U.S. Academic Job Applications

Cover Letters

CV

Research Statement

Teaching Statement

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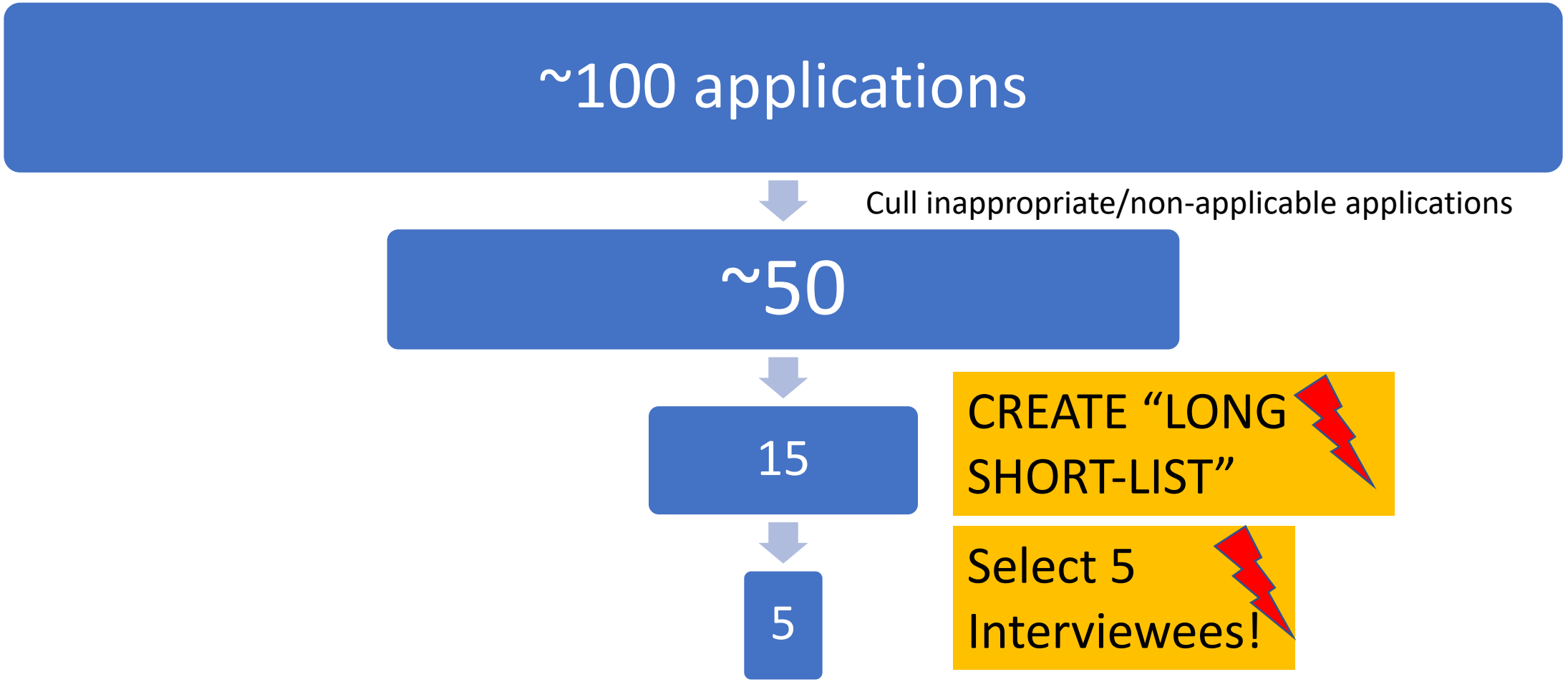
Rule #1: Give them no excuse

- There are far too few jobs, and far too many excellent candidates in most searches – you MUST put your best foot forward



Excuses include

- Typos
- Bad Grammar
- Incomplete application or late application
- Badly formatted references
- Anything that makes your application look anything but perfectly professional
- GET A PROOF-READER (preferably two)
  - Non-experts are particularly helpful for this

How your application ~~is~~ **should be** evaluated

This is a sample grading spreadsheet (credit: University of Michigan Advance site)

Please indicate which of the following are true for you (check all that apply):

- ☐ Read applicant's CV
- ☐ Read applicant's statements (re research, teaching, etc.)
- ☐ Read applicant's letters of recommendation
- ☐ Read applicant's scholarship (indicate what): _____

Please rate the applicant on each of the following:	excellent	good	neutral	fair	poor	unable to judge
Evidence of research productivity						
Potential for scholarly impact / tenurability						
Evidence of strong background in [relevant fields]						
Evidence of [particular] perspective on [particular area]						
Evidence of teaching experience and interest (including grad mentorship)						
Potential to teach courses in core curriculum						
Potential to teach the core curriculum on [particular area] (including creation of new courses)						

Criteria on which you are evaluated

From an actual previous DTM search: graded as high/medium/low

Productivity	Leadership	Creativity	Breadth	Fit

Criteria on which you are evaluated

Additionally:

- Teaching, service, etc, plays a secondary (but non-negligible) role UNLESS the job is at a teaching-focused college (i.e. non-R1). Then it plays a major role.

- MOST departments ***want you to get tenure*** – they risk losing the faculty salary line if you don't.

