

Rob King: Well, welcome, everybody. I'm Rob King, and I'm from the University of Minnesota, and we want to welcome you to this session on how to find a job at the ASSA job market. Over the year, past years, the job market for economics has shifted more and more to the ASSA meetings, and I think that's evident in the job market that's here, but it's-- if you haven't been, it's an enormous meeting and sort of a mind-boggling process, and what we want to do is help you navigate a little bit through that and understand more about it.

It's important both for people that are in the market looking for a job but also for people from departments that are in the market looking for candidates for their jobs. So I think we've got a mix of mostly people who are entering the market, but we've got some people that are on the demand side, as well.

Our format is that we'll have three presentations, about 10 minutes each, and we'll have just a short time for questions after each presentation. But then we'll have some time at the end of the session for some just general questions and answers. Our three presenters are Steve Sexton, who has just recently finished his Ph.D. at the University of California-Berkeley and has started a job or is starting a job at North Carolina State. We have Jon Brandt, who's the department head at North Carolina State, and he was on the hiring side of the decision for Steve, so we've got both sides of the market there. And then we have Jim McDonald from the Economic Research Service at USDA's Economic Research Service, and they are very active in the ASSA job market, and Jim has participated (in) that in the last several years.

So I want to start off with Steve, and he'll tell a little bit about his experiences, and then we'll switch to John and then to Jim. So thank you very much for coming.

Steve Sexton: Thank you, Rob, for inviting me to be here. I'm not sure I'm expert in navigating the job market, but if not expert, then I'm certainly lucky because I am quite happy with the outcome of my job search. But I will try and impart some wisdom to you and some strategies that I sort of picked up along the way.

Berkeley almost kind of goes overboard and overkill in preparing students for the job market. In fact, we have two depart- two senior faculty-- well, one senior faculty and one junior faculty's closer to having been in the job market, and they begin advising our upcoming crop of job market candidates in March before the ASSA meetings. So about 10 months before, they will be interviewing at the ASSAs. Our department is already preparing students for the process, and so I'll try and distill some of the lessons I've learned and some of the practices we have at Berkeley.

So I'm going to first start, before you even are applying for jobs, a year or two out even from the job market-- that may apply to some of you here-- what you should be thinking about in terms of your job market paper and getting out there and getting yourself known in the community. Then, of course, the process of applying, interviewing at the meetings, and then the fly-outs, which, hopefully, follow after your interviews.

So, I think the job market paper may be the most important paper of your life. Certainly, there will be other important papers, but this one is going to determine more than any other paper you write where your first job is, and that's going to determine who your colleagues are, so who you're going to be working with on your subsequent papers, and that first job may very well determine where your subsequent jobs will be. So I think there's a lot of path dependency, and it all goes back to this one paper.

So you should choose your topic wisely, and this may be an obvious point, but I think when you're a student, your first instinct is to just come up with any research idea, right? And once you have an idea, run with it. But when you're thinking about going on the job market, maybe that first idea isn't the best idea, and so you should keep thinking a bit until you come up with a better idea, and make sure you come up with a- have one paper that's really going to be easy to market when you are looking for a job.

And so, for instance, stated preference methods. There's been a lot of great work done on that, but I think that's not valued in the market within the past year or so as much as empirical work based on observational data. So that's something you might want to consider. I just saw a presentation not too long ago where someone was indicating that Bayesian econometrics may not play very well in the market. I don't know; I'm not familiar with it. But these are the sort of considerations you want to keep in mind when you're selecting your job market paper. What is the market demanding today? And so, obviously, you can check journals, you can confer with your advisors at your program, and you can find out where the grant money is going. But this will help give you an idea of what's going to play well in the market when you're in the market.

And then I think, also, your paper should do at least one of the following things. It should either address a big-picture issue and not just be a case study that's going to produce results that are just specific to a locale or a very small issue, or it should be clever in some way, using data in a new way or taking- presenting a new twist on an old concept.

And I think maybe an excellent example of this is a student at Berkeley, Jen Brown, who graduated a couple years before me. She's now in the business school at Northwestern. She had this idea that golfers may under-perform when they're in a competition with Tiger Woods. And it's completely unrelated really in any obvious way to agricultural and resource economics, which is the area in which her training was, but she created a theory that when you have a superstar in the workplace, they may discourage effort and performance among their peers because they just can't live up to the superstar. She established that there is what's now called the "Tiger Woods effect." This paper has been reported widely in the popular media, and she got a great job out of this paper. It was just a clever idea. And then, finally, be innovative in terms of methods or concepts.

