

# After the Offer, Before the Deal: Negotiating A First Academic Job

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By **Chris M. Golde**

What is a fair salary? Can I ask for moving expenses? When can faculty members negotiate reductions in their teaching loads? These are the kinds of questions graduate faculty often hear from their students who have just been offered academic jobs. Besides training young scholars as teachers and researchers, we also mentor them in their search for jobs. As a result, we're expected to know the answers to such questions. In this article, I offer suggestions to the just-appointed faculty member who seeks to be a savvy participant in negotiating the terms of a first job. More senior faculty members can share these suggestions with their students to help them avoid feeling surprised or taken advantage of during such negotiations. Academic departments conducting job searches may also find this information useful: by thinking from the candidate's point of view, departments may be better able to help newly appointed professors make a smooth transition from graduate student to faculty member.

## Navigating the Process

Once a job offer is made, one large task remains--negotiating the terms of the position. As a successful candidate, you can express enthusiasm, joy, and even gratitude. Just don't say "yes" right away. You need time to collect your thoughts, clarify the details of the offer, and gather more information. Then you must evaluate the offer in terms of your priorities, negotiate for what you want, and determine whether the final offer is acceptable.

**Knowing Yourself.** Most people begin by considering the two most tangible aspects of the job: salary and institutional prestige. That is the traditional, competitive view of a college or university appointment: what is the "best job"? But your day-to-day work will involve many facets. Now is the time to start thinking in terms of "best for me." At the center of your considerations should be this question: what do I need to be happy, productive, and (yes) get tenure? Try to set priorities for different aspects of your future faculty life. Figure out what you need to be maximally productive, and establish what you can get by on. Ask for the former, settle for the latter. Your ability to understand and articulate what is important to you will ease the negotiation process. Once you describe explicitly and concretely what it is you want, it becomes easier for others to work with you to satisfy your needs.

**Gathering Information.** Asking for information signals that you are a confident professional who does her homework. Some department chairs have little sense of what new faculty members need, and your questions can help educate the department about how to help you succeed. The answers you get will allow you to negotiate from a more informed position, and if you receive multiple offers, you will be better able to decide which one to accept.

Remember that seeking information from the department and the university is perfectly normal. The department chair is one resource. Other members of the department--particularly ones with whom you have developed a rapport--are also promising sources of information. Other untenured faculty members and graduates of your doctoral program (if there are any) may be willing to help you as well. Written policies should be available from the university's human resources department or Web page. In particular, you should secure a copy of the institution's faculty handbook and check its provisions against AAUP-recommended standards.

Faculty members hired under unusual or "experimental" arrangements often discover to their dismay that little thought had been given to the details of their appointments or to mitigating predictable tension points. If your appointment is outside the norm (split across departments or involving administrative or outreach responsibilities, for example), push those making the offer to clarify (in writing) such matters as tenure

home and performance criteria and expectations; mentoring structures; teaching responsibilities; and office location. With nonstandard appointments, it is advantageous to seek advice widely, particularly from others in similar situations.

**Negotiating.** Searching for a job (and the waiting game that follows) is unlikely to leave you feeling empowered and confident. But once an offer has been made, the power balance shifts in your favor. You will never be in a better position to get what you want than at that point. The offer means that they want you and will do what they can to get you. Your responsibility is to look out for your own interests. Above all, remember that almost everyone negotiates (although research suggests that women and people of color negotiate less frequently than white men). Many people fear that they will appear greedy and ungrateful if they ask for more money or additional perks, but that is rarely true. Offers are often constructed on the assumption that negotiation will occur.

Assume a professional demeanor, be honest, and play fair. As long as you are courteous, ethical, prompt, and willing to accept no as an answer, there's no harm in asking for the information and perks you desire. Some things you ask for may not be possible, at least not for you. (While a "star" senior hire can negotiate for a parking space, an assistant professor may not be able to do so.) But if you do not ask, you may be unwittingly putting yourself at a professional disadvantage.

Keep in mind that the department has constraints, and that you will probably not get everything you want. Some schools work with fixed salary schedules by convention or union contract. Others simply have limited resources, and principles of equity between people and departments limit the number of special arrangements that can be made. Moreover, the money to supply certain items may be controlled by different people (the department, dean, or provost), and it may be impossible to predict which terms and conditions of the appointment are negotiable. Do not assume: ask.

While no hard and fast rules for negotiating exist, it's best to limit the number of counteroffers and requests for information you make. The department chair would prefer to go to the dean once rather than to resolve each issue separately. If asking for more money and compensation is difficult for you, enlist your closest allies. Practice what you want to say. Make your phone calls with a friend present. Send a fax if you can't stand calling. Do whatever you need to do to keep yourself focused and professional. Do not quail.

