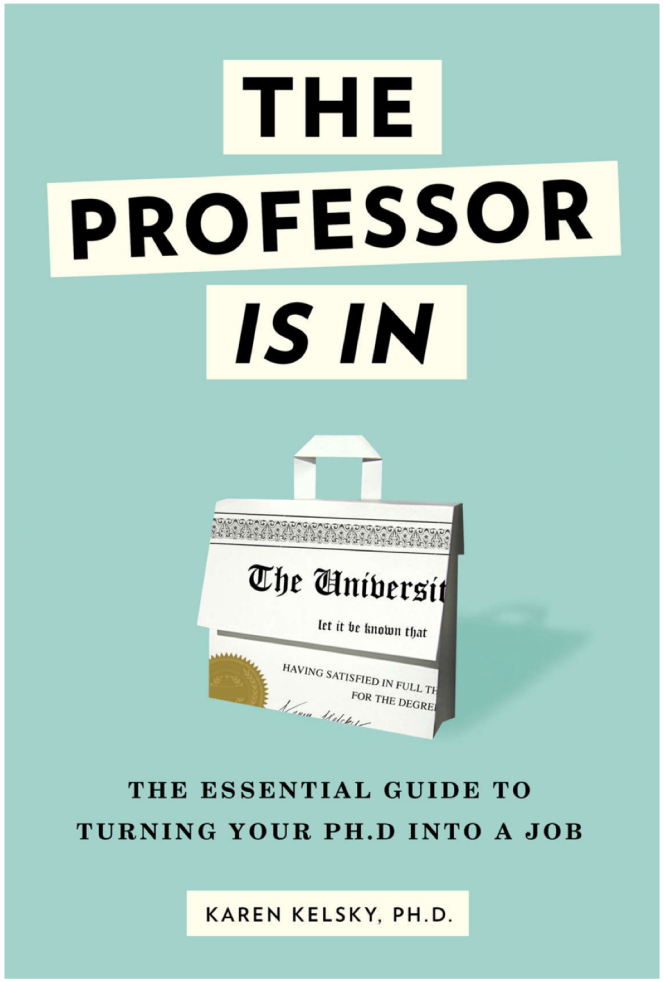
Tales from the road: How I navigated the non-R1 job market

Aaron T. Lee

GSPS, May 2019

TL;DR Version: Buy this book



- No-bullshit discussions of the academy
- Written by a previously tenured professor
- Job document templates that work
- Focuses on faculty applications but easily translatable to postdoc applications

- Deciding to apply ➢Summer+ before
- Writing the applications ➢Sept–Dec
- Round 1 interviews: Skype/phone ➢Nov–Jan
- Round 2 interviews: in person ➢Jan–March
- Negotiating to 'yes!' ➢March

Deciding to Apply

- Is an R1 / non-R1 right for me?

Misleading ideas about the academy

- "I'll be judged on my brilliance/passion, not on lines in my CV."
- "I won't worry about this because our department has a good placement rate."
- "I'm not in this for the money."
- "My adviser is famous so I'll be all set."
- "Adjunct positions are great temporary positions while I figure things out."
- "I'm the exception."

Some differences between R1 and PUIs

R1

- Tenure: Research/Teaching/Service
- Teaching load typically 1-1 (2 classes a year)
- Grant $$ expectations non-zero
- Publishing a few papers a year (w/ g. students)
- Higher salaries

PUI

- Tenure: Research/Teaching/Service
- Teaching load typically 2-3, 3-3, or more
- Grant $$ expectations rare
- Publications? Depends, but non-zero
- Decent salaries (usually)

Some misconceptions about PUI faculty jobs

- Research doesn't matter. I just need to be a good teacher to get tenure.
  - Publications, conference attendance, etc. still expected. Watch out for aspirational SLACs who want R1 publication rates with higher teaching loads.
- I'll use these jobs as a fallback plan if I can't get an R1 job.
  - These jobs are equally as competitive.
  - Applying with an R1 application won't work.
- Community Colleges are not worth my time.
  - While 'tenure' is rarer, full-time (not adjunct) faculty can be compensated well.
  - Potentially quite gratifying.

