Preparing for the Academic Job Market: A Guide for Social Work Doctoral Students and Their Mentors

Abstract

While the academic job market continues to be strong for social work doctoral graduates, there has been relatively little guidance for students and their mentors on how to prepare for and obtain these positions. Research in doctoral education across disciplines shows that students need help transitioning from their role as doctoral student to navigating the academic job market. This article describes the academic job search process specifically tailored to the social work job market, which is unique both in its chronic undersupply of candidates and in its emphasis on practice. Topics covered include early preparation for the job search, preparing job application materials, the selection process, negotiating offers, and finding the “right” faculty position. The need for the development of career services in doctoral pedagogy to help students prepare for the academic job market is also discussed.

Authors Unedited Pre-Print. Published article: Lightfoot, E., Franklin, C., & Beltran, R. (2019). Preparing for the Academic Job Market: A Guide for Social Work Doctoral Students and Their Mentors. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 1-12.

Literature on doctoral education across disciplines indicates that doctoral students need information on the academic job search process (Pifer & Bakwer 2016; O'Meara, Jaeger, Eliason, Grantham, Cowdery, Mitchall, & Zhang, 2014; St. Clair, Hutto, MacBeth, Newstetter, McCarty & Melkers 2017). For example, in a synthesis of 105 articles on doctoral education, Pifer & Baker (2016) developed recommendations for students, faculty and administrators on how to improve the experience of doctoral students based on a three-stage model of development. One of the key results of this review was that students needed tailored information about the job search and employment process to successfully transition from being doctoral students to becoming a member of the academia. In addition, the job search can be a very stressful time for doctoral students, and those who lack knowledge and skills about the job search process may be less successful in securing a job as well as transitioning to a new academic position. Research on doctoral education across disciplines also shows that many doctoral students benefit from knowledge about the job search and employment processes (Allum, Kent, & McCarthy, 2014; Wendler, Bridgeman, Markle, Cline, Bell, McAllister, & Kent 2012).

While generic information on preparing for the academic job market can be helpful for students, it is especially useful to have job market information tailored to the specific job market as the markets vary greatly between disciplines. For example, in some disciplines academic positions are relatively scarce, such as English Literature or Engineering (Larson, Ghaffarzagdean & Xue, 2014, Colander & Zhuou, 2015), which often requires students to employ various strategies to land an academic position or seek alternative employment. However, the discipline of social work continues to have many academic positions open annually for students. In fact, scholars have often lamented the undersupply of PhD level social work graduates who can fill vacant faculty positions for more than thirty years (Anastas, 2006; Feld, 1988; Harrison, Sowers-Hoag, & Postley, 1989; Khinduka, 2002; Mackie, 2013; Zastrow & Bremmer, 2004, Lightfoot & Zheng, Under Review). This undersupply has multiple causes, including the continued growth of social work educational programs and their need to fill faculty-level positions, the continued stagnant enrollment and graduation rates among social work PhD programs, along with the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) requirements for instructors to have an MSW and social work practice experience, as noted in its 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which works to keep those without an MSW from obtaining social work faculty jobs (CSWE, 2015). While there are more than 80 PhD programs in North America, and a rapidly growing number of DSW programs (Lightfoot & Beltran, 2016), a recent job market analysis confirmed that the discipline of social work currently has a relatively healthy academic market, though it seems to have tightened considerably (Lightfoot & Zheng, Under Review). Even with this robust market, scholars and administrators worry that there are not enough highly trained scientists among doctoral social work graduates to conduct high quality research and train the next generation of scientifically-minded social work scholars, as well as not enough experienced social work practitioners obtaining doctoral degrees who can teach the next generation of social work practitioners (Anastas, 2015, Gehlert, Hall & Palinkas, 2017; Lein, Uehara, Lightfoot, Lawlor & Williams, 2017). The purpose of this article is to

address how social work students can prepare for the unique social work academic job market.

