

# YOU GOT THE JOB, NOW WHAT?

## Some Tips on Negotiation

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*The Switch.* After all the years of study, getting your hands dirty in the archives, trying to convince yourself and your family it will all be worth it, you finally arrive at that delirious moment when a department chair phones you up and offers you a job. After all the years it takes to get a PhD and to find a job, you have probably spent a lot of time feeling blown about by Fortune, but now your fate is truly in your own hands, and the switch from job seeker to job negotiator can be sudden and disorienting. It is now vital neither to over nor under play your hand. You need to become aware of what you can ask for in negotiations, what your potential employer's limitations are, and how the two of you can find an arrangement satisfactory for all concerned.

Before you begin any discussions or negotiations you need to take account of the variables.

1. What is your rank? Beginners have much less negotiating room than more advanced scholars, and thus assistant professors are less likely to load up their first contract with goodies than historians who already have a job, especially a job with tenure. Tenure is usually linked to rank, and if a tenure decision is necessary then the time it takes to get a firm offer can be delayed, sometimes by several months.

2. Do you have other offers? The best way to negotiate is to have more than one offer in hand so that you can sue for the best terms possible. Some chairs and deans resist being forced into a bidding war, but a candidate has every right to get the best deal

possible and that means weighing the merits of competing offers. Post-docs are no substitute for a tenure-track job, but winning a post-doc does offer some leverage in negotiating for a job, especially in requesting research leave as a substitute for turning down a post-doc.

3. What is the nature of the institution offering the job? Well-endowed private universities have more flexibility than do public universities that answer to state legislatures. Flag-ship state universities have more assets than the satellite campuses. Private colleges vary enormously in what they can do, depending on endowment, tuition, and enrollments. Church-sponsored colleges sometimes have very limited financial resources and assume faculty will accept lower salaries as part of a sense of religious mission. Research institutions differ considerably from those that emphasize teaching over scholarship and in the long run tend to pay much better.

4. What is the cost of living in the area? It is easy to find out at <http://www.bestplaces.net/col/>. By comparing cost of living indices you can calculate differences in salaries in real terms. If you are moving from a low to a high cost city, you have more negotiating room for a salary improvement, and for some extremely high-cost areas, such as New York City or parts of California, for housing assistance.

***The Negotiation.*** In negotiating keep three rules in mind.

1. Time is on your side. It is in the interest of the employing institution to get you to sign on the dotted line as quickly as possible. It is in your interest to proceed slowly and deliberately. That does not mean you should delay without a reason, but you should not be pushed to decide. A job offer will usually include a deadline for making a

decision. If you still have other possibilities, you can always request an extension of the deadline.

2. Nothing exists until it is in writing. Promises made over the phone can be meaningless even if they were offered with the best of intentions. E-mail constitutes writing. If after a conversation your potential chair fails to put the terms in writing, send her or him an email stating what you understand the terms to be and ask if that is correct.

3. As a general rule in negotiations, the chair is your friend and the dean is your adversary. Except in some very hierarchic institutions, chairs are members of the faculty who serve for a few years and go back into the faculty. One of the few job satisfactions for a chair is in hiring good colleagues, and thus the chair wants you to accept the offer and to be happy once you arrive. In satisfying what you want, the chair may face equity issues with other members of the department and may hesitate to establish precedents, but giving something to you does not necessarily take anything away from other members of the History Department. In contrast, deans control budgets, which lock them in a zero sum game. Deans have to balance the desires of many competing departments and faculty members. It is the dean's job to save the university or college money and to hire faculty on the terms most advantageous to the institution. Try to get the chair on your side and to serve as your advocate by giving him or her good arguments for why you should get what you want.

What can you negotiate?

