

Applying for US Jobs, with a Focus on Entry-Level Tenure Track Assistant Professor Jobs

Professor Charis Thompson

LSE / UC Berkeley

April 30, 2014

UK students

- UK PhDs can be very appealing to US universities, though the US, for all its global reach, is, like the UK, more self-referential than one might like to think
- UK PhDs often have European regional specializations that are desirable
- UK students come with different experiences and knowledge that can triangulate with research traditions in the US
- UK PhDs often have a much appreciated clarity of expression and to-the-pointness that can go down well, as long as it doesn't seem insular
- Many US resident academics actively like many UK university-credentialed applicants' accents: it is often quipped that an English accent (whatever that is) is +15 IQ points to American ears...this is problematic in so many ways, but you get the point!

Timing of the hiring cycle

- Generally speaking, US academic jobs are advertised in the Fall (September, October, November), and have application deadlines from October through December.
- On campus interviews can be anywhere from December to March, usually
- Depending on your discipline, you might get through to the so-called “long list” and have an interview at the professional association annual meeting, or by skype, first
- You should hear by the early to late Spring if you got the job
- You may never hear if you didn’t get it
- Don’t take rejections hard; they don’t usually mean much; it is a serious scarcity situation. Straight in the rubbish is as good a motto as any.
- Do learn from any feedback you get

Basics....

- You!
- You need
 - A) research
 - B) research
 - C) research
 - D) teaching
 - E) service

Research

- Publications are golden – give yourself writing and submission deadlines and stick to them
- Go for either high impact journals or journals that are particularly appropriate for your sub-field
- If you are in a book discipline, go for a US University Press, or Oxford or Cambridge Press if possible
- Have a 1 page research statement
- Other products (blogs, social media presence, etc.) don't hurt, and can even help, unless they are seen as taking your time away from “serious scholarship”

Teaching

- Remember you are up against US PhDs, who have at least 6 years training under their belts, including teaching
- Have sample syllabi, one lower level undergraduate, one upper division undergraduate, and one graduate
- Include full bibliography for 15 week courses, with enough text (lecture headings, sentence or two blurb for each entry) to show where the syllabus is going conceptually. There are many sample syllabi online
- Have a 1 page teaching philosophy ready (don't be too pretentious; try to mean it)

Service

- Service at post doc and assistant professor level can be relatively modest – too much service can be seen as taking away from your research agenda
- Nonetheless, you must be ready to serve the department, in particular, and as you get more senior, the university, the community, and beyond
- Work to enhance diversity (under-represented and non-traditional students) can be especially valuable

Job letters

- Yours:
- What you are applying for and your own qualifications
- Your dissertation title and content summary, your research trajectory, and your publications, with a sentence or two on each
- Your teaching – where you like to teach and how you could contribute to the department curriculum
- Your character / areas of service / what you'd bring to the department
- Why you'd love to work there, if appropriate. Better not to name individual faculty in your letter

Job letters

- Theirs:
- Here you will have to work, seeing as you come from the UK!!!!
- UK faculty don't typically write good letters for the US job market: they are too short, too luke warm, too "damning with faint praise" to US eyes
- Help them – write a first draft, arrange a meeting during office hours during which you help that faculty member write the letter; have all necessary materials ready; ask early; use a letter service like Interfolio
- Ask your writers to speak to your promise to advance the field, your likelihood of advancing to tenure in a timely manner (ie your productivity); and your likelihood of emerging among the top young scholars in some sub-field, as appropriate
- Make sure you use a letter service or other way of maintaining confidentiality; non-confidential letters of recommendation are not worth the paper they are written on

When you get a campus interview:

- Your job talk is paramount.
 - Prepare your talk very well, and talk about work you have **ALREADY DONE**, not work you hope to do, so you are an expert
 - Practice your talk, timed, in front of hotel mirror
 - Follow your discipline's norms regarding whether you read or talk your talk; have visuals
 - Be clear and brief, but not dumbed-down, in your theory
 - Spend most time on what **YOU** discovered and how
 - Don't over- or under-estimate your contribution to the field
 - Cite department members if appropriate
 - Be open and generous, **NOT** defensive, in Q&A
 - Express thanks for questions, and acknowledge new ways of seeing things, insights that might lead you to connect your work to the work of others in the department, things that might deepen your work that could be taken on during the next phase of your research

Interviews

- “Presentation of Self” is very important
 - A) do your homework about the department to which you are applying but DO NOT call, directly contact, etc.
 - Cyber-research, however, is necessary and appropriate: what research foci, teaching spirit, etc., might you contribute to and learn from
 - B) read at least one article by anyone who is going to interview you, especially if you have a one on one meeting scheduled with that person. Read it on the plane, if necessary. Take notes and refer to them, as you WILL forget on the day
 - C) within the limits of authenticity and veracity, be energetic and evidence enthusiasm for teaching and department building; being tired or “over” things at interview is a real turn off to a hiring committee

- Good Luck!