

A Critical Communication Studies Job Search Timeline

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<http://sterneworks.org/jobtime.pdf>

<http://sterneworks.org/Academe>

Note #1: This timeline assumes application due dates in October at the earliest. November is the earliest I've heard of on-campus interviews in Communication departments, but due dates are creeping into October. There is significant drift toward earlier and earlier dates each year. Plan accordingly.

Note #2: New Ph.D.s often overlook opportunities for postdoctoral fellowships, which are a great way to start your career. Note that deadlines for postdocs are earlier than jobs - often September. Plan accordingly.

Note #3: This timeline was originally written for jobseekers in the United States. I've added some information here (and elsewhere in the site) for Canadian job seekers. Note that different countries have different schedules, and usually their own professional associations.

Note #4: Obviously, this is for people working in the “critical” wing of Communication Studies (define it however you like). Advice may or may not be applicable to other fields.

APRIL:

Read this timeline.

AUGUST:

1. Decide whether you're going to go on the market.

Take a cold, hard look at your situation. Generally, I advise students to wait as long as possible to go on the market. When you're 70 or 90, you won't care that you waited a year to be an assistant professor. But an extra year will allow you to finish the diss, get a publication or two and do other things that can help you get a better job. And you will remember that.

2. Get in touch with your letter writers.

Make sure (to the best of your ability) that these are the right people and people that you can trust. Most jobs require three letters, some require more. Some people have a pool of letter writers and choose different people for different jobs, depending on qualifications. EXAMPLE: Your outside reader is a political scientist and you are applying for a job in Poli Sci. A letter from him or her would probably be more useful than a third letter from someone in communication.

3. Work out logistics with your letter writers.

Make it easy for them; ask them how they want to get job listings and addresses for recommendations. How much information do they want on each job? How much advance notice do they need? How do they want addresses? My advisor, for instance, asked that I send him address labels that he could just stick on an envelope and mail off. As it turns out, that's a very efficient system for everyone since I made a set for myself as well.

4. Make sure you've got all your job listing sources together.

a. Bookmark my joblinks page.

b. Go to the Chronicle of Higher Ed and subscribe to their email service so that you get all job listings that come over the line in your area. As a rule, it's better to cast a wider net, as job listings wind up in funny places: you might as well sign up for listings in all of the subfields of Communication, for instance. You may also want to choose allied areas like "other humanities," or a discipline where you have some secondary interest or expertise. Some people prefer to subscribe to a paper version of the Chronicle and look through the job ads the old fashioned way.

c. Bookmark any other websites you find helpful.

d. Make sure your department has a job source book. A lot of departments get listings in the mail. The book should also have job listings from the newsletters of professional associations like CCA, ICA, NCA and AEJMC (depending on what memberships your faculty have).

e. Make a file folder for yourself where you keep all job listings for which you intend to apply. Pick a day of the week to look at job listings, and on that day check out all your job listing sources.

f. Keep track of your job applications in a master Word document or a spreadsheet. You could include location, description, what the application requires, date due, when you sent it out, and when you heard back from them.

5. Find a way to set aside some money (or credit card debt if you're poor) for job search expenses.

Will your department cover all your photocopying and mailing costs? Do they get all the publications you need them to get? If not, costs will add up. Are there costs associated with a placement service you're required to use? Do you have all the clothes you need? Good. Now set aside some extra clothes money, just in case. This goes for men as well as women. You never know what climate you'll be interviewing in, or when. In fact, if you haven't already bought an interview outfit,

you might think about waiting until you've got a reason to wear it. That way, it'll fit just right and you can factor in weather and other issues. Do you have friends who are your size? Consider pooling or borrowing/loaning clothes if you're broke or thrifty. Also, set aside some book money. You never know when you might suddenly need to and read up on someone's work and the book is checked out from the library. . . .

SEPTEMBER

1. Get your application materials together.

You can start this in August, but September is the crucial month. Note that the Chronicle of Higher Ed website has lots of good advice on organizing your materials. Go visit them.

Assuming that you plan to apply for a wide range of jobs, you should have:

a. At least two main versions of your application letter, one for research jobs and one for teaching jobs. You should have more than one faculty member read your application as different people read applications differently.