And then I would also recommend hitting the research circuit as early as you can. As soon as you have a paper that's worthy of presenting, start presenting at meetings like this one, at the ASSAs and at other association meetings. There are also interdisciplinary conferences where you may not be speaking to future decision makers on your candidacy, but you're at least gaining

experience in front of a podium. And so presenting in these settings gives you practice presenting, it helps you get noticed, and helps you network with individuals who may be on search committees or who may be on the faculty at programs to which you're applying, and it helps you get help on your project. So you'll get-- the audience members will catch errors, and they're help you predict question. They'll likely be asking the same questions that the audience, during your job market talk, while you're presenting during a fly-out, they'll be asking the same questions. And if you can predict the questions, obviously, you can have a good answer to the question.

And, also, present in your department and get as many faculty there as possible. Again, the idea is to get as much feedback before you're out on the market so that you can correct mistakes, improve your paper in some way, and then, again, predict questions when you're presenting during a fly-out. And so at Berkeley, we reserve our weekly department seminar in the fall to our job market candidates to make sure they're getting experience, and there's a very concerted effort among the faculty to show up to these talks.

Then when you're applying, I would recommend looking broadly. Now, I was pretty certain that I wanted an academic position, so I didn't apply very much in the private sector or to government positions, but I think it's important to have-- you don't want your first interview to be at a program that you really want to go to. So when you're at these meetings interviewing, you want your first interview to be one where you can kind of work out some of the cobwebs, gain your confidence, and so forth. And so I think having some safeties is important. Well, safeties are important to make sure you get a job out of the process, and then you should also be reaching.

And then I think, also, the process of by which departments determine their position announcements, how they characterize a job that they're hiring for, is often political, and so it may be a dean or someone in the college who has some idea of what they want to hire, and the actual hiring faculty may have a different notion. Sometimes they may tailor a job description to a very specific position, but the faculty may be interested in hiring the best athlete, so whoever they can get, the strongest candidate they can get, regardless of whether their work is in that very narrow, specific area. So don't-- apply broadly. Even if the position is kind of a stretch, it doesn't seem like it's a perfect fit for you because you don't know what that faculty is looking for.

Then I'm actually going to skip over this on account of timing. If you have time when you're preparing your materials and you can tailor the letter to the specifics of each position, that helps, but I think I'd be worried about diminishing returns in that regard, so I wouldn't spend that much time on it.

And then consider how to cut through the noise. Especially within the past few years, the market has been really tight. There's been a lot of supply and not that much demand for new hires, and so hiring departments are getting hundreds of applications for single positions. I think I've heard that for one position, they got 600 applications. So how are you going to stand out among those 600 applications? If you know faculty in the program, tell them that you're applying. Again, this goes back to being on the research circuits so that you meet these individuals. If you know

someone, let them know that you're applying and call- and send them your application materials. If a faculty member in your program knows someone on the search committee or in that department, get them to contact those individuals, as well, and provide a recommendation, and don't be shy. This is the most important period of your life. It's not a time to be worried about imposing on the faculty in your department. You need to be insistent that they do everything they can to help you. Applying and getting an interview at the meetings is the first hurdle, so you should pull out all the stops.

Then when you're at the meetings, especially at the ASSAs, you will be getting requests for interviews, and you need to schedule those interviews. Again, I would recommend having one or two interviews where either the position is not one that you're very interested in or you just think there's not a chance in hell that you're going to get that position. These can be your practices, right? These are your warm-ups. Save the ones that you really care about, that you think you have a good chance at. You really want to get into this program, save those for later in your schedule so that you're more relaxed and you have a little bit more experience in it.

Bring a friend. I was fortunate to have my twin sister on the market with me. It's a very stressful time. If you have a significant other or a friend that you can do the process with, that's great. I would have hated to have been alone doing it.

And then things that you should know. You should know your job market paper and related literature, obviously, but you should also spend some time familiarizing yourself with the individuals who will be on the search committee so that you know if they're doing research in a related area. You should know if there are famous faculty in the department and so forth.

And then a lot of people worry about this five-minute elevator speech. You're never going to have five minutes to tell some stranger at the meetings what your research is, so I wouldn't worry too much about that. You obviously want to be able to characterize in a few short sentences what your research is related to, but you don't need to have a five-minute elevator speech.

