

# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Advice

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### Hedging your Bets

The nuts and bolts of going on the academic and nonacademic job markets at the same time

*By Julie Miller Vick and Jennifer S. Furlong*

**Jenny:** Increasingly Julie and I meet Ph.D. job seekers who are worrying about how they'll fare on the faculty job market and, at the same time, planning to apply for nonacademic positions. They've researched career options and perhaps have some relevant work experience. They want—and need—a job. Some have been on the faculty market in previous years without receiving an offer. Others know that their prospects in academe are dim. Some may just want to test the waters outside of faculty work. So they're hedging their bets and running job searches in multiple realms.

**Julie:** Is this perhaps the new normal? Carolyn Steele, career development coordinator at York University in Canada, said Ph.D.'s used to do either an academic search or a nonacademic one. Now many Ph.D.'s are doing both. "I'm finding that the idea of 'both/and' is replacing the 'either-or' scenario," she said—at least as a transition strategy from graduate school to career.

Many doctoral candidates are "passionate about the potential of their work to improve the world in some meaningful way," Steele said, but they are also interested in continuing to teach, mentor, and publish in professional or academic venues. She added: "Learning skills such as how to conduct a needs assessment, proposal writing, and project management can be very helpful complements to this pluralistic approach to career management."

**Jenny:** Some disciplines, such as economics and chemistry, have a long history of accepting both academic and certain nonacademic jobs as viable career options for their Ph.D.'s. Certain scholarly associations have always posted nonfaculty positions in their job listings, or invited nonacademic recruiters to their conferences.

But now a few things are happening that may make it a more natural path for Ph.D.'s across fields to *not* have academe as their sole career focus. Some disciplines are morphing and redefining their boundaries. Some new faculty hires hold appointments in more than one department while others don't hold a degree in the discipline of the department at all. Many fields are asking how doctoral study (and the dissertation) might be changed to prepare students for a [broad range of careers](#). Those efforts are not without controversy. At the same time, in many nonacademic workplaces, there is a ravenous need for data analysis and, thus, more opportunities for people who have such skills, and that pool of people includes plenty of doctoral candidates.

We've written frequently about how to focus your job search on nonfaculty careers, including our four-part ["Switching Sides" series](#). Here we want to talk about how to manage two different kinds of searches simultaneously.

We want to be honest: Managing two different types of searches at one time (while working on research or teaching) is *a lot* to balance. And you may find that, in spite of all your hard work, your dual searches leave you with no tangible offers at the end. It takes time to find work that is a good fit for you. After years of focusing on academe, once you start looking for a nonfaculty position, it can take one or two jobs to get you to what you really want to do.

**Jenny:** One of the things that make dual searches so challenging is the unusual and rigid timing of the academic job market. Few career paths have a timeline that involves sending your application materials at a specific time of year—usually in the late

summer and into fall—and not starting the position until a full year later.

It may take certain federal agencies that long to finalize a hire because of security clearances or budgetary issues, and some corporate recruiters who visit campuses work in that way, too. But for most nonfaculty positions, you will need to apply nearly as soon as you see the posting in order to be considered—or it will absolutely pass you by. If you receive an offer, you will most likely be expected to start work fairly soon after an offer is made.

Below, we've sketched out a brief timetable of how you might conduct your simultaneous searches. Depending on your discipline, the exact timing might change a bit, but the steps you should take will be similar. It's very likely that you will devote the fall to applying for faculty positions; nonetheless, you should carve out a bit of time in those months to do the networking that can help you transition to nonfaculty positions. Use this timetable to assist in your planning:

### **THE SPRING BEFORE GOING ON THE JOB MARKET**

- *Faculty search:* If you've never been on the academic job market before, now is the time to talk to faculty members and peers who have been through the process about what to expect. At the same time, push hard on moving your research forward.
- *Nonfaculty search:* If you are planning to do an [internship](#) or part-time work over the summer, now is the time to begin pursuing those opportunities.

### **THE SUMMER BEFORE GOING ON THE JOB MARKET**

- *Faculty search:* Start drafting the written materials for your applications—[your CV](#), [cover letters](#), [statements](#) of teaching and research philosophies, and other documents. You will want to have those documents in shape by the end of the summer so you are not overwhelmed by drafting them in the fall, when you face many other work responsibilities.
- *Nonfaculty search:* Start a LinkedIn Profile. And think strategically about

your [network of contacts](#) inside and outside academe.

## AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

- *Faculty search:* Complete your application materials and start applying for tenure-track and nontenure-track faculty positions. Also note the deadlines for academic postdoctoral jobs and begin applying to the ones that could make you a stronger candidate in the future.
- *Nonfaculty search:* You'll probably be overwhelmed by the task of sending out faculty job applications and working on your research. Even so, start reaching out to people in fields of interest with whom you might conduct [informational interviews](#).

