

EARLY CAREER

The articles this month were curated by Early Career Intern Katie Storey with assistance from Angela Gibney, the editor of the section. Next month's theme will be Latinx History Month. To read all of the articles that have appeared, visit the AMS *Notices* Early Career Collection at <https://bit.ly/3aiZYBd>. Articles organized by topic are available at <https://www.angelagibney.org/the-ec-by-topic>.



More on Applying for Positions in Academia

Online and In-Person Interviewing for Tenure-Track Positions

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Showcasing the best version of yourself can be challenging during either in-person or virtual interviews! After a long process of writing job materials and sending them out to institutions, you may find yourself being invited for a screening or final-round interview for your dream position. First of all, congratulations! Your excitement may be short-lived, however, as you grow anxious about how to put your best foot forward and show the search committee and/or department that you are their ideal candidate. Interviews have traditionally been held in person, but virtual interviews have increased in popularity over the past few years (and are likely to continue being used in the future). In the following, we offer insights from our experiences with both types of interviews in recent years.

What In-Person Interviews and Virtual Interviews Have in Common

Try to get a schedule in advance

Try to get a schedule in advance. It may seem obvious that having the interview schedule ahead of your visit would be helpful in preparing for meetings with individual faculty and campus leaders. However, your host and the search committee often have to juggle many time constraints and have to send reminders to encourage faculty to sign up for meeting with you. To avoid receiving your schedule the day you board your flight or when your first virtual meeting is about to start (this does happen!), we recommend asking for drafts of your schedule document every few days before your interview. You may even ask your host if they could share a Google document of the visit schedule, with updates in real time.

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A master list of questions and talking points

In preparing for the meetings you will have during your interview, we found it very useful to create a master list of questions that we might be asked, talking points to emphasize about ourselves, as well as questions that we ourselves would like to ask. This allowed us to customize our preparation for the program we were visiting by simply updating this document for other potential interviews. One approach is to organize your questions and talking points into sections: those about research or teaching, questions for faculty, for the chair, for the dean, or for students. Another approach is to organize your preparation by meeting if you know your schedule in advance: you can list out the relevant questions and talking points for each of your meetings. This was often a lifesaver when we needed a quick reminder of what it was important for us to learn while meeting with various people during the visit.

Ask for meetings with students and external faculty

Throughout your visit, you will likely meet with faculty in research areas related to yours, but also with junior and senior faculty in other fields. Take advantage of these meetings to both let faculty know what sets your scholarship and interests apart, but also to understand the ongoing research and teaching activities in the department, and to learn more about the geographical area you may be moving to. Before coming to campus, you can also ask to meet with specific faculty members who may otherwise not be on your schedule. For instance, you can ask to meet with faculty who started an impactful outreach program or DEI initiative in the department or in the community, or to meet with faculty in other departments, who could be potential collaborators. Your search committee will try to add these additional meetings to your schedule, if time permits.

If meetings with students are not already included in the schedule, we highly recommend requesting such a meeting, with either undergraduate or graduate students, or even with student members of a professional organization chapter that you would want to be involved with (such as AWM). Chatting with students can give you a useful perspective on their experience in the department. Don't expect discussions with students to be easy! We have found it inspiring to have conversations with students who wanted to see how aspiring new faculty intend to make meaningful contributions in their department.

Your scholarly talk

When receiving an invitation for an interview, it is important to pay careful attention to and to clarify what is expected of you. If giving a colloquium-style research talk, make sure you know what the expected time length is, and how much time to reserve for questions. Depending on the department and institution you are interviewing at, it may also be helpful to understand the background of the audience that is likely to attend your talk. In some cases, you may be asked to give an undergraduate-accessible research talk, or to give a teaching demonstration during a class in

the department you are visiting. For some interdisciplinary programs or positions (such as mathematical or quantitative biology), you may be asked to give a chalk talk on your future research ideas in front of the search committee. Clarifying the details of these talks early on will help you best prepare for them.