The committee will want to know why you're interested in that job, will you be a good fit for the department. They'll want to know what your next plans are. They're concerned about you getting tenure in the program. So will you be able to publish, and where do you intend to publish? They also will have a teaching need and want to know where- how you can fit in and help them solve their teaching need, and I would be broad here and express an openness to teaching a lot of different things because ultimately you just want to get the job, and presumably, you'll be able to teach in a broad area -- a variety of subject areas.

And then there may be a surprise question or two. If you don't know the answer to the question, then answer a different question that you do know the answer to. It is kind of a rule in politics. When you get the surprise question, answer the question that you want to answer.

Let's see. Fly-outs. At Berkeley, they advise us that if you don't get a fly-out to a place that you've interviewed at but you do get a fly-out to a neighboring school, then you call back any place that

you interviewed at that's in the area and tell them that you will be in the neighborhood if they'd like to have you come by and give you a presentation. I did this on at least one occasion and they said, "Sure, if you're in the area, we'll be happy to have you come by." So that helps you, gives you a second chance at a place that might not have wanted to invest to fly you out to their program. If you're in the area, it's a lower-risk proposition for them and you may get a second crack at that job.

Stay healthy. I got sick. This is a grueling process, so do everything you can to stay healthy by getting enough sleep and taking any precautions you can. I was sick and I stayed sick the entire time. You aren't getting sleep and you're traveling too much.

The job talk. Let's see-- I think this point is obvious, but then when it comes to the questions, this is sort of your chance to shine off script, right? Anyone can prepare a script and seem articulate and intelligent, but it's when you're asked a question that causes you to deviate from the script that you really have an opportunity to shine. So if you can anticipate the questions because you presented your paper in a number of settings before, that's great. That will impress the faculty. Not only will you have a good answer, but they'll be impressed that you thought of the question before they did.

Push back where appropriate. A lot of times, candidates assume that the faculty member sitting in the audience knows more than they do. No, this is your paper. This is your subject area. And if someone's asking you a question or suggesting something that is wrong, don't be afraid to push back. These people are looking for someone who's confident, right? Not only do you have to stand in front of a classroom and teach students, but they're looking for colleagues who they can have a vigorous exchange of ideas with.

And then don't be afraid to push forward. A lot of times, faculty members might start asking a lot of questions and you're not going to get through your talk unless you just say, "I appreciate the question, but I need- I want to push forward, and I'll come back to that if there's time at the end." This is an obvious point, but sometimes it's overlooked.

Let's see. So when you fly out, there will be lots of dinners and receptions-- and I'll just take one more minute, Rob, sorry-- there will be lots of dinners and receptions, and this is an opportunity for you to show that you can be a good colleague, right? So you want to be relaxed and be sociable, but don't forget that you're still under the microscope. So you want to be sociable and jovial and so forth, but don't forget that these people are inspecting you. So you need to stay on your guard a little bit at all times. And then you also likely meet with a number of faculty during your fly-out visit, and it would behoove you to know something about the research area for each of those faculty members, and these are just going to be pretty casual conversations talking about your research and what your interests are and how they might intersect with that faculty member.

And let's see. This is relatively unimportant. Once you get the offers, you're sitting pretty good, but then you have to consider which offer to accept. You might have some ability to negotiate if

you get multiple offers, and note, there are no secrets, right? Everyone in the community, everyone who's in the market, that is, both buyers and sellers, they're going to know what's happening with you. So you can try and leverage multiple offers, but if you don't have multiple offers, don't try and leverage because there are no secrets.

That's all I've got, so I'll be happy to answer questions at the end or if there's time now, but also, I'll invite anyone to e-mail me.

Jon Brandt: All righty. I'm Jon Brandt from North Carolina State. I was on the other side of the discussion piece that Steve was talking to you about, and I have to tell you that I agree with literally everything he had to say. We would, of course, have a little different perspective on the hiring side.

I have shared around with most of you, I think, this two-page handout on either side. If you didn't pick one up, they're available along some of the outlying chairs there. And this will have pretty much what I'm going to say, maybe in a little bit different form. But let me just get started here.

So my outline is we'll talk a little bit about the process of how it evolves and how a department like mine would be in the market for people, how you all would be doing the application process, the interview itself at the meetings, and then the campus interview.

