

Placement Guide

To succeed in the academic job market, graduate students must first build a strong professional record of scholarship and teaching. In turn, you must prepare your application materials in a timely and skillful manner.

The Department of Political Science offers two workshops for your benefit. A Professionalization Workshop organized by the Placement Director is held each year in the spring semester. It is designed for Ph.D. students finishing their second year in the program. The purpose of this workshop is to help students prepare to build a professional record and acquire teaching experience (please see items 1 and 2 of the document below). Attendance at this workshop is taken and forwarded to the supervisory committees of those students in the second year of the program.

A Placement Workshop organized by the Placement Director is held each year at the beginning of the fall semester. It is designed for Ph.D. students in the fifth year of the program. The purpose of this workshop is to help students as they prepare to enter the job market (please see items 3-6 of the document below). Attendance at this workshop is taken and forwarded to the supervisory committees of those students in the fifth year of the program. Students advancing more quickly through the program should see the Placement Director about attending the Placement Workshop in the fall semester of their fourth year.

The two workshops, this website, and the resources available in “The Profession of Political Science” section of the department library on the 3rd floor should help you as you build your professional record, acquire teaching experience, and seek academic employment.

- 1. Building your Professional Record**
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1. Building your Professional Record

Regardless of your ultimate placement goal (e.g., large research university, liberal arts college, community college, nonacademic career), you should work to build a solid academic record. Any potential employer will want to see that you used your time in graduate school productively.

What are others looking for in your record?

- Potential employers are looking for information in your record that will reduce uncertainty about your future performance. Employers use the “rule of one”: they assume that if you have done something once, chances are good that you can do it again.
- Potential employers are looking for signs that you are neither too narrow nor too broad in your interests.
- Potential employers want to see timely completion of your program requirements.

What would be an optimal record?

- Teach at least one class as the instructor of record and receive very good student evaluations.
- Present two or more papers at professional conferences, including one at the APSA Annual Meeting.
- Author or coauthor (with a faculty member, or student colleague) one peer-reviewed journal article.
- Complete the Ph.D. in a timely fashion. Defending your dissertation within five or six years may be optimal. Extensive fieldwork or the creation of an original data set may add a year or two to the process.

What should you avoid doing?

- While it is very helpful to present papers at conferences and teach one or two courses, your efforts in these areas should not detract the timely completion of a fine dissertation and/or the publication of an article. If you wish to present a paper at a conference, be sure to ask your faculty advisor(s) to review it beforehand. Optimally, you might present the paper in the department first, at a brown-bag session.
- Coauthoring with a professor is valuable because it allows you to observe “how it is done.” However, articles coauthored with professors will be somewhat discounted by those looking at your record, even if you did most of the work. Authoring a single article on your own will count for more than several co-authored articles.
- Articles and chapters appearing in new, unestablished journals or in edited books, like book reviews and encyclopedia entries, do not carry the weight of articles in well-established, peer-reviewed journals.

Hypothetical Timetable

- 1st and 2nd Years: Clarify your areas of interest and get to know your professors. Discuss your professional development with members of your supervisory committee. Prepare for your first and second field exams.
- 3rd Year: Successfully pass both comprehensive exams. Present your master’s thesis or a revised seminar paper at a regional conference and submit it to a journal for publication. Defend your dissertation prospectus. Begin dissertation work.
- 4th and/or 5th years: Present preliminary dissertation findings at a conference and submit a paper co-authored with your dissertation advisor to a journal. Teach your first class. Present

your job market paper at the APSA Annual Meeting and submit it to a journal. Complete your dissertation.

2. Acquiring Teaching Experience

Why is teaching experience important?

Demonstrating that you have experience in the classroom is central to putting together an attractive application packet. Research universities value good teaching, and liberal arts colleges generally consider teaching effectiveness of equal importance to research productivity. For these reasons, the Department makes an effort to give all Ph.D. students the opportunity to teach at least one undergraduate course on their own, apart from any TAing they may do.

How to prepare yourself for teaching

- Pay attention to what professors for whom you are TAing do in the classroom that works well
- Attend UCET seminars
- Examine faculty syllabi (available in the department office and on faculty websites) before preparing your own syllabi. Ask your dissertation chair and/or supervisory committee members to offer suggestions on its content and form. It is likely that one of these faculty members will supervise you in the classroom, so get the conversation started early
- Give your students the best you've got. There is no template for a great teacher. You will fail miserably if you fake someone else's style. You will succeed if you find your own voice in the classroom and are well prepared. Never condescend to your students. Respect them, and set the bar high, then help them to meet the challenge.

