A job market anecdote

This year I went on the faculty job market, and I did not end up with a faculty job. The purpose of this essay is not to bemoan this fact—I have a great life and have started a nice postdoc—but to provide an honest and informative catalogue of the experience. The current job market essays out there have a major survivorship bias. Generally, you're seeing people's stories conditional on their success. I often wonder, when I read the advice: did this person succeed because they did X, or did everyone do X? And even if these victorious essay writers were more likely than other applicants to do X, maybe X is conditionally independent of success but correlated with being organized enough to write a job market post.
So as someone who has always strived to make my struggles and imperfections other people's business (see my CV of failure), I thought it would be helpful and fun to put out a data point from outside of that conditional distribution.

I'll give you all the tea, including all the places I applied to and how far I got in the process. The set of applications I sent is pretty small, for two main reasons. The first is that, while I want to be a professor, and I want it a *lot*, I want to be near my family even more. I just really like my family, and I do my best research when I'm happy, anyway. So when applying to faculty positions I only applied to places in the Northeast and the Midwest, because I felt these would be close enough to family for me (more on this later). Secondly, this year there were many schools that were not hiring at all. It's not just that there were very few theory calls—a good number of schools didn't event have a general call for CS. Even the ones I did apply to I sometimes did with a warning from someone I knew at the University that they basically would not consider me (because of my research area, or, in the case of Penn, because I go to Penn). I put an asterisk on schools like that.

In the end, the positions I applied to were at: MIT EECS, MIT Sloan/EECS joint position, Cornell Tech CS, Cornell CS*, UPenn CS*, JHU CS, Georgetown CS, Michigan CS, TTIC CS, UChicago CS, NYU CS, CMU CS*, Columbia CS* and Columbia IEOR.

The places I got pre-interviews were: MIT Sloan/EECS joint position, NYU CS, Georgetown CS

The places I got onsite interviews were: MIT Sloan/EECS joint position, TTIC CS (they didn't do pre-interviews), NYU CS

Places that I withdraw from post-interview: TTIC CS (TTICS is an extraordinary place, but I realized that even the Midwest was a bit too far from my family)

Places that rejected me post-onsite interview: MIT Sloan/EECS joint position, NYU CS (While MIT sent me a very nice email, NYU never actually got back to me at all after the onsite—so maybe, seven months later, I'm still in the running!)

Leaving me with…

Places I got offers: empty set

So that's how it went for me!

From what I've heard from others, the job market can be stressful in a myriad of ways. I've spoken to people who did not get interviews anywhere. This was incredibly exhausting for them, because rejection is exhausting! I've spoken to people who got interviews at almost everywhere

they applied, and spent the spring semester going to one or two interviews per week. This was also incredibly exhausting for them, because interviews are exhausting! And in either case, you spend months carrying the burden of massive uncertainty, which in itself is exhausting. My particular flavor of exhausting was a bit of both worlds; I had three interviews, which gave me a taste of the hectic nonstop blitz of faculty interviews, while also leaving lots of time for rumination and existential dread.

The goods news is things didn't get exhausting for me until around March. I spent a lot of the fall actually wondering at how *non*-stressed I was. Why did people say the job market was so awful? You just had to write a couple essays, and then sit around and wait to get interviewed. Now, obviously this second step could be very stressful, but it didn't catch up to me for a long time. I think I managed to distract myself and pretend I didn't care and kept myself busy with fun research problems. I did some pre-interviews and except for slight anxiety spikes the hours before them, mostly felt like the job market was an extracurricular activity rather than an all-encompassing void of darkness.

Then the in-person interviews hit.

I consider myself a pretty social person. I'd say that for a Ph.D. student, I might even be *very* social. So when people said the all-day interviews were draining, I nodded sympathetically but didn't truly believe it would be tiring for *me*. As usually happens when I assume I am out of distribution, I was completely wrong. The persistence of high-pressure interactions across one or often two days takes a toll. Even when the meetings were engaging, they felt like they were draining my very life force. On the day of my NYU interview, my face swelled up, and I broke into hives over my arms. I was convinced that they were stress-induced, and in the week after, asked my friends if they wanted to see my "job market welts." It turned out that these welts were actually from *bedbugs*, an entire failure story of its own—but I think the fact that I was willing to believe that they were an unprecedented physical manifestation of my anxiety says a lot about how stressful the in-person interviews were. I'm not sure if there is an easy solution to this, as it makes sense for many professors to want to meet and evaluate the potential new hires. But just know that if you feel like you've had your soul removed from your body after a two-day faculty onsite, you are far from alone.

After the interviews were over, all that was left to do was wait. I distracted myself by visiting Berkeley for the month of April and starting up some really fun projects there. When I began my time there it really wasn't clear what my job prospects were, but as the weeks carried on with no word, I began to grapple with the fact that the 2026 faculty job market was looking like a bust for me. I wasn't as sad about it as I feared I would be—while being a professor seems like a wonderful job, it also is a huge lifestyle shift and responsibility. Having struck out temporarily meant more time in which I could actually do research. It also meant time to reckon with how the rapid advancements of AI might change the research problems I wanted to tackle and how I wanted to tackle them.

Once again, staying engaged in research during this period was extremely valuable for keeping me grounded (shout out to Nika Haghtalab's lab for the great time!), which leads to the only concrete advice I have for future job-marketers. While you are on the market, if you can, stay active in research in some capacity. Not only might this help you in research discussions during interviews, but, at least for me, it provided a wonderful and welcome distraction from the uncertainty of the job market. If there is one thing I am certain of, it's that I really like doing research. It's good to be reminded of what we're here for.