

The On-Campus Interview: Questions—Getting and Giving Information (Hadden/Dessants)

Remember the #1 Rule: You want to get information, but not look like a jerk. You wish to learn about the school, while projecting that you will be a good citizen if hired. Try to spin questions with a “you” focus—what does the individual in front of you think personally?

The following questions might be asked by a candidate of his/her interviewers, and by the candidate's interviewers of him/her while on a campus interview.

You need not ask ALL of these questions, but select those that are most important for you. 6. If you could change one thing about the institution, what would it be? (This is open-ended enough to get lots of useful information without openly expecting the person to be critical.)

(These questions are tailored to candidates in American history but they could easily be adapted to any field in the liberal arts.)

Candidate's Questions: Academic Issues, Campus Facilities, Community

1. What's the library like? (Ask to visit the library if possible, to see for yourself)

Length of loan period?

Size of general collections?

How are collections divided?

Are there special collections?

Special strengths of the library?

What are the archival strengths?

Quality of interlibrary loan? Are there fees for ILL (some schools do)?

On-line databases you need (JSTOR, AhistLife/HistAbstracts...), CD-ROM

Faculty carrels?

Research assistant borrowing privileges?

Check for student study areas—where is the noise level highest?

Hours?

Nearby collections/libraries (special collections)?

Number/availability of microfilm readers, reader/printers, xerox facilities (will you have to wait forever....)

Policies about reserve readings...

Staff—are they considered knowledgeable?

Do they have all the “basics” in your field—check this yourself on-line or in-person.

2. What kinds of facilities and resources are there in terms of videos/slides/films?

For classroom use? For student use?

Can students access materials directly, or do they need faculty to get access?

3. Classes and Curriculum—Questions in the Department

How many classes per semester/quarter do faculty teach? Size of classes?

Is there an expectation about how many classes I will teach per year in general ed v. my specialty? Is there a rotation schedule in place for general ed classes (or do jr. faculty/adjuncts teach most of the surveys)?

Are there expectations about the number of students a faculty member should teach per

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year? Does the department have to hit enrollment targets for funding purposes?
Do graduate level courses count towards the course load? Are courses piggy-backed?
How/Are senior theses or independent projects counted for course load?
Will I be expected to advise undergraduate majors, or is that handled by one person in the department?
What are the requirements for a history major? (check catalog)
Are there general education or liberal studies requirements?
How would you characterize the students in terms of academic preparation?
Attrition rate?
How much reading is assigned in classes: lower division survey; lower division seminar; upper division lecture; upper division seminar? What is the community standard?
How do undergrads support themselves? Financial assistance?
Phi Alpha Theta?
Advising for students who wish to go on to grad school in history?
How much input do history faculty have into curriculum?
Flexibility in history course offerings?
Percentage of history students who go on to professional and graduate schools?
How would you describe past strengths and weaknesses in the department?
What do you think will be hiring priorities in the future?

4. Graduate students:

How many? Masters and PhD? (You can check the AHA Guide to Departments for information in this area)
How are graduate courses structured? How often do faculty teach grad courses?
How many graduate students does each professor typically mentor?
Are grad students assigned to profs as their advisors?
How do grad students support themselves?
Do they get jobs, and if so, where do they tend to get jobs?
Is there any teaching training offered by the department and the school?
How much do faculty prepare grad students for entering the profession (i.e. help them to get jobs, encourage them to publish their work, etc.)?

5. In the College/University generally:

Have there been any recent changes (to curricula, learning objectives, hiring) that you think are notable?
How would you describe relationship between college and town residents? (hostile? Supportive?)
What are strengths and weaknesses of the institution generally? (Too committed to athletics? Not enough money for the library?)
Where do you see the department fitting in with the larger institution (is it mostly the home of pre-laws, pre-business, the center of interdisciplinary connections, in service to the needs of the ed school...)?

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Are there speaker/colloquia series?

What do you look for in a colleague?

6. Community (Or, Atmosphere—for anybody you meet):

For students: where do you want to go after school? Why did you choose to come here?

For colleagues/department chair/dean:

How would you describe the level of collegiality here?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department?

How do faculty members spend their time—do they spend it together?

