

Political Science Job Market Guide

This guide was written by University of Texas Government grad students¹ in 2017 for current and future University of Texas Government job candidates. We included things we learned before and during the market, things we wish we knew, and helpful tips, and tried to consolidate advice into one useful document. The job market changes quickly and people have lots of different experiences, so we recommend that you consult widely!

Timeline

The year or two before the job market:

- Write constantly. Having a publication increasingly counts more than your dissertation. Remember that reviews take 2-4 months and first submission to conditional acceptance takes 6 months at an absolute minimum, one to two years standard. Aim to have multiple manuscripts under review instead of pinning your hopes on one (easier said than done, we know).
- Teach a class, ideally something in your subfield. Jobs want completed course evaluations, past syllabi, etc. This matters much more if you are interested in liberal arts jobs or applying to teaching colleges.
- Pay attention to what older colleagues on the market are doing. Go to job talks, practice job talks, and graduate student meetings with visiting faculty. Ask people how many jobs they're applying to, how long it takes, how the process works, and how they cope with stress.
- Have a conversation with your advisor 6-12 months before you go on the job market about when you plan to go. Make sure they approve.
- Apply to APSA for the year you'll be on the market. Submit as many things as you can (in 2017, you could submit two things) and try to plan a panel around your dissertation topic. It is easier to get a panel accepted than a standalone paper, and you can ask people who may be useful on the market to be on your panel (people like being invited to things). If you propose a panel and it gets rejected, email the section chair and ask if you can present a poster.

Spring semester before the job market:

- Decide and commit.
- Get as many working papers and R&Rs out as possible. The highest quality one related to your dissertation should be your job market paper. Put extra work into it.
- Make sure your committee knows that you are going on the market.

¹ "We" is Calla Hummel, Clare Brock, Cathy Wu, Rachel Navarre, Dana El-Kurd, and Jon Lewallen. Please distribute to any candidate at any school who might find it helpful.

May-June

- Start preparing your CV, cover letter, research statement, teaching statement, diversity statement, and website.
- Start asking people who have been on the market recently for advice and examples of their job market materials.

June-July

- Circulate your materials and dissertation chapters to your committee and get feedback.

July

- First job postings for the following year go up on APSA ejobs (this may change; it gets earlier every year)
- Start asking your committee and other letter writers for reference letters. These will take 2-4 weeks to write.
- Circulate your materials and dissertation chapters to your committee and get feedback.
- Start planning your job talk and know which paper will be your job market paper.

August

- First job application deadlines (usually 1 or 2).
- Job market materials should be done and you should have a web presence.
- You should be looking at ejobs at least once a week (HERC and The Chronicle also have job listings).
- Start a spreadsheet to keep track of the jobs (and post-docs) you are interested in, what they are looking for, deadlines, and how to apply.
- If you are going to APSA, start contacting search committees about APSA interviews.

September

- APSA interviews. Get professional clothes, a clicker, and anything you might need for a fly-out and test it out at APSA (or a summer conference like PolMeth).
- Job market opens in earnest on September 1st with a few deadlines. September 15th is typically when the first big batch of applications are due. Try to submit 2-5 days before to avoid missing deadlines.
- A few post-docs might be due.
- Look at ejobs etc at least every several days and update your spreadsheet.

October

- Modal due date in 2016 was October 1st. October 15th is another big due date. Try to submit 2-5 days before to avoid missing deadlines.
- Departments start contacting candidates for Skype interviews and early fly-outs

- Several major postdocs due October 31st or November 1st.

November

- November 1st is another big deadline. Try to submit 2-5 days before to avoid missing deadlines.
- Many fly-outs, especially for top 100 schools and schools wanting to be in the top 100.
- More post-docs and teaching jobs posted on ejobs (keep checking ejobs)

December

- More fly-outs
- Top departments wrap up their searches
- Postdoc market heats up

January-onward

- More and more post-docs due, and Visiting Assistant Professor positions are posted.
- Committees with later deadlines start getting back to applicants.