Keep your eyes on what's called the job opportunity for economist advertisements. Typically, these come out for departments like ours in either or both the October or November online sessions that you would have, and there's the website to go to. These will announce these job vacancies that departments will have for those ASSA meetings coming up that first weekend in January.

While you're in this process, begin to think about those departments that you would be- and those jobs that you would want to interview for or apply for, and then do all you can to learn about the expectations of the recruiting departments. They may be very well specified in the job application process, or they may not be, and I shared kind of my presentation with Steve beforehand, and he reminded me that it's a very good idea to familiarize yourself to the extent that you can with the recruiting committees. Department may indicate who's going to be at the ASSA meetings, and the more you know about those one or two or three individuals that you're going to be screening with, the more conversant you will be able to be and more comfortable that you'll be able to be with those folks.

Apply early. Get your application in. Make sure that you remind those folks who have agreed to write letters on your behalf to do so. And as Steve said, this is not a time to be bashful. Make sure those three individuals-- typically departments require three letters-- that those folks get them in. A good department will acknowledge having received your application and will indicate, "We have everything except..." maybe your grade transcripts or perhaps one of those letters. So be sure to keep following up on that and get that into the hands of the folks as early as possible.

Some related activities. Hotel reservations at these meetings fill up rather quickly, and so you're going to want to make-- as soon as you know you're going to want to attend these meetings, I would say to go ahead and make a hotel reservation at the site of your choice. May not be the headquarters hotel. It may be one that's more in the middle of the four or five or half dozen hotels that are associated with the ASSA meetings because you're going to be traipsing from place to place, hotel to hotel, to meet with these various folks that you're interviewing with. So being somewhere in the middle is a good idea.

Ladies, I remember some years ago when we were interviewing in Chicago in January, you can imagine what that's sometimes like, and we were walking through snow and slush and so forth, and men typically have on a different pair of shoes than women do, so kind of keep that in mind as you are preparing yourself for these meetings. It's going to be wintertime, and San Diego's a lot different than Chicago or New York City.

Get as much assistance as you can from the faculty and the department that you're in currently. As Steven again pointed out, networking is important. If a faculty member in your department happens to be- know some colleagues or perhaps is even alumnus of the department that- the job that you're applying to, have those folks begin to put in a good word or inquire or whatever you can. Again, don't be bashful about these things.

And begin to anticipate a little bit some of those interview questions that may come along. Some of them are just absolutely obvious, and so you should have not a memorized speech but a prepared answer that says you have thought through this and you're not being caught off-guard by a very- a question that you should be able to anticipate. And then have that job market paper ready and available for your own discussion.

At the interview itself, at these meetings, there's going to be a recruitment center. Arrive on time. And an old friend of mine says that if you're early, you're on time, if you're on time, you're late, and if you're late, that's not acceptable. So be early for your interviews. I know some of you perhaps will schedule interviews such that you're going to have to hurry to get from one to the next one, but be early if you can.

I don't know if I disagree with Steven here a little bit, but you certainly want to have some summary of your dissertation, your work, your research to date prepared and thought about. That doesn't mean you have to have a memorized five-minute speech. I agree with that. But you certainly want to be able to summarize in a few words succinctly what it is that you have to say.

During this process, typically these are 35 to 45-minute interviews, then they'll turn you loose, and that group will sit there and say, "Well, why did you think of that person?" And 15 minutes later, another person will likely come in. So they're typically 30 to 45 minutes. But during that time, we will often ask you, "Do you have a question for us?" And I would hope that you wouldn't come in without a question to ask. A couple of easy questions are, "Well, what's my teaching load going to be?" I mean if they haven't explained that to you-- and a good department will have told you, "Our expectation is that you're going to have two classes or X many classes to teach," but if they

haven't, that's a good question to ask. The other one might be is, "What kind of assistance do you provide for new assistant professors? Do I- will I have a research assistant, another graduate student who I can count on?" But think of a good question, one that preferably you're interested in, but also a question that you said, "Yeah, I've thought about this, and I know I want to come in with the best plan possible. So what kinds of things do I need to know about your department that I didn't find online?" Certainly, you're done that homework.

Be polite even if the recruiters aren't. You are always on display, so to speak, and some of us as faculty will have sat through a couple or three days of meetings interview after interview after interview, and we can be pretty tired at the end of that process, just like I'm sure we're all starting to feel here on Tuesday of these meetings. So just be as polite as possible.

