

The Ins and Outs of Negotiating in Academia

Kudos on having an offer in hand.
But that's just the starting point for negotiations. Our experts tell you how to weigh the terms and broker a better outcome.



Vitae[®]
For Your Academic Life

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Go Ahead, Haggle

Fancy CV paper and six trips to Kinko's: \$124. Interview apparel: \$250. Choosing not to negotiate: \$150,000.

By *Rebecca A. Bryant and Amber Marks*

If you're like most academics, you either negotiate a job offer poorly, or you don't negotiate at all.

As graduate career counselors at a large research university, we work with numerous Ph.D.'s applying for academic jobs. Many of them know how to craft a persuasive cover letter and a compelling CV. They know how to prepare for an interview. But when the job offer comes, they are fairly clueless about what to do next, so clueless that they don't understand what they are sacrificing — in money, time, and resources — by failing to negotiate.

We think that new Ph.D.'s are reluctant to negotiate out of fear. At a recent workshop, one graduate student asked us: "If I try to negotiate, will they rescind my offer?"

In the tight academic job market, that might seem like a legitimate concern. But let us reassure you: Most employers don't withdraw job offers because a candidate attempts to negotiate. In fact, most employers expect you to negotiate. The hiring process in academe is long, costly, and labor intensive. By the time a search committee makes an offer, it is eager to be done and to ensure that its time wasn't wasted. It's in the institution's interest, even in this market, to satisfy at least some of your requests.

The cost to you of failing to negotiate your first faculty position can be significant. Here's just one example: Miranda, a recent Ph.D. in the social sciences, negotiated a 6 percent increase in salary over what her new department initially offered her, from \$49,000 a year to \$52,000. If we assume she enjoys a 30-year career and receives annual raises of 3 percent, the extra salary that she negotiated would translate into an additional \$143,000 over what she would have earned without negotiating.

So, now that you know that you should negotiate, we're sure

you're wondering how. Let's start with the questions we hear most often:

When do I negotiate? Wait until you have received an offer. If salary and "negotiables" (see below) are mentioned in your interview, try to refrain from accepting any set circumstances (perhaps inadvertently) at that time. Receiving a formal offer sets the stage for your negotiation process.

What do I do when the offer comes? Well, don't accept it immediately, even if it is your dream job with an unbelievable salary. Ask for the offer in writing and establish a mutually agreeable period for you to respond. Most students underestimate the time they will need to contact other institutions where they are on the shortlist and make a decision.

Once you have an offer letter in hand, examine it carefully to be sure you understand what you're getting and, in turn, what is expected of you. Will you have a nine-month appointment? Is the salary competitive? Is it a tenure-track position? Do you have access to detailed information on the benefits package? Must you reply by a certain date? When will you be expected to start? What will your teaching load be, and are there summer teaching obligations? If anything is vague or confusing, ask questions.

How do I prepare to negotiate? The first step is to gather as much information as possible. Fear of the unknown dissuades many students from trying. You can reduce your anxiety by following these tips:

Put yourself in the institution's shoes. How large is your discipline? Is the department making the offer well-respected? Is the institution having any financial difficulties or undergoing any changes in administration? A recent Ph.D. in chemistry learned shortly after her interview that the university in question had received a generous private donation to renovate

campus facilities. She kept that fact in mind when she negotiated for laboratory space and equipment for her research.

Identify the possible objections. What questions might the department ask you in response to your counteroffer? One student was surprised when asked, “Why would you need a graduate assistant? You’ve managed without one until now.” Think through the possible scenarios, and make notes for yourself.

Spend time researching the salary. Talk with your adviser and peers to get a sense of what seems reasonable in your discipline. State university salaries are often public record. Recognize that cost of living varies considerably and usually factors into salary negotiation.

List your priorities. What is the bottom-line salary you would accept? What would be ideal? One recent graduate who got an offer from a university in a major city knew she could not afford to rent an apartment there and still pay off her student loans unless her position paid at least \$40,000. With \$50,000, however, she would be able to buy a home. Another Ph.D. worried that teaching summer courses would prevent him from completing his book and therefore jeopardize his chances of winning tenure. Ideally, he wanted a semester free from teaching obligations within his first two years.

Contact institutions where you remain on the shortlist.

Let them know you’ve received an offer and will need to make your decision in the weeks ahead. Inquire about the progress of their search, and with luck, they will be inclined to promptly indicate your status in their search.

What is negotiable? That depends on the limitations of the institution and on your own creativity. A social scientist living apart from her family for a year negotiated to have her Fridays free from teaching to allow her more frequent travel. For most new professors, though, the first and most obvious condition would be salary. Other possibilities include the deadline for your decision, moving expenses, benefits, job opportunities for your spouse or partner, housing arrangements, the start date, teaching load, teaching schedule, committee work, advising load, graduate-student assistance, laboratory or office start-up packages, summer commitments, conference and travel support, clerical and administrative support, and access to child-care and fitness facilities.

How do I negotiate? You have more leverage when you have more than one offer. However, if you’ve done your homework, you can negotiate quite successfully with just one. Depending on your situation, and the flexibility of the institution, some of the following strategies should help you negotiate:

Consider the offer you have in hand, and others you may anticipate. Rank them. Realize that you can ask for more time. Ask for more time than you desire, and settle on something in the middle. Often, you will need additional time to be able to research your options and follow up with other institutions. Negotiate with your least desirable institution first. Once you’ve established the conditions under which you would join its team, contact your first choice and propose your counteroffer.

Ask for more than you expect to receive. Be willing to consider a compromise in response to your counteroffer. A candidate in the life sciences requested two graduate assistants, imagining the research progress she could make with the added help. While she was only allotted one student for the first year, she knew even that would be beneficial.

If you must, forego one-time expenses to net a greater salary increase. Even small increases in salary can add up over time. Remember, your starting salary affects your future salary. Many institutions have standard cost-of-living adjustments and few opportunities for significant increases. One-time expenses are much easier for an institution to offer than salary increases, though less advantageous for you. If you aren’t able to negotiate more salary, ask for conference travel, relocation support, or other short-term expenses.


Determine your deal breakers. Be prepared to reject the offer if the terms are unacceptable to you. Think about how you would advise a friend or colleague in the same situation. We are often better advocates for others than we are for ourselves.

Don’t fixate on one aspect of the offer. We know of a humanities Ph.D. who needed \$5,000 more in salary and was willing to forego a relocation allotment. However, the university would only increase her starting salary by \$2,000. Instead, she sought additional start-up money for her office. Understand your priorities but be flexible and open to compromise.

Request the newly accepted terms in writing. If they are not in writing, they’re not yours. Gary, an assistant professor at a major research institution, negotiated for a semester free from teaching to work on his research, but neglected to secure that promise in his offer letter. Two years later, he was frustrated when his request for a leave from teaching was denied.

