

# Current Lab Manager:

*Interview experiences applying to lab manager positions.*

- General Structure:
  - Applied during senior year of college
  - Some labs you'll interview with just PI, some more in 'layers' with lab manager or other team members first (if PI is very busy)
  - Lab manager interview is very important! Might be more detail-oriented than interviews with PI
- Before interview:
  - Research the lab! Look at the website thoroughly. You don't want to ask questions in the interview where the answer is already on the website. Watch presentations or talks by the PI, read the papers from the lab
  - Prepare at least a few questions to ask about the lab
  - Practice before! In front of a mirror, or make an outline of responses. You can also do mock interviews with a prof or a friend
  - Arrive early, make sure you are dressed appropriately, make sure zoom is working (if a remote interview)
- During interview:
  - The dreaded "tell me about yourself" question -- prepare for them to ask you about how you got to where you are now, why you're applying for the position
    - What experiences did you get, what do you want to get? Why are you applying for the job?
    - Hobbies might not be as relevant
  - Why do your skills match up with what the lab needs?
    - Be honest!
    - Talk about skills in a positive light, what you're willing to learn
  - 'What is your management style?'
    - They want to know about your communication style, how you give feedback, your role on previous teams
  - Experience working with certain populations (ethnic minority youth, child populations, specific psychopathologies)
  - "What do you want from this job?"
    - You can talk about what you want out of professional development -- writing skills, data analysis, etc
    - Talk about where you see yourself in the future too -- desire to apply to graduate school in the future, research career, etc
- After interview
  - Brief thank-you is appropriate, any logistics can be worked out then too

# Current Graduate Student

## *Graduate student interviews*

- Put your best foot forward, but be cognizant of who you are and what you need
  - You're starting a relationship with your future advisor, so be honest about what kind of working relationship you'll want!
- Talking about your research interests
  - You'll already have mentioned these in personal statement
  - You should have some concrete ideas for how you could see your grad school research going (you don't need so many specifics though)
- Be able to talk about your research you've already done!
  - Senior thesis, something you did as an RA
  - Something you're proud of, show your capabilities
- What do you want out of a mentor-mentee relationship?
  - Be clear about what you want from your advisor (frequency of meetings, etc)
  - How do you deal with conflict?

# Current Professor

## *The structure of a graduate student interview 'weekend'*

- Pre-covid schools would pay to fly you out for a few days, you'd have 1-3 days of group meetings, social events, interviews with many people, etc.
- Different programs structure these differently but you'll likely have a 1:1 meeting with your potential primary advisor.
- Many schools set up 1:1 meetings with several faculty members
- At many schools, multiple faculty members have to want to admit a student -- it's a department decision even though the PI of each lab gets the most sway for their students in their lab
- Some schools have tours, group events, lab meetings, info sessions on funding, TAships
- Usually you get to meet current graduate students
- Faculty want to know if you're a good *\*scientific\** fit but also if you're a good *\*interpersonal\** fit. Do you fit in well with the lab group in a professional way?
  - You're still "at work" at the lab dinners -- need to show that you're a decent person and interact with the people around you
  - Professionalism, being friendly and nice
  - People you meet (other interviewees) will also be your future cohort-mates or colleagues at other graduate programs. You'll probably keep in touch with many of them for a long time even if you don't wind up at the same school
- After the weekend, faculty will discuss who they can make offers of admission to
  - Everyone who interacted with the student might contribute their thoughts

- Some people have their 'professional' face on for faculty but aren't professional or around the grad students. Faculty will ask grad students for red flags because they don't want colleagues like this
- After the interview weekend over, brief thank-you emails to people you met 1:1 with (faculty and grad students) is a nice and professional thing to do
  - Thank people and make it specific to what you talked about, but don't make it a long email

*1:1 meetings with faculty. What does this professor listen for?*

- Why are you applying to work with that particular faculty member? Why this lab?
  - If you were going to design a study in the lab, what would you do? Be ready to answer this question if someone asks (not all faculty will)
  - Show the skills to turn a broader question into a specific experiment
- Prior research experience
  - What projects have you worked on?
  - What was your role in those projects?
  - What statistical procedures have you used?
- Faculty will ask what questions you have for them. You should have questions
  - If you don't they might think you aren't that interested
  - It is also a way to get info you need to help make your decision
  - Your question gives information to the faculty member you're interviewing with about what you're most interested in (asking them about their research program for the next few years is good)
- Some questions are better for students than faculty:
  - "What is it like to work with XXX as your advisor"
  - "What is the lab climate"
  - "What is it like to TA in this department"

## Q&A:

*How are remote interviews different from in-person?*

- Harder to have nice informal interactions or to get a sense of the space, but most components are still there. It can be hard to be personable and friendly and not get exhausted with so many remote interviews, but people will generally try to be understanding that we're all doing our best.
- In-person interviews might be easier for meeting multiple people in the lab if possible & safe

*How many students usually get invited to interview? Who eventually decides who gets in?*

- Faculty get maybe 100s of applications, then invite maybe ~20 people to interview at Columbia psych. Department can admit a certain number of students per year, depending on the school. Columbia psych might admit 6-8 per year, for example. Individual faculty members make decisions on how big their labs are and their funding situations for deciding how many students to admit (depending on the school's funding structure).
- Some departments also have ADMITTED students weekends where students are already admitted first, which are different from INTERVIEW weekends where students are not yet admitted.

*When you were going through the interview process, how did you keep yourself in a good headspace with a marathon of interview weekends in a row?*

- Avoid labs/people that seem competitive and adversarial. These are your colleagues!
- Focus on the fact that you'll continue in the field for a long time
- Remember that faculty and grad students aren't just grading you, you're evaluating THEM too to see if it would be a good fit
- Get some downtime! Spend some time alone, or where you aren't being evaluated

*Can there be too many interviews to go to?*

- Yes, traveling is expensive and tiring. However, most schools SHOULD cover your travel to/from interviews
- Don't take interviews anywhere you're not really interested in

*What do grad students look for in people who are interviewing?*

- Red flags -- grad students can often spot inappropriate behaviors or if people behave well around faculty but not around other grad students
- Grad students might help get an impression if someone is really interested in the research, really interested in the lab or not

*When faculty members ask you if you have questions, are they mainly looking for research-related questions? What are other questions you can ask?*

- Don't ask things you can find online
- You can ask:
  - Questions about ongoing lab research
  - Questions about mentorship style -- how often do you meet with your grad students?
  - Questions about the department, collaborations
  - Questions about outside collaborations
  - Questions about cross-cultural research
  - About working with specific populations
  - What is the community of the lab like?
  - Does the lab have research assistants? How does this typically work?

*When you're interviewing with multiple schools, how can you learn about the differences across campuses, departments, faculty members?*

- Ask the grad students what the best and worst things are about the specific faculty member, the department, the program the campus, etc...they will usually give you a pretty realistic picture of what the department is like

*What are ways to talk about cross-departmental research?*

- Ask the graduate students what their perception of inter-departmental collaboration is
- Ask your advisor what opportunities for collaboration would be
- Nothing wrong with asking about collaboration -- nobody should be offended about collaboration.
- Some faculty collaborate a lot more than others though -- everyone will SAY they are collaborative, but look at current projects or history of papers to see what collaborations have happened