And, finally, bring some extra copies of your resume with you to share with those folks in case they don't have them in front of them. They ought to have, but if they don't, it's always a good idea to keep a couple of extra resumes on hand. And you may even find yourself having an opportunity because of a cancellation to interview with a group kind of on the spot that you hadn't set up ahead of time. So always have a few extra resumes on hand.

When you get invited to that campus interview, it means you've successfully completed that first phase of the ASSA meetings, and I think this sheet of paper here really outlines, that I've handed out, more of the things that I can't talk about right now.

But be sure to have practiced your seminar ahead of time. You'll always be expected to give a seminar on your job paper. As Steve says, at Berkeley, they have that time period. If you don't have some time that's structurally set aside by the department, ask the person in your department who puts the workshop and seminar series together, "May I present in October or November?" in enough time that you can get good critical feedback and change a few things. You've spent too much time talking about the technical details and not enough time talking about the big picture. So you want that.

Another good thing to do-- and it was horrible when I did it the first time looking for my first job-- was to tape myself. Somebody in the back of the room was taping it, and we reviewed it after the fact, and I was doing this and just all sorts of things, a lot of ums and ands and ohs and so forth, and so you're going to be your own best critic, and when you see yourself on tape, you will, I think, be a little more prepared and do a little better job. So think about doing that if you can get that done.

Seek as much advice as you can from your faculty mentors, your committee. And as Steven said before, too, remember that even though you're going to have some social time-- you're going to have a breakfast, you're going to have dinners-- you're always being evaluated, so never kind of be off-guard. If somebody says, "Would you like to have that second glass of wine?" you might say no, or you might even say no to the first glass. But be social, but be on your own best behavior and be prepared.

So I will quit there to give Jim some time.

Jim McDonald: All right. Navigating the federal job market. I got my first job through ASSA in 1978. I've been going most years since then. I've been interviewing there for ERS for the last 15 years. Let me walk you through a little bit about what happens with federal agencies, with a little bit of a tilt towards ERS.

There's a dual process. On the one hand, we have the traditional academic-style process. That is, ERS follows it and so do most federal agencies in the sense that we're going to have ads in the JOE, in AAEA newsletter, and other places. We're going to do interviews here and at ASSA. And then we're going to have visits into the agency, where you give a seminar and you interview people. It's very similar to the academic market, and everything that Jon and Steven told you holds for us, as well.

Secondly, though, there is also an official federal hiring procedure through a website called USAJobs. At the end of this presentation, I'll give you a little bit more linkage on what goes on with that, and you need to follow both. That is, we have a dual process, and our applicants go through both processes.

Okay, it's the primary job market. It's enormous. There will probably be 12,000 registrants there. About 10-- that is not job market registrants but total registrants for the conference, 10 times the size of this one. It's alienating. One of my favorite sociology paper titles is, "Why Your Friends Have More Friends Than You," and that's exactly how you're going to feel, pretty much how I feel every time I go to ASSA. All those people seem to know others, and I'm just stumbling around on my own going to something else. It's alienating. Check for AAEA functions. Look for ways to step in and get out of the three days of real slog. It's also highly efficient. You ought to be able to get a lot of interviews, and we're looking to fill our time with lots of interviews with people while we're there.

Most federal agencies have adjusted and they're now hiring through ASSA. It is the global job market fair. Some ag econ departments have not. I continue to get cold calls and vitae from people in February. That's really hard. We're already locked into our process for bringing people in. We've had all our meetings to talk about people. It is really hard to adjust and try to help somebody out if they call us in February. So people really need to adjust to that ASSA process because that's where almost everything goes on. Therefore, we want the vitae and the job market paper well before, all right? We'll do occasional cold interviews outside of those meetings, but it's hard to make that happen.

Once you get an ASSA interview, whether it's with ERS or another federal agency, bear in mind what we do is different than what's going to go on in an academic job. You have a pretty good sense of what goes on in an academic job because you've been hanging around there for the last four or five or six years in your department. You don't know much about us. Go to the website. Talk to faculty and friends, anybody you know that may be working at one of those agencies. Try

to envision the nature of the work. When you go to your interview, be prepared to discuss your job market paper, just as we've talked about before.