Above all, remain calm, professional, and honest. Whether or not you join the faculty, you are likely to interact with the people you’ve met at future events, conferences, or even job interviews.

Your institution wants you to be a permanent hire. It’s your re-



sponsibility to ensure that you'll have the time, money, and support you need to develop your teaching skills, pursue your research, publish, and provide committee service. With preparation and practice, negotiation will become invaluable in other aspects of your life as well.

Remember, the worst they can say is no.

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Getting Most of What You Want

Here's some advice on what to ask for and how to do it.

By Mary Morris Heiberger and Julie Miller Vick

Question: Because of a phone call someone made to him, my adviser is certain I'm going to get a job offer from a university that was one of my top choices. I think I'll want to accept this offer, but I want to take it under the most favorable conditions I can negotiate. What, if anything, can I ask for? How, and when, do I do it?

Mary: We're glad you asked now, before even receiving the offer, because the best time to let an employer know that you want to negotiate is when you get that phone call telling you a written offer will come in the mail.

Julie: That means you need to think carefully before the call comes about what you are going to say. You should go over everything you know about the position, considering what is satisfactory about it and what is not. Then you should prioritize those conditions that you want to negotiate. What conditions are most important to you, and what can you live without?

Mary: Market data can help you make a compelling argument for a salary increase. Do your research ahead of time. *The Chronicle* publishes annual data on faculty salaries. Check out the latest results [here](#). Your professional association may provide additional data. A private institution does not need to make its salary information public, but at state institutions, salaries are matters of public record. If you're anticipating an offer from a state school, perhaps you can find the exact figures for the department you hope will hire you.

Julie: State institutions traditionally have less flexibility with salary than private institutions. If you're not happy with the average salary for the job you will be offered, you should realize that it is unlikely you can negotiate anything very significant. Start thinking about other things that may be negotiable. That way, if you learn that the salary is both not satisfactory and nonnegotiable you will be ready to discuss other conditions.

Mary: It's also likely that if you're in a high-demand field, employers will be more flexible than they are in a tighter market. In any event, do your best to get competitive salary figures and flesh them out with whatever first-hand information or impressions you can gather from your professional network.

Julie: As you think about and discuss salary, consider its long-term trajectory as well. Some well-known institutions award small raises at the beginning, but grant more sizable increases as professors move into senior-level positions. Other institutions offer relatively small salary increases as faculty members are promoted. It's fair to ask the hiring department to tell you the salary differences between new and senior faculty members.

Mary: The more research you've done before the offer comes, the more easily you can respond when it does. The very first thing you should do is to express pleasure at receiving the offer. If you feel comfortable and ready to let the person making the offer know that you'd like the offer improved, you can say something like, "The salary is a little lower than I expected. Do you have any flexibility on it?"

Julie: Most likely the person with whom you are speaking will be able to answer. It is also possible that he or she may want to check with someone else before saying yes or no. Be prepared to state what would be a more acceptable salary if you are asked. Both of you will understand that you're probably asking for a bit more than you expect to be offered.

If you find you need time to digest the information you are getting, it is acceptable to say that you would like to think about the offer and set up another time very soon to continue the discussion. Reiterate your interest in the job and tell the person you will call back on the agreed-upon date.

Mary: We're assuming here that you get the offer via a tele-

phone call, because that's what most commonly happens. However, if the offer comes to you by letter or email, take a few hours to collect your thoughts and then call the person making the offer. Responding immediately emphasizes your interest in the job. Resist the temptation to try to conduct your negotiations by email. It may feel more comfortable at the time, but you'll miss the nuances available in a conversation. Also, you'll have no control over whether your email messages are forwarded, and you really don't want to make the details of the negotiation potentially public.

Julie: Let's talk about some of the other matters you might want to negotiate in addition to salary. They include reduced teaching load in your first year, a new computer or special laboratory facilities, relocation costs, job-hunting assistance for a spouse or partner, and funds for summer travel or research. You should already have an accurate idea of the teaching load. If the other items have not been covered, find out about them. The more information you have, the better you will be able to present your case and the more likely you will be to get what you want. When you do finally receive your contract, it's a good idea to make sure that, in addition to stating your salary, it lists all of the other perks you've negotiated.

Mary: You may also be concerned about standard employee benefits, such as insurance, retirement plans, and family tuition reimbursement. These are usually institution-wide and nonnegotiable, but it's important to know what they are, because they're part of the compensation package. You can get this information from the institution's human-resources office or website, and you probably should, as the person negotiating with you from the department may or may not have all the details straight.

Julie: One thing many candidates would like is job-hunting assistance for a spouse or partner. Be aware that, unless you are very senior, such assistance is more likely to consist of contacts than of an offer of an actual position.

Mary: As you go into the negotiation process, always keep focused on what you really want. For example, if you're a scientist applying in a highly competitive research setting, there may be some minimal start-up package without which you truly cannot do the research program you've established for yourself. Getting what you need for your lab will be a better investment in your own future than will a few extra thousands of dollars in salary. It's unlikely that you'll get everything you would like to have, and if your major requests are met, you can sour a future working relationship by continuing to ask for trivial item after trivial item.

Julie: Focus on the fact that the people you are negotiating

with may be people you work with for decades. Don't make them regret their decision to offer you the job. While you should definitely seek the conditions that will best enable you to do your job well, you should also remember that most people don't find every aspect of their jobs ideal, and they live with that. You will too. You also should think about the kind of institution you're moving to. If you have been at a prestigious research institution for your Ph.D. or postdoc, and are accepting a position at any other kind of institution, there simply won't be the resources to provide you with a research environment like the one you came from.

Mary: So, now that you've got your thoughts in order about what you want, how do you proceed? Carefully. What makes a negotiation possible is that neither party is exactly sure what the other person will do. Cultivate that uncertainty about your own plans. Don't make absolute statements about what you will and won't accept unless you're prepared to have the offer withdrawn. Be ready to explain why what you want is reasonable. There are basically two kinds of facts you can use to support your argument. One is competitive salary data, the closer to home, the better. I've known candidates applying to state schools who've been able to point out that a salary offer is low in comparison with other salaries for jobs at the same level in the same department. That is a compelling argument. The other kind of reason comes from being able to explain the "value added" of hiring you over someone else. What extra things can you bring to the department? Will you help it expand its curricular offerings, bring in grant support, attract new students to the major?

Julie: That said, one of the most likely reasons you'd be given more money is because you have a second offer. So be prepared to be asked, "Do you have any other offers?" It helps if you do have an offer with a better compensation package. Whether you choose to name the institution is up to you, but you can certainly say something like, "As a matter of fact, I do, at a substantially higher salary. But, as I said in my interview, I am extremely interested in joining your department. So I won't make salary the deciding factor, but I am interested in knowing if there's anything you can do to increase the salary some."

