

## Frequently Asked Questions About the Job Market Process

June 10, 2011

1. Who is in charge of the job market process?

You are; you are responsible for your own job market search. I am the overall coordinator of the process, and each of the department's major specialties also has a chair; I believe Robert is the micro chair and Edi is the theory chair. (I am obviously the macro chair as well as being the overall coordinator). You should be sure that the chair in your field knows what is going on with your job market search.

2. Who is eligible to go on the market?

Students who have the approval of their advisors (you need to make sure that you consult with ALL faculty members whom you will ask to write letters, not just your primary advisor – all the advisors should be encouraged to come to your practice job market talk); and who either have not participated in the job market process before, or participated but did not find a job (this is meant to reassure you, not to worry you; we have a very good record of students ultimately getting jobs).

3. When do I need to make a decision about whether I am going on the market this year?

If you are a 6th year student this year, you don't have a choice: If you have an acceptable job market paper in time, you must go on the market; if you don't have an acceptable job market paper in time, you are in deep trouble, since the department must approve your job market paper, you can't go on the market without a paper, and you can't stay in the program for a 7th year.

For other students, basically you should be talking to your advisors (ALL of them, not just your main advisor) to make a final decision by mid-October. It is costly to you and to us for you to withdraw after we send out the department CV's starting in mid-to-late October. It is even costlier to withdraw after you send out applications to employers in early-to-mid November. Anyone who attempts to withdraw from the market after mid December will be shot.

4. If I'm not sure whether I'll be on the market or not, which steps should I take (e.g. should I schedule a job seminar)?

Unless you are pretty sure you are *not* going to be on the market, you should behave as though you are sure you *are*. So, yes, go ahead and schedule a practice job talk, etc.

5. Can I use a coauthored paper as my job market paper?

Yes - if the coauthor is another student, and that student is not also using the same paper. No, if the paper is with one of your advisors. Maybe, if the paper is with someone who is not a student and not an advisor. You will need to discuss with your advisor.

6. How is the market for economists this year?

We don't know at this point. But there is an enormous amount of idiosyncratic variation from subfield to subfield, person to person, and institution to institution, so the overall market conditions may not matter as much as you think, either for good or for ill.

7. How many job applications should I send out?

First, a key principle: You must not apply to a job that you would not accept under any circumstances, even if it were your only offer. If at the end of the job market process you have at least one job offer and you refuse it, you forfeit the right to any further help from us in finding another job.

Given that, there is a range of opinion on how many applications to send. Some students basically apply to every employer advertising a job for which they could conceivably qualify, which at a maximum might lead to as many as 100 applications. Others cull the list. We *strongly encourage* you to apply to a minimum of 25 potential employers, by providing a limited subsidy to photocopying of your job packet: Your first \$x of photocopies will be free, where the details of the policy can be found at <http://econ.jhu.edu/Documentation/JobMarketPrinting.pdf>. Beyond \$x you pay the usual photocopying cost per page, which should encourage you to economize to some extent. Note that every extra employer you apply to puts a burden on the staff, who must send out multiple reference letters for each employer. So please do not apply to zero-probability places. Also, this is

the full extent of the subsidization; we do not provide, for example, the envelopes in which you send out your packets to employers.

We have found that under these circumstances, most students apply to between 40 and 90 employers, though numbers can vary depending on circumstances (e.g. a student with a Fulbright that requires him to apply only in Europe may have a much more restricted set of potential choices, and therefore will apply to fewer than normal for students who face no such restrictions).

8. How many references should I have?

Absolute minimum (and ideal number) of 3. Absolute maximum of 5 (under extremely special circumstances).

You should list as references *only* people who have agreed to write letters of recommendation for you. 5 is the absolute maximum, and is NOT preferred - few employers will read 5 letters. 3 is the optimal number. 4 is acceptable, and better than 3 if you really have 4 people who are very familiar with your work *or* your qualifications. 5 is reserved for cases where you have many people both inside the dept and outside who are thoroughly familiar with some aspect of your work (though it doesn't have to be your thesis; someone for whom you worked as an RA might write an excellent letter about how you performed). You should *not* have 5 references if some of those people are only vaguely acquainted with what you have done. You should probably have at least two Hopkins faculty members.

9. What are the Fed's rules for hiring foreign nationals? Is it worth applying there (since it would not be worth it if they couldn't hire you!)

