

The Academic Marketplace:

Negotiating Your First Faculty Position (in the Biological Sciences)

While working at the Gold and Stock Telegraph Co. in Boston, a young Thomas Edison invented the typing telegraph (stock ticker). He decided to offer his new invention for sale to the company president, General Lefferts. During a meeting between Edison and Lefferts, the conversation finally came around to price. Edison agonized silently about how much to ask for his invention and after what seemed to be an interminable period of silence, Edison was just about to ask for \$3000 when Lefferts spoke up. Young man, Lefferts began, would you consider \$40,000 for this new-fangled machine?

Get a Running Start: Negotiating your first faculty position is essentially the last step in a long educational journey that began in grade school and ended with your Ph.D. or postdoctoral training. It is key to launching a successful career in academia and you should proceed cautiously, responsibly and with your needs clearly defined and articulated. Unlike the young Thomas Edison mentioned above, you must be prepared and informed. You must know the "going rate" in the academic marketplace. What you negotiate now will determine whether your career gets off to a running start or begins flat-footed from a dead stop. This can make a significant difference as you approach the all-important tenure decision.

What Are You Negotiating? Although negotiating a faculty position will depend on the institutions and individuals involved, there are some common features and techniques you should be aware of. It is critical that you know what you are negotiating, and know how to negotiate it. First, you are negotiating a compensation or "start-up" package. A typical start-up package consists of the following: salary, start date, teaching (load and scheduling), space (office and lab), moving expenses, mortgage assistance, and other special needs or requirements (e.g., employment for spouse or partner, travel to meetings or data collection sites, instrumentation, etc.). Second, your negotiations should be guided by an honest assessment of what you need (not necessarily what you want) to succeed in your new position.

Who's in the Driver's Seat? Once you have been notified that you are the top candidate, you become responsible for raising all issues related to your start-up package. You have the advantage; use it wisely. Remember, once you have signed your employment documents, the dynamics of the negotiation change dramatically. Whatever negotiating leverage you had before you signed on is now greatly reduced. The granting of requests made after you have formally accepted the position depends largely on the goodwill and generosity of the department. Offers of employment are never withdrawn because a candidate has asked for too much. This would be inconsistent with the rigorous selection process that has identified you as the best candidate. A department will do everything it can attract you to the position. Withdrawing an offer and going to the next candidate on the list because they are willing to settle for less, is not the way things are done.

Being a Good Negotiator. The key to successfully negotiating your first faculty position is to know the difference between what you want and what you need to be successful in the position. If you are not exactly clear about what you need, consult a faculty mentor about

what is reasonable for each of the items in your start-up package. Be up-front about your special needs. This is not the time to be coy or shy about asking for what you believe is essential for your success. If your research requires an expensive piece of equipment, turn your request in to a win-win situation by offering to share it with other faculty or departments. Remember that making grandiose requests for salary, space and equipment may reveal more about your naiveté than the value you place on your skills and training. Within the UC system, start-up packages for assistant professors can range from \$100,000 to \$300,000, depending on the campus. Typically, these funds are to be used over two to three years to support your research. Most campuses exempt new faculty from formal teaching for the first two to three quarters. Coverage of health and life insurance cost and moving expenses are standard with UC. UC makes every effort to accommodate requests for employment of spouses and partners. Once agreement is reached on your start-up package, you should receive written confirmation of these commitments from the Dean.

A Special Note About Salaries. For most public institutions like UC, salary scales based on a regular review process and are a matter of public record. Candidates should ask for these scales if the department chair does not provide them. Most new UC faculty in the biological sciences start at Assistant Professor III (\$57,300/11 month appointment) based on their publication record and years of postdoctoral experience. Be sure to read your offer letter carefully. Is your position a 9 month or 11-month appointment? Is any part of your salary based on "soft" money now or in the future? Some institutions, particularly private universities and colleges, will offer higher starting salaries than public universities, but a portion of the faculty salary will revert to "soft" money at some time in the future. This means that at some future date you will be responsible for funding part of your salary from extramural grants.

Avoid Creating Ill-Will. Negotiating your position is the first interaction you will have with members of your new department. You will be interacting with these faculty members for many years so be forthright and respectful in your negotiation. Candidates who niggle over details, make overreaching demands or play one institution off of another (trophy hunting) can deplete their account in the department's "Goodwill Bank." Rather than engage in a bidding war with another institution over a candidate, UC will typically make you its best offer and then try to compete with your other offer by making you an offer sooner. When in doubt, seek advice from a faculty mentor or a senior faculty member at another institution. Good luck.