Some misconceptions about PUI faculty jobs

- I was an excellent TA/GSI so I am very marketable for non-R1 schools.
  - High TA marks are not good enough.
  - Having one instructor-on-record course on your CV will go a LONG way. (Diminishing returns on additional instructor-on-record credits.)
  - If IOR not possible, participation in teaching-related programs are great.
- Since these aren't research schools, I won't do a postdoc and apply right away.
  - Possible, but a postdoc will make your application rise to the top of the pile.
  - Again, some research is likely required, so you need to show evidence that you can do it (ideally with undergrads).

Deciding to Apply

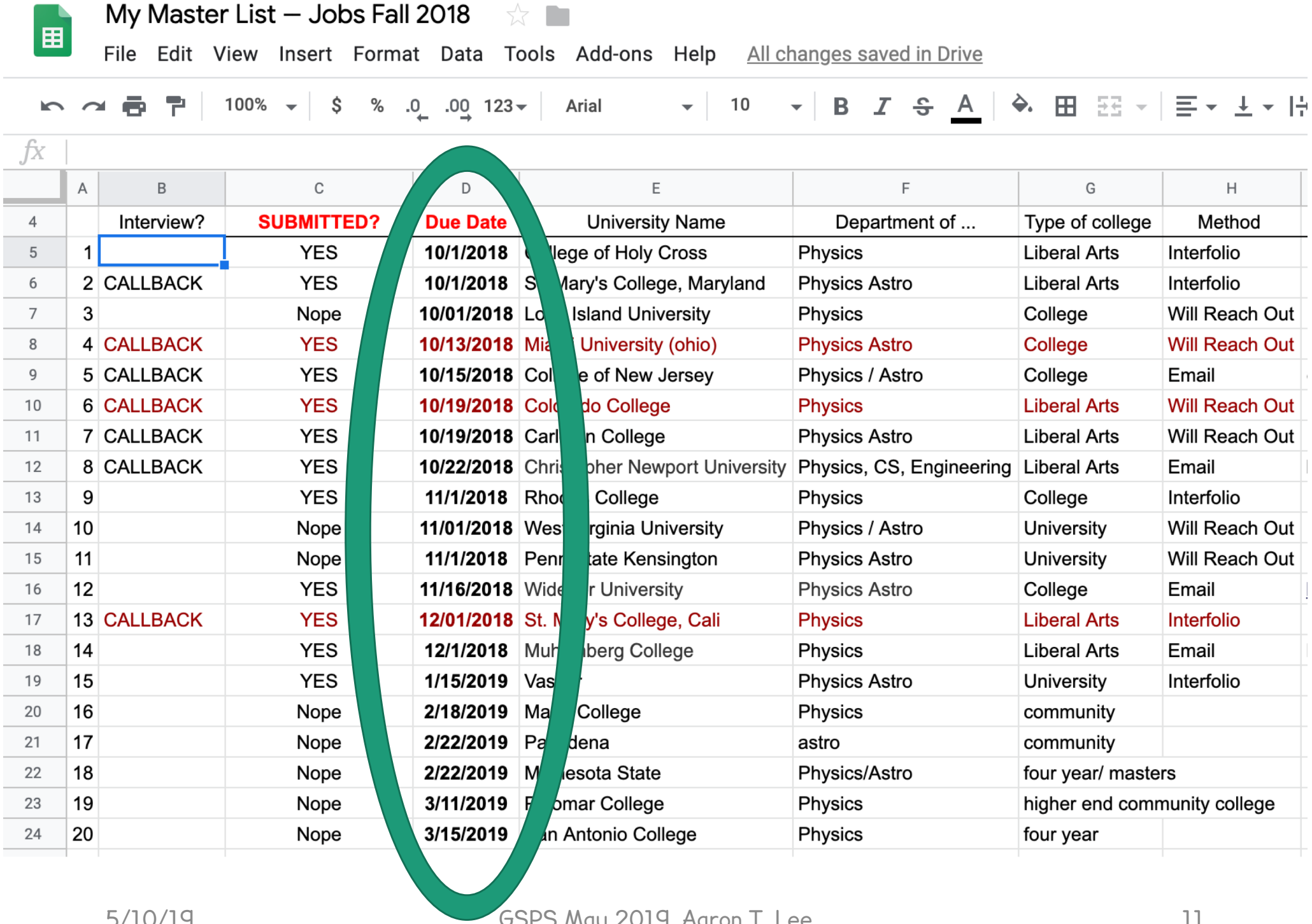
- Is an R1 / non-R1 right for me?
- Do your research, start early, mentally prepare for what's to come.
  - This is a significant time investment
  - Find mentors that aren't your letter writers
  - Re-check job posting sites frequently
  - Rejection is going to happen
  - Imposter syndrome is a bitch

