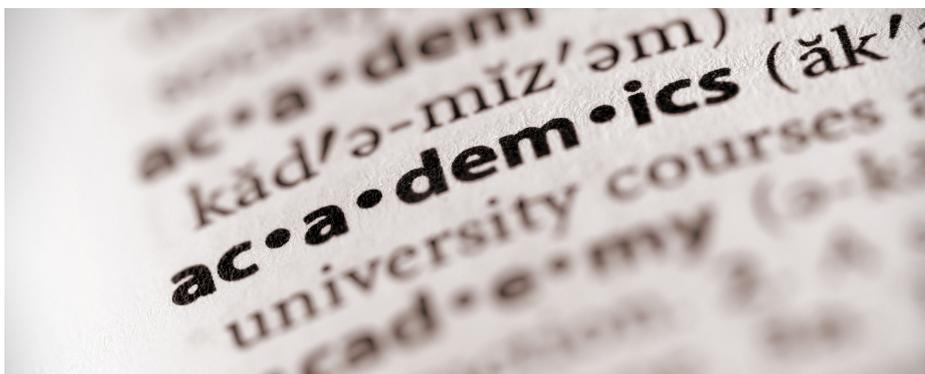


Discover your options

Careers, Internships & Employment

Considering a Career in Academia?



In order to plan a career in academia it is worth considering the questions: How have I determined whether this is the right career pathway for me? What do I know about working in academia? Have I considered both the positives and negatives of academic life? Have I explored alternative areas of work I could apply my qualifications and experience to?

Self Awareness

Self-knowledge is central to the job search process in academia, as in any other job. What are your values? What knowledge, skills and strengths do you have to offer an employer? What are your career and life goals? How do these relate – or not – to a position within academia? What do you want from your first academic working position?

A self assessment profile can help you identify the right job match for you, as well as clearly articulate to an employer *how* and *why* this position is the right one for you. Knowing what your skills, knowledge, interest and strengths are can also help broaden your job possibilities. This is particularly helpful to know as there may be times where you have difficulty getting

your first choice of job due to labour market conditions or other factors.

For further information on job ideas related to your degree subject major area, see www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers. Look at 'What Can I do with my degree in?'

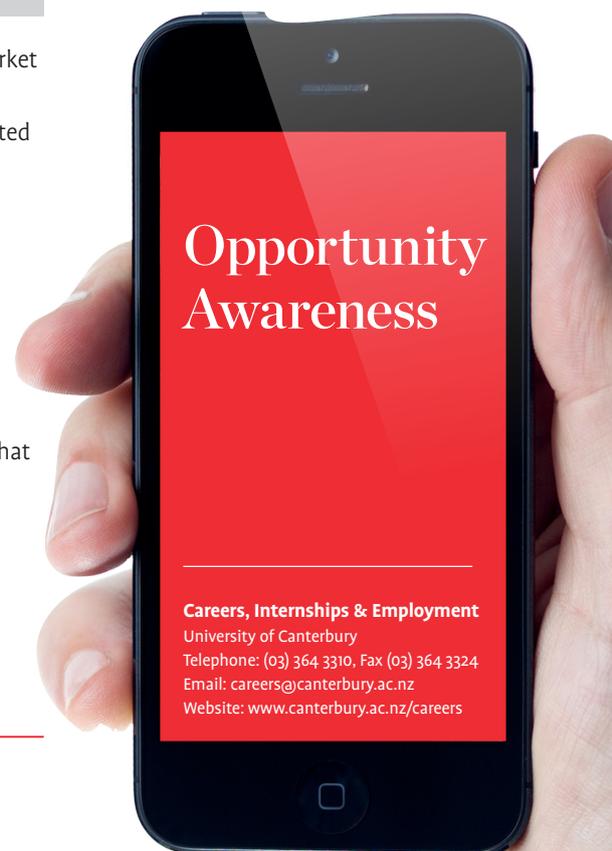
The job of an Academic

In planning a career in academia, it is useful to reflect on what type of academic job you want. Do you want a job that has more of a research and/or teaching focus? This will determine what universities/colleges and positions you apply for – those whose mission is more research and/or teaching oriented.

Typically the job of an academic is as a tertiary lecturer. This involves a combination of research and teaching

in their area of speciality, as well as administrative work. In practice this means the preparation and delivery of lectures, preparing and marking assignments, essays and exams; giving academic advice to students, supervising students research, keeping up-to-date with their own subject area, conducting research, writing and publishing articles on their subject area, as well as attending and presenting at conferences. Talking to lecturers and academic researchers about their experience of working in the field can also offer valuable insight into working in academia.