## OCTOBER

- *Faculty search:* Continue to apply for faculty positions and submit your applications before or by the deadlines.
- *Nonfaculty search:* Schedule your first informational interview. Start reading nonfaculty job descriptions, if you haven't already, to get a sense of what types of careers are out there and what skills are required. Develop [a résumé](#) (or more than one) that is targeted to the field or fields that interest you.

## NOVEMBER TO JANUARY

- *Faculty search:* If you're lucky, this period is when you'll be managing your telephone, video-conference, conference, and other types of [preliminary interview](#).
- *Nonfaculty search:* By January, if you haven't already, start narrowing down the types of nonacademic positions in which you are interested. Follow up with contacts that you may have made during the summer or fall. Begin to apply if you see any positions that are of interest to you.

## JANUARY TO MARCH

- *Faculty search:* If you are invited for a [campus interview](#) (or even more than one), you'll need to work hard on preparing for your job talk, learning about the institution, and getting the details of your trip in order. If you're invited to a campus interview during this time, you'll probably be focusing most of your energies on that opportunity.
- *Nonfaculty search:* If you don't receive any campus interviews, you'll want to increase both the number of nonfaculty positions to which you are applying and the amount of time you are spending networking with

people outside of academe.

## FEBRUARY TO APRIL

- *Faculty search:* If you've received a tenure-track offer, congratulations. If not, you may keep your eyes open for other types of opportunities, such as postdocs or visiting professorships, particularly if you're not sure you're ready to leave the faculty track yet, or if you're finding that your transition into a new career is likely to take more time than you expected.
- *Nonfaculty search:* As you're sending out applications (and networking!) for nonfaculty positions, we hope that you are seeing a few signs of interest and perhaps even getting a few interviews. If not, use the information you've gathered from networking to assess your search. Is the new career you've chosen a viable option for you? Will you have to start a bit lower in terms of salary and responsibilities in order to find what you are looking for? Keep in mind that [your first job](#) will not be your last job.

## APRIL TO JUNE

- *Faculty search:* Whether or not you receive a faculty job offer, make sure that your research and your dissertation are still moving forward. Now is also the time to decide whether you'll go on the faculty market again.
- *Nonfaculty search:* If you've received an offer for a nonfaculty position, consider it carefully: Is it a viable opportunity that will allow you to build new skills? Are you willing to commit to at least two years of working in this position? Does it offer opportunities for advancement? Does it allow you to fulfill personal goals (such as moving to a city you love, or staying close to family)?

## THROUGHOUT THE SEARCH

- *Faculty search:* Touch base regularly with your adviser and dissertation committee, and or with a career counselor.
- *Nonfaculty search:* Touch base regularly with a career adviser or a friend who has done a similar search in the recent past. Discussing your search and getting feedback and suggestions can be very helpful.

**Jenny:** One of the most important things for you to do is [develop a résumé](#). A résumé is not a CV and it should not simply be a revised CV. Instead, it should be a new document that you create to best demonstrate your skills, experience, expertise, and interests within

the context of the field to which you are applying. The important words there are: "within the context of the field. The best résumés have a focus.

**Julie:** An excellent article by [Rachel Leventhal-Weiner](#) entitled "[Don't Fear the Résumé](#)" may be helpful to you as you think about your own. Rachel has been conducting two job searches this year: a faculty job search and a job search in another field. She writes: "Preparing both documents has helped me define my professional identity and figure out what sorts of positions I really want (and don't want). Some people are easily able to do more than one thing at a time; for others, they need to focus on and complete a task before starting something else. However, the energy you generate for one job search can inform and energize your other job search."

**Jenny:** Many candidates will want to give their all to the academic job market before embarking on a different career path. While we very much understand that approach, we would encourage anyone with that mind-set to take the time—while you're in graduate school and on the faculty market—to do the very important networking that can help you build possibilities in nonacademic fields.

It can take a long time to shift gears in your career, more time than you might expect. And, no matter how strong your training, employers may expect you to build some experience in their field before you can be truly competitive as a candidate. Many Ph.D.'s we know have had a transitional year or two in which they are balancing things like being an adjunct along with doing professional work in a new career field.

There is no shame in that. (Just ask me about my years as a coat checker at an upscale restaurant—frequented by undergraduates I used to teach, no less—and the time I spent processing payment transactions for a small nonprofit). These temporary gigs can also

give you a chance to extend your network well beyond your normal academic circles.

Hedging your bets and conducting dual job searches is not giving up on an academic career. It's just being smart and open to the idea of a mix of possible futures.

*Julie Miller Vick recently retired as senior associate director of career services at the University of Pennsylvania and now works there part time as a senior career adviser. Jennifer S. Furlong is director of the office of career planning and professional development at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. They are the authors of The Academic Job Search Handbook (University of Pennsylvania Press).*

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