If you don't have another offer — or if the salary for that offer is no higher — the best you can do is probably to say something like, "Based on what I've learned about the field, I feel I'm a competitive candidate in the range we're discussing."

Mary: Negotiating may involve less conversation than you imagine if you've never done it before. The main reason a department will improve its offer is simply that they have the resources, want you badly enough, and believe they need to do so in order to get you to accept. So in many cases, asking is

all you need to do. Don't feel that you're doing something unexpected, because many departments will assume that you won't accept their first offer and will keep a little something in reserve to sweeten it later on. On the other hand, if a department tells you flat-out that the package offered is absolutely non-negotiable, realize that continuing to push may cost you the job. Most people who will negotiate indicate at least some flexibility. Some departments truly can't improve their first offer, and in these cases you simply need to make up your mind whether to say yes or no.

If you haven't negotiated before, it may help to practice with a friend, a career counselor, or a faculty member, just as you practiced for your interviews. For no-risk practice, go to a secondhand store and try to buy an inexpensive item for less than its listed price.

Julie: You can also remind yourself that at the end of a successful negotiation, both parties are pleased. The department that needed to work a little harder to attract you may be that much happier to have succeeded in landing you.

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The Best Problem: Dealing With More Than One Job Offer

Having multiple suitors is an enviable position but one that carries its own kinds of confusion, pitfalls, and anxiety.

By David D. Perlmutter

In the movie *Broadcast News*, William Hurt's smooth character, rapidly promoted toward anchorman stardom, asks his less-successful schlumpy colleague, played by Albert Brooks: "What do you do when your real life exceeds your dreams?"

Brooks replies: "Keep it to yourself."

Yes, it's tough on the job market for tenure-track positions. Nevertheless, thousands of tenure-track offers are made every year across the disciplines, and contract negotiation is the important next step. But what if you get more than one offer, or anticipate another one? I have no national statistic on that occurrence, but I have experienced and heard from many department chairs that top candidates for assistant professorships often receive multiple offers.

Indeed, as I write, I know of at least a dozen doctoral students and rookie faculty members who are in that very situation. Even if you are not, maybe at some point in your career you will be the object of multiple offers, or in the position of weighing a retention package against a tempting exit to another university.

If you are in such an enviable situation, you should, of course, feel good about it. But there are also issues to resolve and protocols to follow.

Tell the truth. Job hunting, especially for the novice, is stressful, and people under stress can behave outside the realm of good conduct. The temptation to puff your prospects, for example, is almost too strong to resist. A typical example: During a campus visit, the chair of the department describes its timetable for making a hire and then asks, "Will that work for you? Are you a finalist somewhere else?" Well, the pins-and-needles perched candidate may stretch the definition of finalist from reality (a couple of conference interviews) to fantasy fulfillment ("I have some campus visits coming up soon" or even "I have

another offer on the table"). Wouldn't a bit of exaggeration help move things along?

Just don't do it. Saying you are a finalist — or worse, falsely claiming that you have another offer when you don't — is unethical and risky. Certainly, the lie might add luster to your candidacy ("others want him so he must be good") and even speed up the process ("we don't want to lose her; let's go to the dean and see if we can't move forward earlier"). But the reaction may be just the opposite: "We can't afford a bidding war or a failed first-choice hire; let's move on to someone else." In addition, the old-fashioned gossip network and the newfangled wikis and social-media job sites are pretty efficient in revealing the status of searches. Liars get found out.

Don't burn bridges. With multiple offers on the table, it's tempting to get cocky: "So, after all this time at someone else's mercy, now I have the power! Mwa-ha-ha!"

First, on an ethical plane, don't become that which you resented. Second, as a practical matter, you have not been hired yet. Negotiations do collapse. You don't want to stretch the patience, sanity, and budget of your potential employers beyond their walk-away point.

Even if it is clear that one program's offer is far superior to another, treat them both with respect. Be polite and pleasant. Academic disciplines are small towns. Act snotty in triumph and the word will spread. And who knows how future hiring will evolve. The stung and irritated chair of the spurned program might, a few years down the road, end up as your dean.

So inform accurately and without enhancement: "Just to let you know, I do have another offer that came in from Midwest State U. They have initially set my salary at ..."

Hear out the offer. Just as you should avoid a priori prejudic-

es against certain regions of the country, the same is true with job offers. Don't assume that the bigger the university, the better the contract. Maybe you went into your search with College A as your first choice, but don't discount College B automatically if you get an offer from both.

Before you close any deal, wait until you get the offer — preferably in writing — from each department.

Compare, contrast, consider, and be creative. Your future is at stake, so be painstaking and contextual in weighing your options. It's not enough to know that, for example, one place proposes a starting salary of \$60,000 and the rival is offering \$63,000. Once cost of living is taken into account, two close salary offers might diverge wildly, if they come from institutions in, say, New York City versus Iowa City.

Family variables might also matter: If one institution's location has many jobs in your loved one's field, then your total income will be better than someplace where your partner has no job prospects. Or, if one place is near Grandma and Grandpa, some of your child-care expenses may be lower.

The point is, an item like salary is just a raw number that you have to translate into a meaningful figure for your particular situation.

Which offer is better for your career trajectory? Different institutions reward different kinds of achievements. Whatever your career goals, your contract should outline what you need to feed your success. Some items on the checklist have material value (salary), but others may have more career value (lab setup). A rookie mistake is to care more about the former than the latter.

Example: Department No. 1 might offer a lower salary for a job in the sciences than Department No. 2, but make up for the difference with a research assistant, a better lab, and more travel money. All other circumstances being equal, I would rather start my research career at Department No. 1.

Read the room. Some chairs or deans (like me) prefer to put their best offer forward first, thereby reducing the candidate's anxiety of "am I getting the best deal?" in a negotiation. When you are faced with multiple offers, you want to make sure you understand the status of each one. Was the salary just a ballpark figure to start the discussions? Are the contract terms fixed, or can other elements be brought into the mix?

Your people-reading skills are vital here. Do you get a sense that the departments are OK with some bargaining? Some won't be: They think their offer, program, position, and institu-

tion are marvelous and can't understand why you would even be thinking of anyone else. Or maybe their budget or even union contracts limit what they can do for you.

Don't drag things out. The moment you get an offer, formal or otherwise, the invisible clock starts ticking away. Consider that the department chair is now in a position of uncertainty. She can't wait forever, losing other finalists, letting the summer creep closer. The faculty and higher administration will be expecting a resolution. Drawn-out, tortuous negotiations may derail your candidacy.

How long is too long? Two weeks is a typical "offer to cutoff" timeline. The more you delay past that, the more potential bad feelings you risk.

