

# Duke Philosophy Graduate Placement Guide

## Initial Checklist

For those several years from the Market:

- Make a long-term **plan** for finishing your course and exam requirements, coming up with a special area committee and a dissertation director, developing a dissertation proposal, etc.;
- **Present** papers at conferences (there are a lot of them). Make connections;
- Try to **publish** at least one paper (e.g., from a seminar or part of dissertation);
- Keep **records** of everything you do that may be in your CV or application (teaching evaluations, committees, service, etc.). Think about what you can do now that will make your CV look good.
- Go to the **APA** at least once;
- Begin to think of yourself as a **professional** philosopher, not just a student of philosophy.

For those one year from the Market:

- Determine that you will be at least halfway through your dissertation by the time you begin applying for jobs (i.e., the following October);
- Start working on one central chapter that can serve as your **writing sample**;
- Start developing and writing a **teaching dossier** that includes a teaching statement along with a portfolio including syllabi, descriptions of courses you could teach, course evaluations and/or summaries of evaluations, letters from students, etc.);
- Determine who will write your **letters of recommendation**. There should be at least 4. Interdisciplinary folks will want a letter from a non-philosopher in a relevant field. If possible it would be good for people to have a letter from a philosopher external to our Department, although it is not unusual, and perhaps even is still the rule, for candidates to have

recommenders only from their home institution. In any event, you will need to approach your recommenders during the summer before they will write them, and then send materials to them by September 1.

For those going on the Market:

- Make it absolutely clear to yourself and your recommenders that you will be done by May (if you can defend before the APA, it will help your chances);
- Arrange for your **letters**. The best way to prod your recommenders is to give them two completed chapters from your dissertation in the late summer (as well as your CV) so that they can write detailed letters that can honestly say that you will be done by May and that your project is interesting;
- Complete your **CV** (make it look good in both form and content): after education, short dissertation summary and AOS/AOC, try to get publications and presentations on page 1, then include teaching experience, course work, service and list of references;
- Have people read your **writing sample** and make sure it captures the reader's attention quickly and has a self-contained and interesting argument. It should be 15–20 pages;
- Complete your **teaching dossier** (perhaps two versions, long and short, for different jobs).
- Draft your **dissertation abstract** (1–2 pages), and work on your **dissertation spiel**;
- Join the **APA** (the Department will pay the membership fees);
- Get **Jobs for Philosophers** (available only to APA members) and make a list of all possible jobs to apply for. Apply for any job you think you could *possibly* get and would *possibly* take. Remember that the more interviews and offers you get, the better, even if they are ultimately jobs you might not take;
- Find a way to keep your application materials **organized** so that you make sure that exactly what needs to be sent to each position is sent by the deadline;
- Ask for **help** from family, staff, peers, friends, family, and your pet to make sure your application materials look as good as possible;

- Have a **job talk** complete by the end of November, for presentation to the Department;
- Prepare for your **mock interview** in December before the APA. You will need to have your dissertation spiel ready and to work up something to say about your teaching “philosophy,” experience and abilities;
- Try to treat the process as a game of chance and skill, like Blackjack. Know the rules and tricks to make your chances as good as possible but understand that there are many factors beyond your control. Both the (very) few successes and the (very) many failures you will face should be viewed in this way. The Stoics’ perspective may be the most appropriate here!

## Overview

Students working on their dissertations will need to start to think seriously about whether this is the right time for you to commit to entering the job market. As noted in the APA Placement Brochure appended to this document, the job market process is nearly a full-time job in itself. You do not want to go on the market too early and end up wasting six months of work that could have been devoted to making significant progress on the dissertation. The advice in the APA brochure is that you go on the market only if you can be confident that, say, three chapters of a five-chapter dissertation will be completed by September. It is important to keep in mind, though, that you will need to devote some time during the summer on other tasks (indicated below) involved in preparation to enter the job market. Thus, you will need to be far enough along on the dissertation by the start of the summer so that you can begin your preparations during the summer and still emerge in the fall with a good portion of your dissertation in draft form.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the point that you **cannot** wait until the fall to begin preparations for entering the job market. First, of course, you will need to make significant progress on your dissertations over the summer. Though it is not required that you complete the dissertation prior to the time of the Eastern APA meetings, you will need to have by that time a detailed and vivid outline of the entire thesis, **including** any parts that you have not yet written. In fact, you should spend comparatively more time

working on the unwritten parts because these are in most cases the last chapters of the work, and interviewers (hopefully) will be anxious to hear the end of any story you begin to tell. You should first produce a fairly brief dissertation summary (to be inserted into the CV). Using that as a basis, you should then work out a much more detailed outline of the whole thesis that you can use to prepare yourself for interviews. As you prepare these things, remember that it is not important whether the descriptions you give are accurate representations of the thesis you eventually produce (trust me, no one will check); what is important is that these descriptions be coherent, detailed, and vivid.

