

Stanford Department of Economics

Ph. D. Placement Guide

Placement Team and Contacts

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The purpose of this guide is to provide information for graduate students who are completing their doctoral dissertation and who intend to seek outside employment during the coming academic year. Problems, comments and suggestions concerning this guide should be sent to the faculty placement advisor.

The Placement Calendar (more dates to be added).

October	CV and shortlist information due in early October. Susie Madsen mails Stanford CV packet to prospective employers.
November	Faculty job placement meeting, first week of November. Mail job market packets, second or third week of November.
December	Arrange interviews for AEA Meetings, starting post-Thanksgiving.
January	ASSA Meetings.
January-February	Flyouts and job offers.
March	Process closes.

Summary of the Process

You start by preparing a job market paper, which should be ready for circulation by early fall. You will need to make a final decision about going on the market by the beginning of October when the department distributes its list of job candidates. In early November, you mail out packages applying for posted jobs or in response to requests from employers. During December, you schedule interviews for the annual AEA meeting in January. Some of the places that interview you will fly you out in January or February. After the fly-outs, generally by mid-February, you will receive job offers. Usually, you will be expected to make up your mind by March.

The Job-Market Paper

By far the most important of the materials and information that will be considered by prospective employers is your job-market paper. You should focus all of your research efforts on your paper. It is much more important to have one finished job-market paper containing important original research results than it is to have a number of papers at earlier stages. Employers will make their screening decisions on the basis of a single paper you designate.

The job-market paper should look as much as possible like a paper in the JPE or the AER. That is, it should be written at the highest professional level for a wide audience of highly trained economists. You need to give special attention to making your paper understandable to this kind of an audience. You should not presume that your readers are immersed in the particular literature you are working within. You should assume a strong general knowledge of economics and high technical level in your audience. One of the most important things to do in your paper is to be completely clear about what you have contributed. Don't write up existing results

as if you created them. Go out of your way to describe what is new in your work. Use TeX to make it look completely professional.

Getting to the point where your job market paper is in polished form takes a lot of work. It's easy to underestimate the time that is required. You should aim to have your paper ready to send out well in advance of the deadline for mailing packets.

Your CV

You will need to prepare a CV early in the placement process. Here is a [pdf template](#) for the CV. One of the most important choices you need to make is what fields to list for teaching and research. Generally, it is better to be broad in identifying fields. For example, International trade and finance is a good choice. Don't try to invent a field to describe some special interest of yours.

Letters of Recommendation

Prospective employers will ask you to provide letters of recommendation. Generally, these will come from the three members of your committee. You will need to be in close touch with them during the summer and fall quarter. First, bring each up to date on your research and show them the current version of your job-market paper. Be sure that they believe that you have reached the point that you have a good paper and are ready to be on the market. Only then, ask for the letter. Once you have received the support of your committee, give each member a package of information that you think should be in the letter.

A standard letter has the following elements: (1) how well and how long the faculty member has known and worked with you; (2) several paragraphs about your research and how it advances the field; (3) your success as a teacher; (4) how you will relate to others as a colleague. If you were not born in an English-speaking country, the letter should contain a candid statement about how well you express yourself in English.

The department will mail each student's reference letters together in a separate packet to the addresses that you provide. Each of you will be assigned a department administrative assistant who will coordinate the mailing of all of your letters. You need to provide one set of mailing labels for all the institutions/organizations to which you are applying, and give those labels to your assigned admin. If you are applying to an institution which requires electronic submission of letters, please provide your assigned admin a list of websites for electronic submission.

What the Department Does for You

We maintain a mailing list of departments and organizations who hire economics PhD's. We prepare a package that describes all of our candidates and distribute it to the list. We also post the package on our website. The mailing encourages the employers to call me to get more information.

The department holds a meeting at the beginning of November to aggregate information about each candidate. The department does not rank students, but uses the meeting to get the faculty on the same page about what students are on the market, what they are working on, and potential good matches. The faculty uses this information to guide discussions with prospective employers.

During November and December, I will be talking to prospective employers seeking to find interview matches. Your advisors will also be responding to emails and helping you line up interviews. This is basically the place where your advisors and the department can help you get in the door with prospective employers.

The general rule of thumb is that once interviews are lined up, the ball is in your hands. With occasional exceptions, employers hire students that they have interviewed at the meetings, so your interview list is most likely your set of prospective jobs.

Your Job-Seeking Activities

Most jobs in the U.S. are posted on the AEA website [Job Openings for Economists](#). Get to know this site well. Apply for every job that you feel is at all a reasonable fit for you. Students typically send out 60-100 packets.