But what if circumstances don't follow the clock? You get an offer but are scheduled for a campus visit for another attractive position weeks later. Your options are limited: It will become transparent that you are playing out the game as the clock ticks, and you may find the chair who made the first offer start to get doubts and even back out — a real possibility, especially if there was no formal, written offer.

Here, too, ethics and pragmatism conjoin. You should be candid about your situation without making any departments feel like they are Plan B. At some point you may just have to roll the dice and decline one offer in anticipation of another. There are no easy answers if you find yourself in a tight corner, with time passing, although in some cases a college might speed up its hiring process if it knows it has competition.

Being offered more than one tenure-line job is a happy conundrum, but one that carries its own kinds of confusion, pitfalls, and anxiety. Once you've made the choice, however, don't second-guess yourself. Your new home, colleagues, and job will demand your unreserved and undivided attention.

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Ladies, Let's Negotiate

Brokering a better job offer is full of dangers and pitfalls for women that men don't have to face.

By *Melissa Dalgleish*

Advice on [negotiating](#) abounds on *Vitae*, whether it concerns how to broker your [first nonacademic position](#) or how to avoid having a tenure-track offer [rescinded](#). There's even a whole series called [Negotiation 101](#), inspired by the much-discussed case of a job candidate known only as "W" who unsuccessfully negotiated with Nazareth College, resulting in her tenure-track offer being withdrawn.

But advice on negotiating as a female-presenting person? Not so much.

And that's a problem, because negotiating as a woman (and I'm going to use "woman" going forward to shorthand female-presenting people, regardless of how they identify, for bias here is largely related to gender presentation) is fraught in ways that many people — even, unfortunately, those of us giving advice about negotiating — fail to recognize.

It isn't just *Vitae*, though. Advice for women on closing the salary gap very often urges us to step up and negotiate hard, and there is a lot of that advice circulating — so much, in fact, that the original title of this piece, "Negotiating While Female," was very much taken. Headlines abound like this one in *The New York Times*: "How to Attack the Gender Wage Gap? Speak Up." The only headline I could find on *Vitae* that explicitly addresses the issue of women and negotiation gives this advice: "[Women, Don't Demur](#)." After all, writes Noliwe Rooks in that column: "It's always hard to negotiate when you might actually be relieved and happy just to get an offer. Women in particular have a difficult time asking for more: We tend to want people to just sort of notice how fabulous we are and pay us what they think we are worth."

For some of us, that might be true. But for many other women, the solution to the wage gap is not merely to "ask for more" or to stop being "happy just to get an offer."

It is no coincidence that the person whose job offer was revoked in the "W vs. Nazareth" case was a woman. Negotiation is fraught for women in ways that it is not for men. And that has consequences for how much women are willing to negotiate — if at all. Many women don't negotiate because they recognize, consciously or subconsciously, that negotiating is dangerous and can easily backfire.

We're right to sense and act on that danger. Hannah Riley Bowles, a senior lecturer in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, has conducted research that demonstrates that this is exactly what happens. A 2014 essay in *The New Yorker*, "Lean Out: The Dangers for Women Who Negotiate," described Bowles's findings: "In four studies, Bowles and collaborators from Carnegie Mellon found that people penalized women who initiated negotiations for higher compensation more than they did men. The effect held whether they saw the negotiation on video or read about it on paper, whether they viewed it from a disinterested third-party perspective or imagined themselves as senior managers in a corporation evaluating an internal candidate."

And significantly, women in the survey who recognized the penalty their counterparts were paying for negotiating were far more likely to say that they themselves would not negotiate in a similar scenario. "In a follow-up study," according to the *New Yorker* piece, "Bowles asked participants whether they themselves would negotiate in the given scenario — that is, they were now the job candidate and not the evaluating manager. The women, for the most part, said no. They were nervous that the conversation would turn against them. 'Women are more reticent to negotiate than men, for good reason,' Bowles says."

When women negotiate, especially for salary and other financial benefits, they pay a number of penalties: Employers report less willingness to work with those women, and a decreased sense of their hireability and competence. That last one might

surprise us, but Bowles's research suggests that appearing less nice and more demanding — which negotiation tends to do for women — is correlated to appearing less competent.

So what can women do?

Despite the risks for us in negotiating, I am with Noliwe Rooks, she of the "[Women, Don't Demur](#)" article — with some caveats. We should — indeed, I'd argue that we must — negotiate, but there are approaches we can take that can help us negotiate to our advantage and avoid the social backlash that Bowles's research revealed.

I wish we didn't live in a world where women had to tailor their negotiation strategies to work around the pitfalls of unconscious and conscious gender bias. And I wish this article could be focused instead on "how not to be a biased hiring manager." But the world is what it is, and if you are heading into a negotiation anytime soon, I want you to have at least a sense of how you might approach it. Some of the following suggestions are going to make you squeamish — they do me — but better that than be another "W," bewildered and offer-less.

Negotiate in person, wherever possible. The negative effects of negotiating are mitigated when the discussions take place face-to-face. If you can't negotiate in person (and with academic job offers, you often won't be able to), opt for Skype or, at the very least, the telephone.

Frame your asks in terms of their benefits not to you, but to the team or the organization. If you're a new scientist negotiating start-up funds, you might think about framing your request for more money as a way to help you pay postdocs a livable salary. If you know that your new department is up for its five-year review soon, you might consider framing your request for an additional course release in terms of how the extra research you'll get done will help bolster the department's publication stats.

Find ways to legitimize your requests. Negotiators are more likely to give you what you're asking for if there's a clear reason why they should beyond the fact that you're asking. That might include leveraging the social capital of someone with a higher status than you, what Bowles calls the "Don't blame me for asking for more money; blame my supervisor" strategy. An acquaintance of mine who is a new assistant professor negotiated a significantly higher salary, lower teaching load, and additional travel money by invoking the authority of her new institution's provost, who had recently instituted a gender-equity program. Framing her ask in terms of what the provost wanted, not what she wanted, she provided statistics about the salaries paid to female professors in her field as compared

with male ones and negotiated a salary bump equal to the percentage difference. Invoking competing offers is another way to legitimize your requests, but doing so can be socially risky.

So, be careful about invoking competing offers. [Research suggests](#) that employers see women who attempt to leverage competing offers as overly competitive, which causes the social backlash that Bowles cited to kick in, although invoking a competing offer may get you more of what you're negotiating for. The last time I was on the job market, I had two offers and I didn't mention the competing offers during negotiations. Because I was moving into a position comparable to the one I was already in, I relied on the conditions of my existing position as leverage instead. It's hard to know how my new employer would have reacted had I mentioned the competing offer, but looking back I think I intuitively sensed that playing the employers against each other was a bad move. I'm happy with the offer I negotiated and I have a great relationship with my hiring manager, so it seems to have worked out.

