do When You Want to Accept the Offer**

Write a letter back accepting the offer, repeating the salient points from the offer letter. Congratulations!

### **How to Deal with a Spouse Who Needs Employment**

This should not be a primary discussion point in your interview, because you are the one being interviewed. However, if you would take the job only if your spouse finds employment, you should mention to the department head that your spouse is also looking for a job. How much help you will get with this problem is highly variable. However, most institutions are facing this issue with increasing frequency, and have procedures in place for addressing it.

They may be able to help you make contacts with other parts of the university, and in some cases special programs exist to support the salary for “spousal placement.” It may also be possible to get contacts with non-university employers, as well.

## ADVERTISEMENT

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**  
Faculty Position (Open Rank)  
Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering

The Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, College of Engineering, invites applications for tenure-track positions at the assistant professor level. Senior level appointments with tenure are also available for persons of recognized national and international stature. Candidates are sought in the areas of nanoscience, bioengineering and thermal and fluids sciences. Must have Ph.D. degree and be committed to teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels as well as to attracting and conducting sponsored research. Salary commensurate with education and experience.

To ensure full consideration, applications must be received by January 15, 2007; applications will be considered until the positions are filled. Proposed starting date is August 21, 2007. Send an up-to-date biography with names of four references to:

*Professor H. Sehitoglu*  
*Head, Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering*  
*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*  
*140 Mechanical Engineering Building*  
*1206 West Green Street*  
*Urbana, IL 61801*  
*(217-333-1126)*

The University of Illinois is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### Curriculum Vitae

A. N. Applicant  
678 Any Way  
Champaign, IL 61820  
(217) 333-3333 (O), (217) 555-5555 (H)

### Objective:

Faculty position for teaching and research in the field of solid mechanics, heat transfer, and process modeling.

### Education:

- Ph.D. Mechanical and Industrial Engineering  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, June 2007-Expected  
Dissertation: The Effect of Deformation and Processing  
in Production of Metal Matrix Composites  
Advisor: Francis F. Famous
- M.S. Mechanical Science and Engineering  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003  
Advisor: Lester L. Lessknown
- B.S. Mechanical Engineering, Podunk University, 2001  
Honors if you got 'em.

### Employment:

- 9/2003-present: Research Assistant, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Experimental and theoretical study of the properties resulting  
from alternative processing routes in fabrication of metal  
matrix composites.  
President, Graduate Student Organization
- 9/2001-9/2003: Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Introductory Materials Laboratory, Finite Element Analysis
- 6/2003-9/2003: Grocery Clerk, Kroger's, Nowhere, IN
- 9/2005-6/2003: Part-time Co-op student working at Caterpillar, Inc.  
Duties included foundry engineering, CAD design aide

**Publications:**

1. "Mechanical Performance of Metal-Matrix Composites," A. N. Applicant and F. F. Famous, *Acta Metall and Mater.*, 47[5], 1001-7, 2006.
2. "Influence of Melt Processing on Properties of Metal-Matrix Composites," A. N. Applicant, L. L. Lessknown, and F. F. Famous, *J. Engr for Industry*, 24, 156-172, 2003.

**References:**

**Dr. F. F. Famous**, Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1206 W. Green Street, Urbana, IL 61801

**Dr. L. L. Lessknown**, Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1206 W. Green Street, Urbana, IL 61801

**Someone Else**, Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1206 W. Green Street, Urbana, IL 61801

**F. Advisor**, Mechanical Engineering Department, Podunk University, Bloomington, IN 47401

## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

September 9, 2006

Professor M. N. Charge, Head  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
Leading University  
123 Hallowed Hall  
Somewhere, ST 12345

Dear Professor Charge:

I wish to apply for the tenure track faculty position (#3336) in the area of Design, Materials and Mechanics as advertised in the January 2006 issue of Engineering Education. Enclosed is a copy of my curriculum vitae, along with a list of references.

I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and expect to receive my PhD degree in June 2007 from the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering. Under the guidance of Dr. Francis F. Famous, I am currently writing my dissertation which is entitled "The Effect of Deformation and Processing in Production of Metal Matrix Composites." My teaching and research interests are in the areas of solid mechanics, heat transfer and materials processing.