An application package comprises an appropriate cover letter from you, your CV, your job-market paper and potentially an additional paper. Depending on the arrangement you make with you advisors, you letters of recommendation can go out with your packet or be mailed separately.

Discuss with your advisor and other committee members what places would be good matches, and see if they can help get in the door.

If you are contacted by a school that requests your packet, or you receive a request from Susie or your advisors, respond immediately.

The Interview

Proper dress for the interview is east-coast lower-level business attire. For men, this means a jacket and tie. For women, a suit is the safest choice. Avoid anything distracting in your costume. Try to look academic, not flashy or overdressed. Wear leather dress shoes that are not too shiny. Avoid the MBA look unless you are interviewing with business schools.

Most of your interviewers will be Americans, and you will do well to observe American customs during the introductions. Practice a really firm handshake. Really firm. Look the person in the eye and try hard to keep the person's name in mind. You do not need to give your name. Say "How do you do" or "I'm very glad to meet you."

Be careful of your posture during the interview. Lean forward and look attentive; don't lounge or sprawl. Keep your hands at your side, not in contact with each other.

During the interview, show some enthusiasm about your research and about economics. You interviewers will be sitting in a hotel room all day long and it is easy for their energy to flag.

To the extent practical, know the research of your interviewers and consider it in your responses. It is successful flattery to acknowledge the contribution of an interviewer, but be careful not to overdo it.

You will almost certainly be asked to describe your job-market research. Have a 4-minute presentation ready in your head. Stress what is new. Demonstrate your knowledge of the related literature, but spend most of your time on what you have done. Don't go on longer than 4 minutes. The goal here is that if the fire alarm goes off five minutes into your interview, your interviewers will be able to mill around outside saying "we were just talking to so-and-so, who has this really interesting paper that shows xyz."

In most cases, you will be interrupted with questions during this initial presentation. Some may seem hostile. Give calm answers. Whenever possible, answer the question directly and don't run on too much on topics that come to mind (though a bit of that is OK, if it comes out naturally). Questions are often about related research.

You may be asked about work that you don't know about. Do the best you can without making anything up.

Toward the end of the interview, you will probably be asked about your teaching interests. Show an interest in a broad variety of teaching. Remember that at most places, the bulk of teaching is undergraduate. If you feel it at all, express your enthusiasm for teaching undergraduates, especially intermediate micro and macro. With respect to graduate teaching, be sure not to treat it as an entitlement. "I'd also be interested in helping out in graduate public finance, if something comes up" would be the right tone.

Also, be completely ready to give a coherent answer to the question "What research do you plan to do after your thesis?" Show that you have thought about other research topics and that you are the kind of person who will build an interesting portfolio of related research projects. It turns out that this question can be surprisingly hard to answer after spending the last five months immersed in your job market paper. Explaining that you want to improve your standard errors or add Proposition 5.4 is not a good answer. You don't have to lay out the next five years - one good future project is enough - but it's important to convey that you're going to be doing interesting new research right off the bat.

As a general matter, interviewing skill is not innate. You should do practice interviews several times. The department will help to arrange these opportunities with faculty. It is also useful to spend time on your own thinking about questions you are likely to be asked and how you might respond.

Job-Market Visits and Seminars

During a fly-out visit, you will typically spend a full day. Dress for a fly-out is the same as for an interview. Most of the time, you will meet potential colleagues individually. These meetings will be similar to interviews; follow the rules above. These meetings are often a good time to tell someone about your non-job-market paper research. You can also ask your host about their own research. Doing a little due diligence in advance can be useful here. Nothing makes most economists happier than being asked a well-informed question about their own research.

You will also go to lunch and possibly dinner. Use your judgment about whether these are social occasions or just more interviews. At dinner, one clue is whether the others are drinking wine or beer. If so, it is a sign that heavy research is not the right topic. Show that you are an interesting person more broadly in that setting.

Your seminar is key to getting a job. Not only are you selling the ideas in your research, you are showing that you are good on your feet and will do well in the classroom and other places where presentation skills matter.

Start your presentation with the projector off. Spend a few minutes with the attention strictly on yourself, explaining the question you are working on and giving a general description of what you have added. Be careful to do this in a way that does not invite distracting questions that you will be answering later. One of the main reasons not to use slides at this point is that the concreteness of a bullet on a slide often results in chaotic questioning.

Your slides should show graphs, math, and simple tables of numbers. Under strict Bob Hall rules, you should not use any slides that just have text bullets. Many good talks depart from this rule, but you should take his general advice and use simple clean slides that aren't cluttered. Getting the talk off to a good start is important - don't go overly long on the introduction. Get into the heart of the matter and get the audience interested.

Don't try to rush through dozens of slides. A good presentation for a 90-minute seminar will usually have about 20 slides.