In short, frame your asks in ways that legitimize your requests while at the same time communicating concern for organizational relationships. This is the best way, the research suggests, of avoiding social backlash while at the same time increasing your chances of successfully negotiating for the things you want. There are ways to get what you want *and* be seen as likeable — figure out what those are for your particular situation, and practice asking for what you want in those ways.

It totally, absolutely sucks that negotiating as a female-presenting person is full of dangers and pitfalls that male-presenting people in general don't have to face. But it does no good to pretend otherwise. In fact — if the case of "W" is any indication — ignoring reality might actively do some harm. Part of increasing gender equality, especially in pay, is going to involve women negotiating more — but only if we do so in ways that will actually work in our favor.

So women, don't demur. But be strategic about it.

Melissa Dalglish is the program coordinator of the Research Training Centre at the Hospital for Sick Children Research Institute and a doctoral candidate in English at York University.

Navigating the Contract Minefield

A job offer is not the culmination of the hiring process; it's the beginning of negotiations.

By David D. Perlmutter

In 1969, the University of Pennsylvania offered my father a tenure-track position in its business school. Here's how he described his "job hunt": Several Penn professors who had read his work gave their chair and dean a paper my father had just published. They created a position and hired my father by telephone. He showed up to work that fall after signing a brief contract.

Academic hiring today is much more complicated, with many more stages, hurdles, and players involved. A staff member in my college who tracks our hiring found that we now navigate through almost 60 steps before someone is truly, officially hired for a tenure-track position.

In the hands of ethical, competent, responsible people, the modern system should be fairer than the old-boy network of yesteryear. Yet — as anybody who has taken the red pill in today's academic job market knows — the "what could go wrong" aspects you may face as a candidate are legion. So far in this series on the [unpleasant aspects of job hunting](#), we have surveyed fake searches, bad fits, inappropriate questions, scheduling challenges, and interview snafus.

But the search is not over until it's really over. Even if you get a job offer you have not fully emerged from the minefield of possible blunders and betrayals. The offer you receive may be a poor one that will advance neither your research nor your teaching. It may be so ineptly written that problems will ensue about its interpretation years down the road. There are even cases where department chairs, deans, or faculty factions disagreed so strongly with the majority choice of job candidate that they poison-pilled the offer in order to declare a failed search and move on to the next candidate, the one they really wanted in the first place.

Those are extremes. More often, in making job offers, writing appointment letters or contracts, and negotiating terms, even

administrators with good will do not necessarily: (a) have any particular experience or expertise in negotiations or contracts; (b) know all the important details to be specified or even remembered; or (c) dedicate their full time and attention to your hire. In addition, the process is indisputably complicated. Recently, in hiring an assistant professor, I embarrassed myself by having to create three successive new versions of the appointment letter because I kept noticing minor errors.

So when you receive a job offer, you have to be just as thoughtful and tactical as you were when seeking the position in the first place.

Keep it positive and polite. If you receive an offer for a tenure-track position, Rule No. 1 is to be cheery and gracious no matter what you think about the department, the position, or the terms. You are building your reputation as a professional, not just dealing with a momentary dyad of negotiation.

If you do accept the position you are beginning what may well be a career-long relationship, so why not start off in good spirits? Too-vigorous negotiations, or a surly attitude, can leave a sour taste that will hurt you in the job itself. Part of your thinking should be the humbling fact you are on the cusp of achieving a dream — tenure-track employment — that every year falls out of the reach of thousands.

Being courteous and upbeat is also a good tactic. The administrator (dean or chair) who called you to make the offer is very likely under pressure and even some strain. Many chairs today are rightly concerned that a failed search might result in no hire at all. Indeed, I worked at one university that told its chairs, "You either hire your No. 1 candidate or we pull the position." It can be heady to convert from hand-wringing job seeker to catbird-seat reclining power player but, for the sake of your honor and your future, don't abuse the privilege of an offer.

Take time to study the details. Now, being polite and upbeat doesn't mean agreeing immediately to a tenure-track offer, even if that is the initial instinct of many first-time academic job seekers. In receiving an offer, you should also understand that a new process — not a culmination — has been triggered. There are many considerations to mull over, such as salary, moving allowance, and technology set-up. But the focus of this column is how to avoid problems, so take a breath and learn the details about what exactly you are being offered.

When the call comes offering you a position, your script should be something like the following: "Well, this is very exciting! I'd like to write down all the details, consider them, and get back to you as soon as I can if I have any questions. I also, of course, would like to consult my adviser and my family." The details of the offer should include fairly exact numbers for salary, benefits, and each item of your start-up package.

What could go wrong? One valid reason to be a little suspicious is when you see vagueness in the contract language. An appointment letter or contract should never leave to future consideration "hard" items like salary, lab set-up, or moving allowance. On the other hand, administrators might be somewhat loose on numbers because they realize that you may try to negotiate for something more. They don't want to leave the impression that they are absolutely locked in and risk losing you over a few thousand dollars.

Keep it confidential. As dean, I make the hiring calls in my college and write the appointment letters. I always caution our new recruits: "Please don't announce this on Facebook yet." In this age of total, moment-by-moment disclosure of relationship status and what you are having for lunch it is best to limit news of the offer at this point to your advisers and family.

Why? Well, in terms of tactics, if you turn me down, I want to offer the job to another candidate and I don't want that negotiation spoiled by someone thinking they were second choice (even if they were, they don't need to know that). Second, at many if not most universities an offer is not legally final until it has been processed and approved by the central administration and human-resources department. At our university, even after a signed appointment letter is submitted, the official approval takes a few weeks. Then and only then can I make a public announcement.

Of course even with an announcement of a hire a legal addendum must be featured below the candidate's bio: "Hire contingent upon completion of doctoral degree by [date] and an approved background check."

Seek intel about the limits and possibilities of the offer.

Negotiations about hiring appointments are often fraught with tension because each side may not know exactly what the other wants and is capable of giving or giving up. That's why I try in my own negotiations to offer what I feel is the best possible deal of which we are capable.

But in many cases, uncertainty abounds. The chair or dean may have certain conditions that are nonnegotiable — for example, that you "report for duty" on a specific date, that you have a completed Ph.D. in hand, or that you agree to teach certain classes. In my college's appointment letters for assistant professors, we have a relatively new codicil asking that they apply as at least co-primary investigator for one external grant project worth more than \$100,000 within the first three years.

On the other side of the table, there are probably hundreds of different perquisites that you might ask for, depending on your field or area of specialization. In my discipline, the list of potential items in your start-up package might be half a page; in high-energy physics it might be a dozen single-spaced pages. At a major research university, the total expenditure on a start-up package for an assistant professor of French literature might be a few thousand dollars, while for an assistant professor of biochemistry it may shoot into the millions. You should of course be seeking the best possible advice on what to ask for.