Basically, the bottom line is that the rules have been significantly relaxed, and there are now only problems in hiring people not from countries on a state department list of countries with whom the U.S. has "good relations." This is still very vague, but concretely it seems that most countries (esp European and Latin American countries) are not problematic. Apparently, China and Switzerland are two exceptions.

Further information: The Fed does not sponsor people for Green cards, but does encourage its employees to apply on their own and there are several examples of people who have obtained them after a few years.

10. When I am ready for my recommendation letters to be sent (after I have sent my packet to employers), what is the process?

The process is conditioned by several variables:

Your advisers may wish to provide different letters of recommendation for academic and nonacademic jobs. The employer may claim to accept applications by email. And, for those employers who accept applications by regular mail (snail mail), their postal address may be domestic (US) or foreign. You need to separate your list according to these variables, to make the horrific task of sending out the letters slightly easier and less error-prone for the staff.

For all employers,

- (a) Obtain from the dept staff a set of  $n$  empty envelopes with the department's return address (proof of authenticity of the letters) where  $n$  is the number of letters you need sent.
- (b) Divide your potential employers into four categories: academic and nonacademic, and domestic vs foreign postal address
- (c) Print out this list for the dept staff to use to keep track of what they have done
- (d) Put mailing labels on envelopes and give the four piles of envelopes to the department staff (perhaps kept separate by rubber bands, or some other method)

For those employers that claim to accept email applications, include in your list the email address to which the letters should be submitted. The staff will try to send the letters that way, but often there are problems with email so you need to provide the regular snail mail address for all employers.

Finally, some places (e.g. the IMF) have their own special procedures; they want the referrers to register for their website, obtain a password, upload their letters via PDF, etc. Basically, we don't do this. Every place (except maybe IMF) should still be willing and able to accept email or snail mail letters. (For the IMF, the staff will learn the procedure; not for anybody else). This is an unacceptable attempt to shift the burden of work. Employers cannot reasonably expect a person providing a letter of reference to learn the procedures at 25 or 50 or 100

different institutions for every job market candidate in order to get the letters out.

11. What is the procedure for applying to jobs that I learn about after the main process has been completed? For example, jobs which are advertised in the December JOE?

You are not allowed to stop by the department office every 3 or 4 days with an extra 5 or 6 places to apply to. Instead, you should collect any extra places and then plan to go through essentially the same process *one* more time (make mailing labels, get envelopes, print out a list for the staff, etc) as for the main mailing. Given that the main source of extra job postings is the December JOE, the appropriate timeframe for this batch of extra applications is around Dec 5-10.

12. Does the recommendation letter process work the same way even for recommenders who are not Hopkins faculty?

Yes, if the recommender is willing to send their letters to our department staff ([jross@jhu.edu](mailto:jross@jhu.edu)), and abide by the same deadlines that apply to “Advisors” on the timeline. You are responsible for contacting the recommender and making sure they get their letters to the department staff, preferably as a PDF document (but a letter on paper is acceptable), and you should make it clear to the recommender that their letters are confidential (you will never see the letter).

Some recommenders may prefer to handle the process themselves, which is fine; however you will need to be particularly diligent about confirming with them that they have actually sent the letters.

13. Can there be more references than people writing the recommendation letters? I.e. people who are not writing a letter but are willing to provide an evaluation of the applicant in case the potential employer contacts them.

The “References” part of your CV is basically a list of people from whom the employers should expect to receive a letter.

For people who are not Hopkins faculty members, include complete contact information (address, phone number, email address).

If you want to hint that there are other people who could be contacted, include their contact information somewhere else on the CV (e.g. if

you worked as an RA for someone who would be happy to recommend you, don't just list their name when describing the job, list their email address and phone number).

14. Do I need to write a different custom cover letter for every employer?

Yes - at least in the sense that you cannot write a generic "Dear Potential Employer" letter and photocopy it. Mail-merge software needs to be used to make sure that every letter has the name of the chair of the relevant search committee, the institution and department to which you are applying, and the nature of the job for which you are applying (assistant professor, economist, etc).

You should do more highly customized letters for those employers where a) you have a special connection; b) you have special interests or a particularly close match to the employer's need; or c) there is some other reason to think they might read the letter and find it persuasive.

In most cases, it is probably not worth your time to do more than 5-10 customized letters, at most.