But as you're going through that agency website, ask about the nature of the work at the agency. Again, it's going to be different. It will be different among agencies and different from what you envision an academic job is like. Be prepared to ask us, "In my first year, how would I be spending a month? What would I be doing each week or each day? How do assignments get chosen?" At ERS, it's a combination of your initiative and me as a branch chief telling you what I think you ought to be doing, and there's a combination of that that drives assignments. Ask. Ask how assignments get picked, how it is that your work gets generated. Ask about how that's going to change if you're successful, how it's going to change over a three or four or five-year period. Ask about how success is measured at that agency. How is promotion attained? What do we expect out of people?

Now, we're also going to be asking you about your goals, as well, and I could tell you, if you don't ask those types of questions, it works very badly in any interview. You need to be prepared to be asking about what that agency does and already know a little bit about it. Think about your own goals. What do you want to be working on? Because we're going to ask you about that. Our goal at ERS-- it's not the same at all federal agencies-- but ultimately, we want someone 10 years down the road who has a broad area of expertise in some topical area, and we're trying to envision where you might be fitting somewhere down the line. So we're going to be asking you where your interests go after your dissertation, and we're going to be asking you to think about where you want to be in five years. I had an interview once with a guy, and he started talking about the golf courses he wanted to play on. He wasn't really well prepared.

After your interview-- we're going to be very similar to academics for the most part. That is, we're going to go right back. This would be in early January. We're going to have our meetings. We're going to decide who we want to bring in, and we're going to start making phone calls. And it will be staggered. We'll have a first round of people we want to slot in for interviews, and then we're going to have a series more. And so we'll be calling people over the period of three to four to five weeks to bring people in, and we will be bringing them in over a eight to 10 to 12-week period.

But I must also say uncertainty abounds. Our budget is always uncertain, right? Federal hiring rules may be uncertain. Don't be afraid to call. Steve gave excellent advice. If you come in to DC for whatever reason and someone else has perhaps brought you in, don't be afraid to call us and say, "Look, I'm going to be in town. Can I come by and give a seminar?" We do that all the time.

Don't burn bridges. I began my second career at ERS at the age of 43. It was a good thing when I first left in '87 that I didn't tell some people what I thought of them. Again, be calm, be careful. Even if you don't work with us, we're a good place to share data with and to think of projects with, right? So, again, don't burn your bridges. Stay calm.

Stay in touch. We don't mind getting calls about where our process is and where we might be even in two weeks or in a year or two.

Do have your official procedure completed. I'll get to that still in a minute.

When we interview people at ERS, we give you a list of 10 top reasons to work there. One thing we're going to try to distinguish ourselves from academics by claiming that we're a much more social place to work. You get to come in and hang around with us, not like some departments where everybody's working at home. So we're going to try to pitch ourselves that way. We're also going to tell you that we're a research organization, and we are. We expect people to publish. We expect them to publish ERS reports, and we also expect them to publish journal articles. We push the idea that we have lots of seminars. We have state-of-the-art support for people.

Now, not all agencies are research-oriented agencies, and you need to think carefully about whether that's what you want because there's a lot of differences among agencies. If I slip down, think about what's not at ERS. For example, we don't make policy decisions. We're not allowed to say the word "should". We don't directly advise. We don't tell people what to do. If you're interested in really getting involved in the policy process, you need to be on Capitol Hill, you need to be in some types of advocacy groups, or you need to be in different agencies than where we are. We don't manage federal programs. If you're really interested in trying to make a program work more efficiently, you shouldn't be with us. You should be with a place that actually operates a federal program.

We don't offer super-competitive salaries. Consulting firms do, and there's a good reason why they do. It's because you can't go anywhere once you've gone there, for the most part. They have to offer higher salaries.

We don't offer a free choice of research projects. You're constrained on what you can work on. Any federal agency is that way. And you're further constrained within ERS or within any place by the particular branch or the particular group you wind up being in. So ask questions about that group and about possibilities for moving within the agency.

All right. Let me get back to the official process. USA Jobs. What happens is you go to this website. You create an account for yourself. You manage all your federal applications through that account. You file your vitae. You file all your supporting documentation. You set up your account there at USA Jobs. From that, as particular jobs come up, for example, at ERS, we'll have your generic set of papers that gets flown through, vitae and other things, although, remember, through that academic-style track, you've also already sent your vitae directly to us. We will also-- then we actually go into a hiring process, have a series of additional questions that you have to respond to and create a memo. That gets created on your USA Jobs account and filed over to us when you go through that official job.

Finally, start early, now, and be prepared, and you have my contact information if you need further questions. Thanks.