- In order to get tenure you need to:
  - Be able to write strong, high impact **papers** (preferably lots of them)
  - Be able to **get funded** to support your research and students
  - Check boxes on adequate teaching and service

- They will be looking for evidence in your application that you can do these things

The Cover Letter

- This is your chance to tell the search committee why you are perfect for this search in this department

- If you're not exactly what they seem to be asking for, this is your chance to tell them why they should hire you (never admit that you're not what they meant all along, though).

- This is also a place you can demonstrate that you've read up on the department, that you want to move to XYZ state/city, that this is just the right fit for you and for them.

- Of all of the job documents, this will be the most tailored to the specific job ad.

- DO YOUR HOMEWORK! READ UP ON THE DEPARTMENT

The CV

- Should be well organized
  - Education (reverse chronological order)
  - Professional Experience (reverse chronological – focus on related job experience – not that McDonalds job you had in high school)
  - Peer Reviewed Publications (reverse chronological)
    - Include “Accepted” or “In-Press” and give dates of acceptance and doi if you have it
    - DO NOT INCLUDE “in prep” or “submitted” in this section
    - DO NOT INCLUDE conference abstracts here
    - Choose standard format that includes volume #, page #s, and doi.
  - Papers in progress
    - If you have papers that are “in-prep” enough that you can provide a decent manuscript/draft upon request
    - For submitted papers, offer to make available on request

The CV

- Should be well organized
  - Grants (if you have them – these can be anything that supported you or your science)
  - Honors (if you have them)
  - Invited talks
  - Conference Abstracts
  - Service

- The CV should include at the top your name, street address, phone number, email address, and your website
  - DO NOT INCLUDE: Date of Birth/Age, Photograph, Gender, Marital Status, Children, or any similar type of personal information.

The Research Statement

- Anyone can describe their research

- Far fewer young scientists can do a good job explaining why what they do is important for both science and society

- This is a great way for you to distinguish yourself:
  - What do you do (in one sentence)?
  - What are the big research questions that get you up in the morning?
  - What are the more detailed questions we need to address to move forward?
  - How does what YOU do address those questions?
  - What is cool/special/intriguing/new/etc about YOUR research past/present?
  - Tie it back – did you get answers to those detailed questions? What does that mean for the big picture questions?
  - What are your plans to tackle these big questions moving forward (i.e. next 5 to 10 years)?

Research Statement Common Mistakes

- No Context
  - The committee may understand why what you do is interesting, but if they don't think you can sell it to the paleontologists in the department, they won't short list you.

- Failure to emphasize what YOU do, have done, and will do
  - If you talk too much about science in general and don't point out "and THIS is the part I am responsible for", people will wonder what it is that you actually DO on a day-to-day basis

- Failure to describe an exciting and plausible path forward
  - You need a good 5 – 10 year plan. It doesn't need to be set in stone, but you need to say what you're going to do to get tenure

Research Statement Common Mistakes

- Advisor 2.0
  - You need to make clear that what you want to do once you get to Awesome University is distinct from what your PhD and Postdoc advisors did
  - Make it clear that you think for yourself and that you want to pursue research that they are not doing.

- Unrealistic goals
  - A lack of realism suggests a fundamental lack of understanding. Don't overstate your goals.

Research Statement: Figures

- This may be a field specific topic
- For Astronomers: You should have them
  - Figures should not be as detailed as in a paper
  - Figures should tell your exciting research story and highlight your contribution
  - Captions should tell a story to non-experts: why the work is important
- For Geophysics/Geochemistry: it's less common
  - If it would help to describe a crucial result, you can include it.
  - Same rules would apply
  - Check with your mentor/advisor/peers to see what the norm is for your field

Research Statement: Tailoring

- Acknowledge facilities (or workarounds) available at the institution
- Acknowledge pioneers on the current faculty
- Know whether a department tends toward fiefdoms or collaboration, but distinguish yourself

The Teaching Statement

Goals:

- There will be at least one person on the search committee or in the department who really mostly/only cares about teaching and pedagogy. You want this person to be rooting for you, or at least not advocating against you.

- You don’t have to have a ton of experience to do this – you need to demonstrate that you CARE.

- You demonstrate that you CARE in a few different ways, depending on your experience and circumstance…

The Teaching Statement

Demonstrating that you CARE about teaching:

1) Describe your teaching experience not just as a list, but as a transformative learning experience for you.

2) Describe the teacher you want to be.

3) If you don't have a ton of teaching experience, don't overstate what you know. Instead, look up what kind of resources the university has to help new faculty become better teachers. Most universities have these…

The Teaching Statement

Demonstrating that you CARE about teaching:

4) Describe what you can do for the department:

* "Service Teaching" – the big intro classes
* Undergraduate Majors - helping to teach the basics
* Upper level undergrad/1st year grad classes
* Graduate Seminars

5) Importantly – don't say you're going to teach a class that is already offered. If you're unlucky, Professor Grumpy on the search committee will have decided that this is His or Her class to teach and doesn't want you nosing in on his/her turf. (See Rule #1)

6) Instead, OFFER to help with classes such as …. (list classes they offer), then offer to help develop new ones such as …. (list classes they don't offer but should).

The Teaching Statement

Don’t forget about MENTORING – A big part of your job will be “developing a thriving externally funded research program” – that means grad students.

If you’ve ever mentored anyone in research, talk about that. If you haven’t, you should at least talk a bit about how you know how important it is to be a diligent and supportive advisor.

Questions? Comments? Concerns