

Transitioning to Life After Graduate School— Job Search Strategies for Academic and Applied Careers

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This column is bittersweet for us, as it marks the end of our 2-year tenure as the editors of **TIP-TOPics for Students**. As we transition this column to new editors, it seems appropriate to dedicate our final column to a highly relevant topic for graduate students who are transitioning to the post-graduate school stage of their lives—the job search process. Undoubtedly, the job search process can be an anxiety-provoking experience. In addition, the challenging economic times that our nation faces do not make this process any easier or less stressful. A recent report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2009) indicated that the national unemployment rate rose from 6.8% to 7.2% between November and December 2008, with the number of unemployed persons increasing from 632,000 to 11.1 million. Despite the severity of the current unemployment situation in our nation, we feel that the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) gained from a graduate education in I-O psychology provide a unique opportunity for recent graduates to market themselves for a wide variety of job openings. Indeed, the BLS (2008) projects that the number of employed I-O psychologists will increase by 21% from 2006 to 2016, which is faster than average for all other occupations.

In this column, we aim to better prepare you for your job search by describing job search strategies for both academic and applied careers. We interviewed six recent graduates who offered their advice and insights based on their experiences during the job search process. The academic interviewees were **Dr. Mark Bowler**, assistant professor of psychology at East Carolina University; **Dr. Eden King**, assistant professor of psychology at George Mason University; and **Dr. Christopher Warren**, assistant professor of psychology at California State University–Long Beach. The applied interviewees were Dr. Jaime Durley, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Inspector General; **Mr. Christopher Jewett**, Research Triangle Institute; and **Dr. Tina Malm**, Google. The column contains separate sections for academic and applied careers and concludes with advice relevant to both career paths.



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Job Search Strategies for Academic Careers

Beyond the age-old advice to publish, publish, publish, our academic interviewees provided us with some great advice about finding and securing a job in academia. This advice is organized in two sections: (a) places to apply and (b) the process of applying.

Places

Where to Find Jobs

Bowler, King, and Warren looked for academic job openings online. The most common Web sites include the SIOP's JobNet, the Academy of Management, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

The Placement Center at the SIOP conference was also mentioned as a great place to look for openings. For more information about how to make the most of the SIOP Placement Center, see Munson and Bergman's (2006) *TIP* column; for *TIPs* on behavior to avoid at the placement center, see Sasaki, Barbera, Frame, and Crawshaw (2003).

Where to Apply

Consider the type of school where you would want to work. You can choose among research universities, teaching colleges, hybrids, psychology departments, business schools, schools where you may be the only I-O, and schools with or without graduate programs. Know the research and teaching expectations, make sure the balance is right for you, and realize that moving from one type of school to another (teaching to research or vice versa) may be a challenge in the future.

Bowler suggests casting a wide net and being flexible with regard to location. However, "if you need to be specific about a geographic location, you may need to expand your search in other ways," says King. Consider applying to research universities, teaching colleges, and business schools within the same geographic area.

Warren advises to be honest about the places where you would want work; be focused and do your homework on the schools with openings. You do not want to waste the institutions' time or your time with unnecessary applications. As Warren noted, "If you apply to 10 schools in a very detailed, knowledgeable fashion, you'll know if they have openings in your area, you'll know if you're qualified, you'll know that you'll be happy there, and if all those things are there, you should have a good shot."

These *TIPs* should get you started on finding openings; below are more *TIPs* on the job search process.

Process

The Application Process

Start early. "The process is faster than you realize," says King. She advises you start searching in the summer before you graduate by looking for openings

and preparing your materials (i.e., curriculum vitae, job talk, letters of recommendation). King warned, “It is an ongoing process; you look for jobs, you find the job, you apply, and then you do it all again because the jobs don’t all come out at one time, so you have to keep looking and keep applying.”

“Keep your letter writers in the loop,” advises Warren. The process can get hectic, and with each position possibly on a different schedule, you want to make sure your letter writers know which searches are active.

The Job Talk

After reviewing the applications that are submitted for an academic job opening, most institutions ask their top candidates to present a job talk, which should paint a broad picture of you as a person and your research agenda (Barbera, Carr, & Sasaki, 2004). Here are two recommendations for preparing and presenting an effective job talk.

1. Find out how much time will be allotted for the job talk and follow-up questions, who will be attending, and the expectations for the job talk. Bowler, King, and Warren suggest that you prepare for a diverse audience; you could be presenting to a room of I-O psychologists or to the entire psychology department.