To become a tertiary lecturer you need a postgraduate qualification and/or extensive experience in the area you are



teaching. Most tertiary lecturer positions require a PhD, but a master's degree and industry experience is acceptable in academic shortage areas. Indeed industry experience is recognised as being highly valuable in some disciplines. Tertiary lecturers gain skills on the job and through carrying out research. Many tertiary education providers have in-house training courses in adult education too, offering lecturers the opportunity to up-skill. See www.careers.govt.nz/default.aspx?id0=103&id1=A426E2F4-1E6B-46A3-A5FF-8E29612FBB70

Building Your Portfolio in Preparation for Seeking a Job in Academia

In order to effectively prepare for your job search in academia, preparation is best started at the beginning of your doctoral studies. That is, alongside achieving your doctoral degree, you need to develop a portfolio of evidence that highlights your specialist area of expertise, research and publications, teaching experience, paper delivery at conferences and ability to write grant proposals. This information will all be of interest to future tertiary institutions you are applying to.

Choose Your Research Topic in a Considered Way

Choosing an area of doctoral research can come about through a variety of ways, including your own interest, suggestion by faculty members and funding availability. It is helpful to consider the marketability of your topic to potential future employers as part of your decision-making process too. That is, is your research an area of interest or growth? Or could there be some possible negative reactions to your research? That is, could your research be perceived as too narrow, too broad or too controversial? Carefully considering your research topic in an informed way will help influence and shape your future job possibilities¹.

Build Your Teaching Profile

Take advantage of the broad range of ways you can gain teaching experience alongside, but not at the expense of, your postgraduate studies. Summer school teaching, tutoring in your subject area, demonstrating in laboratories, giving lectures in your

supervisor's class and becoming a teaching assistant or teaching coordinator will enable you to develop your portfolio of teaching experience.

In addition it is helpful to gather evidence of your teaching practice through collecting formal, objective university-based course evaluations from students. Observations and references by faculty members of your lecturing/tutoring, any teaching qualifications and awards, and some "sample student letters" (unsolicited) are all helpful to include as well.²

Think about who you consider to be a good lecturer and why. Observe how they lecture and talk with them about what they consider 'best practice' teaching. In addition watch yourself on video to self evaluate and refine your teaching skills.

Consider doing formal teacher training at tertiary level.

Build Your Research and Publications Profile

The higher the quality and quantity of publications you have in key journals in your area of expertise, the better. One of the best ways to increase your publication output is to get involved in research projects, other than your thesis. This will also enable you to build a stronger research basis and network for recommendations and references in your future job search.³ As it can take time to publish an article, the sooner you begin producing and publishing articles out of your postgraduate work, the higher the chances are that you will have something in print when it comes to applying for academic positions.⁴

Deliver Papers at Conferences

Delivering papers at conferences adds to your portfolio, as well as enables you to increase your professional networks. "Pre-screening interviews" can take place at conferences so be aware that potential future employers will be listening and observing your presentation skills. It is important to remember however, as Sowers-Hoag and Harrison (1998) note in their book *Finding an Academic Job* that publications are considered more "weighty" than presentations of conference papers.⁵

2 Sowers-Hoag and Harrison, 1998: 13

3 Boden, Joe 2005: 8

4 Sowers-Hoag and Harrison, 1998: 15

5 Sowers-Hoag and Harrison, 1998: 15

Develop Your Track Record Writing Grant Proposals

Researching and writing grant proposals from the beginning to end will highlight your research skills and provide evidence of your ability as a future faculty member to be able to write and get grants. This is especially helpful if you are applying to a private research focused university where the ability to gain external funding is critical for hiring, promotion and tenure.⁶ Gaining grant proposal writing experience can be achieved through grant writing for your own research and/or assisting another faculty member to do this for their research. If you have yet to gain experience in this area, talk with your supervisor and members of your faculty to see whether you can assist another staff member with writing a grant.

Maintain your Professionalism

In the words of Sowers-Hoag and Harrison (1998) it is advisable to 'be a good departmental citizen'. This involves maintaining and developing good collegial relationships and respecting diversity of opinion. Volunteering or serving on committees, taking on tasks that need doing, that due to limited time and priority others have not been able to do; and/or becoming a student representative in curriculum design and evaluation area are also helpful ways to develop your professionalism and recognition of being a good colleague to work with.