Increasing doctoral students' knowledge about the academic search process has been promoted as a pre-requisite for a successful transition from doctoral programs to academic positions (Pifer & Baker, 2016). While most social work doctoral programs offer some instruction on job market skills, this instruction is not standardized and varies greatly from program to program, with some offering little guidance on how to prepare for and conduct an academic job search. This paper addresses an important but neglected area in literature on social work doctoral education concerning how PhD students can prepare themselves to land the "right" academic job. Using both research and practical experiences, this paper addresses the knowledge and skills needed to apply for and interview for academic jobs. The authors of this paper include two doctoral program directors who have mentored numerous students on the job market and chaired multiple search committees, and a doctoral candidate who is currently on the job market. While this article was written with PhD students in mind, we also believe that the information provided will be of value to faculty members that advise and educate doctoral students.

Characteristics of Quality Faculty Candidates & School Types

As with most disciplines, the criteria to select quality social work faculty include notable letters of recommendation, published original work in refereed journals, interdisciplinary collaboration experience, receipt of a doctoral degree, teaching excellence as well as overall personality fit with other faculty members (Harrison et al., 1989; Khinduka, 2002). However, unlike other disciplines, the needs and requirements of social work schools vary depending on the degree level offered to students, such as a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees in social work (Anastas, 2006; Council of Social Work Education, 2010; Feld, 1988; Harrison et al., 1989; Mackie, 2013). Social work schools conferring bachelor and master level degrees must also meet the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) by CSWE (Mackie, 2013). In the last few decades, researchers have attempted to examine the nature of the academic job market by analyzing the characteristics most desired by social work schools seeking faculty candidates. Harrison et al. (1989) and Feld (1988) conducted a national survey among deans, directors and search committees between 1984-86, while Anastas (2006) and Mackie (2013) conducted an analysis of social work academic job postings between 2001-2002 and 2010-2011 respectively.

Interestingly, while these researchers used varying strata of school types to understand the needs of social work deans and their departments, all three studies found very similar results when they segregated the schools based on the level of degree conferred to students. As such, for social work schools granting only a bachelor's degree, and not a master's or doctoral degree, the desired characteristics for faculty included teaching, practice and field work experience as well as having a master's degree in social work (Feld, 1988; Harrison et al., 1989). Following a 2001 EPAS mandate, most faculty position advertisements posted by search committees in BSW-granting schools included a requirement that candidates have at least two years of social work practice experience after receiving their MSW degrees (Anastas, 2006; Mackie, 2013). While an MSW degree was required by BSW-awarding schools, institutions conferring doctoral degrees

were more likely to require a PhD in social work or related field, or in certain circumstances an “ABD,” also known as “All But Dissertation,” prior to appointment (Anastas, 2006; Feld, 1988; Harrison et al., 1989; Mackie, 2013). Institutions conferring doctoral degrees were also found to desire scholarly productivity and the ability to obtain external funding in their faculty candidates (Anastas, 2006; Feld, 1988; Harrison et al., 1989; Mackie, 2013). Schools conferring doctoral degrees in social work were the least likely to seek candidates with a two-year post-MSW experience (Anastas, 2006; Mackie, 2013). Additionally, Mackie (2013) found that teaching experience was equally important for all school types regardless of degree level awarded (p. 742).

As directors of social work doctoral programs, we have noticed a greater focus among “research extensive” or doctoral-granting institutions to attract candidates with high scholarly productivity. In fact, aside from demonstrating prior teaching and practice experience, faculty search committees in such institutions expect new PhD social work graduates to have at least four to five peer-reviewed publications listed in a candidate’s curriculum vitae. It is important to remember, however, that simply having a list of authored publications does not demonstrate scholastic excellence. Indeed, as Khinduka (2002) stated in his observations of trends in social work higher education, “the publications of the candidate needs to reflect a thematically integrated body of work rather than a series of unrelated research efforts lacking consistent or coherent themes...a glut of inconsequential publications needs to not be confused with serious intellectual work” (p. 689-690). In addition, the ability of candidates to obtain external funding certainly can only add to their desirability among such schools.