Where do you go for a good cup of coffee?

Are there good places for book buying/browsing? Good restaurants worth knowing about? Places of interest?

Have there been any recent changes (in town, in the community spirit, in construction...)?

What are community resources like?

Where do faculty members live?

How much are average rental apartments in cost? Housing costs?

What's the area like?

What is the local economy built upon? (Factory work, computers, hospitals...)

How are athletic facilities in the community and on campus?

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Candidate's Questions for Faculty Members

1. Are you up for tenure? What are your chances of achieving tenure? Have most faculty who have come up for tenure within the last ten years received tenure?
2. What do you think the department and school value when making tenure decisions?
3. Are you teaching courses you enjoy and is the course load satisfactory?
4. Do you feel you get enough time and support to pursue your own research?
5. Do faculty have input into undergraduate and graduate history curricula and course offerings?
6. If you could change one thing about the institution, what would it be? (This is open-ended enough to get lots of useful information without openly expecting the person to be critical.)

Candidate's Questions for Students (undergrads and grads)

1. What are you studying?
2. Are you writing a senior thesis?
3. Do you have plans for graduate school?
4. What do you as graduate students (or history majors) like about the department and what do you dislike?
5. Are the faculty supportive of graduate students? How much contact is there between grad students and professors?
6. If you could change one thing about the institution, what would it be? (This is open-ended enough to get lots of useful information without openly expecting the person to be critical.)

Candidate's Questions for the Chair (or Senior faculty):

1. What would you describe as the strengths of the institution generally?
2. Which divisions or departments are the strongest in the university? Have they traditionally received the largest funding?
3. Do grad students work as research assistants? Teaching? What type of work?
4. If you could change one thing about the institution, what would it be? (This is open-ended enough to get lots of useful information without openly expecting the person to be critical.)

Candidate's Questions: Terms of Employment

[Note: Be careful, and take your cues from the chair or dean—they may not want to talk about money until after they make an offer, but they should be willing to discuss everything else listed here. Aside from Money, you may also ask questions below to other faculty members, and probably should, just to get a balanced impression of the school.]

Money

What is the expected salary range for the person hired in this position? (Don't ask about a specific salary.)

How many months are in the salary (9 or 12)? Are they paid monthly, weekly, year-round? (Some institutions allow a 9 month salary to be paid on a 12 month basis.)

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What are the typical pay raises (most are 0-3%); what have they been in the past 3 years?

How are pay raises determined (faculty contract, merit, flat raises across the board)?

Are there incentive programs for excellence (bonuses for teaching prizes)

What is the typical raise for promotion and tenure? Flat rate?

What method used to allocate summer teaching? What pay rate for summer teaching? Is there a rotation, or other method for determining who will teach in summer or extra sessions?

Benefits

Explain benefits: what is included (covered as standard)?

major medical, dental, life insurance, retirement, disability, mortgage program

if critical for you, find out when coverage starts (is there a waiting period)?

How long has the university been with this insurance carrier?

Pension

TIAA/CREF? If other, what do they have?

Are there options within local retirement plan?

What is the level of the univ. contribution and my contribution? (Given as % of salary.)

Other Benefits

Are moving expenses covered, fully or partially?

Do they have local-add-ons: housing allowance, commuting expenses, faculty housing, special mortgage rates (all important in urban or expensive areas)?

Are computers provided to new faculty?

Describe sabbatical program.

Is there support for leave for fellowships outside university?

Is there maternity/paternity leave? (If relevant for you)

Educational discounts: assistance for continuing ed? Family discounts (children, spouse)?

Athletic facilities: is there a cost to faculty?

Parking (usually a source of humor): available, how hard to get, how much does it cost, is it assigned based on seniority? Alternative local transport? Campus bus routes?

Research Support/Travel Support

Money for travel to conferences? What types of participation supported (delivery of papers only)?

Is there a formula for how much money each year? Is conference travel limited to particular types of conferences (field specialties v. teaching improvement—depending on institution type, they may support only research, or only teaching)?

Is there special money for junior faculty for conference or research travel?

What is the policy on attending conferences during term? A problem? Do they have expectation about making up missed classes?