As a postgraduate student, it is also helpful to remember that you are continually evaluated by faculty and at any event where staff and students are present. Therefore maintaining your professionalism and reputation is critical, as members of your faculty and students will contribute to your future job search portfolio through providing references and course evaluations.⁷

Continually Engage in Professional Development

Developing your professional skills, knowledge and expertise is critical in the modern tertiary environment. New technologies, new funding formulae, new standards for accountability and new ways of doing academic work have meant that academics need to maintain their

6 Sowers-Hoag and Harrison, 1998: 17

7 Sowers-Hoag and Harrison, 1998: 18

knowledge and skills in areas outside their specific discipline. For example, changes have occurred in teaching (tertiary teaching pedagogy, incorporating a broader range of learning styles, the use of technology to post course information for students and the changing student demographics, with students from a diverse range of multicultural backgrounds), research conduct (such as Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), increased global research collaboration and grants and tenders with industry) and changes to university governance.⁸

Finding A Job in Academia

Learn About the Academic Job Market

Talk to previous students in your department who have recently got a job and ask how they did it, as well as lecturers who have recently joined your department. Talk with staff in your department to see whether they have contacts you can speak with for an informational interview. Networking at conferences is also a great way to learn about jobs in the academic job market.

Think about the type of institution you want to work at and the location of where you want to work. Build your knowledge and networks of other countries and markets. For example, do you want to work in a country where English is a second language? Academic work is done all over the world, but jobs are relatively scarce. Therefore you may need to be willing to search and relocate nationally or internationally.⁹

Most disciplines have a mailing list that distributes job information to an international audience. If you are not already receiving this information, talk to a member of faculty in your department, so you can get key job search websites and journals with academic job vacancies listed. In addition, there are some websites included below that may be of use to you in your search for academic job vacancies.

Job Hunting For Academic Positions

In the first instance Careers, Internships & Employment would strongly advise that you speak with an academic in your department or others who are well-connected to your

discipline about where jobs are posted in your field as this will provide invaluable assistance from others in your profession.

Alongside that the Careers, Internships & Employment website does have some New Zealand, Australian and other overseas academic websites, including academic job vacancy links in a range of degree areas that you might find helpful to read.

See www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers/student_graduate_employment/vacancies_academic_positionsl.shtml

In addition Careers, Internships & Employment has some books, including *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic career*, which maybe of use to you.

Job Application Process

When it comes to recruitment for academic vacancies, your area of expertise, personality and departmental fit are all factors that are considered. Your job application form, cover letter, CV, portfolio of work and the job interview process are all used to establish whether you are the right person for the job.

Your job application form will ask you to list information, such as your qualifications, experience, record of research and publications. You can attach your CV to your job application form, but make sure you fill the application form in. Don't write "see CV" even if there is some repetition between your CV and the job application form.

You are likely to have to write answers to key competencies questions for the position. In answering these you need to provide evidence as to how you handled a situation in the past that would demonstrate that should you be faced with that situation again in the future, you have the behaviours and competencies required to handle it. When writing your answers to a competency based questions it can help to use a structural framework such as the S.T.A.R principle. Here you briefly describe the situation, tasks and action steps you took, followed by the results. Remember, the potential employer will not just be looking at *what* you have said, but also how you have written it.

Referees you provide may be contacted prior to, during, or after the job interview process. It could be verbal or confidential written feedback that is sought to attest to your character, abilities and experience. Make

sure you ask people to be your referees prior to writing their name down and give them an up-to-date copy of your CV and briefing on the job/s you are applying for.

Writing an Effective Cover Letter

State why you are applying for the position. Illustrate a match to the position by highlighting your key competencies, skills and strengths. Demonstrate your interest and motivation, as well as a realistic understanding of what the job is about. Finally make your 'points of difference' and reasons for wanting to work for a particular organisation clear to enable the readers of your application to make a connection to you. Remember, the cover letter should be no longer than one page.

Writing an Academic Curriculum Vitae (CV)

An academic CV needs to include information that addresses the key points of the position description and person specification, with evidence of where you have developed these. The length of your CV may vary depending on the vacancy, your level of experience and the information required. The order of the information may also vary depending on what might be most important to highlight for the position you are applying for. For example, an academic position that has a higher research component you may choose to highlight your research and publications first.

In general 'a CV for an academic job should be simple and list items such as personal details, education, academic employment history and/or relevant employment history to the position you are applying for, grants and awards, publications, presentations, professional memberships, courses taught and any other relevant professional activities. Personal information, such as interests and hobbies, and functional details, such as listing skills gained or duties performed, unless you performed an unusual duty that had bearing on your academic work [could] be omitted.'¹⁰ When included, a balanced approach is suggested. Personal interests and achievements can highlight your 'points of difference' to an employer, where interest areas may capture their attention as a way they can promote their country to you as an ideal destination for you to live and work.

⁸ Boden, Joe, 2005: 8

⁹ Joe Boden, 2005: 9

¹⁰ Joe Boden, 2005: 10

Often you will be required to write a Statement of Research and Teaching Interests which you can attach and/or put in the body of your CV. The statement should be relevant to the job advertisement, addressing the main points raised for both teaching and research in the job description and person specification.