Don't hold out for the impossible. There is no point in demanding something they cannot give. That is why you need to obtain reasonable intel, and read the room. The chair or dean might simply tell you, "Here are some things we can do for you, but let me be candid up front in that we cannot do these other things." During your campus visit, it would also have been perfectly reasonable for you to chat about start-up packages with some of the department's recently hired assistant professors. You can even do a little research and check out the start-up packages at peer institutions.

At the same time, people can tell you a lot by their tone as much as by their words. A friend of mine at a research university in the Northeast described getting into a bidding war with several other department chairs for a top young researcher. He admitted, "I know I must have sounded desperate on the phone to him, but my dean and the whole faculty were saying that we must get this guy."

Alternately, if your ever-growing list of demands is received with a more testy and curt response each time, you are probably getting closer to "Look, this is not working out; never mind" territory.

Consider the point of view of administrators:

- Resources — to support your salary, moving allowance, or technology — are finite.
- Enthusiasm for a new hire is a relative quantity that can decrease when it feels as though the candidate is trying to squeeze the department dry.
- The morale and opinions of the rest of the faculty must be taken into account. If your start-up package is well above what everyone else got, they will find out about it.

In fact, that last point is a real governor on job offers. A dean or chair does not want to demoralize or anger senior scholars, or even junior ones, who might be outraged at the lavishness of the new arrival's start-up package.

So administrators can't give you everything you may want. That is why you must listen to tone and words, and read between the lines of all conversations and correspondence. Sometimes, a statement of "I don't think we can go higher than that" may mean there is still some flexibility, and the chair or dean might even be pushing to get you a bit more. At other times, the same words are a clear warning klaxon: "Push any harder, kiddo, and this will be our last phone call."

Of course, if all they have to offer is truly not enough for you, and you have other prospects, feel free to walk away. The decision to terminate the negotiations — and what to do if you are blessed enough to have multiple offers or are waiting on another department — will be the subject of another essay.

Contract negotiations for an academic job hire are not a mere formality. They have become more tense and high stakes than I can ever recall in the 20 years since I was first hired on the tenure track. As job prospects for the tenure track diminish in some fields, hiring just the right person at the right price has become an imperative for many beleaguered departments worried that a failed search will lose them a faculty position. That is why the process must be treated by both sides as if they were both on the same side. After all, what you want as a candidate is to be welcomed into a new community where you are valued, respected, and rewarded. A good contract and a good relationship are not mutually exclusive.

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A Dean's Take On Salary Negotiation

Here's a hirer's approach to negotiations and what goes into making an offer.

By Roger Sinclair

When I place the call to offer an appointment to a candidate, I know the starting salary I am going to offer and I hope that the candidate will be expecting that amount, or very close to it.

That's what should happen if the messages we have been sending to the applicants throughout the search process have been received. If it doesn't, we might have a failed search, which, as administrators, we hate. We know the time, commitment, and resources that go into faculty searches, the recriminations that follow failures, and the uncertainties associated with having to muddle through another year with makeshift arrangements.

But let's start at the very beginning. As academic leaders, we have an overriding interest in paying competitive salaries to our job applicants because we want to attract and retain qualified faculty members to carry out the institutional enterprise. Rarely, if ever, is there a desire to shortchange a new hire.

I am the dean of a college of business in the rural Midwest. In deciding on a salary for a new faculty member, I look at the amount budgeted for the line, which depends on both external and internal factors.

The external factors include the going salary rate for that rank (e.g., assistant professor) in that discipline (e.g., finance) among our peer institutions and in the region in which we are located. The going rate is affected by whether a candidate has the requisite terminal qualifications (usually a Ph.D. from an accredited institution) and years of experience.

Salary information from our peer institutions is readily available from surveys conducted by accrediting bodies, professional organizations, and disciplinary societies, and is accessible to applicants. The survey results give me a pretty good idea of how much I need to offer to be externally competitive in the hiring market.

My university is neither top-ranked, rich, nor located near a major urban center. Given all that, I know that our salaries will not be competitive with those offered by universities that are elite, well-endowed, and/or situated near a large city. Job applicants need to be sure in which segments of the academic job market they want to compete before sending in their CV's.

Internal factors also affect the starting salary we offer to our chosen finalist. Those factors are primarily the university's available resources (how much we can pay) and the administration's compelling desire to maintain internal equity (how much we should pay).

Assuming we have the money to enter the market (and we shouldn't be there if we don't), I want to make an offer that has the least impact on distorting the existing salary patterns and that will not create salary inversions in the department and the college. Salary inversions occur when newly hired assistant professors make more money than other assistant professors or even senior professors already in the department.

A related problem we grapple with is salary compression where many current faculty members have their salaries bunched together in a very narrow band on the salary spectrum. Administrators and faculty members would prefer to see the salaries spread out to account for seniority, merit, or market value. Having new hires leapfrog over those faculty members caught in the compression is something I consciously try to avoid.

Similarly, I would not offer a salary to a new hire that is well outside the high end of the going rate for that rank. Ignoring internal equity issues will only ensure that the new hire will join a department of sullen and grumbling colleagues. And that new hire will be unhappy the following year, should a new faculty member come in with an even higher salary.

Furthermore, in places where faculty members are represented by a union through collective-bargaining contracts, many salary parameters (such as summer pay rates) are contractually set with little scope for negotiation. At a university like mine, salaries in one department send signals throughout the campus about the availability and allocation of university money, and those signals affect morale and expectations.

As a dean, I keep those broad issues in mind and usually meet with the provost to discuss, and agree upon, the starting salary I'm going to offer a new hire, to prevent the likelihood of the latter vetoing the offer later on. Job applicants need to be aware of those internal dynamics at any university.

While external and internal factors determine the boundaries of what I will offer a candidate, they come up only at the very end of the search process. Much earlier on, we set the stage to ensure that job applicants know us well enough to have a realistic expectation of what salary they can expect to receive here.

That starts with the job announcement. It describes the position and also draws attention to the university. The smart and serious applicant would have read the announcement carefully, visited our website, and checked out our peer institutions. We convey some of that information in materials we send to applicants, at initial interviews at association meetings, and in the preliminary phone interviews.

We make it a point of describing who we are and who we are not. For example, we are a teaching-focused, mostly undergraduate institution. We are not a top-flight research university. We are a public institution in a financially strapped state. We are unionized. We do not have a large endowment. We are not located in a major urban center, which means our cost of living is low.

The applicant who does the research on us will be able to correctly place us in the national academic galaxy and form a pretty good idea of the sort of salary we will offer. Thus, the better we are at describing ourselves early on, the more we are able to weed out applicants who may not see us as the right place for them.

