

# Negotiating the Academic Job Offer in the Humanities and Social Sciences

*Notes from a GCS program on February 11, 2004 Featuring:  
Kelly Bronnell, Professor and Chair of Psychology  
Jon Butler, Dean of Graduate School and Professor of History*

## Humanities (Jon Butler)

**One of the defining characteristics of negotiating a job offer in the humanities and some social sciences is that there is not all that much to negotiate.**

- \* Usually not a lot of perks to negotiate (no lab space, etc...)
- \* Benefits are really not negotiable because of IRS rules, however, you should be clear about the benefits that you are being offered, and may certainly ask what the benefit package is - many schools have that information online. There is nothing wrong with asking the department chairperson about the benefit package.
- \* You can negotiate whether you will you get a computer or a printer. Even things like furniture can be something that you might want to ask about. At some institutions you may need to ask about photocopying.

**Salary is negotiable when you have another offer but it is difficult.**

- \* Salary parameters are pretty narrow for starting PhD in humanities and \*soft\* social sciences. Your best leverage is an offer from another school.
- \* Most institutions have a starting salary for starting junior faculties with PhD. And unless there is another offer you have little leverage.
- \* At state schools there is nothing to negotiate with salaries (tight budgets currently and printed salary schedules)

**Ask the chair what you should be asking about.**

- \* This is a good idea and not at all improper to do so. It is in the chair's interest that you get off to a good start.

**What should be your tone with the chair or the department representative?**

- \* You need to have some sense of what is maneuverable.
- \* You need to have some sense of what is appropriate to the institution. The chair will tell you what is appropriate to ask about and negotiate.
- \* You need to remember that you are starting a relationship that might last a very long time with an institution - you need to make a good impression.
  - you need to be respectful
  - you need to do it in a way that will reflect your qualities as a colleague, scholar, and teacher.
- \* Keep the long-term relationship in mind as you think bout short-term negotiation.

## Social Science (Kelly Brownell)

- \* When you negotiate you want to be assertive, not aggressive or passive. You need to know what you can get and ask for it but not be overly aggressive.
- \* Get calibrated; find out about your institutions. You can do this by contacting professional organizations or asking mentors and friends at the institution.
- \* There is a limited salary range that chairs can work with for a new PhD, but ask for what you can because subsequent raises will be calculated against this base.
- \* The key issue is being able to do your work; this should be the most important thing to consider when negotiating. Summer salary, space, lab equipments are all open for dis-



cussions, but you should set priorities for what is most central to your work. It is important to ask for things during these negotiations because in subsequent year the chair will be working for all the faculty with a small pool of money.

- \* Remember that you and the chair wish for the same outcome - you being a member of that faculty. Therefore, there is all the reason to be on good terms with the chair, for both your immediate and long-term needs. If at the end of the process you and the chair like each other you have accomplished your task
- \* Don't bicker too much. Most chairs will be honest about what they can do.
- \* Don't engage in negotiation before you decide that you're seriously interested in the position/institution. In other words, don't use negotiating to help you make a decision about an offer. If you negotiate a lot then turn down the position, people can get angry.
- \* Be gracious to people that you turn down because you will encounter them many times in your career.
- \* Be a nice person, but also ask for what you need.

## Q and A

1.) Supposing you get an offer before you hear back from everyone - how long should you ask them to wait?

- \* Tell institutions lower on your list that they are no longer in consideration.
- \* For the institutions higher on your list, ask the institution about their situation.
- \* Remember that budgetary concerns generally trump the ethic of giving the candidate enough time. They may need to fill a slot before it disappears on them.
- \* Try to hear their words but they will also give you a sense about why they have such a short time. It will also give you a sense of how the institution works.
- \* Two weeks is about average.
- \* Note that \*an agreement to agree\* is not enforceable (governed by state laws and it is not enforceable in any state). They will tell you that they can make you an offer only if you can tell them that you will accept the offer.
- \* Some lower ranked institutions start their offers early to try to pick off good people then you are sort of stuck with a bird in the hand versus or the potential for a better nest. You can let the later institution know about your situation

2.) What should you do about getting a job for the spouse looking for a job at the same or a nearby institution?

- \* Ask the chair. You ask for help (don't demand it) to get placement for a spouse moving with you.
- \* Dean's and Provost's offices are accustomed to this situation and they will try to help you as well.
- \* You should also do some leg work on your own.

3.) Should you let other institutions know that you are interviewing at other institutions?

- \* Don't bring it up but if you are asked then go ahead and answer it truthfully.

4.) Should you raise issues about spouses, children, etc, before the offer?

- \* Not really, you should wait until you have an offer in hand. After you have the offer, then in a polite way you can ask questions.
- \* If asked by them about these things come up with a vague answer - that way you are being honest but not demanding anything.



5.) What about things like mortgage assistance programs?

\* These fall under benefits - they have it or don't have it.

6.) How can you find out whether you are being offered a reasonable salary?

\* Academic salaries are published for public institutions, and The Chronicle of Higher Education also publishes salary information.

7.) Should I wait for a written offer?

\* Verbal contracts are legal but they are difficult to prove or enforce. You have to make a judgment about good faith. Written offers will take variable amounts of time to arrive due to idiosyncratic natures of institutions.

7a.) Is it wrong to ask for something more tangible?

\* No, you can ask a chair to send an email that spells out the most basic aspects of your appointment, such as salary and teaching load and nature of the appointment (i.e. tenure track or not, renewable contract or not, length of time of contract)

8.) Is it appropriate to call up people in the department to ask what you should ask for?

\* It is appropriate although note that Jon Butler said you should not do this without asking the chair. Other professors don't really know the business parameters of the department.

9.) Are teaching loads, leave time, and tenure clock negotiable?

\* At some institutions where teaching load is negotiable (especially if you are coming in with grants) it is fine to ask if there is any flexibility. Most however have pretty strict policies where these things are not negotiable.