**Assessing Multiple Offers.** Multiple offers are both a luxury and a source of considerable tension. Offers rarely come in together, leaving the candidate holding an offer from one institution while waiting for a second institution to decide whether to make an offer. Candor is your best ally: departments understand about negotiating multiple offers and will often extend the deadline for deciding on a position. If you request an extension, however, you should be genuinely willing to accept the offer. Once you decide to turn down an offer, inform the institution immediately. Remember, other candidates are waiting.

Identifying which parts of each job best suit you simplifies the task of choosing between institutions and offers that are structured differently. Multiple offers strengthen your ability to bargain with your first-choice school. You can ask that institution to match an offer from another school. (Do this only if you are serious about the first school and only if you have such an offer from a second institution.)

## Negotiating Salary

Salary is an important part of your job offer, although a low salary can be balanced by other things. Whatever you are offered, ask for more. Remember, an institution's lifetime investment in one professor's salary and equipment will probably exceed a million dollars. So a few thousand dollars may be trivial to the institution, even though it's critical to you.

Difference in initial base salary is a big contributor to the earnings gap between men and women in academia. This difference stems partly from the fact that many men negotiate more aggressively than many women do. Moreover, disciplines that are overwhelmingly male-science and engineering, for example-are

compensated at higher rates than those that include many academic women—such as education and the humanities.

Salary matters not just for the present, but also for the future. Pay increases are usually a percentage of prior salary. A faculty member earning \$60,000 gets twice as much from a 2 percent across-the-board pay raise as a professor earning \$30,000 (\$1,200 compared with \$600). Besides the salary amount, you also want to ask about the length of the contract. Is it for nine, ten, eleven, or twelve months? Can the paychecks be spread over twelve months? What is the recent history of annual salary increases?

When negotiating for salary, it helps to understand the context of the offer. Smaller, less prestigious institutions, for example, generally offer smaller salaries. What are the salary norms in your field? Salaries are simply higher in some fields than in others. Faculty members, recent graduates from your doctoral program, and your professional association can help you determine the salary ranges in your field. As for the salary norms in the department, the Web, a local ally, or the university library may be able to give you departmental salaries, especially for other recently hired assistant professors. Institutional salary scales can be gleaned from the AAUP's annual salary survey (published in the March-April issue of *Academe*) or from a database maintained on the Web by Arizona State University, which relies on data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. You can determine the cost of living in the city in which you will live using cost-of-living calculators found on the Web (the cost of housing, child care, car insurance, and the like vary). Another determinate of local cost of living is whether your partner, if you have one, will be able to find employment.

Summer support is often separate from academic-year salary, because many institutions pay on nine-month contracts. New faculty often receive one or more months of summer salary (sometimes called "additional ninths") in their first year or so until they are able to garner their own summer support. Ask whether faculty members in the department and the college earn summer salaries. If so, how? Is summer teaching available? Could research support for one or more summers be part of the start-up package? Does the institution offer competitive grants for summer support? Can faculty members spread their nine-month salary over the summer months?

## Negotiating Other Forms of Compensation

**Moving expenses.** Institutions can pay all, some, or none of your moving expenses. Get estimates for packing and moving your possessions. Determine the cost of moving yourself. These figures will help to inform your negotiation. Find out whether the institution will pay for your move directly or how quickly you will be reimbursed if you pay for the move yourself. Save all of your receipts—unreimbursed expenses are likely to be tax deductible.

**Housing.** If you are moving to a new city, particularly one that is far away, you may want to secure a place to live before actually moving. The institution might pay for a second visit for this purpose. If you make the visit after accepting a job offer in writing, such payment will probably be considered a form of compensation, and, as such, may be taxable. On the other hand, if you visit before you sign a contract, the visit will probably be considered part of the job search process and not as compensation.<sup>1</sup> Some couples use second visits as a chance for the partner to see the campus and the city.

Regardless of whether you plan to purchase a home or rent a place to live, it is helpful to meet with a realtor to get a tour of the town and learn about different neighborhoods and the local housing market. If you plan to buy, find out the market range for the kind of home you desire. If you plan to rent, what are common terms of leases? (Are they month-to-month or annual? Are they tied to the academic year?)

Look for an office that helps faculty or students with off-campus housing. Employees in such offices often have maps and a lot of local knowledge. Some institutions, especially those in areas with tight and expensive housing markets, have on-campus faculty housing or programs to help faculty members purchase

homes. Find out whether temporary housing is available for your first week or month on campus if you need it.

