What are Search Committees Looking for?
Putting Together a Successful Faculty Application
What Are You Looking For?

- What type of institution? Research-1? Teaching?
- Does weather matter to you?
- What parts of the country appeal to you?

Think carefully about whether you would really go to a place before you apply. Think through your personal priorities and let them guide you.
What is the Department Seeking?

- The advertisement may be focused in a specific area. Does it overlap your expertise?
  - If there is a question, address that issue in the application.
- The department may provide information in the advertisement, but peruse their website for deeper, more detailed information.
Applying for a Position

- “Cold” applications
  - Usually need to have connections to the department
- Responding to an advertisement
  - Consider level and areas requested
- Solicited applications
  - Be sure to present at the most relevant conferences. Hopefully this visibility will lead to contacts with hiring departments.
The Department’s Timeline

- Timelines vary significantly between disciplines and between schools
- Be alert to the advertisement pattern in schools in which you are interested
  - Some departments move quickly and make a rapid offer with a short timeline
  - Some departments gather a deeper pool and move deliberately through their candidate list.
The Application (1)

- **Cover letter**
  - Offers an opportunity to create interest in you
  - Summarizes your qualifications and interests

- **Curriculum vitae (Well organized! Error free!)**
  - Education, honors/awards, grants, summary of research experience, publications, invited talks, abstracts, oral presentations, teaching experience, service activities, any other pertinent information
  - Some institutions may request copies of reprints of your work
The Application (2)

- Summary of research accomplishments and research goals (length often specified)
- Summary of your teaching interests and experiences (length often specified)

If the length of these documents is not specified, be sure to include a brief, well-articulated summary at the beginning of each document — some reviewers may not read the entire document, others will want more.

THESE DOCUMENTS ARE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT
The Application (3)

- Letters of recommendation
  - *KEY ELEMENT*
  - Number ranges from approximately 3-5
  - Remember that these individuals will have to write for *every application* you submit.

- Some departments will ask you to provide the names, others will ask that you solicit the references to send the letters.
  - Timing of the letters varies — some ask for the letters from the beginning, others later in the process
The Application (4)

- Writers of letters of recommendation
  - Critical that letters come from someone who knows you well.
  - Status of the person matters, but if they cannot speak knowledgeably about you the letter will be discounted.
  - May be particularly helpful where publication record is low — and the reference can provide perspective (e.g., started a new area and work is just emerging).
Research Statement

- Remember that the search committee members may be in areas peripheral to your research
- Describe two or three research proposals
  - Usually one that is related to your prior work that is clearly feasible
  - One or two projects that demonstrate your ability to think beyond your current work
What to Include?

- Statement of the problem
  - Key unanswered questions in field
  - How will your work contribute?
- Description of research plans
  - Break into specific aims
  - Include figures
  - Be both creative and realistic - mix of high-likelihood and high-reward projects
- Show how it will be possible to get grants in this research area
What to Avoid?

- If you proposed work is too close to an advisor’s area, you may be too much in their “shade.”
  - Talk with your advisor so that you understand one another’s plans/directions.
- Proposing work in which you have no experience is risky.
Teaching Statement

- Describe your philosophy towards teaching and experiences that led to this perspective.
- Discuss courses within the core curriculum that you could teach.
- Propose new courses that might be developed in the future that you could teach.
What to Emphasize in your Application?

- Find out about the department/school
  - Importance of teaching vs. research
  - Areas of interest/growth
- May want to customize your application materials for different positions
- Brag about your successes (within reason)!
What is Makes an Application Stand Out?

- Varies between departments/institutions
- Strong publication record
  - Most important factor!
- Exciting research plan
  - Creative and innovative while also feasible
- Great reference letters
  - Evidence of innovation, creativity, hard work, etc.
- Interesting and innovative teaching plans
  - Highlight your experiences and capabilities
- Other experiences
  - Experience writing a grant, etc.
What Happens Next?

- Generally administrative staff do not review applications
  - Primarily a faculty effort in which a subset of search committee will read an application
- Faculty committee (sometimes full faculty) will select candidates for interview (often 3-6 out of 100-200 applicants)
What Are Search Committees Seeking?

- Educational institutions, degrees, honors
- Publication record (suggests potential trajectory)
- Teaching potential that matches need
- Positive perceptions of references
- Research area that “fits” with departmental goals
  - May match already existing, may open new areas
What Makes Application Stand out?

- Perception of excellence by wide spectrum of reviewing faculty
- Effective organization that clearly conveys:
  - Strong research accomplishments
  - Well-written and exciting research plan
- Exciting vision of teaching
- Research that integrates into the department
Recommended Reading

- **Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty**
  - Howard Hughes Medical Institute

- **At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator**
  - Kathy Barker, Cold Spring Harbor Press