The Academic Job Talk
The Job Talk

• During the job interview process, the job talk aims to reveal how well you fit in as a teacher, scholar, and colleague.
Hiring Process in Academia

• Positions advertised (Chronicle, Higher Ed Jobs, newsletters, etc.)

• Applicants typically submit CV, references or recommendation letters, and cover letter

• The job talk begins with the cover letter
Hiring Process in Academia

• Phone interviews conducted for selected applicants (second opportunity for job talk)
• Typically 2-3 candidates invited for campus interviews
• 3rd and most comprehensive job talk takes place during campus visit
Preparation for Interviews

• Thoroughly research the:
  – Institution
  – Department
  – Faculty within the department

• Prior to campus visit find out what sort of talk is expected, expected content, your audience, allotted time, space/equipment you can use, etc.
Why is the job talk important?

• Typically a single opportunity to impress:
  – Most faculty and students may meet you only during the job talk

• Must be considered as a performance

• Ought to describe your teaching style, research abilities, personality traits, etc.
What is the talk about?

• Most often it’s about the candidate’s research
• May be replaced by a sample teaching lecture
• Either way, content must reflect why you are the best candidate for the position, describe your connection with the department
You Are Demonstrating

• That you can give an engaging presentation as a teacher/researcher
• That you can convey your research and its importance to non-specialists
• Your research potential
• That you can interact well with people
Before the Talk

• Attend as many job talks as possible
• Know your audience (undergrads/faculty/university wide)
• Know how long the talk should take (typically 30-35 minutes, the remaining for questions)
Crafting an Interesting Presentation

• It is not a dissertation defense!

• Do not overload presentation with minute details

• Use PowerPoint slides, but sparingly
  – Do not use complete sentences
Writing Your Job Talk

• Start out by giving an outline to the audience of what you will cover
• Provide an outline of key parts of dissertation (This does not mean chapter by chapter)
  — Present information thematically
  — Ex: The first part of my study X, the second part Y, the third part Z
The Job Talk continued...

• Start out with an interesting result, story, scenario, etc. that grabs the attention of the audience
• Result, story, etc. should function on multiple levels to demonstrate various things that relate to your research
• Avoid jargon and acronyms
The Presentation Should Answer

• What does your research seek to do? (Articulate an argument)

• How does your work fit into a broader conceptual or theoretical framework and what, specifically, is that framework?

• What is your contribution to the field?

• Why should the audience care about your research?
The Presentation

• Practice, practice, practice!
• Know your talk well enough that you don’t have to read word for word
• Occasionally stop and interject a scripted thought that appears natural
• Make eye contact
Remember

• It is a formal presentation. Err on the side of being overly professional vs. casual in your delivery
• Dress Appropriately
• Finish on time. A poorly planned and rehearsed talk will run over time.
• Be CONFIDENT.
The Q&A: The Do’s

• Do anticipate questions
• Do Jot down questions
• Do take a minute to give a thorough response
• Do ask if the person can clarify what they are asking
• Do ask: “did I answer your question...or were you looking for...”
The Q&A

• Don't be afraid to say "I don't know. That's a great question and I'll have to think about it". (Just don't do this too much.)

• Think of questions as part of a dialogue, not as criticism you must deflect.

• Treat every question seriously and with respect.
The Q&A: The Don’ts

• Do not be dismissive of questions you may deem unimportant
• Do not ignore the questions of students
• Don’t stand by the podium the entire time. (Don’t lean on the podium)
• Beware of ego and arrogance
Tips

• Plan for disaster. Have a copy of your talk in various forms and e-places.
• Do not eat a big meal prior to talk
• If you need liquid, drinking with a straw will save you embarrassment