**Health care.** In this age of managed care, it's often hard to discern differences between health-care packages, so you need to ask some questions. Does the health plan cover high-cost items (such as orthodontia, eye care, or physical or psychological therapy) necessary to you? How much are insurance premiums? When does the health plan take effect—with your first paycheck, on your first day of work, or six months after you start work? Will the plan cover your partner or dependents? Is it possible to arrange for health-care coverage beginning in the summer before you arrive?

**Appointments of spouses or partners.** If you have a partner or dependents, you may face additional considerations. Increasingly, institutions recognize that many academics have partners who are also academics (dubbed the "two-body problem"). Some institutions have well-crafted strategies for helping the "trailing partner" secure a position through spousal hiring plans. Some even pay for career-placement assistance for a nonacademic partner. Couples who have already negotiated the system can be rich sources of advice.

**Other family-related benefits.** Does the institution offer college tuition support for your children? Can your family take classes or enroll in degree-granting programs at low or no cost? Will you and your family have access to facilities, such as recreation and day-care centers? Does the institution have a "domestic partner" policy? (Such policies are becoming increasingly common.)

If you are planning to add to your family, ask about family-leave policies. How long is the tenure clock stopped for pregnancy and childbirth? Will you be relieved from teaching? Who will find your teaching replacement, you or the department? Does family leave apply to men? Does it cover adoption or parent care?

**Other questions.** Besides the issues covered above, you may want to ask the following questions. Can you arrange for an advance on your first paycheck? For many new faculty members, the months before and after starting a new job are financially draining. Do retirement and life insurance benefits begin immediately, or do you have to work for the institution for a certain time before they kick in? How are retirement plans structured? State universities are often under state plans, which may not follow you if you leave the state. Many institutions participate in TIAA/CREF, whose retirement funds are portable to all member institutions. Does the institution offer tax-deferred savings plans or pretax reimbursement accounts for health- or child-care costs?

## Balancing Faculty Roles

While compensation issues loom large in most job negotiations, many new professors find, once they have started, that managing time is their main concern. Find out how you are expected to allocate your time, and whether you will be protected from some of the more time-consuming demands. The expectations placed on you are partly a function of the mission of the institution: research universities, community colleges, regional universities, and liberal arts colleges have different missions and different expectations of faculty members. The role and size of the department also shape expectations. Will you be called on to teach campuswide "service" courses? How many majors, graduate students, and faculty members (full- and part-time) does your department have?

**Teaching.** Teaching is probably the most time-consuming activity for new faculty. You will want to clarify your teaching load: number of classes each term, number of new course preparations you will have in the first few years, typical enrollments, types of students (undergraduate, graduate, majors, nonmajors), and freedom to develop new courses.

Teaching-related duties also consume out-of-class time. What are the departmental norms for meeting with students outside of class? How many office hours each week do faculty members hold? How many undergraduate honors theses, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations might you supervise?

Schools that stress research productivity may allow flexibility in teaching loads. If your load is relatively light, can you stack your teaching so that you have terms with no teaching? How are reductions in teaching load allocated-in the first term, the first year, any two semesters before the tenure decision, or the year before the tenure decision? Under what circumstances is teaching reduced? Today, even large research universities are paying more attention to teaching. How will your teaching be evaluated? Does the campus have resources to help improve your teaching?

**Advising.** Academic advising is an often-overlooked aspect of the faculty job. Yet many new faculty members commit themselves to being good advisers, either to emulate outstanding advisers they had, or to be better than bad ones they had! Advising can absorb enormous amounts of time, particularly in the first year when new faculty members must learn the requirements and bureaucratic procedures of their institutions. Initially, students awaiting your arrival may eagerly seek you out. Find out how much advising you will be expected to provide and whether training is available. Should your position involve advising doctoral students, ask how many students most faculty advise and how quickly you must reach a full load.

**Service.** The faculty job traditionally comprises three components-the trinity of teaching, research, and service. Service, the often-underappreciated component, includes service to the institution (committee work and participation in undergraduate student life), to the public (consulting, public speaking, and outreach), and to the profession (review of scholarly papers and leadership in your professional organization).

The importance of public and professional service to your professional identity and scholarship are easy to see. Being visible professionally helps you to make a name for yourself in your field. Campus service, on the other hand, does not improve a professional reputation. It's often dismissed and undervalued, because research and teaching usually determine tenure and promotion decisions. (Smaller institutions, however, often expect significant service.) The conventional wisdom is that untenured faculty ought to be "protected" from service. Nonetheless, for many people, campus service is important and often enjoyable.