What sort of response will I get if I win a grant for a semester, or a year? Will they pay ½ salary?

Any programs for first year faculty—course reductions or financial support in first 3 years?

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Is there a grants officer/program for grants in humanities? What type of support?

Is there faculty development money for creating new courses? Other scenarios? How competitive, and who gets it typically? How much money in pool? What can money pay for (Ras, xerox, equipment, travel)?

Computing

In the department, what is available for faculty? (Work stations, in my office) Does everyone have a printer? Is there access to laser printing?

Support for purchasing software? Is there a dept. or university standard (Mac or IBM) for hardware?

Is there equipment you will need available (scanner, text editing software)? Do they have laptops for research travel?

From home, do they have dial-up access to university mainframe?

Is support good for computer users (help desk, email only, installation, upgrades)? Free or cost?

Tenure/Promotion

What are promotion and evaluation procedures?

How would I be evaluated? When, and how often?

Describe tenure process and requirements?

What will I be expected to do (build portfolio, solicit letters)?

What is the rate at which tenure is achieved within the department?

What level of approval is required (if dept. ok's, is it a rubber stamp further up?)

Peer evaluation (other faculty visiting my classroom)?

How much weight placed on publications, conference participation, committee work, teaching—are they ranked, or given % weight to each?

Before leaving: make sure you know when you can expect to hear from them.

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Interviewer's Questions asked TO candidate: Research and Dissertation

1. Tell me about your dissertation - I've read only your abstract.
2. Are you sure that you'll finish your dissertation in time? What's left to do?
3. What theoretical framework(s) have you used in developing your research?
4. If you were beginning your dissertation now, what changes might you make in both your research and writing?
5. Why doesn't your work address _____?
6. What are your continuing research interests?
7. What are your research plans for the future?
8. Where do you see yourself in several years?
9. What are your plans for applying for external funding over the next few years?
10. Have you tried to publish anything yet?
11. Why is your dissertation significant to your field? Why do you think it's important to the larger study of American history?
12. Do you consider yourself a researcher or a teacher?
13. Have you spoken to any publishers yet? Which ones? How much work do you think you need to do to turn your dissertation into a book? Do you have a timetable for this?

Interviewer's Questions asked TO candidate: Teaching

1. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
2. How would you structure courses in US foreign relations for different levels?
3. How do you motivate students?
4. How would you encourage students to major in history?
5. What level course do you most enjoy? Why?
6. How would you incorporate dissertation research into a course?
7. How would you guide graduate teaching assistants in large lecture courses with discussion sections?
8. How would you organize a graduate class in US foreign relations?
9. Do you have any sample syllabi and/or teaching evaluations you could show us?
10. Our students are probably not as capable as those you are used to teaching, or those you taught at _____. How would you confront this?
11. How might you teach various courses outside your field of US foreign relations (i.e. an American history survey and courses in second field)?

Interviewer's Questions asked TO candidate: Interest in the School

1. Why are you interested in this school?
2. Would you be more comfortable at a large research university, or a small liberal arts college? Public or private college/university?
3. How do you feel about living in this location?
4. Do you have any questions for us?

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Demonstrate that you would be a good colleague by showing interest in the work of other faculty and enthusiasm for collaborating with department members on teaching issues, course development, and departmental curriculum planning.

Show that you can help the department by getting grants, organizing research projects, involving undergraduate and graduate students in the department, and engaging in academic service (committee work).

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Items to take with you to the interview:

All correspondence/email/information you have exchanged with school. Your letter of application and c.v. (Which is what they will have in front of them).

Copies of information about the school that you acquire: faculty list with areas of teaching, syllabi you get from the web...

Any handouts you prepare for teaching or research presentation:

overheads

sample syllabi

statement of teaching philosophy

Double-check with chair that nothing additional is needed for your folder: student evaluations, teaching portfolio, list of courses taught, research plan for next 3-5 years...

Reminders:

Number the pages of your talk.

Practice the timing of your talk–make sure it fits the time allotted.

Test your talk in front of an audience and get their feedback.

Make a professional appearance–have briefcase/folder to carry information, take pad and pen for gathering information, and carry spares of anything essential in both carry-on and checked luggage!