One approach that we have found especially helpful is holding mock interview talks ahead of the actual interview. You could hold these with fellow students, postdocs, or faculty mentors in your current department. This will give you a chance to practice in a supportive environment, with a community that will give you valuable feedback or ask you questions that will mimic those that you will be asked in the actual interview. You may also find it advantageous to invite faculty that you know well from institutions that are similar to where you are interviewing, as they can give insight into how to align your material with what the institution values most.

Online Interviews

Virtual interviews (held over Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, among others) are now often used for interviews for Postdoc and Visiting Assistant Professor positions. For tenure-track positions, search committees typically use virtual interviews to narrow their applicant pool down from 20–40 selected applications to their final 3–4 final candidates that will be invited for the final round interviews. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, many final round interviews have been conducted virtually, including John's! Virtual Interviews present many challenges: technical difficulties are likely, your interviewers' background settings may be distracting, and conversations are hard to initiate. Fortunately, there are skills and habits you can start developing now to set yourself up for success on the virtual job market.

Practice speaking virtually

The best preparation for virtual interviews is to practice professional speaking in an online manner as much as possible. This may include giving talks at virtual conferences or joining an online group.

To get some practice, I (John) joined a local Toastmasters group nine months before interview season. Toastmasters is an international nonprofit educational organization that empowers its members by helping them develop public speaking and leadership skills. My Toastmasters group met weekly over Zoom; each week, its members can practice speaking by giving a prepared speech, hosting the meeting, responding to interview-type questions, or evaluating another speaker's presentation. I initially struggled performing each role online, but I gradually became more comfortable with each additional experience. By the time I began interviews for tenure-track positions, I was confident speaking online: in the face of technical difficulties, I asked my interviewers to repeat themselves; I laughed with interviewers when their pets jumped on screen; and I learned

about my interviewers between meetings by initiating small talk about their hobbies and non-math interests.

Making a good virtual impression

It is important to be mindful about your appearance and sound during virtual interviews because your interviewers will form their first impression of you during your first two minutes on screen. Before an interview, you may want to ensure your room lighting and camera angle show a clear picture of yourself. Some strategies to consider include:

- Light should ideally evenly hit your face from a lamp, window, or lighting kit located behind your camera. Your face may be hard to see if your light source is coming from behind or above you.
- Eyeglasses can reflect your computer screen and block your eyes, which prevents your interviewers from making virtual eye contact with you. If you need glasses to see, you may want to angle your camera before the interview to avoid this.
- Look at your camera (and NOT at the screen) to maintain virtual eye contact. Place your camera level with or slightly above your eyes to provide the best angle of your face.
- A clean and warm background can help your personality shine through. We find that including things that matter to you, such as pictures of family or a favorite cartoon, can help your personality shine through.

Have a virtual conversation

Virtual interviews can feel one-sided and distant, but it is important to remember that they are actually a conversation! Some small changes on your end can turn a tough interview into a pleasant conversation.

- When speaking to a screen full of faces, it may be tempting to make statements like “I really admire how Dr. X has led program Y in the department, and I hope I can contribute,” even if Dr. X is on the call. You might worry that addressing Dr. X directly will come off as too aggressive or intrusive; in reality, this statement distances you from the hiring committee. In a more successful interview, you can instead say “Dr. X, I really admire how you have led program Y in the department, and I hope I can contribute.” As opposed to the first statement, this second statement turns the interview into a conversation.
- Virtual conversations often lose steam when one or two speakers dominate the airwaves; a good conversationalist will keep everyone involved. If you find an interviewer is not engaged during an online interview, we find that you can pull them back in with simple statements of the form “Dr. Z, I’m really curious to hear your thoughts on this topic.” This should be done in moderation, however, in case Dr. Z is multi-tasking or preoccupied.

Incorporating these small changes into your virtual interviewing repertoire will allow you to comfortably converse with potential colleagues and can transform a day of hectic interviewing into a fun day of chatting about math, teaching, research, and scholarship. We recommend trying some of these changes during your next Zoom meeting!

Interviewing in Person

In-person interviews for academic jobs can feel extremely overwhelming. Most of them involve visiting the campus and department for 1–2 days, which includes giving one (or more) talks, meeting with many faculty members, the department chair, and (usually) a dean. Devoting ample time for preparation before you start your travels, such as creating a master list of questions or scheduling a mock in-person interview with your community (as mentioned above), can significantly reduce the stress associated with the interview. Certainly, the advantage is that you will get to potentially tour the campus, visit the department and see potential offices, as well as have meals with faculty and students. All of these experiences can paint a good picture of what your life in the department and at that institution may look like.

