HOW TO FIND YOUR FIRST ACADEMIC JOB

Tips for UCLA ethnomusicologists from Helen Rees (Director of Graduate Studies, 2006-8)

11 May 2007

My timeline

1994	Ph.D. in Music, U. of Pittsburgh
1994-7	Assistant Professor, New College of the University of South Florida
1997-2002	Assistant Professor, UCLA
2002-	Associate Professor, UCLA

Advance preparations--start now, even if you're a first-year

1. Keep up with the job ads posted on the Society for Ethnomusicology website. There is an archive of expired ads from the last five years at http://webdb.iu.edu/sem/scripts/positionannouncements/archiveyearlist.cfm. This can be accessed by members and non-members alike. Members of SEM can also access current job ads through the "member login" section of the website—these are not made available to casual browsers. Read each job ad with great care, and make notes about what each one asks for. E.g., are there any secondary areas demanded? Common ones are historical musicology, American music, ability to direct a world music ensemble, music theory, ability to teach one or more Western instruments, etc. Over the years, build up a profile of the kinds of requirements that are written into such ads. I suggest you use a notebook specially for this.
2. Work on your secondary areas. Taking a few historical musicology courses, keeping up your piano or conducting abilities, or developing a second area interest in the Americas, could pay dividends. If you can do more than one, all the better. A good way to keep up with and demonstrate a commitment to your secondary area is to join the relevant society--e.g., American Musicological Society if it's historical musicology you're pursuing. This will then join SEM in the list of professional memberships that should come at the end of your CV. If appropriate, you could even take a doctoral qualifying exam in your secondary area--Tanya Merchant did one in baroque music, for example.
3. Try to TA for the broadest possible range of courses--don't always go for the same one, even if it saves time. The broader your experience, the more attractive to an employer.
4. Other useful sources of job ads and general information on hiring trends, etc., are the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, the listserv of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology (http://www.thebfe.org.uk/content.php?id=100), and College Music Society (http://www.music.org/cgi-bin/showpage.pl).
5. Start thinking about how to differentiate yourself from the crowd of new Ph.D.s you will be competing with. Apart from the suggestions in the second and third points above, which mainly relate to teaching, mark yourself out as energetic and professionally active. Give papers at SEMSCC and SEM and other professional conferences, and get one or two articles published, or at least accepted, before you hit the job market. And remember it can take years for an article to go from submission to print.
6. Go to conferences and make contacts from year one; get known professionally and socially.

Casting your net widely
Unless your family responsibilities prevent it, you need to cast as wide a net as possible. This consists of two parts:
1. Do apply for all jobs that look reasonably relevant to you--in this job market, you can't pick and choose at the application stage.
2. Be ready to move anywhere in the country, even somewhere you think you'll hate. You can always aim to move once in a job, but may only get one offer for your first position. And don't rule out working overseas. Many countries like American Ph.D.s and consider American applicants seriously. Read the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (UK) for jobs mainly in Britain and the Commonwealth, and don't ignore foreign jobs advertised in the CMS listings. Do bear in mind, though, that coming back to the US could be more difficult than job-hopping within this country.

The job application
This usually consists initially of three main parts: the cover letter, the CV, and the list of referees. Some job ads will also ask for transcripts and/or writing sample and/or personal teaching philosophy and/or syllabi up front; some may want one or more of these after working out a shortlist. A few ask just for cover letter and CV, plus a list of referees to contact if they put you on their long list.
1. Do your homework on each institution. Use websites and any personal contacts.
2. Tailor each letter to the institution concerned, and send EXACTLY what they ask for--no more, no less.
3. Do not send the first few letters off without getting a faculty member to vet them. And do not make any errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation, or vocabulary usage in the letter. This will probably get your entire application thrown out immediately.
4. Ditto for the CV--writing one is an art you need help with.
5. Referees: pick people who are relevant to the institution's needs (e.g., if the job asks for a secondary competence in historical musicology, ask a musicology professor who thinks well of your work to write one of the letters, as well as the two or three ethnomusicology instructors who know you best). Give each referee at least two weeks' notice that you need the letter, together with copies of the job ad, your letter of application, and your CV. Ask each one to confirm by email that they have sent the reference. Alternatively, some faculty members may prefer to deposit a letter in your dossier, especially if they are frequently asked for letters by students who are not their own advisees; if this is likely, then get the dossier set up well in advance. At UCLA the dossier is called the "credentials file"; you can set one up via https://secure.career.ucla.edu/Credential/.