Where I found job postings

Jobs start appearing ~Aug--Sept

- Chronicle of Higher Ed Job Site
- Physics Today Job Site
- AAPT Job Site
- HigherEdJobs.com
- InsideHigherEd.com

- AAS Job Site mostly R1 positions (and postdocs)


My Master List – Jobs Fall 2018

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help All changes saved in Drive

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
4		Interview?	SUBMITTED?	Due Date	University Name	Department of ...	Type of college	Method
5	1		YES	10/1/2018	College of Holy Cross	Physics	Liberal Arts	Interfolio
6	2	CALLBACK	YES	10/1/2018	Saint Mary's College, Maryland	Physics Astro	Liberal Arts	Interfolio
7	3		Nope	10/01/2018	Long Island University	Physics	College	Will Reach Out
8	4	CALLBACK	YES	10/13/2018	Miami University (ohio)	Physics Astro	College	Will Reach Out
9	5	CALLBACK	YES	10/15/2018	College of New Jersey	Physics / Astro	College	Email
10	6	CALLBACK	YES	10/19/2018	Colorado College	Physics	Liberal Arts	Will Reach Out
11	7	CALLBACK	YES	10/19/2018	Carleton College	Physics Astro	Liberal Arts	Will Reach Out
12	8	CALLBACK	YES	10/22/2018	Christopher Newport University	Physics, CS, Engineering	Liberal Arts	Email
13	9		YES	11/1/2018	Rhodes College	Physics	College	Interfolio
14	10		Nope	11/01/2018	West Virginia University	Physics / Astro	University	Will Reach Out
15	11		Nope	11/1/2018	Penn State Kensington	Physics Astro	University	Will Reach Out
16	12		YES	11/16/2018	Widener University	Physics Astro	College	Email
17	13	CALLBACK	YES	12/01/2018	St. Mary's College, Cali	Physics	Liberal Arts	Interfolio
18	14		YES	12/1/2018	Muhlenberg College	Physics	Liberal Arts	Email
19	15		YES	1/15/2019	Vas	Physics Astro	University	Interfolio
20	16		Nope	2/18/2019	Ma College	Physics	community	
21	17		Nope	2/22/2019	Pasadena	astro	community	
22	18		Nope	2/22/2019	Minnesota State	Physics/Astro	four year/ masters	
23	19		Nope	3/11/2019	Palomar College	Physics	higher end community college	
24	20		Nope	3/15/2019	San Antonio College	Physics	four year	

You're going to have to deal with rejection

	R1	PUI	Submitted / Had
• Deciding to apply			
• Writing the applications	➢200	➢100	➢15
• Round 1 interviews: Skype/phone	➢20	➢10	➢6
• Round 2 interviews: in person	➢6-8	➢2-3	➢3
• Negotiating to 'yes!'	➢1	➢1	➢2

Writing the applications

- Cover letter (also Pdocs)
- CV (Pd)
- Teaching Statement
- Research Statement (Pd)
- Sometimes: Diversity Statement
- Surprisingly rare: Teaching Portfolio
- 2-3 letters of reference (Pd)
- Unofficial transcripts (ugrad and grad)

Another plug for TPII: Chapters dedicated to each document

PART IV. JOB DOCUMENTS THAT WORK

TWENTY-ONE. The Academic Skepticism Principle

Cover Letter

TWENTY-TWO. What's Wrong with Your Cover Letter

TWENTY-THREE. Tailoring with Dignity

TWENTY-FOUR. Rules of the Academic CV

CV

Teaching

TWENTY-FIVE. Just Say No to the Weepy Teaching Statement

TWENTY-SIX. Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

TWENTY-SEVEN. The Research Statement

Research

Diversity

TWENTY-EIGHT. What Is a Diversity Statement, Anyway?

Cover Letter: Templates

11. You're Disorganized and Rambling

Here's how a research-focused job letter should read.

