

Preparing to Interview for an Academic Position

Alexander A. (Sandy) Sawchuk
Professor
Chair, Systems

Ming Hsieh Department of Electrical Engineering

sawchuk@usc.edu

<http://ee.usc.edu>
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089 USA

- S.B. in Electrical Engineering, MIT, 1966
- M.S. in Electrical Engineering, Stanford, 1968
- Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, Stanford, 1972
- Various short-term jobs: NIST, NASA, Comsat
- At USC since 1971
- Administrative jobs
 - Director, Signal and Image Processing Institute (SIPI)
 - Deputy Director, Integrated Media Systems Center (IMSC)
 - Chair, Ming Hsieh EE-Systems

- What are the most important elements of interview preparation?
- What research about the institution should you do before the interview and how, including whom you should contact and what questions you should ask?
- Explore school's web sites thoroughly—academic programs, research programs, faculty
- Talk to students and faculty that you may know at the school where you are interviewing
- Think about how you match the culture and style of the school
- Prepare as though it is an exam - anticipate the questions you will be asked and be ready to answer them. Make up the exam questions yourself - what would you ask?
- Contact your host (department chair, group leader, faculty) and discuss the interview schedule and procedure in advance

- How should you practice for your interview?
- Rehearse your answers to these questions:
 - What is the future of your research area in 3-5 years?
 - What are prospective research funding sources?
 - What courses would you like to teach?
 - What courses are you qualified to teach?
 - What new courses would you develop?
 - What lab facilities, space, and equipment are needed to get started?
- Have your friends role-play the interviewer
- Rehearse your research seminar
 - give the big background picture
 - your own contributions and future work
 - relate it to the institution

- What should you definitely do and definitely not do during your interview?
- Do:
 - Show that you are positive, engaged, prepared, and a good listener
 - Ask a few questions yourself: you are interviewing them as well as vice-versa, for example:
 - What mentoring support is available?
 - What help in applying for research grants is available?
- Don't
 - Criticize the school about any perceived shortcomings
 - Appear arrogant or egotistical

- What should you do post-interview and when/how, including whom you should contact at the interviewing institution and what should be conveyed to them?
- Contact the department chair and/or your faculty host(s) shortly after the interview and tell them how much you enjoyed the visit
- Follow up on any questions that were raised
- Ask them their timetable for making a decision, if this was not previously discussed