A note on the timeline

Some search committees start reviewing applications immediately. Others sit on them for a semester. Most R1 tenure track jobs are posted in September and October but some go up in the spring. Some jobs with October deadlines don't interview people until the spring semester. This means that the job market is trending towards year-round and there's still a chance if you don't have a job by the spring, but the uncertainty is also spread out over years. **It also means that turning R&Rs into forthcoming articles or other major CV updates are important at any point during the year you are on the market.** You can and should email the search committee chairs of the jobs you have applied to with an updated CV if you get a publication or major grant while on the market.

How to apply for jobs

The vast majority (95%?) of the jobs that you'll apply for are posted on APSA ejobs and you need a current membership to access it. Jobs ask for 3-10 of the same 10 documents: cover letter, CV, letters, teaching statement, research statement, evidence of teaching effectiveness (portfolio or evaluations), sample syllabi, diversity statement (all public California schools ask for this), unofficial graduate transcript, and up to three writing samples. You need to have all of these ready to go when you start applying, but you only really need to customize the cover letter for each job. Schools have you apply electronically via their own jobs website, Interfolio, Academic Jobs Online, or just emailing everything to a search committee.

Tips and tricks:

1. Make an excel spreadsheet to keep track of the jobs you plan on applying to, their deadlines, what they want and how to apply. **This is important because some schools will take down or change the announcement on the day it's due and you won't be able to find it again.**
2. Start looking regularly on ejobs in July or August. Look through all postings because using search terms will make some fall through the cracks.
3. Get into the habit of looking at ejobs every day or every few days during September and October.
4. Get your applications in at least two days before they're due to avoid website problems.
5. Actively and verbally thank faculty and administrative staff for the work that they do because they make your life orders of magnitude easier and smoother.

Materials

All positions will ask for a CV and cover letter. You should try to tailor the cover letter to each position. Most will ask for a research statement, writing sample, teaching statement and/or teaching portfolio. Some will ask for other things and we recommend that you prepare them ahead of time.

Write all of your materials for a general political science audience and minimize jargon. Show your drafts to faculty outside of your subfield to make sure you're on target (for example, if you are Comparative, get feedback from Americanists, or vice versa).

Cover Letter

- The cover letter should be a professional letter that states who you are and what job you're applying for.
- The first paragraph of this and the first page of your CV are probably the only things that you can count on the committee definitely reading, so make it perfect, catchy, and unique. Your job is to get them interested enough to read more.
- Unique can and should be anything that's interesting policy-wise or anything that has been in the news recently or is a recent and talked about political trend.
- Summarize your research and what you'll bring to the job in 2-3 sentences in that first paragraph.
- Use the following paragraphs to summarize your dissertation, point to any publications, teaching, and elaborate on your qualifications for the specific position.
- If you are applying for several different types of jobs, consider writing several versions of your cover letter. For example, you could have a liberal arts letter and an R1 letter, or a policy school letter and an American Politics letter.
- No more than two pages.

CV

- Your main accomplishments (publications, grants, expected PhD date) should be on the first page.
- Look at other people's and find a format you like.

Research Statement

- Introduce and summarize your dissertation in one to three paragraphs, including how far along you are.
- Discuss any publications (first) or working papers (second) in one to two pages.

- Briefly outline future research that's clearly connected to your dissertation or publications in one or two paragraphs (this is not the place to introduce new topics).

Teaching Statement

- Detail your teaching experience in one to three paragraphs
- Discuss your teaching philosophy in one to three paragraphs
- Conclude with classes you are interested in teaching that are related to the positions you are applying to.
- Put a screenshot of your best teaching evaluation (just the numbers) at the end of a teaching statement, with a brief explanation of how to interpret the evaluation. Many schools don't ask for teaching effectiveness, but it can help to send it anyway.

Writing Sample

- If you have a publication, submit that as a writing sample.
- If not, your best paper should be your job market paper and your writing sample.
- You can also submit a dissertation chapter.
- Many jobs ask for more than one writing sample, so have a couple ready to go.