In my experience, candidates who are fresh on the job market often tend to focus on the starting salary. That is understandable but may cause the applicant to miss the full picture. The total compensation package — of which salary is a major component — is a more meaningful indicator. For example, we offer a very generous benefits package — a 100-percent, employer-contributed retirement plan, excellent health insurance, and so on — and we are proud of it.

As an employee, the taxes you pay tend to be lower when more of your compensation comes in the form of benefits. And in our community, the salary goes much further than it would in Chicago or Detroit. I draw attention to those facts when I talk to job candidates. They need to understand: A generous benefits package can, and should, more than offset a lower-than-average salary.

Although the university's resources and the desire to maintain internal equity limit the amount of the starting salary, I am often willing to provide one-time payments that do not add to the candidate's base salary. Requests for a signing bonus, a grant for summer research, a stipend to complete the doctorate by the end of the semester, paying for moving expenses, picking up the membership to a professional organization, buying preferred software, or giving additional money to attend a conference are all legitimate and more easily accommodated.

Offering any of those perks does not alter the base salary and allows me to maintain internal equity in the department while, as an overall package, I can make sure it is consistent with that offered by our peer institutions. Plus, the incentives are one-time payments so I am not tied to paying them for the long term when I may or may not have the money.

If we've done our part, astute applicants should be able to do the research and judge for themselves if this is where they would like to work. We would expect applicants to withdraw if their salary demands are higher than what we can offer. We want that to occur before a campus visit so that we are all spared the expense and disruption to our schedules.

So, when I make the call to offer the job, if we have sent the right messages and the candidate has done her research, my salary offer is in the ballpark. There is no haggling or talk of "Let me think about it," or "I have another offer that pays this much."

Instead, the candidate may ask for her one-time needs, and I am open to accommodating them. I may explain the reasoning and the internal dynamics of the salary structure at the university. But, usually, the phone call is a celebratory conversation where a match has occurred and a successful search has concluded. The words that cross the phone lines should be "Welcome to the team" and "Thank you."

Roger Sinclair is the pseudonym of the dean of a business college at a public university in the Midwest.

What's Your BATNA?

It's your "best alternative to a negotiated agreement," and having one in hand improves your bargaining position.

By Katie Rose Guest Pryal

In any negotiation, being willing to walk away means that you essentially have all of the power. Sure, the other side might have some things that you wish you had, but in the end, if you don't agree to their terms, the side that most wanted the contract is the loser.

Here's an example. Most of us were taught, probably by a parent, that the first rule of car buying is to be willing to walk away from a deal you don't like. In my house, that is also the second rule of car buying. (Our third rule is to not use paint color as a decision factor.) Applying the walk-away rule to a car deal puts the power in your hands rather than the seller's. (That is a bit of an oversimplification. You might feel a little sad leaving the car behind. But you'll get over it knowing you did the right thing.)

Of course not all negotiations are so simple. Among the most difficult are the ones we do in the workplace. And job negotiations in the academic workplace are often especially fraught. For non-tenure-track employees of all stripes, our lack of leverage and job security often means that we have little negotiating power at all. If you are a contingent faculty member at a university without collective bargaining, how can you negotiate more favorable conditions?

I don't have a magic answer, but I have a concept I want to share that helped me with my own negotiations: BATNA. It stands for: "best alternative to a negotiated agreement." Thinking in terms of BATNA can make your life off the tenure track — or your transition out of academia — a little more well planned and enjoyable.

Over the Barrel

What led me to BATNA? I spent 11 years as a non-tenure-track employee of various universities. My positions varied widely: I worked at three different universities, in four different divisions, in five different positions off of the tenure track. Once,

I had a job where I started out with a three-year contract. I thought it was going to be fantastic. Then the head of the division called all contingent faculty into a room together and told us that all future contracts would be year-to-year. No more multi-year stability.

We were upset. But there was nothing we could do. After all, a year-to-year job was better than no job, and most of us needed jobs. We had no leverage to demand longer contracts. If we all quit together (which would never have happened anyway, given the particular dynamics of our group), the division head could have replaced us with new people. We preferred to think that "new people" might not have been as good as we were, but who knows, really. There are many great unemployed professors out there.

The division chair had us over a barrel. Having no negotiating power was a terrible feeling.

A few weeks later, the division chair called us into that room again, and this time told us that not all of our contracts would be renewed the following year. Some of us would have to be cut. The administration, we were told, would be reviewing course evaluations to make the decision of who to keep and who to fire. (The word "fire" was never used, of course. I believe "not renewed" was the preferred euphemism.)

Once again, we were over a barrel.

At this point, I'd been working in the division for three years without a raise. And there were no raises — not even cost-of-living increases — on the horizon. Instead, we were playing a real-life game of *Survivor* in academe.

If you want to know why adjuncts and other non-tenure-track faculty unionize, just ask around for stories like that one. They're everywhere in the academy. Broken promises, Ama-

zon.com-like competitions pitting employees against one another to retain their jobs. When my division chair announced this academic version of *Survivor*, I left that job without trying to negotiate. What would I have negotiated?

Luckily, I had a place to land. Another non-tenure-track job in another division. Another three-year contract. I thought things would be better. They weren't. There are some things that will always be problems so long as there are haves (tenure-track faculty) and have-nots (contingents). The tenure-track faculty got paid twice as much as we did to do the same (and sometimes less) work. They had special privileges we never saw. But the social interaction was the worst part: Our names weren't worth learning. We weren't worth knowing.

Well that just wasn't going to work for me. After three years in this new division, I put in for a promotion to the non-tenure-track equivalent of associate professor. I received the promotion. I did not receive a raise or any other added benefits. Just a new title.

Um, what?

I was a mother of two, pushing 40, and tired of playing Academic *Survivor*. If I was so great that the division would promote me to associate, then it needed to give me a raise and a few other things, too. It was time to negotiate for real. And to do that, I needed leverage. I needed BATNA.

Who's Got the BATNA?

BATNA is one of my favorite acronyms, right up there with [FUBAR](#) and [SMITF](#). In fact, when you find yourself in a FUBAR work situation that makes you want to SMITF, you need to consider your BATNA and then go talk to your boss.

BATNA — “best alternative to a negotiated agreement” — is a negotiator's term. It is not synonymous with your “bottom line,” which, according to negotiation expert David Venter, refers to the “[worst possible outcome that a negotiator might accept](#).” Bottom lines are terrible. You don't want to negotiate with your eye on the bottom line. You want the *best* alternative, not the *worst*. If you can't agree with your adversary, you want your BATNA.

The function of BATNA, Venter explains, is that “it prohibits a negotiator from accepting an unfavorable agreement or one that is not in their best interests because it provides a better option *outside* the negotiation” (emphasis added). BATNA is the open door that you can run through as soon as you see that your negotiations are going awry. It's your escape route, he says.