In my dissertation work, I have studied the role of processing characteristics on the mechanical behavior of metal-matrix composites. We have fabricated for the first time Ni-graphite composites having mechanical strength superior to ceramics, but with the ductility and formability of chocolate. I have also developed a unified field theory of composite behavior, which describes our experimental observations with great reliability. See the enclosed curriculum vitae for further details.

I am very committed to pursuing a career in academia, and look forward to hearing from you regarding my application. If you wish to discuss my educational and research background in further detail, please call me at (217) 333-3333. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A. N. Applicant

Enclosures

## ITINERARY

### Interview Schedule

A. N. Applicant  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
Leading University

#### Wednesday, January 18, 2007

7:15 p.m. Arrive Somewhere Airport, American Flight #4126;  
Tim O'Shenko will meet at airport. Staying at the  
Respectable Hotel [Confirmation #0048809-0].  
Dinner with Tim O'Shenko.

#### Thursday, January 19, 2007

8:15 a.m. Breakfast - Newton Raphson will meet in the lobby  
of the Respectable.  
9:45 Pete O'Tube, 332D Hallowed Hall. O'Tube will escort to  
Dean Noe.  
10:30 Dean Jess A. Noe, College of Engineering, 106 Ivied Hall  
11:10 Oki will escort from Dean Noe  
11:15 Kerry Oki, Associate Head of Department, 154 HH.  
Oki will escort to lunch.  
12:00 noon Lunch - Faculty Club [Kerry Oki, Ken Dewitt]  
1:15 p.m. Monty Carlo, 122 HH  
2:00 C. D. Point, 248 HH  
2:45 Tim O'Shenko, 332C HH  
3:30 Seminar preparation, 248A HH. O'Shenko will escort to seminar.  
4:00 Seminar, "Evaluation of Composite Interface Properties  
Using Clever Experiments," 218 HH.  
O'Shenko will escort to reception.  
5:00-6:00 Reception, 158 Hallowed Hall. Jenny Rater will escort  
from reception to dinner.  
6:30 Dinner, Wholey Cow Steakhouse [Jenny Rater, Will Burn]

#### Friday, January 20, 2007

7:30 a.m. Breakfast - Carmen Vortex will meet in the lobby  
of the Respectable.  
8:15 Leah Punoff, 250 HH  
9:00 Will Burn, 362E HH  
9:45 Gil Airkin, 332F HH

10:30	Clay Potts, 250 HH
11:15	S. Broken, 212 HH. Broken will escort to lunch.
12:00 noon	Lunch - Faculty Club [S. Broken, C. D. Point, I. M. Shore]
1:15 p.m.	I. M. Shore,
2:00	Frank Stein, 266 HH
2:45	Lois Cost, 352 HH
3:30	Tour of Laboratories w/Gene Poole and Leah Punoff
4:30	M. N. Charge, Head of Department, 208 HH
6:00	Dinner, Classy Restaurant [M. N. Charge, Della Kitt]

**Sunday, January 22, 2007**

6:00 a.m.	A-1 Limousine will pick up at Respectable Hotel.
7:00	Depart Somewhere Airport.



**WHO'S WHO**

Based upon the itinerary and materials received from the department, A. N. Applicant makes up this list of people and their areas of research to prepare for the interview.

Who's Who on the Interview Schedule
-------------------------------------

Interviewer	Position/specialty
Jess A. Noe	Dean of Engineering
M. N. Charge	Department Head
Tim O'Shenko	Vibrations
Newton Raphson	Numerical methods
Pete O'Tube	Experimental fluid dynamics
Kerry Oki	Simulation
Ken Dewitt	Human factors
Monty Carlo	Game theory
C. D. Point	Information theory
Jenny Rater	Energy systems
Will Burn	Combustion
Carmen Vortex	Fluid dynamics
Leah Punoff	Stability theory
Gil Airkin	Numerical methods
Clay Potts	Ceramics
S. Broken	Failure analysis
Frank N. Stein	Bioengineering

## OFFER LETTER

April 13, 2007

Dr. A. N. Applicant  
Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
1206 West Green Street  
Urbana, IL 61801

Dear A. N.:

The Department of Mechanical Engineering of Leading University is pleased to offer to you a tenure-track appointment as an Assistant Professor of Mechanical Engineering. This offer is made upon the unanimous recommendation of the Faculty Search Committee.

Your academic appointment would begin August 15, 2007, with an academic year (nine months) salary of \$80,000.