What to include in your application packet regarding teaching

- A statement of your teaching philosophy. In this statement, expound on what you want most to convey to your students and what methods you employ to achieve this. What do you hope students take away from your classes, not solely in the narrow academic sense, but in the broader existential one (i.e. what would you want them to remember about the class in twenty years). Strive to convey your passion for teaching authentically.
- Numerical/aggregate and narrative/qualitative indicators of your teaching effectiveness. Consider the use of devices like bar graphs to highlighting your abilities. If you are significantly above the CLAS and/or Departmental mean in your student evaluations, put this information on a bar graph with an appropriate legend. It's easy on the eyes of frequently overburdened committee members, and very convincing. You will also want to include a range of student comments culled from your evaluations. Select those

comments that describe, in specific ways, precisely what you do that makes you a good teacher.

- Detailed syllabi of any courses you have taught (and perhaps a syllabi of a course you would like to but haven't yet taught).

3. Five Steps to Going on the Market

1. Prepare your application materials in the summer or early in the Fall Semester of the year you intend to seek an academic job. The packet that you mail out should include a letter of application, your C.V., course syllabi, statement of teaching philosophy, writing samples, and official transcripts (if requested). Ask your dissertation chair to look over your materials and offer suggestions.
2. Check job listings on a regular basis at E-JOBS on the APSA web site, the Chronicle of Higher Education, and the bulletin board in the Department.
3. Request (generic) letters of recommendation as early as possible, and no later than the first week of September from at least three faculty members (typically those who know your work best, notably members of your dissertation committee, and in particular its chair). These letters should be given to Sue.
4. Submit request to Sue, the Graduate Program Assistant, to mail out the departmental materials at least two weeks prior to application deadlines. These materials include your C.V., unofficial copies of graduate transcripts (if provided), and internal letters of recommendation. Be sure to supply Sue with an updated C.V. Before any materials will be sent out by the department, each student going on the market must meet with the Placement Director to discuss his/her placement packet.
5. Prepare your job talk, consulting with your dissertation chair. It is highly recommended to give a trial presentation in the Department. To schedule this presentation, contact the faculty member of Department Speakers' Committee in charge of the brown-bag sessions).

4. Writing a Letter of Application and Constructing a CV

A Letter of Application, like a CV, is best when tailored to specific audiences. Start early in crafting a generic letter, and write multiple drafts after receiving feedback from faculty supervisors. Then tailor it to fit each institution to which it is sent. Be absolutely certain to proofread and spellcheck your letter (and CV). Bad first impressions can be deadly.

Generally, a letter of application should be about two single-spaced pages and describe in some detail your interests and accomplishments and why you think you are the right person for the job. A good letter of application will be:

- Confident, energetic, and forward looking - let them know that you are well equipped for the challenges that lie ahead, but don't be boastful. Convey the fact that you are keen and ready to roll and are set to build on your accomplishments.
- Earnest - don't fudge any facts about what you've done or plan to do.

- Well-informed - find out something about the department and its faculty and note how you complement their strengths; let them know that they are receiving more than a form letter

Your letter of application should include:

1. A brief introduction, noting the job you're applying for and a list of what is provided in your packet
2. Statement of current professional status (e.g. ABD, on post-doc)
3. Statement of research interests
4. Detailed description of dissertation, funding for its research (if applicable) and plans for its dissemination (book manuscript, or series of articles)
5. Description of future research projects (possibly derived from unanswered questions from the dissertation)
6. Description of publications and their funding
7. Brief statement of teaching interests, experience, and philosophy
8. Concluding statement, possibly indicating why this job opportunity is particularly appealing/well suited to your own strengths and interests

A CV should include a concise and consistent account of your background and professional accomplishments. It should use formatting for clarity and emphasis. A CV should list your:

1. Post-secondary education
2. Title of Dissertation
 - a. possibly the name of your dissertation committee chair)
3. Publications
 - a. including in press, forthcoming, and manuscripts in preparation
4. Conference Presentations
5. Teaching/Research Experience
 - a. Courses taught as instructor or teaching assistant
 - b. Research assistantships
6. Fellowships, awards, grants, funding opportunities
7. Professional Memberships
 - a. e.g. APSA, Women's Caucus
8. Graduate Student Organizations
 - a. e.g. Student Government
9. Additional Skills and/or Experience
10. List of References

5. Giving a Job Talk

- The job talk and the following question and answer period is one of the most important points in the job application process. For most of the department, this 30-40 minute performance is the only exposure they will get to you and your research.