The summer provides a prime opportunity for the sort of intensive work required to have command of the dissertation; **Do not** let the opportunity pass you by. As I have indicated, though, one reason it is advisable for you to have a significant portion of the dissertation drafted before summer is that you will need to set aside a significant amount of time during the summer for working on other tasks that are essential for preparing to enter the job market. These tasks include the following:

- (1) Prepare your **CV** and short and long dissertation summaries;
- (2) Arrange for **at least four recommenders** and send them an appropriate amount of material in a timely manner;
- (3) Prepare your **writing sample**;
- (4) Prepare your **teaching dossier**;
- (5) Become a member of the **APA**;
- (6) Prepare for **job interviews**;
- (7) Prepare your **job talk**.

In particular, during the summer you will need to attend to tasks (1)–(3), since the Department is now **requiring** that graduate students who want to enter the job market complete the following **by September 1**:

- Have polished drafts of the CV and short and long dissertation summaries;
- Arrange for at least four people to serve as recommenders, and send them your CV and samples of your research; and

- Have a polished draft of at least one writing sample

These are **minimum requirements**. Note that the Department is now requiring that students send sufficient material to recommenders by **September 1** (preferably earlier), with the amount and nature of the material to be determined in consultation with the dissertation advisor. Also, by this same date students should join the APA, with the Department covering the membership fees (see restrictions on this policy in #5 below).

### **1. CV and dissertation summaries**

The *curriculum vitae* (CV) should be polished and professional looking, with your AOS and AOC prominently displayed. The CV should include a short paragraph-length summary of the dissertation. There is good advice on what to include in the CV in §4 of the “APA Placement Brochure” (available online at <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/proceedings/v79n4/public/placementbrochure.asp>). Also see the Placement Officer or DGS for samples of CVs.

Since the market is so competitive, there is more pressure for candidates to have something on the CV that sets them apart. Typically this includes publications and conference presentations. It may be too late to do much about changing this if you are ready now to enter the job market. But if you are in the early stages of thinking about the job market, you will want to keep in mind the advantages not only for your CV but also for your professional development of presenting papers at conferences. APA divisional meetings can be good venues for presenting your research, though you should keep in mind that deadlines for submission can be far in advance of the meeting date, especially in the case of the APA Eastern Division meetings. Also, you must balance work on conference talks with work on the dissertation. It's great if these kinds of work are complementary, but if they are not you need to keep in mind that the closer the dissertation is to being finished by the time you go on the market, the better.

In addition to the brief dissertation summary to be included in the CV, you need to prepare a longer dissertation summary (up to 3 single-spaced pages), as well as abstracts of any other written work that you would be willing to send out. Check with your advisor

for advice on writing the dissertation summaries.

## **2. Letters of recommendation**

You want at least four letters: three (including, of course, one from the dissertation advisor) that speak to your promise as a philosopher and one that speaks to your teaching. You can have either a separate letter on teaching, or a letter with the issue of teaching as a distinctive part of a more general letter of recommendation. Start thinking now about who you would like to write your recommendation letters. Make sure that your recommenders either now know your work well or will have the chance to know it well far enough in advance of writing their letters. Around **August**, remind them that they promised to write for you, and by **September 1**, provide them with your CV and with the samples of your research that you and your advisor decide is appropriate. In the case of the person writing your “teaching letter,” you will want to provide a copy of your “teaching dossier” (see #4 below). The Placement Officer and DGS will then work to ensure that the letters you request are in on time and appropriate for your file.

You can certainly have more than four letters. But don’t go overboard: there is at most a negligible advantage, and at worst a positive disadvantage, to having an additional letter from someone who does not, in fact, know you or your work well.

Occasionally, applicants have the opportunity to receive a strong letter from someone **outside** the department. If you can do that, it can be a real plus: readers will take such letters seriously, since the objectivity of the philosophers writing them is not as much an issue. One advantage of presenting papers at conferences is that it provides the opportunity to make contacts with people outside the department who are candidates for outside recommenders.

## **3. Writing sample or samples**

It is standard to include with your application a writing sample drawn from the dissertation. However, you will want the sample to have the look of a journal article, indeed, something that has the look of a real contender for publication in the best

journals. When preparing the sample, keep the following fact in mind: the typical evaluator will be reading—usually in an all-to-short space of time—several dozen or possibly over a hundred writing samples. That means that only in rare circumstances will she read a paper from start to finish; you want your paper to be included in those rare circumstances. In order for that to happen, you need to write so clearly and engagingly that it just begs the evaluator to read it carefully.

In order to increase the chances that your sample is read, you will want to ask yourself the following questions.

