



James Wasmuth PhD Parasite Genomics, 2006

Who is your current employer and what do they do?

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary, Canada. Since 2011.

What is your job title and what does the job entail?

Assistant Professor, the North American equivalent of Lecturer

I run my own research group in Host-Pathogen Interactions. This involves training graduate (MSc & PhD) students and postdocs. I am responsible for applying for and securing the necessary grants (money) from a range of funding agencies. I also coordinate and teach on the Genetics course for undergraduate veterinary medicine students.

How did you achieve your current position?

I knew early on in my PhD studies that I wanted to try and pursue a career in academia. Mid-way into my second year I began looking to see what types of postdoctoral positions were available. While I didn't apply for any that early on, it was useful to see the sort of skills people were asking for.

One vital aspect was going to conferences. These were great opportunities to meet other students and also chat informally with professors that were looking for postdocs. In my final year I applied for five or six postdoc positions - it was important not to pin all my hopes on one opportunity. When applying I made sure that I tailored my cover letter for the particular research and also asked questions about the project in my email. Now that I am hiring postdocs, I look for the personal touch in the applications; even reading the abstracts of the Prof's papers can raise it above the others.

I was fortunate to get a few offers and picked a position at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. There I had a very supportive supervisor, who made sure that I took an active role in grant writing and supervising undergraduate and eventually graduate students. As well as the main research, I was given time to explore my own side projects - many didn't get past a couple of weeks, but one has ended up as a major publication.

Again, I occasionally looked at the job-listings to see who was recruiting in my subject area. When it came time to start applying, I began writing the application early, before I'd even found a suitable listing. The final draft of my application went through ~20 revisions. Show it to current faculty members in your institute, especially ones on hiring committees. However, be ready for contradictory advice. Don't accept all suggestions - it's your application after-all.

For the interviews, preparation was key. I spent the days before ensuring I knew something about each of the people I would meet. A quick read of one or two abstracts from their most recent papers may be sufficient. I'm now on hiring committees and I'm amazed that some people with excellent CVs don't spend time learning about the Institute to which they are applying or the people with whom they want to be colleagues.

How do you feel you have used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your research degree in your career to date?

Naturally, the specific research skills developed in my Masters and PhD are crucial for the work my group carries out. Beyond those, my PhD supervisor was excellent in ensuring that I considered the bigger picture. This is something I try and instil upon my own trainees. Research scientists are also one part professional writers, both papers and grant applications. In addition to funding my own research, this skill helped me secure government development money for my rugby club!

Other qualifications

BSc (Hons) Biochemistry, 2000, Imperial College, London

MRes Bioinformatics, 2002, University of York