DATE

NAME OF RECIPIENT/SEARCH COMMITTEE

DEPARTMENT

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

DEAR NAME/CHAIR OF SEARCH COMMITTEE:

PARA 1: I am applying for job X in Department Y. My Ph.D. is in Z, from the University of Q, in the field of R ([YEAR]). I am currently S at the University of W. My work broadly speaking focuses on A and B.

PARA 2: Your primary research project; briefly what, where, and how. Also, major sources of support.

PARA 3: Your primary research project's large contributions to the field and discipline as a whole—how it pushes boundaries, engages in dynamic new debates, and enlarges the discipline. This is a maximum of two or three sentences in length.

PARA 4: Your publications and conference papers, past, present, and future, on this project.

PARA 5: Your second project, with mention of publications, conference papers, and grants you have under way or planned.

PARA 6: Your teaching, as it ties in with all of the above.

PARA 7: An optional second teaching paragraph.

PARA 8: Your specific interest in the job and department to which you are applying. [To write this paragraph, consult the chapters on tailoring; focus on specific programs, specializations, and faculty by name, which shows that you have done your research.]

PARA 9: I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you.

SINCERELY,

SIGNATURE

NAME

Teaches you how to brag about yourself without being over the top.

DEPARTMENT OF ASTRONOMY
College of Natural Sciences

2515 Speedway, Stop C1400 • Austin, Texas 78712-1205 • PHONE 512-471-3000
FAX 512-471-6016 • www.as.utexas.edu

Nov 26th, 2018

Dr. Jessica Kintner
Chair, Department of Physics & Astronomy
Galileo Hall
1928 Saint Mary's Road
Moraga, CA 94575

Dear Professor Kintner,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Physics at St. Mary's College. My Ph.D. is in astrophysics, from the University of California Berkeley, where I was an NSF graduate

the University of Texas Austin. I believe my teaching and research experiences have uniquely prepared me to be an effective instructor and research mentor, and I am excited at the opportunity to join the vibrant community at St. Mary's College.

curriculums. The freedom to explore, rather than seeking a pre-determined correct answer, boosts curiosity and motivation, and the result is that my students, majors and non-majors alike, come up with the same questions being asked by professional astronomers. These successful teaching efforts have led to me receiving both teaching awards available to graduate students, a

I am particularly drawn to St. Mary's College because of its dedication to building an inquiry-based curriculum through scholarship and close student-faculty interaction. As an undergraduate and

office hours, small upper-level courses, and informal "bull sessions," where faculty would stop by student spaces to chat about physics. I drew upon these experiences when I ran an independent

student spaces to chat about physics. I drew upon these experiences when I ran an independent study on computational physics. Starting with no programming experience, my freshman student ended the course writing his own differential equation solver to simulate a two-dimensional array

student I simulated the most massive stars in the universe, understanding how their radiative feedback impacted their environment. My expertise in radiative transfer and computational

CV

Came up in interviews:

- Instructor experience
- Past experience working with undergrads
- Professional development
- Publication topics

Did not come up in interviews:

- TA experience
- Outreach

Teaching Statement

- Talk about Concrete Examples, not just "big ideas"
  - Even if you just have TA experience
- Talk about assessment
  - Both your own self-assessment and how you assess whether your teaching is working
- Your statements all should help each other
  - Tie in diversity and research into your teaching philosophy. How do these statements inform the others?

Research Statement

- Consider your audience
  - An R1 astro department knows different things than a mostly physics department
- Have more than one topic you can talk about
  - Show evidence your research portfolio is diverse (or that you have plans to diversify)
- Include potential student projects
  - Either grad or undergrad, depending on where you are applying
- With this and the teaching statement, try to highlight what the department is looking for.
  - Don't hesitate to write and ask if the job post isn't clear.

Diversity Statement

- Relatively new document – good and bad.
  - Good: No expectations about what it should say
  - Bad: No expectations about what it should say
- Give examples of previous shortcomings
- Tricky Question: How much about yourself do you disclose?
- How would you encourage diversity in the classroom / research group?
- Good if you can show evidence that you've read up on these issues (e.g., cite a paper)

Letters of Rec

- They shouldn't all say the same thing.
- You can talk about the content with your letter writers.
  - Ask them to consider mentioning X, Y, Z.
- They will forget to do these unless you manually remind them.
  - Email reminders, not a spreadsheet.
- Abusive PhD adviser?
  - Not a deal breaker if they are not included.
  - Prolly not true for R1s, though. (Maybe another letter writer knows enough of the situation to talk about it in their letter?)