Evaluations/Teaching Portfolio

- Many positions want to see evaluations, past syllabi, and any future syllabi. Get these in order.

Diversity Statement

- All public California schools and some others ask for a one to two page diversity statement.
- This can be about your experience as an underrepresented minority in academia, and/or any outreach or teaching approaches you take to foster more diverse spaces.
- Have someone give you feedback on this, especially if you are not from an underrepresented demographic.

Miscellaneous

- Sample syllabi: can also be your past syllabi.
- Religion or spirituality essay: your choice on if you want to write one of these up; most private religious schools ask for one.
- Transcripts: get an unofficial scan to submit.

Topics

When should you go on the market?

When you have some dissertation chapters done, an article that will be published and a clear plan to finish the dissertation. However, in real life, this will also depend on the state of your funding, your family situation, how comfortable you are with uncertainty and the like. Talk to your advisor and older graduate students; this really is going to be a personal decision.

Where do I find faculty listings and post-doc opportunities?

APSA ejobs, HERC, the Chronicle of Higher Education, area studies associations like LASA. USAjobs also lists all of the positions for military institutes. Most positions are cross-listed in multiple places but some aren't. Many international jobs are on ejobs, but a lot are also on <http://www.jobs.ac.uk/>.

What should you apply for?

Any job that you want and that you are qualified to do part of. If a listing has three preferred characteristics and you meet one of them, apply. Sometimes committees write down the things they absolutely need. Sometimes they write down the search committee members' three favorite topics. You have no way of knowing and when in doubt, apply.

You can also apply for jobs that don't totally fit you, but you could make work. Keep in mind that when an application calls for something like women in politics or race and ethnicity, it can sometimes be a signal that they're looking for some diversity in their candidate pool, and you might be able to go ahead and apply even if it's not exactly your area of expertise.

Decide if there is a deal breaker. This could be teaching online, a greater than 3/3 load, teaching at multiple campuses, etc.

How do you find and apply for international jobs?

If you are at all willing to move outside of the United States, you should consider it. Jobs in other countries can have much lighter teaching loads and come with tenure or something similar. Many international jobs advertise on APSA ejobs, particularly those looking explicitly for American-trained PhDs. You can also find listings through area studies organizations' websites, like LASA, or through word of mouth. Many ask for the same materials as a U.S. job would, but may have a different or more extensive web application. Start the application early and ask for help.

When applying for an international job, stress that you are really interested in moving to that place and that you are very serious about the job. Stress this in your

cover letter and be specific, and in any interaction that you have with faculty. Stress any family ties to the area, any language skills, and experience living there (or somewhere similar), etc.

The interview and flyout process may be different. Some institutions do the full job interview over Skype or a truncated job interview over Skype and do not have a flyout. Others fly a candidate out only after an offer, and others do the full flyout and interview process. Make sure you know what the process is and ask plenty of questions.

Do you need a website?

Search committees and faculty told us that many of them Google candidates once they make a medium list, short list, or are coming for an interview. A professional website makes this easy on faculty, makes it harder for you to be confused with someone else, and centralizes all of your information (again, making it easier on the search committee). A website also gives you control over your professional image and makes you look more like a professional and less like a student. It also helps people put a face and images to a CV, which makes you more memorable.

Calla has resources on her teaching page to get you started:

<http://callahummel.com/index.php/teaching/>

Why is there so much conflicting advice?

You will receive so much conflicting advice. Take what sounds right for you. There are two primary reasons for conflicting advice: First, faculty members often give job advice to a group of students with very different goals and prospects. What applies to someone aiming for an R1 job may not apply to someone aiming for a teaching job, or liberal arts versus public flagship. Second, the job market is random and changes quickly. Thus, people may not know what works and what doesn't, but they know what they did.

How much time does each part of this take?

Expect the job market to take about as much time as a graduate seminar over the summer and fall. Your CV, cover letter, and statements should go through a number of drafts and you should meet with faculty to get feedback and go through another round of revisions at least three times. Scanning job pages for new postings and updating your spreadsheet takes a half hour to an hour every few days. Once you have materials ready to go, applying for a single job takes 20 minutes to an hour, depending on what online portal they use and how much time you spend tailoring your cover letter.