Being comfortable is key

The visit itself can feel like a marathon, both on an intellectual as well as a physical level. You will be moving a lot and having productive conversations with various people throughout most of your 1–2 interview days. It is therefore important to ask for short breaks between meetings as well as for some time before your talk(s) to collect your thoughts.

Since you are visiting in person, you will likely spend more time thinking about what you will wear in this professional interview setting. Regardless of the exact choice, we found that it was important to wear comfortable clothes and shoes, since the interview days involve plenty of walking. There are often no breaks between campus and dinner meetings, so be prepared to wear your outfit for the whole day. One of us can also attest that keeping some bandaids handy saved her from an uncomfortable situation during her interview!

Express an interest in the location

Some institutions may include a tour of neighborhoods or even a meeting with a realtor, all of which can give you an idea about places to live in the area. Even if your schedule does not include it, you could ask to see particular neighborhoods or visit a famous site at that location. This is not only a means for you to explore your potential new home, but also a way to show your particular interest in a position. While interviewing, it is challenging to keep in mind that programs and institutions worry that their short-list candidates may not actually come even if offered the position. Showing a genuine interest in exploring the location of an institution gives you one way to fight this worry.

The in-person scholarly talk

The in-person research or teaching talk may feel like the most stressful aspect of the academic job interview. Perhaps we can suggest a different and useful perspective on this, that one of us learned from a mentor. The hour during which you are giving your talk is actually the time when you are most in control. During that time, you are guiding others along your mathematical journey and through research results and scholarship that you are an expert in. Therefore, it is a time to enjoy and to show your enthusiasm for your work.

Finally, we must acknowledge that everything we suggest above takes a long time to prepare for. In our experience, it is very reasonable to expect that your research productivity will stagnate, as you make time to practice and research your potential future department. It is very useful to frame this work as making an investment in your professional development and network, which will pay off in the long run. In addition, we have found that having to present our research to mathematicians and students outside of our research areas during interviews and job talks really forced us to think about how to broadly present our work. Being ready to present your research in an accessible way and networking with colleagues at different institutions are skills that you will benefit from throughout the rest of your career.



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Credits

Photo of Maria-Veronica Ciocanel is by Laurie DeWitt, Pure Light Images.

Photo of John T. Nardini is courtesy of John T. Nardini.

Preparing for a Tenure-Track Job at an Urban Public College

Heidi Goodson and Diana Hubbard

There are many types of institutions that you may be considering when preparing for the academic job market. In this article, we aim to provide some insight into applying for a tenure-track position at an urban public college. Additionally, we hope to highlight some aspects of working at this type of college that may be different from other institutions in order to help you decide if this is the right type of academic environment for you.

We are both assistant professors at Brooklyn College, one of the four-year colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system. Brooklyn College has approximately 16,000 undergraduates and 2,500 graduate students, but despite this, in the mathematics department our classes are all relatively small. Like many other urban public colleges, our students primarily live off-campus. We mostly teach undergraduates, but we also support MA programs in education. Additionally, we are affiliated with the PhD-granting Graduate Center at CUNY, and we have the opportunity to work with graduate students. For us, Brooklyn College is the best of two academic worlds: we get both a liberal arts college experience on our campus and an R1 research community through our affiliation with the Graduate Center.

In many ways Brooklyn College is unique, but we will feature some aspects of working here that are generalizable to other urban public colleges. While we discuss some other ways that you can make your application stand out at a school like ours, your primary focus during graduate school and your postdoc should be on your research program and your teaching and these will be the most important things to highlight in your application materials.

Supporting the Needs of the Student Body

When applying to a job at any school, you will want to show that you have thought about how to teach, mentor, and support students. But different student bodies have different needs, and your application should reflect this. At Brooklyn College, for example, many of our students come from backgrounds that are underrepresented in higher education: many students are not native English speakers, come from low-income households, are first-generation college students, or are adult learners. Many commute to

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