

## Questions you can ask on your job interview

Reskin 7/3/08

Some of the suggested questions are re things that every job candidate should know about. However, many don't apply everywhere. Don't ask questions whose answers you should already know (like from the dept's web site—such as the courses they offer). Some I've included because they give you something to say as you talk to person after person, some of whom won't be able to have thought of any of your questions. But they should also help to give you a feeling for a department and to compare departments.

I've categorized questions by the person to whom you might logically ask them, but most of these questions you can ask anyone, and you might get useful data by asking the same question to people who are differently positioned.

### Department Chair or Head

(A headship system is potentially more despotic; in a chairship system faculty have more power [although less faculty power is not inevitably a bad thing for an asst. prof.; it depends on who is the chair/head])

Teaching load? Is it fixed, or does it vary depending on rank, productivity, etc.

Are there sabbaticals? Is there any kind of mini-sabbatical for junior faculty

Which, if any, classes get teaching assistants

Does the department have an honors program?

How big are the classes?

How many majors does the Department have?

What kinds of courses does the chair seeing you teaching, if you got an offer and accepted it.

Can you buy off courses with grants?

What kinds of facilities exist for using computing/the web in instructional settings (e.g., a computer lab?)

### *Graduate program*

Size of graduate program

Average GREs for entering students and have they changed over time

Do graduate students go to national professional meetings? Does dept. help defray their expenses?

What kinds of places are graduate students getting jobs? (they will only tell you the good ones; not the ones who work at Podunk state or in Macon County Parole Office)

Do students have office space in the department?

Are most students funded?

How many, if any, have fellowships

Any training programs (e.g., NIH demography)

How long does it take students to finish, on average

Do they write MA theses? What kind of prelim/general exams do they take

### *Kinds of resources available for research*

Are RAs available?

Department policy re funds for travel to professional meetings?

What kind of support is available for computing (i.e., staff support)  
Does the department/university have any small grants

#### *Governance*

Chair or head?  
Frequency of faculty meetings?  
Is there an executive committee?  
What are the standing committees?  
Committee load for assistant professors

*Department's future hiring plans*—is the department looking to build in particular areas, or does it tend to look for the best available people?  
How the review system works for junior faculty (annual, biennial, etc)  
Time frame for their decision making re the position for which you're interviewing

**Dean** (you probably won't see a dean, but you might)  
Relative to other depts, how strong is sociology in the college?  
What are the dean's plans for building in sociology?  
From the dean's perspective, what are the dept's strengths and weaknesses?  
Does the college have resources available for research?  
If it's a public institution, how is the university's relationship to the legislature?  
About what percentage raises has the legislature provided in the last few years?

### **Faculty Members**

#### *Professional life*

Their own research and teaching  
Do they work in their office? Do faculty work in their offices evenings/weekends?  
What do they like best about the dept  
If you feel brave, ask things in the dept. that need improvement  
How the department chair is selected and her/his term.  
Who's next in line?  
*If you have good rapport*, what is the dept's/university's policy re family leave? Can faculty who have a child stop the tenure clock. Does the university offer any daycare. (by the way, it is illegal for them to ask you any questions about your childrearing/bearing plans or your marital status, or about physical limitations that require accommodation)

#### *Teaching, the graduate program*

What they teach (how often does class meet, how many students  
What do they think of the undergrads? the graduate students?  
Do faculty collaborate with graduate students?  
How often do faculty teach graduate courses? Do they get to teach graduate seminars in their own research area? Do they get to choose what courses they want to teach  
Do graduate students publish and, if so, where?  
How well do grad students do on the job market?

*Campus/University/community life*

Ask about any of the following facilities that interest you: library quality (there are published ratings on this, by the way), interdisciplinary contacts, parking, gym/pool; other recreational/cultural things like places to hike, camp, the symphony, arts theaters, restaurants (faculty love to talk about the restaurants)  
What's it like to live there?

**Graduate students\***

1. Do the faculty encourage you to publish?
2. Do faculty collaborate with students?
3. Things you like best and least about the program
4. how long does it take students to finish, on average
5. how well do graduate students do on the job market
6. What they did their MA thesis on (if they have theses)

\*typically not many show up and of these only a few talk. Use your discussion-leading skills to draw people out. Listen rather than talk. However, usually one of them will ask you if you work with students.