One benefit service brings is the opportunity to meet colleagues; such connections can be personally and professionally enriching. In addition, being regarded in a positive light by colleagues across campus can help when tenure decisions are made. Service also allows faculty members to contribute meaningfully to the life of the college. But it does take time, so you should determine whether embracing (or avoiding) service responsibilities is supported or punished in the institutional culture. You should also find out how many committees and projects you are expected to be involved with, and whether you might serve on campuswide committees. If you are a member of a historically underrepresented group on your campus, you may be sought out for advising and service more frequently than your colleagues. Will you feel comfortable turning away students who want your time? Can you get credit or relief (shift in assignments) for saying yes, or support for saying no to such requests?

**Other questions.** You might want to consider the following questions in addition to those posed above. Will there be an orientation for new faculty? What mechanisms exist for learning about the institution and your department? Can you get an e-mail account right away? How soon can you start to get routine departmental information forwarded to you? Will you have a formal mentor? If so, whom? If you must finish your dissertation in your first months on the job, what kind of support will you receive to ensure that you complete it? Is there a time limit for doing so? Will you have secretarial support? If so, what kinds of tasks will the secretary perform?

## Finding Out About Resources

Inform yourself about the resources available to you to help you carry out your job. The norms and policies for access to supplies and equipment vary enormously between institutions and fields. Particularly in the

sciences and at larger research universities, faculty members must pay for their travel, supplies, and equipment from their research grants. Faculty members who must do this usually receive start-up packages to pay for these items in their first years.

**Research and teaching assistants.** If you will oversee research or teaching assistants, here are some questions to ask. Will the assistants be graduate or undergraduate students? Will they be assigned, or will you select them? What responsibilities do TAs and RAs usually assume? How are salaries determined? Are graduate assistants unionized? If you are in a field in which graduate students are funded by their advisers, will you have to recruit graduate students to work with you, and does their quality affect your prospects for tenure? Will you have to compete for students with your colleagues? Will you get research assistants in your first year? Must you use grant or start-up funds to pay them?

**Supplies and equipment.** You will need to tell your department what supplies and equipment you will need to be productive. If the department has not hired a new faculty member for a while, you may have expectations based on your experience in graduate school that differ from what your new department imagines to be the norm. Will you need special pieces of equipment; space for your office, lab, project, or storage; or computer hardware or software? What kinds of office supplies are provided, which are restricted, and which must you pay for from grant money? Does the department limit supplies or access to photocopiers and telephones?

While research grants may eventually pay for the expense of running a lab, start-up funds are often provided to launch the research until grants come in. Your doctoral adviser should be able to help you construct a list of your needs. How many years of start-up funds are typical in your field? How soon does the institution expect you to fund your lab from outside grants? What are the consequences if tight funding precludes doing so?

**Travel.** Will travel to scholarly meetings, research trips, and pedagogical conferences be covered, or will you have to subsidize your travel out of your own pocket? Are funds available for your students to travel? Often, little travel money is available, and it may be allocated competitively.

**Research grants.** Grants are a way of life in some areas, especially in the sciences at institutions that confer doctorates, but they are relatively rare in other fields and institutional settings. Whether or not grants are the norm at the institution, will you be supported in seeking and managing them? How? Will you be allowed (or encouraged) to buy out teaching with grant funds? Is support available for undergraduate research?

## Keeping Track of Deadlines

Two deadlines are important in your negotiation: the date by which you must decide whether or not to accept an offer and the date on which you must start the job. Institutions will expect you to respond to a job offer promptly, but most colleges will give a reasonable period—usually two weeks—for you to make up your mind (and to collect information). If you can conclude the negotiation earlier, do so. If you need more time, ask. Some institutions have firm decision deadlines, but others may be more flexible.

Regarding your starting date, you will want to know when your contract begins, when you should arrive, and if your office will be ready when you arrive. If you or your partner has a prior commitment, you may want to delay the start date. To make long-term plans, you'll need to ask about the schedule for the academic year. When are faculty members expected to be around and available, and when is it permissible to be off campus (such as during the summer or over winter break)?

Gathering information and negotiating will consume your time and wrack your nerves, but you will reap the rewards for years to come. Understanding the unique culture of your new institution will help you to integrate yourself more easily into campus life, and the knowledge you gain about the job and yourself will help you to thrive professionally. Welcome to the academic profession.

## Note

1. This article should not be considered reliable tax advice. Consult an expert.

*Chris Golde is assistant editor of Education Administration at the University of Wisconsin--Madison*