If you accept our offer, the following provisions are offered so that you may vigorously pursue and develop an innovative sponsored research program within Mechanical Engineering, in general, and the Design and Materials area, in particular:

1. Your teaching load will be one course per semester for the first two academic years. For those faculty with active sponsored research programs, teaching loads, to date, have not grown appreciably beyond this level. Your teaching assignments will be finalized after Professor Clay Potts, Associate Head for Undergraduate Programs, reviews teaching requirements and discusses with you your specific teaching interests, goals, and aspirations.
2. You will receive an appointment to conduct research for two months during the first two summers. Your monthly salary will be 1/9 per month of your then-current academic year salary. For the first summer, your monthly salary will be \$8,000 per month for two months. For the second summer, your monthly salary will include any merit adjustments in salary that may be made for the second academic year.

If you have other external research support, you may request a third month, or fraction thereof, of summer support at the same rate.

3. The department will provide you with two one-half time research assistants of your choice for two semesters and two summer months to assist you in initiating your sponsored research program.
4. For your office, you will be provided a personal computer, which will be connected via the department's computer network to the university's computer network, and a full complement of software. This network provides access to computers on campus.
5. You will receive \$5,000 per year, during your first three appointment years, for travel from the Alumni Endowment Fund. The allocation of these travel funds will be your responsibility. Typically, these funds are used to support travel to professional society meetings, to technical conferences to present papers, to visit potential research sponsors, etc.
6. To support your sponsored research program, the College of Engineering and the department will provide a grant of \$30,000 during your first two appointment years. These funds are for the purchase of research equipment/instrumentation and/or for the development of physical facilities to support your research program. Through careful planning, these funds may be used to leverage other research funding.
7. The department will commit cost-sharing funds, not to exceed \$20,000, during your first four appointment years to leverage funding of research proposals to external research sponsors who have "matching funds" as a requirement.
8. To house your research program, you will be provided laboratory space in the Mechanical Engineering Building. This space has access to utilities needed in your research.

The Campus Research Board has an excellent record of providing research support to new faculty members. Consequently, there exists an excellent opportunity to leverage the funds committed by the College and the department by submitting a research proposal to the Campus Research Board. The Research Board acts quickly to determine their support for each research proposal through an on-campus faculty peer review procedure. Typically, this process takes between one and two months to complete after submission of the proposal.

We believe that our extensive ongoing research activities in Mechanical Engineering will provide a rich environment for you to develop your research program.

While it is important for you to establish and conduct your own independent research agenda, collaborations with senior faculty members in ongoing research activities may also provide you many opportunities that will support the development of your research program.

In addition to establishing a vigorous program of research, you will participate in our teaching programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. There are several courses in the Design and Materials Division that we believe you can contribute to in a substantial way. In addition, we will encourage you to revise/develop course offerings that are complementary to your research interests.

Excellence in teaching and excellence in research are important factors for professional development, advancement, and success within Leading University. We believe that our offer, when coupled with your interests and background, will provide you an opportunity to excel in both.

To assist you in your move and transition to the Somewhere area, you will be provided up to a maximum of \$4,000 for actual costs incurred in moving. A document describing the reimbursement of moving expenses for faculty members is enclosed for your information. The university also has agreements with several moving companies that provide for a substantial discount for new faculty members who are moving to the Somewhere community; a written description of this program is also enclosed.

Enclosed for your information is the "Leading University Academic Benefits and Services Guide." This will provide you some general information about our benefits program at Leading. Specific questions should be addressed to the Benefits Center, 100 Ivory Tower, telephone 555-0987.

On behalf of the faculty, academic professionals, support staff, and students of the department, we extend to you our warm welcome to join us. We sincerely hope that you will respond favorably to our offer. Since our needs for new faculty require careful planning, we would appreciate your written reply to our offer by not later than May 14, 2000. If you should have any questions or require more time to make your decision, please do not hesitate to write or call me collect.

If you accept our offer, we will need to present the recommendation of your faculty appointment to the Board of Trustees at Leading University for their approval. To do so, we shall require a completed Personal History Form; two copies of the form are enclosed.

Sincerely,

M. N. Charge

Professor and Head

Enclosures

c: Professor C. Potts, w/o enclosures

Approved by:

-----  
Jess A. Noe, Dean, College of Engineering