

TO: All students on the job market
FROM: Professors Ken Rogoff and Philippe Aghion, Placement Directors
Date: November 27, 2007
RE: Q&A #4: Practice interviews and actual interviews

Make a note that (1/2) Practice Interviews are being scheduled for December 11 and 12. Much will depend on the supply of faculty interviewers. Let Nicole know if you want an interview and whether you need the earlier (Dec. 11) date. Given the various constraints, we cannot entertain requests for particular times. Interviews will be 30 minutes, with about 20-25 minutes for the interview and 5-10 for a critical assessment by the interviewers (or novel addition to the usual interview).

Will practice interviews make me more competitive in this rough and tumble world?
Precisely. You must be prepared with a great presentation and superb interview skills.

I've finished my job market paper, mailed my packets, and assembled a dazzling wardrobe. I guess I'm ready for the job market and can go to the Caribbean for the next four weeks.

Not so fast. Go at your own peril unless you want a job at the University of West Indies. Don't slow down. You'll need more than just your job market paper when you talk turkey to places in Boston and at fly-out time. You'll need to show that you will finish your dissertation by June or sometime during the summer. You may need to demonstrate that you have given some thought to a research agenda. We have found that students get too preoccupied with the job market and get little done on their research. You should not spend an entire year getting a job.

When will I start hearing about interviews?

Per our earlier explanation, your packets have arrived at their destination and they need to be read and judged by a committee. A few places will e-mail or call you the first week of December to schedule interviews. But most will do this during the second and third weeks of December. All the more reason not to head off to Aruba.

What if I don't get enough interviews?

Stay calm. Right now we don't anticipate any problems. But, if you don't have around six interviews scheduled by the December 10, tell us and your advisors. A few well placed calls at that critical moment can do wonders.

What happens during an interview?

Interviews usually begin with the comment/request: "tell me about your work." You will then have at most 2-3 minutes of uninterrupted time to tell the group (anywhere from 2 to 5 faculty) about your dissertation and job market paper. You should prepare a 2-3 minute version of your summary and also a longer version (about 5-6 minutes). The 5-6 minute version will include many of the details that you will be led into by the interviewers (who will interrupt). If you prepare the longer version, you will have cogent answers to many

of the questions you will be asked. The most important advice you can be given regarding the interview is “practice, practice, and then practice again.” Give the interview to your friends, to your cat, to your dog, even to the wall.

How should I begin my summary?

There are many ways of beginning your summary statement. A few possibilities include: (1) Begin with a sentence about the general subject matter of your paper. “My dissertation concerns various aspects of search theory” or “My general field is American economic history.”

(2) Begin with one sentence “hook” into the central question of your job market paper. “Sharecropping is ubiquitous, but what can explain why shares vary across countries but generally not within countries over time?” “Corruption is rampant in many countries, but what is the impact on the economy?”

Where do I go from there?

Then state the issue your job market paper addresses or the question(s) you pose. Next briefly summarize the methodology, data sources, results, and so on. Do not mention superfluous, tangential subjects that will land your interviewers on another galaxy or create a major combat zone in a hotel room. Don’t get involved in a literature review that will glaze all eyes. Make your presentation as clear as you can. Make it accessible and interesting to any economist. Be animated about your own work. If you aren’t excited, why should any one else be?

Because I’ll be giving my talk many times, I’ve decided to change it every few hours during the meetings so I don’t get bored.

Not a great idea. Remember that even though you have heard your own presentation at least 100 times, your interviewers have not yet heard it once. An actor plays the same role every night (twice a day if there is a matinee). The role must be new and exciting every time. Yours must be as well. But do not radically change your summary to make it more interesting to yourself. Stick with the best one you have. Romeo must have gotten a bit bored with his lines, but he didn’t change them to bid farewell in his own way. Hamlet does not decide to be part of a musical comedy.

What other questions might I be asked?

Other questions will be asked at the interview, but the most important is a variant of “What are you working on?” and all of the related questions concerning your research. Additional questions include: “What other essays have you completed for your dissertation,” “What courses would you like to teach,” and “What is your research agenda for the next several years.”

How long are interviews, and what will I be able to know in advance?

Interview generally last for 30 minutes but can be 45 minutes (and even one hour). You will know the length in advance and thus can schedule interviews efficiently. You can ask for the names of the interviews, although all may not be known at the time of scheduling. The person setting up the interview will provide you with the name of the hotel and the name under which the room is listed and/or will give you the code that you

must have to obtain the room name and hotel when you are in Boston. Information on most of the rooms will be collected by Nicole at the Harvard suite and you should go there as soon as you arrive and throughout the day, as you can.

What is the Harvard Suite and how do I find out where it is? There will be two Harvard suites, both in the Hilton Riverside (the AEA Headquarters hotel). One will be used for departmental recruitment and the other for our graduate students and faculty to relax and chat. Clare will have one suite and Nicole will have another. Nicole will send out an e-mail to job market students when she and Clare check-in to let you know the room number, since that information is not available until check-in. Nicole will also provide you with her cell number. You will be given the codes (and hotel names) for all your interviews and these will be used to get the room numbers. It is important that you make contact with the Harvard suite on Thursday evening. Nicole and Clare will be “crack room codes” and offering food and beverages. It is a great place to unwind upon arrival and during interview days, if you have any spare time.