- Your job talk should demonstrate that you know the broad contours of the landscape surrounding your field of interest, and that your work addresses and answers an interesting and significant intellectual puzzle with practical implications. It should give the audience a good sense of your professional interests and expertise.
- It should demonstrate that your dissertation work is theoretically informed and methodologically rigorous. Your work should be introduced in a broad context, and should capture and hold the attention of audience members beyond your particular subfield. In turn, it should clearly demonstrate an advancement of knowledge within your subfield.
- Your presentation should also demonstrate that you are a collegial person interested in the give-and-take of intellectual community. Strive for a conversational tone without compromising the rigor of your work.
- Tips for the talk:
 - Stand, do not sit.
 - Begin with an expression of your pleasure at the opportunity before you
 - Do not simply read a paper verbatim. Make regular eye contact, employ hand gestures, and use a conversational tone.
 - Do not rush!
 - Start with a genuine puzzle or arresting example of what you're talking about
 - Provide a general context, but get to the meat of the matter as quickly as possible
 - Use overheads to provide structure or hand out a one-page outline to your audience
 - Break up the talk into modules and clearly map them out
 - Use anecdotes to illustrate theoretical points
 - Conclude by underlining the significance of your efforts in both a specific and general context
- Tips for the Q & A:
 - Think about the likely questions beforehand and prepare general answers to them. These answers might then be tailored to meet actual questions that arise.
 - Establish that you own your turf: people will try to probe you (sometimes rudely) to see if you are comfortable on your turf. Stand your ground, gently but firmly. You won't do yourself any favors if you concede ground in order to look agreeable.
 - Demonstrate your interest in and appreciation of people's queries. Never be dismissive of questions or appear combative. Embrace all questions as a welcome opportunity.
 - Stay on point. Remember to answer the actual question. Taking notes is often a good idea.
- Practice, practice, practice! Give your talk and Q & A in a department brown-bag session, and again in front of friends.

6. Meeting with Faculty and the Department Chair

A crucial part of any job interview process is office meetings with faculty and the Department Chairperson. These meetings may be numerous and can be tiring. Stay alert and focused, and be prepared to repeat yourself when answering identical questions for the tenth time without a hint of impatience or fatigue. Getting a schedule of the office visits ahead of time will allow you to learn something about each of the faculty members interests. Do your homework.

- Be genuine. It's too easy to spot a fake.
- Be prepared with questions, such as:
 - Number and kind of courses you will teach and scope for new courses development and availability of TAs
 - The expectations for tenure
 - Availability of research support
 - Availability of professional support (for attending meetings, etc.
 - The nature of the city and surroundings

7. Available Resources:

The Department library has a section on the profession for graduate students which includes copies of *PS: Political Science and Politics*, *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career: A Portable Mentor for Scholars from Graduate School through Tenure*, and some articles and chapters you may find particularly useful, including:

1. John A. Goldsmith, John Komlos, and Penny Schine Gold. 2001. "Landing an Academic Job." Pp. 66-131 in *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career: A Portable Mentor for Scholars from Graduate School through Tenure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
2. Daniel Fuerstam. 2005. "The Academic Hiring Process: A Survey of Department Chairs." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (October): 731-736.
3. Jon B. Gould. 2003. "No Second Chance at Making a Good First Impression: Peril and Possibility in the Campus Visit." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (October): 791-794.
4. Donald Kent Douglas. 2002. "Tenure-Track Employment Opportunities at the Community College Level: A View from the Job Candidate's Perspective." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (March): 95-100.
5. Evelyn M. Simien. 2002. "On the Market: Strategies for the Successful Job Candidate." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (September): 581-583.
6. Kent M. Brudney. 2001. "Academic Careers in Community Colleges." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (March): 149-153.

7. A. Lanethea Mathews. 2000. "The Changing Structure of the Academic Job Market." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (June): 237-242.
8. Daniel W. Drezner. 1998. "So You Want to Get a Tenure-Track Job." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (September): 609-614.
9. Michael D. Martinez, Lee Sigelman, Mary E. Guy, and Randolph C. Horn. 2004. "Symposium on 'How to Get and Keep Your Academic Job.'" *Florida Political Chronicle* 15 (1, Spring): 57-63.
10. Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott. 1998. "Navigating the Academic Job Market Minefield." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (September): 615-622.
11. Meredith Reid Sarkees and Nancy E. McGlen. 1999. "Misdirected Backlash: The Evolving Nature of Academia and the Status of Women in Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (March): 100-108.