The writing sample
A few job ads ask for a writing sample up front. Most, however, request it only once you're past the first cut. The best thing is to have a suitable sample ready BEFORE you start the job search process. The sample needs to be something that gives a good idea of your research, your ability to handle both data and sophisticated concepts, and your writing skills. If you have already published a major article in a prestigious journal, consider using that. For instance, one recent graduate published an influential article (based on his M.A. research) in *Ethnomusicology*, and this came out a couple of years before he hit the job market. This kind of situation is ideal. For most people, however, a very polished first dissertation chapter may be more likely to be

available. Make sure there are NO silly mistakes in the grammar, spelling, or punctuation, as these can get you thrown out of the applicant pool faster than you can say "semi-colon." Have an eagle-eyed mentor or colleague double-check anything you send out for structure, clarity, and technical accuracy. Occasionally the institution will say something like "no more than 15 pages" or "about 30 pages"—in which case, get as close as you can. One of our students, faced with a 15-page limit, was forced to expand a conference paper from 9 pages to 15, on very short notice. With immense success, though—he landed an interview and ultimately the job.

The conference interview

Not all jobs involve a preliminary interview at a national conference, but many do.

1. Again, do your homework on the institution. This includes checking websites, personal contacts, AND looking up all the faculty in RILM and other databases (and if necessary *Dissertation Abstracts*) to find out how actively they publish and what their interests are.
2. Clothes. Neatness is a must, and err on the side of formality. Nowadays women can probably get away with a trouser suit in all but the most conservative states and institutions. Jackets are wonderful things for promoting a professional image.
3. You will probably be given a chance to ask questions, so prepare one or two intelligent ones, showing a strong grasp of and enthusiastic interest in the peculiarities of the institution concerned. But avoid potentially controversial topics.
4. Do ask a faculty member here to practice typical interview questions with you before you go. Don't babble on indefinitely in response to a question--give a business-like answer that tells them what they want to know, and adds one or two extra items of info if relevant.
5. For all interviews, including conference, phone, and on-site, make sure you have prepared ahead of time a one-minute summary of your dissertation, since you are bound to be asked to give a brief description of it. Practice your one-minute summary with other graduate students and experienced faculty to make sure you're hitting the right points. It should be something that hooks the non-specialist and is memorable. If you can find a way to explain to a composer and a classicist in 60 seconds why your fieldwork-based study of music and nationalism in Turkmenistan is exciting and relevant, then you have a winner. Even if you're sick of the topic yourself, smile and sound excited and engaged about it.

The phone interview

This is increasingly commonly used to get from about eight candidates down to around three or four. It's vital to practice with a faculty member in advance.

The on-site job interview

1. All of the above apply to this, obviously.
2. It is vital to appear healthy, lively, and genuinely interested in the target school, its students, programs, and your potential colleagues. A great question for the latter is some variant of "I was impressed by your recent article in *American Music*; is this a line of research you're still following?" (Of course, make sure you've read the thing first--preferably read at least one representative article by each faculty member. And be aware that at some teaching-intensive institutions, older faculty may publish very little, so if that seems to be the case, tread carefully.)
3. Practice your cheerful, confident smile--faculty are interviewing someone they hope would be a pleasant colleague as well as a competent scholar/teacher. This may seem obvious, but when

you are the center of attention for two or more intensive days, you may need to learn how to switch it on when you'd rather collapse in bed.
4. Follow the instructions you are given to the letter. If asked to give a 45-minute research talk to non-specialists, do not exceed 44 minutes, and try it out first on non-specialist friends to make sure it is suitable. If asked to give a research talk on one subject and teach a class based on another, make sure you do exactly that. We're happy to give you a "mock interview" here first if you ask.
5. When you get back from the interview, consider sending email thank you notes to the main faculty members you met, and to any staff and students who facilitated your visit or took particular care of you. This can create an excellent impression.

Special considerations for non-resident aliens
If you wish to apply for US jobs, do check how your graduation date may affect your right to be physically present in this country.

Building and maintaining your reputation
Try to cultivate a presence in the field, and a reputation for excellence, courtesy, and reliability. Ideally you will have given conference papers, perhaps published one or two things, and helped out at local or national conferences by the time you hit the job market. All this is about building your reputation--i.e., your good name. I would strongly suggest that you NOT change your name once you embark on graduate school, and absolutely not once you have given conference papers and published. The reason for this is very simple: it takes a lot of hard work to build a reputation and get yourself known, and if you suddenly change your name (which happens most often, of course, when women marry), people simply won't be able to locate you, and will not necessarily connect your new name with all the achievements you built up under your old one. Even if you keep your own name as a middle one, your conference papers and publications will end up split, with some under one and some under the other in indexes and databases. This can be disastrous on the job market if a potential employer is trying to track down what you've done, and it's confusing for professional mentors, who have to try to keep straight ever increasing numbers of names over the years. It can also cause problems with paychecks.

Imponderables
As in any field, unforeseen and unforeseeable factors not necessarily related to your competence may affect any one job application. This is why you must cast your net as widely as possible.

Useful publications
Apart from those mentioned above, you may find the following of interest:
1. Heiberger, Mary Morris, and Julia Miller Vick. *The Academic Job Search Handbook*. 2nd edition. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
2. Toth, Emily. *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

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