Once you get an interview, spend as much time as you can preparing your job talk and slides; an hour or two a day would be good. Also read up on the department and their faculty.

How do you deal with stress and uncertainty?

Very consciously maintain your best stress management and coping strategies. Prioritize getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercise so that you can maintain a basic level of energy and normalcy. Make sure that you have people to groan to about the market who are sympathetic (grad student friends, partners). Developing and sticking to a routine that routinizes job market tasks but doesn't let it take over your life is a great idea. For example, limit job hunting to 30-45 minutes in the morning as you're waking up, do productive work during your most productive daily hours, and then submit applications in the evening as you run out of energy (or whenever you have a slump that busy work can fill).

If you have a spouse, be sure that you are in constant communication about this stuff. Don't bother spending hours applying for a job that your spouse will absolutely refuse to move for. If your spouse hates Oklahoma and swears they will never live there, don't bother with an Oklahoma-based job.

What are APSA interviews?

APSA interviews are speed dating for academic jobs. They take place in a giant room all together. They can be 10 minutes to 45 minutes and are designed to assess your fit and interest in a position. You will be interviewed by 1-3 people who are usually some combination of the chair and search committee. These are great practice for presenting your research and experience to strangers in quick succession; however, don't put any faith in how well an interview went and your chances of getting a job.

To set up APSA interviews, check ejobs in August and identify the jobs that say they'll be at APSA. Email the contact person with your CV and cover letter for that job and say you'd like to set up an APSA interview. They'll get back to you saying yes or no (they'll say no if they don't think you're a good fit; this saves time for everyone) and asking for times. Don't schedule interviews close to each other because some tend to run late.

You can also ask your advisor or committee members to introduce you to the contact person for a few jobs that you are very interested in and ask them if you can have an informational meeting with a faculty member.

What are Skype interviews?

Skype interviews are usually short- or medium-list screening interviews with the search committee before they decide who to fly out for a job interview. The questions will be relatively standard questions about your research, your interest in the position, and your qualifications. You must practice for Skype interviews and should practice with the placement coordinator and your advisor. They can be very awkward and practice helps a lot. Always remember to look into the camera instead of at the screen to make eye contact.

Some international jobs also do Skype interviews instead of fly-outs. Treat these and practice for them like you would a fly-out job talk. Make sure all technology works as well as it can, especially the wifi. Know that these will be weird and awkward because it'll be difficult to make out faces and names.

Reserve a seminar room for Skype interviews and make sure of no interruption. If possible, use a professor's office.

How should you prepare for fly-outs and job talks?

Practice at home until you have memorized your talk. Give it to a friend or partner a couple times. Practice extensively at home and then schedule a practice job talk with the department. The department practice talk is an opportunity to polish a talk, not an opportunity to go through it a first, second, or third time. Make sure it's as good as you can get it before the department practice talk. Give it again or before or both to a small group of graduate students. Take thorough notes on what works and what didn't and tweak it each time.

Once you have a job talk scheduled, run through your talk and slides every day until the real thing. Polish a script. Try to get your friends to sit for a presentation. Record yourself (video and/or audio) and review the recordings.

Write down the questions that people ask after your practice talk because they may be asked again in the real one. Either address them in the presentation or have a strong prepared answer.

Never go over time. Aim for the talk to be a few minutes shorter than the official time. People like concise talks and they resent being kept over time. Get plenty of sleep.

What if I have public speaking anxiety?

Most people do. Get a therapist before the job market if you can. The major thing for getting over anxiety is to face the thing causing you anxiety. This means practice your talk as much as you can, join Toastmasters, give conference and class presentations, etc.

If you can teach before you go on the job market, it really helps with anxiety. Teaching several times a week in front of 100 people is a great way to start getting used to public speaking (i.e. exposure). If you can't work it out to do that, see if there are any professors who would let you guest lecture in their classroom. Any practice is good practice. Getting comfortable in front of an audience will help both with the job talk and with any teaching demonstration you may have to do.