However, we recognize that schools of social work do not simply value research ability alone when selecting faculty candidates. Various institutions that award BSW, MSW as well as doctoral degrees, with their “mix” of research and teaching responsibilities, value research, practice and teaching experience equally. Therefore, candidates who wish to apply to such institutions must provide evidence of prior teaching, research and practice experience in equal measure. Finally, because social work is foremost a practice discipline, there are many schools that focus primarily on training future social workers, and grant BSW, MSW and/or DSW degrees, without conferring the PhD. Such institutions highly value faculty candidates with extensive teaching and practice experience, usually preferring that candidates have at least two years of practice experience after receiving their MSW degrees. Search committees in teaching-focused institutions often seek faculty candidates who have a range of knowledge in social work and possess the skills to teach a wide range of classes. They also may be expected to have a background in administration, accreditation and providing supervision in fieldwork. Therefore, candidates who wish to apply to teaching-focused social work schools must demonstrate in their curriculum vitae the diversity and breadth of classes they have taught as well as their effectiveness in working closely and advising undergraduate and graduate students.

The Academic Job Search: Early Preparations

For most first or second-year social work doctoral students, the academic job search may seem like a distant prospect that only needs to be tackled by those nearing the end of their PhD journey. But having worked with countless new PhD graduates seeking

academic positions, we highly recommend doctoral students to begin thinking about their long-term goals early in their doctoral program. Students who wish to enter the academic tenure track job market must think about the type of school they envision themselves in, whether it is a research-extensive institution where scientific research is of prime importance, a teaching-focused school that primarily focuses on social work education, or one that is in between. To get insight into what faculty search committees are looking for in their dream candidates, we suggest beginning to peruse the job postings listed in various websites such the career website hosted by CSWE or the Social Work Academic Jobs Wiki, a crowd-sourced site listing social work academic jobs (<http://academicjobs.wikia.com>), during their first or second year of their program. As discussed above, students will see that the job requirements will vary by type of institution. Research 1 institutions might require applicants to have an already established publication or grant acquisition record as well as teaching experience, while teaching institutions might require applicants to have extensive teaching experience as well as extensive practice experience. Likewise, Research 1 institutions will typically look for those with a PhD for their tenure track faculty positions, while teaching institutions might consider those with either a PhD or a DSW. There are also variations in the requirement for an MSW and post-MSW practice experience among positions, with many positions in all types of schools requiring an MSW and two years of post-MSW practice experience. Keeping an eye on the job descriptions for several years before applying will assist students in preparing accordingly for the type of position they desire.

For those students interested in schools that value research, it is vitally important for them to begin developing research and teaching experience that can be documented in their curriculum vitae (CV). Doctoral students need to start the process of building their publication record as well as presenting their work at various academic conferences, such as the two major social work conferences, CSWE's Annual Program Meeting and the Society for Social Work Research's (SSWR) Annual Conference. In addition, many students will find it useful to present at specialized social work conferences, such as the Annual National School Social Work Conference or the National Conference on Social Work and HIV/AIDS; international social work conferences, such as the biennial Social Work and Social Development (SWSD) Conference or the biennial International Consortium on Social Development (ICSD) Conference; interdisciplinary conferences, such as the Gerontological Society's (GSA) Annual Scientific Meeting or the biennial National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN); or other appropriate disciplinary conferences, such as the Association for Public Policy and Management's (APPAM) Annual Fall Conference or the American Public Health Association's (APHA) Annual Meeting. Presenting at conferences not only can assist doctoral students in getting input from colleagues about their preliminary findings, but it can also be an important place to network in preparation for their academic job search and future academic careers. In addition, we strongly advise doctoral students interested in schools that emphasize research to begin the process of applying for grants and awards during their doctoral program to show their ability to obtain internal or external funding.

Students interested in any type of tenure-track academic position will need to have some form of teaching experience, as teaching is a vital part of all tenure-track jobs.

Most social work PhD programs in the United States now have some sort of training in pedagogy and many have teaching practica, and we recommend that students take advantage of such opportunities. Many hiring committees will expect new faculty to have teaching experience, with one or multiple independent sections of courses usually preferred, though many schools will also value experience as a teaching assistant. Some schools that emphasize teaching might require much more extensive and varied teaching experience. They also might desire applicants to be familiar with accreditation, curriculum design, and/or field education. Those desiring positions in teaching institutions might consider volunteering to serve on academic administrative committees or to serve as field educators to gain this type of experience.