2. Practice your job talk. Our interviewees recommend practicing in front of peers, faculty, or even your family. Someone unfamiliar with your research may be able to point out unclear or confusing parts. Likewise, try to observe others giving a job talk.

The Acceptance Process

1. Congratulations! You’ve got an offer. Be prepared to respond quickly—some of our interviewees had as little as 2 days to make a decision. Two weeks is more common but that can still feel rushed when you’re making a big decision and may have a family or partner to consider.

2. Know how much start-up money you will need to break ground on your research program. Bowler suggests asking friends or mentors for estimates and be able to provide the rationale for how that will help you secure external funding in the future.

Job Search Strategies for Applied Careers

In this section of the column, we describe some of the places to search for applied jobs, the job titles for which to search, and some important elements of the applied job search process.

Places

It can be difficult to ensure that you have adequately covered the bases when searching for applied jobs. Our applied interviewees shared the places where they searched for jobs, which we organized into three categories:

1. *Discipline-specific sources.* These sources included SIOP's JobNet, the Placement Center at the SIOP conference, and *TIP*. Try searching for jobs on your local I-O professional chapter's Web site, if available, and the Society for Human Resource Management's Web site. Search the recruitment Web sites of consulting firms and companies with reputations for hiring I-Os, and browse the SIOP conference program for ideas about which companies hire I-O psychologists.

2. *Nondiscipline-specific sources.* Some of our interviewees searched for applied job openings on popular recruitment Web sites, such as CareerBuilder, Monster, and YAHOO! HotJobs. Your area may also have a recruitment Web site that is specific to that geographic region (e.g., www.trianglejobs.com). In addition, Durley suggested that job seekers search for openings on the federal government's recruitment Web site, www.usajobs.gov. Finally, utilize resources available in your college or university's career center.

3. *Other sources.* Attend career fairs in your area. Come equipped with a one- to two-page resumé and be prepared to briefly describe I-O psychology to recruiters and provide a rationale for how your KSAs could benefit them. In addition, your previous or current internship experiences could possibly be turned into full-time job opportunities. Finally, let colleagues and professors, and even family members and friends, know that you are looking for a job.

When searching for applied jobs, it can also be challenging to determine which job titles to use as search terms. Our interviewees suggested the following: human resource (HR) analyst, HR business partner, HR consultant, HR manager, program analyst, psychology analyst, and research analyst. However, as Jewett and Malm cautioned, many of the job openings you will encounter in your searches may be HR-only positions. You will need to decide if an HR job opening has enough of an I-O slant to maintain your long-term interest in the position. If you are having minimal luck searching with these terms, use search terms that highlight the subdisciplines within I-O, such as recruitment, selection, training, or learning and development. Finally, if you are still having trouble finding job openings, then consider Durley's advice, "You can apply I-O to a lot of different things. We are prepared with such a global set of skills that you really could spin it for anything that you find interesting, which is a great benefit of our background." Even if a position does not require an advanced degree in I-O psychology or a related field, the KSAs that are required for the position may be directly related to I-O. Think creatively about how your KSAs may apply to openings that are of interest to you.

Process

The Application Process

One of the first items of business is to develop a resumé. In many graduate programs, curriculum vitae (CVs) are more common than resúmes; however, resúmes are typically more appropriate than CVs for applied jobs.

Whether you are developing a resumé for the first time or are updating an existing resumé, here are a few *TIPs* regarding resúmes.

1. Despite the old adage that resúmes should be kept to one page, feel free to extend your resumé to two pages to fully showcase your education and KSAs.

2. Listing your presentations and publications on your resumé may be unnecessary, unless you are applying for an applied research job; however, you may want to create a separate handout showcasing your presentation and publication record in case a prospective employer requests this information.

3. Have others review your resumé. Although these reviewers may provide conflicting advice, “even conflicting advice really helps,” said Jewett.

4. Consider the outlet. “If you’re going to a career fair,” said Durley, “I would just have a general resumé. If you’re applying to a specific job, I can’t emphasize enough the need to tailor the resumé to that specific job.”

One dilemma you may encounter when applying for jobs is that they require a certain length of experience (e.g., 2–5 years), which you do not have. In regards to this dilemma, our interviewees stated the following:

1. “I would not be intimidated by the number of years posted on the announcement,” said Durley. “A lot of times that’s the ideal and it really depends on who else is applying for it.”