The Phone/Skype Interview

- You're chatting with a panel of 2-6 people.
- Dress to impress, at least from the waist up.
- Have a cheat sheet on your screen. Don't just read it, though!
- This is a 30 minute sales pitch. Get comfortable humble bragging about yourself. You are there to sell YOU.
- Research the dept., the people on the committee, relevant campus programs, have some numbers on your cheat sheet.
- Think through your answers and offer more information than you think you need to. They typically won't ask for clarifications/follow-up.
- Send a thank you email after.

Common Interview Questions

- "Why do you want to work at X?"
- "Tell us an example of a good/bad teaching experience."
- "Explain your research to us non-experts."
- "How do you plan on involving undergraduates in your research?"
- "What's a class you are prepared to immediately teach? What class are you not ready to teach?"
- "How will you handle the fact that a higher teaching load will reduce your time to do research?"
- "We at X are committed to diversity and inclusion. How would you address these issues in the classroom?"
- "Do you have any questions for us?"
  - ALWAYS have at least two questions!

The Campus Visit

- Given a few weeks notice.
- One or two days long.
- Includes interviews with faculty and admins, teaching demo, research talk, tours, lunches and dinners.
  - All of these items are part of the interview.
  - Ask if there are opportunities to meet with the (under)grads.
- Nonstop activities – Bring power bars or something with you.
- Send a thank you after the visit.

21-Jan	Monday		
Breakfast at hotel	1/21/19		
Ride to Campus		8:45a	
Arrive to Physics Office		9a	M
Tour of Campus		9:15-10a	Ja
Meeting with Physics Chair		10-10:45a	D
Meet with Physics Staff		10:45-11p	Je
Prep time for presentation		11a-12p	Ca
Colloquium Presentation		12-1pm	C
Tour of Colorado Springs		1:15-2p	Ka
Meeting with Dean of Faculty		2:15-2:45	D
Meeting with Provost		3-3:30	D
Meet with Physics Faculty		3:45-4:15p	D
Ride back to hotel			
Dinner with Physics Faculty		6:30pm	N
Ride back to hotel			

22-Jan	Tuesday		
Ride to Campus	1/22/19	7:45am	
Breakfast with students		8-9a	Pl
Teaching Demonstration		9:30-10:30a	P
Meeting with Vice President/Dir Butler Center		11-11:30a	D
Lunch with Staff and Faculty		12-1pm	Pl
Meeting with Physics Faculty		1:15-1:45	D
Meeting with Physics Faculty		1:45-2:30	D
Meeting with Physics Faculty		2:30-3	D
Meeting with Search Faculty		3-3:20	D
Meeting with Search Faculty		3:25-3:45	D
Ride back to hotel			
Dinner with Physics Faculty		6:30p	K
Ride back to hotel			

The Campus Visit

- Individual faculty
  - Sell yourself as a team player
  - Have a sense of what they work on
  - Anything that has come up before is fair game; they've likely forgot.
- Chair
  - Overlap w/ dean topics.
  - Is startup funded by department or university?
  - Fair to ask about timeline for decision.
- Dean
  - Tenure requirements/expectations, compensation
  - May talk about teaching/research, may just be admin
- Provost
  - Big picture ideas of university, what challenges have the university been facing?
  - Resources available at Uni level?

The Campus Visit

- Research Talk
  - Know (ask!) what the intended audience is.
  - Should it be understandable by (under)grads?
- Teaching Demo
  - Can feel awkward and artificial.
  - Go in assuming you're the prof. and that this is just another day of class.
  - Likely the 'students' will be the search committee, and they are terrible at acting like students.

The Negotiation Phase

- You've won the lottery!
- It is expected that you will negotiate, but they don't want you to.
- Uncomfortable situation—colleagues can suddenly feel like enemies.
- Don't accept the offer on the phone.
- Get a sense (from someone else) of what is typical for startup packages and salary.
- Ideal situation is that you have multiple offers and can leverage them against each other.
- Rescinding offers apparently is becoming more common, but I never felt like that was a threat.