Early in their doctoral program students need to assess if their own amount and type of practice experience is sufficient to obtain the type of jobs that they seek. Some students choose to gain additional practice experience while they are in their doctoral program to ensure that they have enough post-MSW practice experience in their particular area of research or in an area in which they hope to teach. International students who plan to enter the job market in the country where they are studying might want to consider obtaining additional practice experience during their PhD program, depending on the types of courses they plan to teach. For students in joint MSW/PhD programs, it is vital for them to discuss with their PhD Program Director how to build post-MSW practice experience into their program.

In addition, students in the early years of their doctoral program are advised to take advantage of any job market colloquiums or teaching presentations that occur in their school, or even at schools nearby. These can include job market presentations made by candidates interviewing for positions at their own university, or by students in their own program who are doing mock presentations in preparation for an upcoming campus visit. This early exposure to job talks can help students prepare for their own job interview experience.

Finally, students need to recognize that most faculty members are more than willing to advise and talk with doctoral students about their experiences. Early or midway through their program, doctoral students need to discuss their long-term goals with their advisor, trusted faculty members, and/or doctoral program director. Faculty advisors have a wealth of experience and knowledge as well as a wide network within the social work department and beyond. Building professional relationships within the department and outside it will only be beneficial for doctoral students, particularly when it is time to find dissertation committee members and asking for letters of recommendation.

The Academic Job Search: The Job Search Year

The final year before graduation is the intensive part of the academic job market preparation. This final year requires the most guidance for doctoral students to land an academic job. A few guides have been published covering the basic processes of the academic job search such as where to apply, applications, selection process, campus visits and so forth (e.g. Kelsky, 2015; Vick & Furlong, 2016) but this information is very generic and does not provide the specifics to guide graduates within social work. For this reason, we chronicle the job search processes and highlight knowledge and skills that are needed for social work education. Doctoral students in a traditional path, who are

graduating in the spring or summer, are expected to start identifying and perusing academic job postings online the summer prior to their graduation. They must continue to identify desired job postings through the fall and winter of the final year of their program.

Where to apply?

We advise our doctoral students to keep an open mind when applying for academic positions, particularly in the types and location of the school. In our experiences, students often discover that their “dream” school is not what they had anticipated at the beginning of their search. Most doctoral students on the job market seek academic positions that specifically advertise for an assistant professor, or indicating an “open rank”, which means the school is open to hiring an assistant, associate or full professor. Some job postings may have a particular focus area, such as a position description seeking candidates with an interest in disability policy research, or someone with the ability to teach in the clinical track of an MSW program, while other job descriptions will be broad. Students must carefully read job announcements to determine if the position is a tenure track or not, or if the position is a time-limited or “term” position, and if they have the necessary qualifications for the job (e.g. MSW with practice experience). Students can consult with their advisors or PhD Program director for assistance with this process. In addition, students on the job market are encouraged to research schools to examine if it is a good fit for their needs and contact the chair of the search committee for specific questions. Creating a spreadsheet of potential academic positions may be useful for doctoral students to help manage their decisions of where to apply.

Application Materials

Job announcements for social work faculty positions typically appear on various social work specific job boards in late summer, and continue through the fall and spring. In the past several years, many universities have been scheduling their application deadlines to coincide with CSWE’s Annual Program Meeting, though deadlines can be both much earlier and much later than this meeting.

Universities and departments have different application requirements, but nearly all include an application letter and a CV. In addition, applicants might be asked to provide letters of recommendation or names of people who could write letters of recommendation, writing samples, a research statement, a teaching statement or teaching philosophy, teaching evaluations, or a broader teaching portfolio that might include evaluations and sample course materials. It is important for all materials to be carefully constructed and tailored to the position for which the applicant is applying. Students need to be attentive to the details in each application and follow the job application instructions. They should send in exactly what is requested by the search committee and in the format in which it is requested. Students can add the application requirements into a spreadsheet to help keep track of the differing application requirements and to make sure that materials are turned into schools correctly. It is important for materials to be proofread and edited carefully. Faculty search committees are often sifting through hundreds of applications, and an applicant does not want their application to stand out by misspelling the name of the university or containing typos in the CV. Applications are

typically either uploaded to online application systems, or sent via email to the chair of the search committee or a staff person.