There is also a technique called an exposure hierarchy or fear ladder (Google it). You move yourself through parts or versions of the thing that gives you anxiety until you are as prepared as you can be for the real thing. For example, a job talk exposure hierarchy might look like: make slides, write out a script, practice by yourself with the script, practice by yourself without the script, give the talk to a close friend, present a conference version of the talk or give it to a class or group of graduate students, give the talk to the department, then do the real thing.

What are fly-outs like?

If you like people, fly outs can be really fun. You'll be put up in a hotel, wined and dined, and you'll meet a bunch of smart and interesting people who really want to hear about your research. However, fly-outs are really intense; it's common to have 12 straight hours of interviews with no breaks. It is very important to keep your energy level even throughout the day, because faculty members expect you to be on, interested, asking them questions, and driving the conversation the whole time. Be aware of your coffee, water, food, and bathroom needs and plan accordingly; bring snacks and water.

You will likely have a series of one-on-one interviews with faculty punctuated by group meals, a job talk, and perhaps a teaching demonstration. Have a list of ten standard questions to ask at one-on-ones and try to have at least one prepared question for every faculty member that you'll meet with (write all of these down). Try to get faculty members talking about themselves and their research because this makes them feel good and it conserves your energy. Example standard questions are what is the department culture like, how has the department changed, what are the students like and what they are interested in, do faculty members co-author, what kinds of informal support (like faculty writing workshops) are there, etc. Example individual questions include "I saw on your CV that you're currently working on X. Can you tell me more about that project?" If there's no substantive relationship to your work, talk about data collection, fieldwork, where they get ideas, etc. Remember, you may feel like you are simply repeating yourself, but while you have been asking the same questions all day, the person you are talking to doesn't know that.

If you run out of questions a good last resort is to say something like: "I feel like I've asked most of my questions. What question should I have asked, but didn't think of?" Sometimes this will solicit them to talk about something you wouldn't have known to ask about, or at least keep the conversation going long enough to open up a new avenue for questions or help you think of more questions.

Meetings with the chair and the dean or dean's office are times to ask administrative and university questions like what the strategic plan looks like, where they see the department in 5-10 years, what the relationship between the college and department is, etc. Softball questions that make you look good are things like asking what the teaching needs are and then following up their answer by talking about

how you're excited and qualified to teach those, asking if the college/department wants faculty members to apply for external grants and then talking about how you'll do that, asking if the department would be interested in you starting a faculty writing group (or something similar), teaching an emerging topic or method, or going to something for further training. Also ask about mentorship opportunities (for you to mentor students and for junior faculty to get mentorship from senior scholars).

Be sure, however, that you're asking questions that are appropriate to the job you're interviewing for. Show a sensitivity and understanding to their focus. If you're interviewing with a teaching school, it's appropriate to ask questions about research, but you should make sure you're also asking questions about faculty resources to improve teaching and about opportunities to mentor and work with undergraduates (at a liberal arts school, for instance, they'll want to know you care about that).

In general you want to show that you understand the kind of students they have and what they're looking for. If you're interviewing at a school where students are top of their class (like an SLAC), you want to talk about how you're going to involve and challenge the students. If you're interviewing at a directional school, you still want to challenge and involve the students – but you need to show that you're going to meet those students where they're at.

Meals are weird because the faculty know each other and are relaxing and dining on the department's dime, but you are being interviewed. However, you also need to show that you will be a collegial colleague and potentially a friend. Be a real person, but keep it professional. Relatedly, you can have a drink, max two, but do not get drunk under any circumstances and you should probably avoid getting buzzed. Do drink a lot of water.