A1. Nicely ask your departmental secretary or administrator for some letterhead. All of your cover letters should go on letterhead.

b. Organize your c.v. As a grad student, I occasionally rephrased my "research interests" section depending on the wording of the job description. Otherwise, the c.v. was exactly the same from place to place.

c. If you don't already have it, get together a 2-4 page abstract of your dissertation. This is useful to send out with sample chapters (so readers know how it fits in the bigger project), and allows you to go into a little more detail than is in your application letter.

d. Revise and polish your writing samples. Some people use the same sample for every job that asks for one, others choose the writing sample from a few different options, depending on the job description.

e. Write or update your statement of teaching philosophy. Very occasionally, it may be necessary to tweak a teaching statement for a specific job, but mostly, you'll use the same exact one.

f. Assemble your "evidence of teaching effectiveness." This should include numerical evaluations (and an explanation of how to read them -- evals look different at different schools), photocopies of the written evaluations from a small class, sample syllabi and handouts, sample course descriptions for classes you'd

like to teach, and anything else cool that you think would be useful. Note that you won't send everything to every school, but you'll have it ready.

g. Once you have everything assembled, make lots of copies of the materials that won't change (like evaluations or published essays) and put them in a file. It'll save you time later.

2. Study up on the schools where you are applying.

Check out their websites. Learn everything you can about them and then customize your applications appropriately.

3. Send out your first application.

At this point, I imagine most people will have to send out their first application before the 1st of October. Once you do, take an evening off and celebrate a little.

OCTOBER

1. Continue sending out applications.

2. If you're not done with your dissertation, this is a great month to make lots of progress.

You want to be as far along as possible at every stage of the process. If your committee is reading your dissertation or you're done, how about working on another journal article or a book proposal?

3. Work on your presentation skills.

It's good to think about job talks and "sample teaching" but also consider the conversational aspects of interviewing. What kinds of questions will you ask them? Can you explain your research in one minute or less to a nonspecialist, like a dean or a member of a hiring committee with no expertise in your area? Can you answer questions about your teaching with some panache? Are you ready to make small talk on the interview (I know, it shouldn't matter but it does. People want a colleague that they'll like, and who can blame them?).

NOVEMBER

This is the month of the annual National Communication Association (U.S.) meeting -- NCA.

American schools looking for all stripes of communication scholar show up and do informal interviews. Unlike MLA and AHA, these preliminary interviews are not a "required" part of the process for most jobs. But like MLA and AHA, it is the only game in town as far as fall conferences where there are informal

interviews before campus visits. While NCA is not essential for getting a job in your field, it is the only place to meet potential employers before they start on-campus interviews. Paper proposals are usually due the previous February, so plan early. The Critical-Cultural Studies Division has been growing steadily and is likely to be a good home base, though they are also the most competitive in terms of acceptance rate. If you think attending is essential, have a backup plan. It is possible to submit (and present) in more than one division of NCA.

If you are going to NCA:

1. Make sure any presentation you make is polished. You might actually have an audience member who is sizing you up for a job.
2. Within your budget, make sure you have professional clothes appropriate to the climate (NCA is sometimes in cold places like Chicago and sometimes in warm places like Miami). Don't forget about comfort. There's usually a lot of walking at conferences, so you're going to have to strike a balance between suave and smart in the shoe department, for instance.
3. If possible, set up a mock NCA interview with faculty who know the process. This is strictly my experience, but I found that at NCA interviews, I did very little talking. Be ready to listen as well as provide quick, clear answers to interviewers' questions. I usually took a moment to think before I answered people's questions.
4. Chill out. If you get interviews at NCA, you often won't know until the last minute.

If you are not going to NCA:

See October.

Either way:

Begin to assemble a jobtalk. Even though many schools do not require a formal presentation, it's a good idea to be ready so that you can do one in a hurry. Many departments have opportunities for their students to give mock jobtalks. When I did my first one, I called in a bunch of favors and set it up myself. If you're lucky, you won't have to do that.

Also begin thinking about a sample teaching plan, in case you're asked to teach a class while on an interview. You won't know what you're asked to teach, but you can always think about how. For instance, are there some tricks that you find particularly effective for getting discussion going? Write them down.

DECEMBER-JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH

These are the months where the majority of interviews and job decisions happen. If you haven't already done a mock job talk, think about doing one. Keep plugging away on your own work, as most of your applications will be out and you'll have little job-market stuff to do, unless the phone starts ringing for interviews.

Stay sane.