The statement should be comprehensive conveying a complete picture of your research and teaching experiences. It may be up to several pages, with introductory and summary paragraphs included. The statement needs to be well organized, particularly in the case of research themes and ideas. Start with theme statements, then move to specific examples of research projects, and papers published or pending. Statements about research collaboration are particularly helpful.¹¹

Job Interviews

Once applications have been screened and you have secured a job interview, get to know the people in the department where you are hoping to work. One way to do this is through viewing the staff section on the departmental website which will have photos and profiles of staff members. Learn about their research so you are able to engage in effective conversation with them at the interview. Give some thought as to how your own research might fit with other staff members in the department you are applying to.

Universities in different countries may vary their interview process for academic positions. For example, in NZ, UK and Australia, there is usually a panel of 4-5 staff members, whereas in North America, job talk and informational discussions with staff are your 'interview'.¹² In general, initially you may have an exploratory discussion over the telephone, a videoconference interview, a formal face-to-face panel interview, or a combination of all three.

The initial exploratory discussion over the telephone is where you are likely to be assessed on your communication skills, ability to build rapport and motivational fit (that is how much consideration have you given to moving to the country where the position is; whether you have talked with

your family about the shift and whether you have talked with students and other staff in the department you are applying to). This initial conversation will enable the panel to gauge how serious your interest in the position is and what homework you have done to demonstrate a match between you and the position you are applying for.

Videoconferences and/or the face-to-face interviews frequently have a two-part structure. The first part will include a range of non-behavioural and behavioural interview questions with the panel. Secondly, in addition to being asked about your research and teaching experience, you are highly likely to have to do a presentation on your area of expertise. As this is a formal presentation, you need to convey your knowledge about your subject area in a professional and structured way, using the appropriate technology, illustrating your main ideas and sub ideas, exploring the implications of your research, how it fits into the structure of the discipline, established ideas and concepts. Remember to mentally prepare yourself for your critics, making sure you have good answers for any difficult questions that could be asked of you. Remember too that you may have the panel, as well as other departmental staff and students assessing you on your presentation.¹³

Practice makes perfect! Think not only about *what* you are saying, but *how* you are saying it. Consider your demeanour, pace and voice, posture, movement, gestures, eye contact and use of AV aids as you prepare for your job interview.

Handling Multiple Job Offers

Congratulations you have gotten an academic job – or perhaps several offers! Evaluate your job offers against your self-assessment information, including your life and career goals and what is important to you. Think about which position may offer you both the best circumstances for your personal, as well as professional life. Discuss your decision with faculty members where you have done your postgraduate work and get their opinion, as well as family, friends and/or a career counsellor.

¹³ Joe Boden; 2005: 12–13

What If I Don't Get Offered An Academic Position?

If you are finding it difficult to find a job in academia, honestly evaluate your personal characteristics, the labour market and your job search strategy. For example, tape yourself teaching and see whether there are any areas you could improve on. In addition remember it may not be you! The labour market can fluctuate and may negatively impact on your ability to get an academic position. Therefore being open to exploring alternative avenues of work, including part-time work, such as teaching an undergraduate class or doing post-doctoral research, is worth doing. UC Careers & Employment can also offer you support in coaching in your job search, so consider making an appointment with a career counsellor to help you.

Consider delaying formal graduation. That is, after "defending" your dissertation and prior to graduation use that time to be a "student" for another term or two, perhaps working as a graduate assistant. Use the opportunity to polish your dissertation research for publication and/or improve your instructional credentials. Complete other scholarly projects and/or undertake new, short-term ones with faculty. If you qualify for a tuition waiver, you could consider doing some other study that might enhance your knowledge in your field. This will also give you the advantage of keeping you "in the loop" with university life and culture.¹⁴

Sources

Boden, Joe (15 September 2005). *Current issues in the tertiary landscape / How to get a job*. Presented to Aiming at Academic Careers Programme, University Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Canterbury

Sowers-Hoag, Karen and Harrison, Dianne F.(1998). *Finding An Academic Job*, (Available on loan from UC Careers & Employment)

Human Resources, University Centre for Teaching and Learning, and Careers, Internships & Employment staff, University of Canterbury, September 2006

Careers, Internships & Employment also has a range of career planning books and assessment tools that you can use to help you in your career decision-making process, as well as career consultants you can talk with. See: www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers

¹⁴ Sowers-Hoag and Harrison, 1998: 102

¹¹ Joe Boden, 2005: 10

¹² Joe Boden; 2005: 17