The application letter is one of the most important parts of the application packet. In the letter, applicants need to describe how their experiences and skills are a good fit for the position for which they are applying. Those who are applying to positions in schools that emphasize research or teaching will need to have several boilerplate versions of their letters. These tailored letters are typically two to three pages long. They describe an applicant's research, teaching and practice experience and detail how they meet the requirements of the particular position including the social work practice experience requirements.

Nearly all positions will require letters of recommendation, either at the time of application or later in the application process. Students need to think carefully about who writes their letters. It is important for students to ask for letters of recommendation from faculty who know their work well and who understand the types of positions for which they are. Typically, students ask their advisor or chair of their dissertation committee and other committee members, as well as other faculty or supervisors. Students who are applying to a teaching-focused school need to make sure that letter writers can address their teaching, which might involve asking a faculty member at another college where the student worked as an adjunct to write a letter. Doctoral students must be respectful of faculty members' time in regards to letters. Therefore, when requesting letters of recommendations, doctoral students need to provide sufficient time to complete the task, and not give faculty members quick deadlines to meet. It may even be helpful to provide talking points to make it easier for faculty members to write the letters. For example, students can help faculty members who write letters by providing them a curriculum vitae and a list of their accomplishments in research, teaching, practice, and leadership.

The Selection Process

All schools and departments of social work have slightly different methods for selecting candidates. Typically, schools have a formal search committee appointed by the Dean, made up of faculty and staff, and sometimes students and alumni, to screen applicants and make recommendations for hiring. A search committee chair typically runs the search, and often a staff member assists. Applicants can contact the chair or the staff person with application questions. Once candidates submit their applications, the search committee often has a process for whittling down from the large stack of applications they received to find candidates that are the best fit for their school, such as CV reviews of minimum or desired qualifications. Some schools might receive several hundred applications for a single position, while others might only receive a handful. Students might hear right away from the search committee, or might not get a response from the search committee after submitting their application. If a student has not heard back from the search committee prior to CSWE, or if they have another offer, we suggest that they contact the chair of the committee to receive an update on their application status and/or screening timeline.

Preliminary screening interviews or meetings. Some schools conduct preliminary meetings or screening interviews with applicants, while others do not. These preliminary

meetings can have varied purposes – they can be formal screening interviews used to screen potential applicants for deciding whom to bring in for campus visits, or they can be similar to informational interviews to help garner interests in the position. Preliminary meetings are often done at the social work academic conferences, particularly CSWE’s Annual Program Meeting and SSWR’s Annual Conference. Students who are on the academic job market for research positions need to plan to attend both of these conferences during their job search year, while those who are applying to teaching positions need to focus on CSWE, as most teaching schools do not do interviews at SSWR’s conference. These conference interviews can vary, from a more informal meeting in the lobby of the hotel or a coffee shop with one or several search committee members, to a structured hour-long interview with the full search committee in a dedicated conference room or a hotel suite. While at the conference, students should attend any reception held by a school for which they are interviewing, where they might have a chance to meet other faculty members as well. Many schools or departments do telephone meetings or video interviews as a way to screen applicants. Some schools do both conference and video meetings and, and may triage students at the video meeting prior to CSWE, or triage students at CSWE before a more in depth video interview. These will also vary similarly in format.

Students need to prepare for any type of preliminary meeting as they would any other job interview. They need to research the schools where they are doing their preliminary interviews, and come prepared to talk about their own experiences and skills as well as how they would fit with the school’s various programs or centers. Students need to dress professionally for these meetings, whether in person or over videoconference, and bring plenty of copies of their CV. Many PhD Program Directors and advisors help their students prepare for preliminary interviews by conducting mock interviews. The more prepared a student is for a preliminary interview, the less nervous they will be. Many schools also provide a list of questions that students may be asked so that students can prepare themselves for an interview. Table 1 provides some sample interview questions.

