

CRGE Graduate Colloquium
Surviving the Academic Jobtalk when you are an Interdisciplinary Scholar
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10. Logistics. Get the logistics for the jobtalk straight when you arrange the interview and prepare accordingly. Questions you want to ask:

- Who will be attending and how large is the audience likely to be?
- How long should my talk be? How long will the Q&A be? When do people have to leave?
- Do they want a formal paper, an informal seminar-style discussion, or do they want you to teach a class?
- What kind of room will we use? (formal lecture hall, classroom, sitting around a seminar table, etc.)
- What A-V equipment will be available?

Get more details as needed. For example, if they want you to teach a class, whose class will it be? Can you choose the topic? Get a copy of the syllabus, etc.

Make sure you hit your time target exactly. Take a clock or timer and use it.

9. Audience research. Scope out your audience. Different audiences require different kinds of presentations. For example,

- a graduate degree granting research I institution may expect a fairly sophisticated presentation of your current research, will want to know what you can offer to grad students, and will closely evaluate how you handle questions and challenges.
- At a branch campus of a state college, they may be less interested in your research than your presentation and communication skills. They may be evaluating what your teaching style would be and whether you will be able to hold your own in large lectures and with a heavy teaching load.
- At a small liberal arts college, you are likely to have students, and maybe a majority of students in your audience. The search committee will be able to evaluate how you engage with them directly.
- You may also have a mixed audience of departmental faculty, faculty from other units, grad students, undergrad students, and sometimes even members of the public.

Pitch your presentation to the particular audience, but don't talk down.

8. Plan ahead. Don't underestimate the time needed to prepare a good talk. You may have a conference paper or perhaps a presentation you made at the final oral defense of your dissertation, but you will probably still need to massage it. Choose your best research material, if that's what's appropriate, and hit the following scholarly expectations:

- present a clear question, methodology, and argument.
- identify your original sources or what your research consisted of
- demonstrate a critical approach to working with sources or with theory
- show that you are aware of other relevant scholarship (including things by members of the department)
- state the significance and excitement of your topic and your results.

It takes most of us a couple weeks to pull together and practice a truly first-rate talk. It's hard to do this at the last minute when you've already booked the interview and are starting to stress out about it.

7. Proper presence. Don't be lulled by the search committee's assurances that informality will reign. Most search committees and units take the job talk very seriously. Make sure you do, too, and prepare carefully and thoroughly.

6. Practice, practice, practice. Presentation style is important.

- Be sure that you have good A-V aids and are in control of your A-V technology. If you use A-V, be sure to talk to the audience, not to the A-V images. Be prepared for their A-V equipment and for its failure—have a back-up plan.
- Project, speak loudly and clearly, look people in the eye, and control the flow of what's going on.
- It's your talk, so don't let people knock you off your rhythm w/interruptions.
- Even if you're reading a paper, practice so that it doesn't seem like you're wedded to your text. Step out to meet the audience.
- Consider having a videotape party w/your friends so you can work on eliminating any annoying nervous habits that break out when you present.
- Include Q&A in your practice sessions with friends and mentors.
- MAKE SURE you hit your time limit perfectly. If you do not want to read a paper but just talk through your points, be aware that usually adds 10 minutes onto a presentation. Don't try to cram too much in. You can also introduce additional content in the Q&A, including extra slides.

5. What is your message? Be clear about what you want to present. Ways of thinking about that:

- What are the three most important points you want the audience to get?
- Say what you're going to argue, argue it, and then make sense of what you argued for the audience, perhaps by fitting it into a bigger body of research and showing what you've accomplished and what remains to be done.
- The beginning, middle, and end of your talk should have fresh substance in them.

Don't dumb down and don't employ mind-dulling repetition.

4. You're a teacher. Remember that some in your audience will be evaluating your teaching style and potential. Aim for an engaging style that reaches out to your audience and draws them in. Use your teaching and presentation strengths—it may be humor, finding just the right witty anecdote, centering your talk on a hot question, asking the audience to fill in the blank, or having knock 'em dead visual aids. Capitalize on what you do best. Be sure to include lively examples or illustrations, so your talk isn't just the presentation of abstract concepts.

3. Interdisciplinarity rules. Do not apologize for your interdisciplinarity, topic interests, approach, or passion for your work. Craft a talk that shows what you're interested in and what you can do and present it with confidence and aplomb!

2. Speak their language. However, you will find it necessary to translate your work for non-specialists and students. Make your presentation accessible to your audience. This is a fair request. Aim for a sophisticated lay audience or a mix of scholars and students, depending on your situation.

- Keep jargon and the esoterica of theory in reserve. Speak in plain English.
- Aim to cover both axes of the "T". Provide some genuine depth of analysis in your talk (the vertical dimension: disciplinary or field depth) but frame your work so that listeners who are not experts can understand how it plugs into bigger and more general questions in the field that they may be familiar with (the horizontal dimension: cross disciplinary reach).
- Be ready to answer technical questions but don't lead with technique.
- It is a fair and expected situation that some nonspecialist in the room will ask you what in the larger scheme of things your work really amounts to. Be sure you're ready with a thoughtful and well-framed answer. The same strategy can be used to answer an overly

narrow question. (How does your work on the prison industrial complex inform scholarship in my narrow and unrelated field?)

1. You rule! Believe in yourself and in your convictions. Present your interdisciplinary work and commitment to social justice w/passion and belief. Interdisciplinarity can work both ways—it can evoke skepticism and ridicule or great admiration and fascination in those unfamiliar w/the approach you're taking. Don't go into your job talk fearing what the reception might be and don't let adversarial respondents get to you. You're not really going to change your whole way of approaching your scholarship and teaching because a couple of audience members disapprove, don't share your politics, or think social justice has no place in academe, are you? It's your job as an almost- or newly-minted Ph.D. to shake things up and to challenge whatever normal science is in your field.

Show 'em who you are and what you can do!