Often, only one side has a strong BATNA. In a negotiation both sides may ask, in shorthand, “Who has the BATNA?” As you've no doubt figured out: You want the answer to be you.

Start Thinking About Your BATNA

If all you do after reading this column is start rethinking your work situation, then you're already on your way to creating your BATNA. Having the BATNA means shifting the power to your hands and out of the hands of those people who force you to play *Survivor* with your colleagues. It means that — if at any point you can't reach a fair negotiated agreement with your chair or dean — you have an alternative.

Often, as you can imagine, that alternative involves leaving your current position. But not always.


Creating your BATNA is the hard part. I was lucky. My first division — with its surprise contract changes — made me paranoid about job security. My paranoia made me feel like I needed to build up outside sources of income. So I start writing books and building up a consulting business — essentially, I started freelancing on the side. And over the course of eight years, that work started to pay off.

Fully aware of my tenuous job security, I worked hard so my side-gigs would pay off. Then, when I got my fake promotion, I had strong BATNA. The strongest, in fact: I was willing to leave the job if the division didn't meet my terms. And leaving wouldn't be a desperate move on my part. I would be leaving to do something that would make me just as happy as the job I'd been in. Leaving my job was truly a good alternative for me.

One other thing: BATNA relies on context. When you compare your academic job with your alternative career options, you might see — as I did — that your best alternative to negotiating more favorable working conditions *inside* academia is a strong job *outside* of academia. You also might find a new job at another campus, or in another division at your institution, and be able to use that new job as your BATNA.

My BATNA was my willingness to work as a self-employed person (a freelance academic) instead of an employee of the division that gave me the fake promotion.

But your current BATNA could be simply doing less in the job that you now hold: doing less unpaid service or holding only the minimum of office hours. All of the “adjunct heroics” (as Rebecca Schuman has put it) may need to go out the window. Then you'll have time for your own work that could lead to al-



ternative income — like writing a book or consulting on the side. You'll have time to strengthen your BATNA anew. After all, who knows when you might need it.

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Not Every Job Offer Is Negotiable

At community colleges, there's not a lot of wiggle room.

By Rob Jenkins

Let's get one thing out in the open right away: A faculty job offer at a community college is pretty much a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. Yet perhaps there is a faint glimmer of hope in that qualifying phrase — "pretty much."

Say you go through the interview process for a full-time faculty position at a community college and you're offered the job. (Congratulations!) Your starting salary will almost certainly be dictated by a system-mandated or union-negotiated scale. Once the administration has determined where you fall on that scale, based on your education and years of experience, they have very little leeway to offer you more money, even if you threaten to walk.

Other perks that are more or less common at four-year institutions, such as lab space, graduate assistants, and research grants, are virtually non-existent at community colleges. Whatever travel money the college might have (and lately, at most community colleges, it hasn't been much) is generally divided up equally among the full-time faculty. Reductions in teaching load are usually reserved for senior faculty members engaged in vital and time-consuming projects, such as chairing major collegewide committees. Even the starting date is probably firm.

So there's really very little left to negotiate—except, perhaps, where you fall on the salary scale. And that's a key detail, because all your future raises will be influenced by that initial placement.

Remember what I said about the scale at virtually all community colleges — that it's based on education and experience. Under the heading of education, most two-year schools recognize essentially three levels: master's, "master's plus 30" (meaning 30 graduate semester hours), and doctorate.

Years ago, I left my graduate program with a master's degree

and 30 hours beyond the master's to take a full-time teaching position at a community college in another state. In our initial discussions, the administration assured me that I would come in at the "master's plus 30" level. However, after reviewing my transcript, the academic vice president decided that one of my courses didn't count because it had the same number as another course. That left me three hours short and meant a difference of nearly \$2,000 in starting salary (which was a lot of money back then).

Fortunately, I was able to obtain a letter from my graduate director attesting to the fact that the two independent study courses in question, although they had the same number, were in fact two different courses with different content. The academic VP accepted that explanation and gave me the higher salary.

I don't know if that actually counts as negotiating, but, as I said, educational level is one of the few areas where there's any wiggle room at all. I didn't like where I was originally pegged but fortunately was able to wiggle my way up a bit.

The other area where you might have some room to negotiate — and which could have a huge effect on your starting salary — is experience. Most salary schedules are simple tables with "educational level" on one axis and "years of experience" on the other. Regardless of where you fall on the education axis, the more years of experience you can claim, the higher your salary will be.

But here's where it gets tricky: Two-year institutions, even in the same system, often define "experience" very differently. Some only count years spent teaching full time at the college level. However, more and more schools these days are taking "part-time equivalency" into consideration (which is only fitting, since so many people start out as adjuncts). For example, since a typical full-time load for community college faculty is

five courses each semester, some schools will count 10 courses taught on a part-time basis as the equivalent of a year's worth of full-time experience.

Most community colleges don't recognize teaching experience at the high school level or below. However, some will count high-school experience, especially if the college and the high school in question are part of the same entity (such as a local school system or county government). And others give candidates partial credit for their high-school years, perhaps on a two-for-one basis.

The bottom line is that this one of the very few ways you can significantly improve your situation during the community-college "negotiating" process. If the administration really wants you, but they know they can't simply offer you more money (because it would violate the policy or contract), yet you have some documented experience that falls in a gray area — either because it's part-time or at the high school level — they may, just may, be willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, count as much of your experience as they can possibly justify, and try to bump up your salary that way.

I have heard of that sort of thing happening — heck, I've participated in it as an administrator — and I would say that, while it's not exactly common, it's not all that rare, either.

Just know that after all is said and done — once you've made all your arguments and they've been accepted or rejected — you have to be prepared either to take the offer on the table or, if it's just not enough money, walk away. Because, in the end, that may be the only thing you really control.

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Links and Resources

Negotiation 101

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/402-negotiation-101>

There's been a lot of talk — but little consensus — about how to negotiate an academic job offer. So we asked eight Vitae columnists to dole out some advice.

Will My Offer Be Rescinded if I Negotiate?

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1268-will-my-offer-be-rescinded-if-i-negotiate>

It's still rare for tenure-track offers to be withdrawn but it does happen. Here are the red flags.

The Etiquette of Accepting a Job Offer

<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Etiquette-of-Accepting-a/138207>

Tips on getting to 'yes' efficiently and amicably.

Disappointed With the Offer?

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/934-disappointed-with-the-offer>

Unless you're negotiating with an elite university, there may be little you can do about that.

Job-Market Challenges for Tenure-Track Academics

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1326-job-market-challenges-for-tenure-track-academics>

A career coach offers advice to professors on negotiating and networking.

Negotiating, Nonacademic Style

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/933-negotiating-nonacademic-style>

With an offer in hand, it was time to talk terms.

Front photo: Western High School fencing team, 1925/National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress