A ONE-PAGE CHECKLIST FOR PURSUING AN ACADEMIC JOB

NB: This document contains only one person's recommendations that are based primarily on U.S. academic jobs. For other and more specific advice, I highly encourage you to speak with multiple colleagues about professional development and strategies.

Step 1. Assess your interest in and reasoning for pursuing an academic job.

☐ As with any career decision, it's crucial to consider why and how an academic job is important to *you*. Consider pros/likes and cons/dislikes of academic jobs compared to other careers. Unless you can only imagine yourself as an academic scientist, at least look into other career options—for example, we need science PhDs in political and media spheres more than ever!

Step 2. Prior to Applying: As a Graduate Student (and Post-Doctoral Researcher)

☐ Find 2–3 people, preferably those who are 1–2 steps senior to you (e.g., junior faculty, post-doc), whom you can trust to provide career advice, feedback, and resources (e.g., job application statements).

☐ Take every opportunity to network and disseminate your research in academic (and non-academic) spheres. Besides posters and talks, an effective way to achieve this is to organize a symposium and invite speakers whom you want to potentially work with.

☐ Apply for grants and awards, including society grants and teaching awards at your institution.

☐ Attend as many job talks as possible and keep a note of what makes a 'great' job talk. Ask faculty about their thoughts too.

☐ If possible, ask your mentor if you can observe or be involved in a search (sometimes a search committee includes a student).

☐ Begin to develop a 10-year research plan and how the data you're collecting now will contribute to these plans & grants.

☐ Create a professional-looking CV and research website that highlight your job-related skills, activities, and accomplishments. Make sure the website clearly displays your contact information and pops up in Google searches.

☐ Act professionally when interacting with colleagues. You never know who will be evaluating your application in the future!

☐ When you're ready to begin applying, sign up for weekly updates from job listing sites (e.g., AAAS Science Careers: https://www.sciencemag.org/careers; The Chronicles of Higher Education: https://jobs.chronicle.com; HigherEdJobs: https://www.higheredjobs.com). Social media (Twitter, Facebook groups) are good supplementary resources for job postings.

Step 3. Preparing Applications for Academic Jobs

☐ Search committees generally look for: (*i*) research & grant potential (*at the institution*); (*ii*) teaching experience (*that are transferable to the teaching needs of the institution*); and (*iii*) communication skills (including how well you write). Make every sentence count towards your strengths related to these qualities.

☐ Carefully read each job description and tailor your application to the position. Also, contact someone on the search committee to ask for further details on what kind of applicants they are looking to hire. Search committees often want to speak with you!

☐ Reference Letters: select a range of references who worked with you in different ways (e.g., director of a course you taught for; external collaborator) so that letters complement, rather than overlap, one another. When requesting a letter, it's a good practice to provide a link to the job description and bullet points of your qualities and examples that you'd like the letter writer to emphasize (this prevents letters from overlapping in content too much). Try to ask for letters well in advance of the application deadline (≥3–4 weeks) and send increasingly more frequent reminders as the deadline approaches.

☐ Cover Letter: ≤2 pages unless specified otherwise. A cover letter is critical for making a good first impression, elegantly summarizing your relevant skills and experiences, and getting the search committee excited to know more about you.

☐ CV: spend time formatting so that items are neatly organized and easy to find. Do not "pad" your CV—search committees tend to notice this. Avoid including conference abstracts as "publications" (make a separate section for them) and listing "in prep." manuscripts as much as possible (1–2 may be permissible).

☐ Research Statement: To avoid sounding like a list of projects, develop a strong narrative structure that links your research interests and experiences. Include a 5 & 10-year research plan incorporating the resources of the institution you're applying for.

☐ Teaching Statement: I recommend organizing the text by mode of instruction (academic, non-academic), audience, and/or course topic. If possible, include quotes and scores from teaching evaluations to provide evidence of your teaching quality.

☐ While working on your application, keep in mind what makes you distinct as a researcher/instructor. For a given position, many applicants will likely have strong research (and even teaching) accomplishments. To make your application stand out, emphasize any research and teaching experiences that are truly distinctive and unlikely to have been done by other applicants.

Step 4. Job Interview

☐ Prepare for your interview by simulating interviews with your friends and/or career service provided by your institution. Important thing here is to become comfortable talking about your research and strengths.

☐ A 'great' job talk is different from a 'great' conference or seminar talk. Above all, a job talk should demonstrate your research potential. Some of my suggestions include (*i*) organizing your talk in the context of your 5, 10-year research plan; (*ii*) point out any awarded grants and collaborations as you describe your projects (in a tasteful way); (*iii*) keep your talked focused on 1–3 big ideas rather than a survey of all of your projects; and (*iv*) mention 1–2 specific ways your research will benefit the department and institution you're applying for, such as potential collaborations with faculty in the department or programs on campus.

☐ Prepare thoughtful questions for the search committee (e.g., expected amount of teaching, resources for research).

☐ For in-person interviews, bring printed copies of your CVs in case one is requested.

☐ If you want to really impress, bring a tentative research budget that you can share in case a good moment to present it arises.