15. How does the video of the seminar work?

There will be a volunteer who runs the camera for the macro seminar and one for the micro seminar. The JMCC will train that person to operate the camera and that person will be responsible for obtaining the camera from the dept office and returning it to the dept office when done, as well as transferring the file containing your magnificent presentation to a CD-ROM that you can pass down to your grandchildren when you want to give them something they can use to mock you.

16. What happens if I don't get any job offers?

First, don't start worrying too early. The way the job market works is as follows: The market decides who are the stars for the year, and those people each get 25 offers. The 22 places that have no chance of hiring them (along with the 3 who do have a chance) then wait for a month until they learn the candidate has turned them down. They then make an offer to one of the other stars, who has already accepted a job at Harvard and also turns them down. Then, in March, they get realistic and start making offers to people they might actually be able to hire.

So if you don't have any job offers by Feb 15, don't worry. (But do keep in touch with your advisors and with me during this period).

Usually the candidates who have the most difficulty finding jobs are those with strong restrictions (usually geographical). In other words, if you say "I can only take a job in New Jersey" then it can be very difficult - this is the only category of student who have sometimes not been able to find a job in the last few years.

As noted above, if things don't work out on the market this year, then you have the right to our help again next year.

17. Does the department pay any of my expenses for the job market?

At many schools, students going on the market are charged a fee to cover the costs in time, postage, and photocopying associated with the department's marketing of their students. We don't charge a fee, we provide the modest photocopying subsidy mentioned above, and we pay postage for the letters of recommendation. But that is the extent of our ability to help with the expenses associated with the market. Think of your expenses as an investment!

18. How long should my job market paper be?

Maximum of 25 double-spaced pages (excluding figs, tables, appendices), min 11 point type, 1.25 inch margins. If figs and tables are included in the text, maximum of 35 pages.

A wise person once said that a paper is not finished when nothing remains to be added; it is finished when nothing remains that could be taken away.

If you think you can't fit everything into these guidelines, think again. You've got to realize that *nobody is going to read a huge fat paper just because you spent a lot of time writing it*. Get to the point. No rambling footnotes designed to prove you've read every paper since the seminal contribution by Moses.

There is one escape clause to the above: If necessary, you can have substantial appendices containing tables and other material, and refer to them briefly in the text. This is an excellent way to establish points that may be necessary to the argument of your paper but not particularly interesting in themselves. Maximum of 10 pages of appendix

material. (And remember that you will be paying the marginal cost of copying, assuming you exhaust your subsidy).

19. How long should the cover letter be?

One page. Period.

20. What should be in the abstract?

It can either be an abstract for your job market paper or for the dissertation as a whole. It must be one page, but does not need to fill the page. Min 11 point type, 1.25 inch margins. Don't try to squeeze the maximum possible number of words onto the page. It is more important that it be readable and look professional than that it mention everything you have done.

21. What's to stop me from applying for a job in JOE even if my advisors don't think I'm ready? I'll just send my application in and hope that someone will hire me even without advisors' approval. [Nobody has been bold enough to ask this question directly, but I'm pretty sure several students have thought about it, so let me answer it here.]

There is no point in your applying to employers unless you have approval from advisors and a reasonable job market paper. The first thing every employer does is to look at the letters. If there are no letters, or the letters basically say "this candidate is not prepared," the employer will throw your application in the trash and look at the next applicant in the pile of 400 other people who applied for the job. If your letters are adequate, the employer looks next at the job market paper. If it is incoherent, the employer A) throws your application away, and B) mentally downgrades JHU for the purpose of future hiring. Hence our absolute requirement that you have a coherent job market paper or you're not going on the market.

Just to make it crystal clear, I will say it again: If your advisors are not prepared to write a letter that says you should be hired, no employer will hire you. So there is no point in trying to apply on your own without your advisors' approval - it would be a waste of paper, money, and time on your part. Your application will simply be ignored if it does not come with advisors' letters, and will be discarded if it comes with letters that say you are not ready.

(Of course, I am referring here to jobs which are part of the usual PhD hiring process in economics. There's no reason you can't search for another kind of job, say as a brain surgeon or a rocket pilot, which does not require a PhD in economics. And of course you are welcome to apply to jobs that require only a masters degree in economics, for which you can reasonably request letters from anyone who has supervised you in the JHU program).