

FMARC · PH.D. WORKSHOP – AUDRA BOONE, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Navigating the Job Market & Building the Network That Sustains Your Career

A guide to interviews, campus visits, and networking



The job market and your professional network as a single connected system are integrated

01



The Market

School types, applications, and what matching looks like from the other side

02



Interviews

AFA/initial interviews and the campus visit, start to finish

03



Decisions

Reading signals, managing offers, and handling competing interest

04



Networking

Co-authorship and external letters — relationships that outlast the search

Know What Each School Is Buying

Research, teaching, and combo schools all expect teaching proficiency — but they weight research very differently, and that shapes everything from your CV to your interview answers.



Research-Focused

Research output drives hiring, tenure, and reputation. Job talk quality and pipeline strength carry the most weight.



Teaching-Focused

Classroom effectiveness and student outcomes are central. Strong research still matters, but it's not the deciding factor.



Combo / Balanced

Departments expect credible output on both dimensions. Candidates need a coherent story for each.



The bar keeps rising: more schools — at every tier — now expect at least some top-tier publications

Before You Apply



Get your advisor on board

Listen to their advice on timing, target list, and positioning. They've seen this cycle before — repeatedly.



Plan to cast a wide net

You may need to apply to a variety of schools across tiers and types. Narrow targeting is a luxury, not a default.



Set your floor in advance

Decide which schools you'd accept over a visiting position or no job at all — before the pressure of an actual offer clouds the decision.



Make your website work for you

Keep it current and professional. It can impact the first impression a search committee forms before the interview.

Getting Interviews: Expect Noise

*Some of this is simply **outside** your control — and accepting that early will save you a lot of unnecessary second-guessing.*



What's Outside Your Control

- Number of applicants per posting
- Specific subject matter a department is targeting that year
- Departmental politics and budget timing



What You Can Influence

Connections — Faculty at your institution can open doors and vouch for you directly.

A polished, current website — Often the deciding factor in whether a committee even opens your CV.

A tight, well-rehearsed pitch — The parts of the process you control deserve disproportionate preparation.

Initial Interviews: Know Your Story



Practice. Then practice again. This is the single highest-leverage thing you can do.




Be ready to answer, fluently and specifically:

Why is this question important?

How does it contribute to the literature?

What do you find?

What is the genesis of the idea?

-  **The RA-or-thinker test:** How you describe the idea's origin signals whether you're an independent researcher or merely executed someone else's design.
-  **Translate for the room:** Interviewers outside your area will be present. Communicating your paper's core so a generalist follows it is genuinely impressive — depth-seekers will ask follow-ups.
-  **Know your whole CV:** Be prepared to discuss any paper you've listed, not only the job market paper.

Beyond the Job Market Paper



Research Pipeline

Interviewers want to see a research program, not a single paper. Be ready to describe what comes next and why it follows naturally.



Research the Department

Know the people and their work — this matters most for the campus visit. Also know the town: asking informed questions signals genuine interest (more relevant for campus visits).



Yes, You Can Ask Questions

Non-obvious questions are welcome — for example, about hiring timeline, if it hasn't been covered. It shows engagement.



Follow-Up Emails

Nice but not necessary. A thoughtful follow-up on a specific point or question signals genuine interest — keep it brief.

The Campus Visit: Close the Information Gap

Departments are risk-averse. They do not want to extend an offer and wait on someone unlikely to accept — and without information, employers tend to infer the worst, on both good and bad signals alike.



Volunteer information proactively

If something would help their decision-making, share it before they have to ask. It's normal for a department to look for reasons a candidate might not be a good fit — give them less room to speculate.



Address fit factors directly

Family considerations, the city or university town, country — if these are relevant to your decision, it's reasonable to discuss them candidly rather than leave the department guessing.

The Job Talk: Three Practical Rules



Practice the opening cold

Rehearse the first few minutes specifically — that's where nerves peak and first impressions form. Be ready to field questions on any part of the talk and do not try to make up an answer



Balance literature vs. contribution

A common misstep is over-investing in prior literature instead of your own paper. Show how you fit and contribute without reciting a laundry list — but know the relevant comparisons cold if asked directly.



Stay composed under pushback

Never appear hostile or visibly upset. It raises real questions about whether you'd be a difficult colleague — or resistant to the feedback every paper needs to get published.

Tip: watch how other successful academics present at workshops and seminars — borrow what works.

Managing Competing Interest



If You Get a Dominating Offer

If you haven't visited yet, offer to still come if logistically possible — or propose another time. Transparency here tends to be respected, not penalized.

If you already have an offer from the dominated school, tell them asap so they can move on to their next candidate.



Don't Placate With Conflicting Signals

Be careful not to give different schools conflicting answers about your preferences just to make each one happy in the moment.

It's a small profession and people talk.

Consistency protects your credibility — and your options — much better than telling each department what it wants to hear.

The Job Market Is a Networking Opportunity

Treat people well — at every school, whether or not it leads to an offer. You never know how someone you meet today might matter tomorrow: as a conference contact, a future co-author, a referee, or the source of your next opportunity.

What Good Relationships Compound Into



Co-Authorship

New methods, faster timelines, and a broader research profile — built on relationships that started as ordinary conversations.



External Letters

Letters carry weight in proportion to how well the writer is known and how well they know your work. That familiarity has to be earned, not requested cold.



Referee Relationships

Reviewing and being reviewed by the same community builds mutual respect — and visibility — over years, not weeks.



Career-Long Visibility

Conference and seminar contacts become the editors, discussants, and colleagues who shape your reputation for a decade.

Habits That Build the Network



Treat every interaction as long-horizon

A school that doesn't make an offer this year may host your future co-author, discussant, or external letter writer.



Show up at conferences and seminars

Discussant slots and Q&A are low-pressure, high-visibility ways to get on a senior scholar's radar — organically. Send comments about paper after the conference.



Ask specific, substantive questions

When you send a paper or approach someone at a conference, lead with a real question about their work, not a generic request for feedback.



Volunteer to referee

Reviewing for journals where senior scholars serve as editors builds visibility and credibility within the community that will write your letters.