1. Salary. An offer should usually include a salary figure. It is not considered polite to ask about salaries until there is an offer on the table, but since future raises are usually a percentage increase of your base, your beginning salary can have long-term

effects on your life. In some institutions, especially state ones, beginning salaries are fixed, allowing little or no room for negotiations, but you can certainly try for more as long as you have good reasons for asking for more. (When I was a chair I once had someone who we were trying to hire send me an email that simply read, “give me more.” That did not work.) Try to figure out the salaries for faculty in your rank at that institution or at comparable institutions. In many states, the salaries of public employees are published. In most private institutions, salaries are a closely guarded secret.

2. Tenure track timeline. Make certain that either in your appointment letter or in the published materials of the college, the time to tenure is spelled out. (I once had a graduate student who never asked about tenure and accepted a job in a college that did not give tenure. Do not assume anything.) If you have already had some teaching experience, pin down whether any of those years will count on your tenure clock. It is in your interest to have the longest time to tenure possible so that you can build up your publishing record and begin to make a professional reputation. If you finish your book sooner than expected it is almost always possible to go up for tenure early. If you have or will have children, you need to determine what effect if child bearing may have on the time to tenure. However, you do not want to be in rank too long because it may later raise questions about your rate of productivity.

3. Research leave and/or sabbatical. Know what the institution’s sabbatical policy is. If you are going to be required to complete a book in order to earn promotion and tenure, does the institution provide you with research leave? If not, will it allow you to go on leave if you can land a major grant? Will the institution make up the difference between the grant and your salary? If you are negotiating with a research institution, you

should inquire whether you can apply for a leave after three or four years of teaching. Do this before you sign rather than wait until after you are there. The terms of a research leave is becoming more and more common in hiring letters at major institutions.

4. Research account. Most historians spend money traveling to archives and living in distant places while doing their research. Ask the hiring institution if it will give you a research account to cover those expenses. These can sometimes be renewable for several years. You will have a better chance of getting a research account if you can demonstrate a considerable financial burden in conducting your research. The advantage of a research account for you is that it is non-taxable and for the institution that it does not figure into your base salary.

5. Computer. If the college does not provide you with a computer, ask for one as part of your hiring letter even if you already have a computer. If you have need of other specialized equipment for your research, ask for it in the hiring letter.

6. Moving expenses. Most institutions will give you a moving allowance, but be sure to ask.

7. Library start-up costs. If you are in an esoteric field or one for which there has not previously been faculty at the hiring institution, you should be able to negotiate a supplement to build up the college library in your field.

8. Housing supplement. If the cost of living or of buying a house in the area is significantly above the national norm, you should inquire about a housing supplement. Some institutions own housing, which they rent out or even sell to faculty at below market rates, but there is usually competition for that housing, so ask at the negotiation stage.

9. Special personal needs. If you have needs for child care, special schools, or medical care that might inhibit the effective performance of your job, now is the time to inquire about what the institution can do to help you. Much more can be accomplished at this stage than later on, but do not be offended if no help is on offer.

***The significant other issue.*** If the hiring committee and chair have played by the rules, they have not asked you anything about your personal life until now. However, most people come to a new job with a spouse or partner who may also have a career. Unless your ability to accept the job depends on there being something for your significant other in the new town, your personal life is still none of the business of your employer, but if you will not be able to accept the job or if your happiness will be compromised without some form of employment for him or her, then you should have an honest conversation with everyone concerned. It has become more and more common for institutions to help new hires find a place for their significant others (including gay partners), and although finding a second job is often difficult to do, especially if it involves finding a second tenure-track academic job, it is not impossible. Some institutions even have a designated officer to help. Finding that second job can make or break a deal, and department chairs are very aware of that, but they usually have limited powers to deliver.

***The basic principles.*** Keep the following principles in mind as you negotiate what may be one of the most important transitions in your life.

1. Know what you want.
2. Be specific in requests and have reasons for them.

3. Think ahead about what kinds of costs you will face in the near future. Do you have student loans to pay? Will you need school tuition for children? Are there research costs for finishing your book?

4. Be honest. Academia is a small world, and everyone knows everything in the end. Department chairs and deans frequently phone one another, so do not assume you can pull the wool over anyone's eyes.

5. You are in charge of your life. Time is on your side.