<Table 1 About Here>

The Campus Visit. In most cases, the search committee will invite selected candidates to a campus visit in the fall or spring. These job visits are normally offered to only a few select candidates that the search committee is seriously considering for the position. Therefore, while we encourage students to think broadly when applying to schools, we highly advise candidates to reject an offer for a campus visit if they do not foresee the school as a good fit. Attending a campus visit without the intention of seriously considering accepting a job offer can damage future relationships in the small discipline of social work.

While there is no typical job visit and schools often have varying considerations and requirements, most candidates can expect a campus visit to last one to three days. Typically, schools fly candidates to campus and/or reimburse them for their other travel costs, and provide suitable accommodations during the campus visit. The campus visit usually includes a job interview with the search committee, a job talk and/or teaching

presentation, meetings with other faculty, students, and administrators, campus or city tours, and a meeting with the Dean or Director.

We encourage job candidates to research thoroughly the school that they will be visiting. Search committee members often remember candidates who know the names of faculty members and their research specialties as well as have a thorough knowledge of the school including its program concentrations, research centers and other characteristics that makes the school unique. Students need to arrive at the campus visit with plenty of questions, including ones that go beyond the regular boiler plate questions, such as “what support do you provide to new faculty,” to more specific questions that demonstrate the candidate considerable research on the school, such as, “how connected is the school with the university’s interdisciplinary Center on Aging,” or “I see you conduct annual international study abroad trips with your MSW students, can assistant professors participate in leading these trips?”

Campus visits usually include an in-depth, formal interview with the search committee. These interviews often, but not always, use structured interview guides that correspond to the position and type of university. Depending on the type of school, candidates need to be prepared to answer questions about their current and future research plans, their teaching, mentoring, and social work practice experience as well as their experience seeking grants, working with diverse populations, and engaging with the community, among other topics. These questions typically include informational questions, such as “describe your teaching experience”, or behavior based questions, such as “describe a situation when you had a conflict in class. How did you respond?” In some schools, a candidate might be asked questions regarding the general job environment, such as, “give an example of when you were part of a team that worked well? What made it work well?”

A significant part of the job visit is for the candidate to provide a job talk and/or a teaching presentation. The job talk, which typically lasts about 30 to 45 minutes, will consist of a candidate presenting his or her original research or dissertation. In most cases, faculty and students are invited to attend the talk and will ask questions about the research topic. These are often videotaped as well. We highly recommend that doctoral students on the job market practice their job talk often, and in front of faculty and students. During the job talk, not only are candidates demonstrating their research knowledge, but also are showing how well they can present, which can potentially indicate their ability to teach. Candidates need to be prepared to answer tough questions about their work and be willing to state that they may not know the answer to the question. Candidates in this position need to maintain composure and state that they will give an answer at a later date.

Teaching presentations vary significantly, but can last as little as 15 minutes to as long as two hours with the candidate teaching a part of or the entire duration of the class time. For the teaching presentation, candidates may be given a topic to teach that fits within the schedule of a class, or may be asked to teach content they are already familiar with. Often these teaching presentations are conducted in actual classes with students, with search committee and faculty members seated in the back of the class to assess the candidates’ teaching ability, including their effectiveness in engaging students on the

topic. Teaching presentations can also be given to “mock” classes, consisting of faculty, staff and/or students. Students who are asked to do teaching presentations need to think carefully about how they are going to engage the participants. The point of the teaching preparation is to demonstrate teaching skills, so this is not the time to give a long, uninspiring lecture or show a video that takes up most of the class time.

The job visit also includes one, several or many meals, as well as times when a candidate might be walking or driving in the car with a faculty member, staff member or student from one meeting to a next. Candidates need to consider that the times when they are with faculty or students as part of the interview. This can be awkward for candidates, as they might find themselves in situations where they are out to dinner with faculty who are drinking and telling jokes, and the candidate must remember that they are on an interview. It is wise to limit alcohol consumption, or avoid it altogether. Candidates also need to recognize that while there are many human resources rules and anti-discrimination laws that govern hiring, most faculty and staff are not familiar with the rules, and might ask inappropriate questions in attempts to be friendly, such as asking whether a candidate has children or a partner, especially in these informal settings. Other faculty might broach such personal topics in a more appropriate manner, in an attempt to highlight positive aspects of the campus, such as pointing out the on campus daycare or discussing work/life supports. Candidates might want to discuss with their advisor how they can deal with these sorts of situations before going on a campus visit.