- Do the first two pages lay out a problem that is intriguing enough to spark the interest even of philosophers who do not specialize in your area?
- Do you lay out the problem clearly enough so that the reader can easily summarize it to herself?
- Do you make clear—at least in outline—what approach you will take to the problem, and why that approach is at least *prima facie* promising and original?

You will want to show your sample to several people in a position to critique it. If you and these other readers can answer “yes” to all of the preceding questions, you are on the way to producing a successful writing sample.

You may submit more than one writing sample, **but only if**

- there is no sacrifice of quality,
- there is no significant cost to the other preparations you must make (especially for your job talk), and
- the topics of the writing samples do not overlap too much.

Meet these criteria, and you will enhance your application by including additional writing samples. But this is optional since it is still acceptable to submit only one sample.

#### **4. Teaching dossier**

It is advisable that you prepare a teaching dossier that includes summaries of computerized course evaluations, samples of student hand-written comments, and a statement of teaching interests. You need to have this ready by **September 1** to send to at least the recommender assigned to discuss your teaching.

## **5. Joining the APA**

At the spring placement meeting you will receive information about becoming a member of the American Philosophical Association. Please apply for membership by **September 1**, and see Lisa Poteet to ask about having the Department cover the cost of membership fees. It is important to become a member for two reasons: (1) you will then receive *Jobs for Philosophers* (and have access to it on-line), and (2) membership enables you to use the placement services of the APA at convention time.

Please note that the Department will pay APA membership and conference registration fees for up to two years for those of our PhD students who are on the market and are in full residence in the Department.

## **6. Interviews**

In job interviews, it is important to look people in the eye. Be calm and friendly; remember, they are considering you as a prospective colleague, and not just as a philosopher. If a question stumps you, admit it; there is absolutely no advantage to trying to bluff your way through, or to “holding your ground,” come what may. Better would be to try to articulate the philosophical reasons behind the fact that the question is stumping you. Above all, try to think of yourself as engaging the members of the interview committee in a stimulating philosophical conversation. That is exactly what they would like to be doing with you.

A typical interview will have four stages:

First, you will give a short summary of your dissertation.

Second, they will ask you a lot of questions about your dissertation and research.

Third, they will ask you about your teaching.

Fourth, they will invite you to ask them questions.

With respect to these stages:

- (1) Your summary should be short and sweet. It should pass the same tests that apply to the opening pages of your writing sample. Remember, this summary gives you your one clear chance to direct the course of the subsequent conversation, since the interviewers will be listening with an ear to spotting tough, interesting questions to ask you. Thus, you should be able to spot, ahead of time, what the most likely such questions will be. Finally, practice your summary, both to yourself, so that you have it down cold, and in front of other people, so that you can get feedback about its clarity and distinctness, and about the questions it is likely to prompt.
- (2) It is impossible to predict with certainty the questions you will be asked. The best advice is probably to focus your attention on the sort of effect you want to achieve in this stage of the interview. First, you want to convey to your interviewers that you have absolute command of the relevant dialectic. Second, you want to convey your awareness of, and deep, deep philosophical interest in, the connections between your areas of research and outlying—even far outlying—philosophical areas: you want to project the image of the committed general practitioner. Why do you want to do both things? Because your future colleagues will be happy if they know you are not just a narrow specialist, but someone they will enjoy talking to. The best way to prepare to this stage of the interview, prior to having your mock interviews with departmental faculty, is to pester friends to mock-interview you, with the dual aims of tripping you up dialectically, and throwing philosophical questions at you from left field (i.e., the kinds of questions that force you to confront connections between the philosophical material you are most comfortable with and other, less familiar material). You should keep in mind that questions during this stage of the interview might concern not only your dissertation research, but also what your next research projects will be. You will want to give some thought about how best to answer questions concerning the latter.

(3) At some point during the interview, you most likely will be asked what you would do if given such-and-such a course: it might be an intro course, or an advanced undergraduate course, or (in the case of schools with graduate programs) a graduate seminar. Rule of thumb: if you have listed something as an AOS, it's fair game at this point for any kind of course; if you have listed something as an AOC, it is fair game for any undergrad course. Past experience suggests that most applicants put off, sometimes until the very moment the question is posed, thinking about what they will say in response. **Do not do this.** You should, in fact, have a short "spiel" to give about **every** combination of course level/topic that you would be prepared to teach. This spiel should **not** consist of a syllabus and set of readings, or even a recitation of topics. Rather, it should begin with a one- or two-sentence statement of what you hope to achieve, pedagogically, in such a course—how students who take it would benefit from it. Then you can follow up by saying, e.g., by reference to a list of topics, **how** you would achieve these goals.

