

Planning Your Academic Negotiation

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*These are just my opinions, based on my experiences and observations.
Please get advice from lots of people and do what feels right to you.*

5 axes of happiness as an academic professional: What do you want out of your negotiation?

- External Life Things (near significant other, parents, region of globe you like, spousal offer, etc.)
- Collegial Environment (like the people you work with, effective university administration, etc.)
- Research Opportunities (near your study system, near external collaborators, etc.)
- Support for your work/happiness (great infrastructure, institutional investment in your set up/work, available space, start up funds, etc.)
- Agreement between professional expectations and your personal desires (teaching/research balance, work life balance, numbers of grants/students expected, etc.)

How you negotiate and what you ask for should be framed to balance these axes so that you can be happy and productive. There is no “correct” way to balance these, there is only what will make you the best and happiest person.

Negotiation basics for academic positions:

The Beginning:

When do I negotiate?

Wait until you have received an offer. If items you anticipate negotiating for/about are mentioned during an interview, try to avoid language that indicates blanket acceptance of the terms. You can ask during an interview what the institutional cultural practices are about the logistics of negotiation (e.g. with whom you would actually be negotiating, and would it be before or after a formal offer is sent to you). There are binding, informal offers; many institutions have switched to preferring to negotiate what the formal offer should look like to be accepted, eliminating internal draft stages in favor of informal negotiation (don't negotiate before you receive at least a written/emailed informal offer – if you get an offer by phone, follow up with an email thanking the person for the offer and restating the terms as you understood them, making clear that your restatement is for clarity, not an acceptance).

What do I do when the offer comes?

There is an instinct to say “yes” immediately if it is your dream job, or if you don't yet have better options. Don't do that. Ask for the details in writing (or offer to provide a transcribed version of a conversation for mutual confirmation of understanding). Have a

discussion about expected time frame for a response (remember that a response can be a counter offer, not a final answer). Even if you think this is the perfect job for you, time to think is always valuable – it lets other offers come in, it lets you have conversations with more mentors about the details of the offer, it gives you more time to call other places and tell them you have an offer and ask whether there is the potential to hear about their decisions within a reasonable timeframe for comparison, etc.

What should be in the offer?

As a bare minimum: what is the duration of the formal appointment? 9 months? 10? 11? 12? Or is it a soft-money position (in which case, what happens if you don't get sufficient external support)? How will salary be paid (you can have a 9 month appointment paid over 12 months)? What are the details of the benefits package? Is there an expiration date on the offer itself? What is the start date? What is the teaching load? If the appointment is not 12 month, during which months are you expected to teach/be on campus? Are you obligated to be on campus a certain number of days? Are you allowed to undertake outside consulting, and if so, up to how many hours/days per month/year?

Preparing Start-Up Negotiations:

Create an actual budget – this is so you know what numbers you are talking about, not to send/share with your potential employer; ideally, create “pie in the sky”, “realistic”, and “bare bones to get by and still be happy” versions for yourself

Do you have a wet lab?

What will lab equipment you want your lab to own cost?

What will supplies cost on a monthly basis to maintain function in your lab?

What will you have to outsource? How much will that cost on a monthly basis?

Do you want to have grad students (immediately/ at all)?

How are students supported in the department you'd be joining?

Do you need to ask for tuition waivers to be supported as part of your start up?

Do you need to ask for RA/TA lines? Do those go away after a while or do you have those as “your right” in the program?

How much is summer pay for a student who doesn't teach? (You can use this supplement normal admission deals to attract great students to your program)

Do you need summer salary covered for a number of years as you get up and running?

Do you need money to attend conferences (travel and registration)?

Do you need money to invite visitors/collaborators?

Do you need money for publication costs for open access publications?

Do you need money to hire a grant writer/consultant/editor to help with your first few submissions?

Always include “some extra money for unforeseen expenses” - this should not be a small amount.

Etc.

Many things you want to settle may have nothing to do with financial issues, but fall under the other axes of work desiderata – these don’t go into a budget, but still write them down and work out the same sets of “happy” outcomes for you. I still recommend having aspirational, realistic, and bare minimum cases worked out for yourself.

Some institutions offer start-up funds as institutional matching on external grants – this is not as good a deal. See if you can split this so that at least some funds are guaranteed.

You ALWAYS want unexpended funds to roll over for as long as possible, if you can. (Some institutions won’t let you do this – try as hard as possible.)

If the institution wants an detailed budget, ask how strict the categories are? You want to be able to reallocate between budget categories as freely as possible.

Key Issues that Might be Pertinent (some things may be negotiable at some institutions; ask politely if these are on the table)

Health care

- Does the available plan cover high-cost items necessary to you? (e.g. orthodontia, eye care, physical therapy, psychological therapy)
- When does health coverage begin? First day of work? After a probationary period?
- Are dependent covered? When?
- Can benefits begin earlier?

Family leave policies

- Tenure clock changes? Required or allowed?
- Are men/non-biological female parents covered for new-child leave?

Retirement benefits and life insurance policies

- Is there a probationary period, or do benefits start immediately?
- Is there a vesting period?
- What happens if you leave employment? Do you lose accrued contributions? Do you lose some of it? By when do you need to arrange shifting it?