While candidates may have different priorities to consider before making a decision, such as their family as well as their own well-being, we encourage our PhD graduates to deeply examine the climate of the school by observing and talking with other faculty members during the job visit. It is important to ask faculty about departmental support and the tenure process for new assistant professors. Candidates must also ask about the expectations placed on faculty, such as whether there is a greater teaching or research load, the work schedule new professors are expected to maintain and the specific classes they are expected to teach. Learning about the overall status of the department within the institution as well as the diversity and quality of the student body is essential for the candidate to understand before accepting an offer.

Once the campus visits are completed, it would be beneficial for candidates to create a “decision criteria” that can help them determine their school of choice. Prahinski (2002) offers a short list that can be included in the academic candidate’s “decision criteria” such as location, tenure capability, compatibility in research and teaching with peers, salary, caliber of students, department size, and power within the school.

Responding to Job Offers

Unlike many other fields, social work candidates on the academic job market who have a publication record, teaching experience and social work practice experience can have multiple job offers. However, candidates often have to be willing to move to find a position that fits their desired qualities and conditions. It is therefore the candidates’ responsibility to invest in not only learning about the available faculty positions and its schools but also to reflect on how they may want to pursue life within the academia, and where they, along with their family, are interested in living.

Since it is common for those on the academic job market to have more than one job offer from different schools, we highly advise job candidates to wait in accepting a position. This can take some negotiation with schools who will want applicants to decide quickly on their offer, but accepting the first offer is often not the best course of action. Candidates with multiple offers may have room to negotiate their salary, start date, teaching load and schedule, moving expenses, start-up and technology funds, conference travel and research support, funding during the summer months, assistance for their partner and housing, travel expenses and even their decision dates.

We usually receive numerous questions from doctoral students on starting salaries and how to negotiate with deans and directors about a salary offer. While it may depend on the type of university that made the offer, it is possible for an academic candidate to obtain a school's salary range for assistant professors and use it as a baseline for negotiations. At most academic institutions, faculty salaries are often public information. Many public universities have fairly recent salary information published online, or students can search for salary information on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>). We encourage candidates to ask for help from their advisor, mentors and their school's dean or director for assistance in a job offer negotiation. Even though applicants will want to negotiate their salary, the dean and director who made the offer will want to know that their selected candidate is interested in the position. They will also want to know what it will take to get their preferred candidate to commit to their school. If students decide against a school during the salary negotiation or at any time in the process, we advise our students to be courteous and let the school know as quickly as possible so that they can continue to pursue other candidates. At some schools there may not be much room for a salary negotiation because of salary compression, that is, a school may not be able to make a salary offer that is higher than the salary of a current assistant professor with five years of experience at the school. Doing so might demoralize more seasoned faculty or cause them to demand a raise. In these situations, students might want to negotiate in other areas, such as for guaranteed summer funding for a certain amount of years, or more money for start-up costs, moving or travel.

In the end, students often narrow down their preferred schools to two, making for a difficult decision. We have noticed that things other than salary may come into play such as job location, quality of life, and other priorities within a candidate's family. When a student is having difficulty deciding between schools, we advise them to use a decision balance sheet by listing the pros and cons for each school in order to facilitate the decision process.

Discussion

The academic job market in social work is robust, but competitive (Lightfoot & Zheng, 2019, Anastas, 2006). Given the current job landscape, it has become essential for PhD graduates to assume positions in the professorate and to take their place as the next generation of scholarly leaders. Social work faculty search committees are determined to find quality candidates who have combined practice, teaching and research experience to generate not only scholarly work but also have the ability to advise and produce knowledgeable social workers and to become the stewards of the social work discipline

(Anastas, 2006; Harrison et al., 1989; Khinduka, 2002).