(4) Interviews almost always close with the interviewers asking the candidate if she has any questions for them. Sometimes, unfortunately, the answer is "no"—or worse yet, the depressing "what is your timeline for deciding?" It's worthwhile thinking of something interesting to ask, e.g., about the character of the department, or of the undergraduates, or of the university. The more your questions are based on knowledge of the department and the curriculum, garnered, for instance, from the departmental website, the better. Also, remember that people love to talk about themselves, and about things in their professional life that they care about: give them a brief opportunity to do so.

The Placement Officer will set up mock interviews in house for **early-mid December**. It would be to your advantage to have other practice interviews with friends or faculty before that time.

## **7. Job talk**

First, it would be an advantage for you if the topic of your job talk differs from the

topic(s) of your writing sample(s). Many departments won't demand this, but some might (or at least try to); and at any rate, everyone will be more impressed, *ceteris paribus*, if you give them something new.

Second, the job talk should be based on a finished paper—preferably, a paper that meets the same standards that apply to your writing sample. Keep in mind that some places may ask you to send them your paper ahead of time. You can refuse, but obviously it would be better if you didn't have to.

Third, you should plan on practicing the job talk enough times—informally, in front of the mirror; less informally, in front of friends; least informally, in front of our department—so that you can give it without reading the paper. If you need to read from your notes, that's fine, but the goal should be to present in a less stiff and more conversational manner.

Fourth, provide a clear, uncluttered handout that serves mainly to help your audience keep track of the discussion. You can also feel free to use other visual aids such as Powerpoint, though this is optional.

The Placement Officer will set up times for mock-job talks during **mid-November/early-December**. You will need to have something ready for that time. If you think you do not have anything you feel you can present, you probably are not ready for the job market. Those who receive invitations for campus interviews will give their job talks again sometime after the start of the spring term.<sup>1</sup>

## **Timeline**

April/May

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of §§1–7 were lifted from Ned Hall's helpful guide, "Notes on Preparing for the DJM (Dreaded Job Market)." Also, you may want to compare the advice in these sections to the related sections of the APA Placement Brochure, available on the APA website at <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/proceedings/v79n4/public/placementbrochure.asp>.

The pre-fall placement meeting at which the Placement Officer indicates what is needed for those seeking to go on the job market the following fall. At this time, information on how to join the APA will be disseminated and a suggested schedule for summer work will be reviewed.

### Summer

- Work on the dissertation;
- Work on lining up at least four recommenders: speak with advisor about possibilities;
- Make contact with recommenders before September, and send material to recommenders by September 1;
- Work on the dissertation summaries: have drafts of these by end of July, polished drafts before September;
- Work on the CV: have a polished draft before September;
- Work on writing sample: know topic by end of May, have rough draft by end of July and polished draft before September.

### September

At the first fall placement meeting, the Placement Officer will ensure that all those entering the job market have finished a draft of the CV and dissertation summaries, have secured and sent material to at least four recommenders (by September 1), and have a polished draft of the writing sample. Also, there will be a discussion of the teaching dossier, the importance of joining the APA, and the schedule for mock job talks and mock interviews.

### October

The first issue of *Jobs for Philosophers* arrives the third week of October; it is issued four other times throughout the year (November, January, March, May). Every opening that comes to the department's attention (except through *Jobs for Philosophers*) will be posted as soon as possible on the departmental bulletin board. Many times these announcements precede the announcement in *Jobs for Philosophers* and give more information about the

opening than is reported in *JFP*.

The deadline for sending material to your recommenders is **September 1**. Prior to applying for positions, you are urged to submit a sample letter of application to the Placement Officer or DGS for suggestions as to how it may be improved. You may use the Department copier to duplicate materials to be submitted to prospective employers. However, the Department will **not** pay for copy services done by outside sources. Job applicants are responsible for securing their own stationery, envelopes, etc. and paying for the postage to send their application letters and samples of written work. The Department covers the cost of sending confidential recommendation letters. **Important:** Only those who have indicated to the Placement Officer their intention to enter the job market by September 1 and who have met the September 1 deadlines for preparing material and sending it to recommenders can use departmental services to send letters. Those who do not satisfy these conditions but still wish to enter the job market must arrange for their recommenders to send letters directly to search committees. Since it is onerous for recommenders to mail their letters to numerous departments, this option should be avoided if at all possible.

#### November and later

You should plan to give a **mock job talk** prior to the Eastern APA meetings. The Placement Officer will determine the specific date for your talk. In late November arrangements will be made for a **mock interview** with departmental faculty, to take place in December shortly before the APA meetings. It is advisable that you will have practiced at least portions of both your job talk and your interview prior to performing these before the Department.

#### December

Before the Eastern APA meetings job candidates will meet with the Placement Officer and DGS to review placement procedures at the convention. Prior to this time, candidates must register for the convention, with the Department covering the registration costs. (See #5 above for restrictions to this policy.)