Teaching /Mentoring Issues you Might want to Consider

Specific Course Details

- What are typical enrollments for classes you’re likely to teach?

- What kinds of students are likely to be in your classes? (majors? minors? non-majors? graduate students?)
- Can you develop new courses? Or do will you instead teach existing courses?
- Will the courses have associated graders? TAs?

Reductions in Teaching Load

- First term?
- First year?
- Non-specific semesters prior to tenure?
- Can grants buy you out of teaching? Who needs to approve?
- Can you time-bank courses?

How will Teaching Be Evaluated?

Are there Teaching Improvement/Support Resources on Campus?

If you have a joint appointment, how will your teaching be split?

Will you mentor students in research?

- **Graduates?**
- **Undergraduates?**
- **Are there expectations for how many you should be mentoring?**
- **Do you get to choose them, or are they assigned to you?**
- **How are the students supported?**
 - What are the duties the students will have to ensure continued support?
 - Must you pay the students out of start up funds?

Departmental/University Service Issues you Might want to Consider

- Is there training for advising duties?
- How will service contributions be evaluated?
- What are departmental expectations for committee and advising duties for junior/new faculty?
- What are university expectations for committee duties for junior/new faculty?

Potential Items to Consider for Negotiation

Teaching/Service

- Teaching load (number and timing of courses)
- Number of class preps (and how do they ramp up)
- Teaching schedule
- Course releases
- Advising load
- Committee work expected (departmental and college)

Salary

- Annual base salary
- How are cost of living/annual increases handled? What have the increases (if any) been over the past few years?
- Are there merit based increases? How often? How are you to be evaluated?
- Are there additional duties you can/must undertake for additional pay? How is access to those opportunities allocated?

Administrative details

- Response and Decision deadlines
- Start date
- Time till formal evaluation? Tenure clock?

Academic Support

- Research assistants (GRAs, work-study students, summer student salary)
- GTAs

Lab Funding

- See suggestions above on preparing your planning budget – plan it out until grants or tenure happen

Discretionary funding

- Money to set up your space
 - Furniture
 - Repairs/renovations (you may not need to ask for money for this, it can be negotiated as something the university needs to do for you in advance of your arrival)
 - Computers
 - Books for your own use or to add to the university library collection in your area
 - Software licenses (ask what is already available college-wide)
 - Phone lines
- Support for personal professional opportunities
 - Conference registration and travel
 - Funding to host events and invite speakers (great way to get senior people in your field to get to know you – these can become your collaborators, mentors and letter writers)
- Money to cover leave (if not already automatically defined by contract)
 - Pre-tenure paid leave
 - Sabbatical leave

Spousal/Partner hires

- This can be within the same department, other departments/colleges at the same university, or even at neighboring institutions – ask them to leverage professional networks

Personal Support

- Support to house hunt
 - Additional money for visiting to look at places
 - Is there a real estate agent they have in house? Work with in the community and trust? Discounted?
- Moving expenses
 - If it's a lump sum, get an estimate on what it will cost from professionals as a benchmark
 - Is there a company they recommend/work with? Discounted?
- Housing arrangements
 - Mortgage assistance?
 - Faculty housing?
 - Is there an easy way to perhaps sublet from faculty on sabbatical if you want to get to know the area for a while before making housing choices?
- Access to/ discounts for services
 - Childcare?
 - Fitness facilities?
- Tuition waivers/reductions for self, partners, or children

Countering an Offer

- Practice discussing the issues with friends and a mentor to get comfortable advocating for yourself
- It's great to reiterate your interest in the position and thank them for the offer – this doesn't mean you're accepting
- State the features you want
- You can and should include a statement to the effect of: "These are just the ways I have come up with to support the things I want/need to be successful here, but I welcome other potential ways to support those things that might work just as well instead."
- Provide reasons for each of your counter positions - these reasons should be well-researched and as objective as possible
- Allow time for a response
- Have a set of potential minimally sufficient criteria in mind and get comfortable with the idea of walking away if none of them are met
- Keep in mind that everyone wants you to succeed in the position. I *highly* recommend phrasing the negotiation as "Please help me figure out how to have the best chance of becoming one of your star faculty members."

Finalizing an Acceptable Offer

- Get the offer in writing and review it carefully to make sure it reflects what you think was agreed to in the negotiation
- It's not legal until you both have a signed offer/contract. (Keep a copy!) This can take a while, so don't get too nervous if you don't hear back after you conclude the negotiation for some time.

General Advice

- Ask for more than you actually want – have at least a few easy things that would be nice if you got them, but are ready to sacrifice instantly. Don't ask for things you couldn't possibly use.
- Don't be surprised if illegal/unpleasant things happen during this process – don't be thrown if/when they happen.
- Be comfortable being your own best advocate. It's sometimes uncomfortable to ask for more – it's fine to try and think of friendly ways to phrase the request, but you should always still ask.
- It is never unwelcome to ask the Chair/Head of your potential new department if there is anything that would help the department for you to include in your requests for support.
 - (This is because hiring is one of the few times when individuals have leverage)
 - Don't sacrifice your own requests to include these
 - Sometimes these requests can include time-shifting resource access between the department and you