Obtaining job search skills is a necessary pre-requisite for a doctoral student to gain employment in the academic job market (Pifer & Baker, 2016). While job market knowledge and skills are essential to the success of PhD students, the practical processes of an academic job search have not been written about in doctoral education literature in social work. This paper therefore addressed an important but neglected area in literature on how PhD students can prepare themselves for the academic job market. Using both research and practical experiences, this paper addressed step-by-step guidance about the job search and preparation process. In particular, this paper covered how to prepare for the academic job market starting in the second and third years of doctoral studies and what to do later in the process when specific job search strategies are needed. The recommendations in this paper are grounded in research on doctoral education and on the experiences of doctoral program directors. Each recommendation is meant to be practical and are directed toward doctoral students and faculty members that advise and mentor these students.

Given the importance of academic job market preparation in doctoral education, faculty need to attend to the job search and employment processes within the social work discipline. This is particularly true given the industry's current need to move graduates into academic positions. To provide more consistent instruction for doctoral students about the academic job market, the advice given by faculty through informal mentoring and advising around the academic job market process needs to be formalized into career services that can assist students with the academic job search and employment processes. As is suggested in this paper, career services and preparation needs to start at the early stages of doctoral students' career and supports need to be made available throughout the job application, interview, and job decision process. Attention to preparation for the academic job market may require some changes in doctoral pedagogy and departmental services offered to doctoral students. An ideal approach would be for schools of social work to offer career services to doctoral students. Alternate instructional strategies may also be helpful, such as capstone courses, colloquium that guides students through the job market preparation, workshops, support groups and resume services. We know that some schools already offer one or more of these approaches. Instead of a piecemeal approach, however, we would like to see schools develop effective programmatic and curricular approaches to help doctoral students on the academic job market.

As doctoral program directors that have been advising students while in the academic job market, we would like to see competencies and guidelines on job search and employment process services developed that schools can follow. An evaluation of what schools are already doing would be helpful since no research on doctoral education exists on what career services are being offered and with what impact. We believe guidelines and evaluation would be useful next steps to assuring that PhD students are prepared for the academic job market.

Conclusion

There is currently a critical need for PhD students to take academic positions due to a shortage in social work faculty members, yet the academic job market is extremely competitive. Currently no social work literature exists that provides practical guidance on

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how to prepare for the academic job market. This paper provides essential knowledge and skills that can assist PhD students and their advisors in understanding the job preparation, search, and employment processes within universities. Guidelines and research are needed to help doctoral programs and schools of social work instruct students on how to prepare for the academic job market.

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Table 1
Sample Question for Faculty Job Interviews

Domain	Sample Questions
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your research interests? • Tell us about your dissertation. • What led you to be interested in your topic? • What research methodologies/approaches do you use? • What is your research plan for the next five years? • What types of journals do you foresee yourself publishing in? • In what ways do you disseminate your research findings? • What sorts of funding could you expect to get to carry out your research? • Tell us about the grants you have received. • How do you engage the community in your research? • Who would you say are the greatest researchers in your sub-field?
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What courses have you taught and/or are prepared to teach? • If you could teach any course, which course would it be? • How would your students describe your teaching? • How would you structure a class on X, including texts/assignments? • What are your strengths/weaknesses in teaching? • How do you promote diversity in your classroom? • How will you tailor your courses to meet the needs of (international, nontraditional, first generation, etc.) students? • What is your experience with distance/online learning? • How do you incorporate technology in the classroom? • Would you be willing to participate in our (international, service learning, honors, online, etc.) programs? • Describe how you have responded to conflict in your classroom. • What is your approach to supervising/mentoring doctoral students?

Table 1 Continued

Domain	Sample Questions
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe your practice experience. • How does your practice experience inform your research? • How do you draw on your practice experience in teaching? • Describe your continued connections with the practice community. • Provide an example of a social work practice experience that illustrates your expertise in (administrative, policy, clinical, etc.) practice.
University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are you interested in our school? • What is your experience with (small liberal arts, large research, all women's, historically black, land grant, online, etc.) colleges? • What qualities would you bring to our faculty? • What are your reservations about joining our faculty? • Describe how you would fit with our mission? • Are you familiar with the work of X and Y (famous or not so famous people in the department)?
Work Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of organizational style/supervisory style do you thrive in? • Describe a previous experience working collaboratively. • How do you feel about working with others in developing syllabi, critiquing each other, etc.? • How would you deal with conflict among the faculty?