

Description

The Most Commonly Wasted Opportunity

When the stressful interview comes to its inevitable end, it's either gone really well and you think it's in the bag, or you "ummed" and "aahhed" all the way through it and you're wishing you had just stayed in bed this morning. Then comes the last painful step: "Do you have any questions for us?"

If it went well, you might be tempted to ask if you can see your office, but if it went badly, you might be tempted not to bother at all and simply respond: "No Thanks." Neither response would be acceptable, but they are characteristic of a common flaw in interview preparation. One of the best ways to impress your interviewer is to show that you have done your homework on the company/institution and are *genuinely* interested in working there. So here are the 10 questions you should ask in an academic interview:

Do Your Homework

- Research the company/institution
- Research the program and the department
- Research the biographies and published works of the people who will interview you (if known) and the people you will be working with.

The objective here is not to come across as a know-it-all stalker, but to be able to frame your questions as a future colleague rather than just another interview candidate. Ask the questions at the appropriate time in the schedule, and aim to make them specific to the people with whom you are meeting:

- To the interviewer/Search Committee Chair:

  How would you describe the successful applicant for this role?

- To the Department Head/Research Supervisor:

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How would you describe the department/research team to a colleague?

- Follow-up to the Department Head/Research Supervisor:

Do you think that colleague would be surprised by that description?

- To the Department Head/Research Supervisor:

What is the average length of time before I can expect to be able to lead a research project?

- To the Department Head/Research Supervisor:

What is the department's/team's position on replication studies? (do they support validation of results or is it all about publication?)

- To fellow researchers:

Why did you choose this project?

- Follow-up to fellow researchers:

Has it lived up to your expectations?

- Follow-up to fellow researchers:

What is your greatest frustration with this job?

- To the Department Head/Research Supervisor:

Where do you see this department/team going over the next five/ten years?

- To the interviewer/Search Committee Chair:

What is your timetable for filling this position?

Your Questions are Just as Important as Theirs

If you have done extensive preparation on the questions you are likely to be asked, it's easy to forget that the questions you ask are equally valuable to the interviewer. Are you proactive? Are you organized? Do you come across as being genuinely interested in this opportunity or are you just

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shopping around? Don’t be reticent in asking tough questions – this is an important decision for both parties to make – and asking softball, easy-to-answer questions would just reinforce their concern that you’re just shopping around. This is the best opportunity you have to get straight answers to straight questions that won’t run the risk of being misconstrued in email form. Make the most of it.

Category

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