Use at least 24-point fonts for your slides. In graphs, use heavy colored lines. Tables should be limited to 20 numbers at the very most. Tables must be reformatted from your paper -usually they have to be broken into several slides.

You will get lots of questions, and your skill in handling them is central to your success. Always give friendly answers even if the questions seem hostile. A smile is a good response to hostility. Remember that the other people in the audience will be embarrassed by a hostile question and will be on your side. Try to answer questions on the spot, but defer them if you can't make progress. Don't try to do too much new theory on your feet -be ready to say "I'll have to think about that -maybe we could discuss it later."

As in an interview, you should try to be aware of who in the audience has contributed to the area of your research. If you are asked a very detailed question about a specific data issue or a technical problem, it is okay to give a succinct answer targeted just at the expert in the audience even if others cannot follow it exactly. Your whole talk should not be like this, however.

Practicing the job talk several times is absolutely essential. You must schedule a session of your seminar to present your finished job-market paper during the fall quarter. Try to arrange at least one other rehearsal just before you go on the road in January. Co-opting your fellow students to listen to your talk is recommended.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. After I send out a packet to the JOE address of a school, sometimes I receive a separate solicitation from a particular person at the school. Should I tell him that my packet already has been sent to the school? Or is it to my benefit to send him another?

A. Definitely send a packet directly to any individual requesting it.

Q. How many packets should I send out?

A. The average seems to be around 75.

Q. Who pays for the packets?

A. The department will provide supplies such as 9x12 envelopes, letterhead envelopes, labels, and bond paper. These supplies are available in the academic office on the shelf above the typewriter; help yourselves. You are responsible for sending out your own job market packets and providing postage.

Q. What do I need to prepare when sending unsolicited packages?

A. The department will mail each student's reference letters together in a separate packet to the addresses that you provide. Each of you will be assigned a department administrative assistant who will coordinate the mailing of all of your letters. You need to provide one set of mailing labels for all the institutions/organizations to which you are applying, and give those labels to your assigned admin.

If you are applying to an institution which requires electronic submission of letters, please provide your assigned admin a list of websites for electronic submission.

Q. Should I ask faculty for teaching references as well as general employment references, or do I only need to send teaching references if specifically requested?

A. The preferred solution is for faculty references to cover both research and teaching. In some cases, it might be appropriate for a candidate to have a separate letter covering teaching.

Q. Is a cover letter essential if my package is specifically requested?

A. Yes, for sure.

Q. What happens if I drop out of the market?

A. You will impose costs on the department if you drop out. Thus we ask you not to go on the market unless you are quite sure you are ready, and have the support of your advisors. You also lose the benefit of the efforts you put in, which would have to be repeated next year. You would not lose much in terms of reputation with employers if you dropped out before the meetings. After that, you are likely to be remembered as a dropout if you interview. It would be quite costly in reputation if you dropped out after you start receiving fly outs or offers.

Advice from Previous Job Market Candidates

✍ Best to have two interview suits since you'll have little time for dry cleaning. If you only have one suit, use hotel dry cleaning. (Monika Piazzesi's recommendation: buy the second suit and pay off the credit card debt after you get your job.)

✍ Some universities may invite candidates to a campus visit even in March. As some people say, this is because such schools wait for the market to clear, or in some cases many offers are rejected so that they have to look at the second part of the shortlist. So please tell student on the market this year to be persistent and not to be disappointed too much even if they don't get any response to AEA interviews within a month or so.

✍ My paper was not finished until mid November. It made me very nervous seeing that many people had sent out their packages, while my introduction was not even finished. However, I think it had the big advantage that I was very much inside of my paper during the flyouts. (Jon Levin's recommendation: do not attempt to follow this advice.)

✍ Tom Sargent gave me the advice to just say "I don't know" instead of saying something possibly wrong. I think this advice helped me a great deal.

✍ At my interviews, some schools gave me the impression that they would fly me out if I wanted, but did not say so directly. I phoned one school and they were interested even though they hadn't contacted me. If a job market candidate were to ask me for informal advice, I would strongly recommend that he or she not be shy about phoning up schools and asking about fly-outs.

Job Market Resources

1. The AEA's [Job Openings for Economists](#). This site contains job listings, and well as several papers that may be relevant, including John Cawley's Guide (and Advice) for Economists on the U. S. Junior Academic Job Market, September 2004.

2. Stanford Economics Department Resources

- a. Roger Noll's [Placement Guide](#)
- b. Luigi Pistaferri's [slide presentation](#) on job placement

3. External resources, tips and advice

- a. John Cochrane's [writing tips for Ph.D. students](#)
- b. David Laibson's [job market advic8](#)

- c. AEA Web page on [job market research](#)