Do not say anything negative about yourself. If you haven't done something or don't feel great about something, do not say that. Omit it from your answer or talk about your concrete plans to do it. You want people to focus on what you have done, not what you haven't, and people will latch onto negative comments. They know what you have and haven't done from your CV and **your job is to emphasize your strengths, skills that you'll bring to the department, and your fit for the position.**

Advice from a faculty member who has interviewed people: in the one-on-ones, candidates should be professional but personable. Know what each person you're meeting with studies and have questions for them. Assume that most people haven't done more than glance at your CV and talk about your work accordingly. Talk about your working papers, publication pipeline, and ideas and projects for the future so that the faculty member knows you'll be productive. It's OK to bring up hobbies if the conversation gets chatty, but talk about ones that are relatively normal and not very time consuming (like cooking or hiking).

Tips for what to wear

Wear whatever makes you feel confident and is in the business casual to business attire range.

If you're going to be picked up at the airport by someone from the school and taken straight to dinner, take dress clothes in your carry on then change in the airport bathroom after your flight, so you aren't wrinkly and smelly.

Be aware of the weather when you go and try to layer appropriately if it will be hot or cold or if there will be a big difference between indoor and outdoor temperatures. You don't want to be obviously sweating through your meetings.

If you're wearing high heels, take a pair of decent flats in your purse. They may end up taking you on a walking tour of the campus and you don't want to have to ask for a Band-Aid because your feet are bleeding.

How do you negotiate?

Everyone should negotiate. They expect you to negotiate. When you get an offer, express excitement and enthusiasm and say you need to tell your advisor the good news. Take the offer to your advisor and get your advisor's advice. Make a list of the ideal improvements that you would want and then go talk to other committee members and faculty about the offer and their negotiating tips. Write out a formal email/letter, or a script if you'll be negotiating over the phone.

Two to four requests are normal. You only really have leverage if you have another offer. However, if you have one offer, it's common for them to still improve one or two things. Standard things to ask for include 1) base salary increase (important because future raises are percentages of your existing salary), 2) a course release your first or second semester, 3) additional research/conference travel funds, 4) money for a book conference, 5) relocation costs, 6) spousal employment. When you are making requests, give the chair a reason why each request would be useful to you and points of comparison (For example: ask for a course release by saying that it will ease your transition and help you maintain an active research agenda while moving. Ask for a salary increase by citing the area's cost of living, the posted salaries of the other jobs you applied to, or the average salary for assistant professors in your subfield).

Other smaller things could be membership fees for APSA or software. You can also ask if the university has funds to help defray a house hunting trip. Some places will even extend your first year contract to a 14-month one if you need health insurance coverage. But be smart; base your needs on what you really want or need and where you are applying. If it's a teaching college, be careful requesting course releases, sabbaticals, research support, etc.

Remember that whatever you ask for, someone has asked for more. Do not be afraid to ask for what you want, just be prepared to hear no. They will not take offense at you asking; again, they expect you to negotiate. They will take offense if you are rude, obviously disappointed, or drag things out unnecessarily.

Ask once. This is not supposed to be a game or a long bargaining process. Make your requests clearly and respectfully once. The chair typically has to go to the dean to get approval for any changes. Ask them to do that once, don't keep changing or adding requests. Changing your requests and dragging the process on is one way to piss off your future chair. The exception to this is if you get another offer, then just show each department the other's offer (again, with the help and advice of your advisor).

If some changes are made, make sure everything is written down. If you negotiate over the phone, make sure that you email the department chair with a summary of key items later to avoid potential misunderstandings and keep a record.

Concluding remarks

Going on the job market is stressful and a lot of it is out of your control. Remember, there are hundreds of people applying for the same job as you. The search committee has to go through all of these applications. Maybe something on yours will catch their eye, maybe your font will offend them. While hard work clearly increases your chances, some of this will just be luck. If you aren't limited by location and have publications, you will have more chances. Still, some people will do all of that and still not get a job; others will do much less and get hired. Getting a job requires applying to the right places at the right time. Spending more than one year on the market is common.

There is also nothing wrong with leaving academia. If you do, you will likely make more money and have more control over where you live, and those are very important things.

We wish you the best. Please don't forget that what matters most is if you're happy and satisfied with what you're doing.