There's a lot of waiting involved with being on the market. You'll need to set aside some time to pay attention to market stuff, but set aside lots of time to NOT pay attention to market stuff. Don't let it be your primary topic of conversation at parties. Keep up with your other enthusaisms, as they say. Take care of yourself.

If you get an interview, be prepared.

When you get an interview, be ready to let your interviewers know about an special accommodations you need (are you a smoker? vegetarian? do you have a disability? drink a lot of water?). For research jobs, I always asked to do my jobtalk as early as possible in the interview, because I liked that better. If They should give you a choice of dates. If they don't, you can still ask if the date they offer doesn't work for you.

Read up on interviewing. The articles by Charles Stivale on sterneworks (<http://sterneworks.org/StivaleInterviewADFL2002.pdf> and <http://sterneworks.org/bestfeet.pdf>) are good even though they're not specific to communication scholars, as are many others. Ask your profs and your classmates who have already had interviews for tips. If you haven't done a practice jobtalk and will be giving one, now would be a good time to do it.

More and more schools are asking interviewees to purchase airline tickets and/or hotel rooms and get reimbursed later. Because it amounts to an interest-free loan from an individual to an institution, it is unethical. It's bad enough when schools do this to guest speakers (at any given time during the last three years, I have been waiting for hundreds of dollars in reimbursement money from one or more institutions), and but it's astoundingly unethical when a school with lots of money asks broke graduate students to cover for them.

Unfortunately, not much can be done while you are a candidate. So as with clothing, leave some space on your credit card for this kind of eventuality. Sometimes, it can take up to two months for a school to pay you back. Hopefully, this won't happen to you, but be prepared if it does. If you are later offered the job and turn it down for another one, do future candidates a favor and cite the "loan" as one of the reasons you are

declining the offer. If you accept the job, work to change your institution's policy or to find a way around it for future job candidates.

After an interview, don't get cocky, but again be prepared.

What will you need/want if they offer you the job? Don't get caught unprepared. Talk to faculty and get a list of requests together. If need be, have a script. Also remember that you don't have to negotiate right away. If you get a call with a job offer, it's fine to express your elation and tell your the chair that you'll call him or her back in a day or so. As far as possible, don't commit to anything else in that first call, especially a timeline for your final response. Then take 24 hours and get your game plan together.

Sometime in winter, a second job market season begins.

During this second season, there will be a few additional tenure-track position. Departments will also begin to advertise non-tenure track positions. Some will be 1-year visiting appointments to replace a faculty member on sabbatical (more and more rare these days) or who has left (more common) while the department gets it together to advertise the position the following year. This can lead to a second round of interviews in March or even April (though in the US, the AAUP sets a deadline in April for offers and moves, not that everyone follows it). The listings for non-tenure stream positions will continue into the summer, and if you aren't getting bites on the tenure track offer and you can't stay put for another year (which is what I recommend--moving is expensive and time-consuming), then you'll need to start applying for these temporary positions.

APRIL

By now, (1) you'll either have wrapped up a job, (2) be in the process of wrapping up a job, or (3) doing some soul searching because you didn't get a job or didn't get a job you want. If you're in category #1 or #2, you no longer need this timeline. But you should get ready for the surprises that a new job brings.

If you have a job offer

1. Read the pamphlets on negotiating starting salaries and best practices for new scholars. They are pitched to Canadians but contain a wealth of useful information for Americans as well. <http://www.caut.ca/uploads/newfacultyhandbook.pdf> and http://www.fedcan.ca/english/pdf/fromold/NewScholarsManual_ENG.pdf .
2. Once you've signed on the dotted line, read about the transition from grad student to professor here: <http://sterneworks.org/24/from-grad-student-to-prof> .

If you didn't land a job, you have some work to do

1. Get your work situation set.

What will you do next year for money? Can you teach in your department or somewhere else on campus? Will you apply for visiting positions at other schools?

2. Do NOT be too hard on yourself.

There are a million reasons people don't get jobs, and only a few of them are in the full control of a candidate. Besides, getting depressed won't help you do better next year.

3. Instead of self-doubt or excessive self-criticism, you need to plan.

What can you do to make yourself more attractive to employers next year? Finish the diss? Publish more? Something else? You've got about five months where you don't have to think too much about the market and can work on these other things. In fact, I recommend thinking as little as possible about the market during your off months, except to get stuff done. Concentrate on your work and other aspects of your life. Don't let the job market become a topic of idle conversation.

4. Read this timeline.

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