2. Malm mentioned that “you can compensate a little through your education” and should “count internship experience as work experience.”

The Selection Process

Once you are ready to apply for a job, it is important to gain some familiarity with the selection process. The selection interview was encountered by all of our interviewees; these interviews differed with regard to their purpose (i.e., screening, recruitment and selection, selection only), degree of structure, communication medium (e.g., telephone, face-to-face), and type (e.g., panel interview, serial interview). Regardless of the type of interview, one thing seems certain—you will be interviewed. To practice interviewing, we suggest scheduling a mock interview through your college or university’s career center or asking a colleague or friend to help you practice. Our interviewees also offered the following *TIPs* with regard to interviewing:

1. “Answer the question you’re asked,” said Durley. “Employers are busy; they ask you a question because they want an answer. Try not to deviate from the actual question too much.” Malm noted, “Stay calm and take a few seconds to think about an answer. Don’t ramble.”

2. Research the job and the company before your interview.

3. Ask good, thoughtful questions about the job and the company. Prepare these questions beforehand and bring them with you to the interview.

The Acceptance Process

1. Congratulations! You’ve got an offer (or multiple!). Now you have to figure out where you will be happiest. Our interviewees suggest assessing

both person–job and person–organization fit by reflecting on the responses you received to questions you asked during the interview and other indications of the organizational culture; after all, you are selecting them, too. If you are struggling with whether or not to accept a job offer, then Durley suggests that you seek advice from your major professor or someone else who knows you well and can speak to whether or not the job would be a good fit for you.

2. Malm suggests a few more considerations: (a) your potential supervisor’s management style; (b) whether or not your coworkers will be familiar with I-O (and if not, what benefits/frustrations may follow); and (c) the degree of challenge associated with the position.

TIPs for All Searches

The following *TIPs* from our interviews are applicable to both academic and applied job searches.

1. *Keep your options open.* Warren suggested that if you’re not sure where you want to end up, get some experience on research projects, try teaching, and find opportunities to work on consulting projects. Durley agreed by stating, “I wanted to prepare myself for a lot of different things and then see what opportunities were available when I actually got on the job market.” Explore your options, experiment, and examine where you flourish.

2. *Do research.* Publications and research experience are necessary for academic jobs but can be indispensable to applied jobs. As Durley noted, “Do the research while you’re in graduate school to give yourself exposure to different types of positions.” Although an applied employer may not require (or expect) publications, managing research projects is a transferable skill that could be useful for any job.

3. *Seek out mentors.* Seeking mentorship from junior faculty can be helpful when you start to apply for academic positions. Likewise, recent alumni who’ve taken applied positions can provide support to current students seeking applied jobs. Mentors can provide advice, serve as sounding boards, and provide psychosocial support throughout the job search process. In addition, mentors may be willing to serve as letter writers or references and can offer you advice when you’re deciding whether or not to accept a job offer.

4. *Network.* All of our interviewees emphasized the importance of networking throughout graduate school. Although networking can be intimidating, it doesn’t have to be. As Durley noted, “You don’t have to have some specific question; you don’t have to have some novel point. It’s just a matter of going up, introducing yourself, and expressing some interest in something they said.” When King went on the job market, she used her networks to find out about openings. You can broaden your search by networking at conferences, utilizing your professors’ networks, and through LinkedIn, an online professional networking tool.

5. *Negotiate before accepting a job offer.* In both the academic and applied job markets, our interviewees said that you should know your market value so you have a solid foundation from which to negotiate. This information can be found online or by asking people who've recently taken a similar job. We also suggest that you consult the "Salary Survey of SIOP Members" (Khanna & Medsker, 2006) for information to help you prepare for salary negotiations. Also, keep in mind that "money isn't everything; make sure to have good benefits" said Jewett. "All the little perks add up to money anyway."

Conclusion

Although the job search process can be stressful, we encourage you to keep the faith and stay the course. As King stated, "I wish I knew that it would all work out. I wish I knew there were a lot of good jobs out there and I could be happy in a lot of places. I wish I'd seen it more in a positive light rather than, 'Oh my god, I'm never going to get a job!'" We hope the strategies we have shared in this column will be helpful as you begin the job search process, and we wish you great success in your endeavors.

Many thanks to our interviewees, Drs. Bowler, King, and Warren, Dr. Durley, Mr. Jewett, and Dr. Malm, for their valuable contributions to our column. We appreciate your advice and insights and thank you for sharing your experiences with us.

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