Rob King: We've got about eight minutes here for questions, and you've had a lot of information thrown at you, but what we'd like you to do is direct your questions to any of our three panelists,

and we'll repeat the question because we're saving the audio of this, and then we'll answer as quickly as we can. So thank you.

Jim McDonald: It's very good to go from ERS to a...

Rob King: Could you repeat the question?

Jim McDonald: Oh, I'm sorry, yeah, I'll repeat the question. The question was, why is it difficult to go from a consulting firm to anywhere else? Well, if someone else is going to hire you, they want to look at a publication record. It's rare that a consulting firm will allow you to publish. It's rare that you're going to have the set of contacts that would allow an academic place to hire you or a federal agency to hire you. So the typical job flow, I would say, is more often from academia or from a place like ERS to a consulting firm or because you're going to bring some expertise with you. You've gotten to the stage where you say, "Okay, I want to make a lot of money, and I don't really care about going back." So it's a lot easier to build your career in an academic position or at a federal agency and then go to a consulting firm, right?

Jim McDonald: We will set up specific position announcements on USA Jobs. We will also advertise, though, through the JOE and through the AAEA newsletter. We will ask you to send your material both directly to us and through USA Jobs. Now, I forgot to repeat the question, so let me say what the question was there. The question was, now that ERS has somewhat tighter federal rules for how we advertise jobs, and the question was whether that has changed the information we're obtaining, and I would say no, it really hasn't changed the types of information that we're obtaining and how we're obtaining it from them. You can still send things directly to us, and we'd like you to do so, and you also file on USA Jobs.

Jon Brandt: Well, I'll take a shot at that first, I guess. Oh. So the question was, what's the trade-off between a goodness-of-fit person to the position that's being advertised or finding the best candidate, the best, as we call it, the best athlete available, to use that sort of jargon?

And I think if I were in your shoes, I would look at the job announcement. Occasionally, departments have the good fortune from their deans or whoever else of providing the money to be able to really sort of advertise for the best candidate available. We want a good, applied economist with strong quantitative skills. Pretty wide open, and so you're likely going to get more job applications under that kind of a criterion, as opposed to one more narrowly defined.

So if it is defined as somebody who works in ag policy or somebody who works in food and farm marketing kinds of things, you just have to ask yourself, "How do I fit?" because at the ASSA meetings, or, quite frankly, anywhere else, I think, as Steven pointed out, it has been a buyer's market, and so there's lots of candidates.

And if we have a more-- and I would think if the departments have a somewhat more narrowly described job, if you're in a position, if you're not finding yourself fitting in that description, the likelihood is that there's going to be 50 or 100 or 300 other applicants who do fit better, and so

you won't get very much consideration. Steven's right, we had a lot of applications for our job described in Resource and Environmental Economics, and some of them just didn't fit, and so they-- no matter how good they looked, we didn't consider them because we were trying to hire for a topical area within the broad applied economics area.

So look at the job. If it's wide open, obviously, you're going to have more opportunities, but there's going to be a lot more candidates typically applying, as well.

Steve Sexton: I agree with what Jon said. I would also say, though, that typically the marginal cost of applying to another school is going to be quite low because most of the applications now are going to be done on EconJobMarket.org, I believe. It's a standardized process, and so it's going to be pretty easy for you to apply to another program. And I'm aware of at least some programs where they had targeted funds or they had a directive from the dean or the college that they were to hire in a certain position, but they were looking for the- but the actual hiring department wanted the best athlete. So if they can sell you to the dean as fitting the job description, then they certainly would like to do that. So oftentimes, the hiring department wants the best candidate, but they may be being constrained by the higher-ups in the school or because of the source of the funds. If you have a network- and people in your department, on your home faculty, know faculty in the hiring department, you can often find that out and know what your chances are in advance.

And I guess one other thing that I would just want to say, and I meant to mention this in my presentation, most of the jobs will be on the Job Openings for Economists, the JOE, which is on the AEA website, but also, a lot of applied economists can get good jobs at policy schools, and they don't always know to post their jobs to the JOE. So two websites that I'm aware of that often list policy jobs that are appropriate for economists are-- I believe it's PublicServiceCareers.org, and they have a search engine where you can plug in that you're looking for jobs for those with a Ph.D., and then also PolicyJobs.com or .net, I think. But if you Google these two websites, I've got you close to them. You'll be able to find them if you Google them. But if you're interested in a policy job, which oftentimes there are good policy jobs for applied economists, I would recommend searching those websites, as well.

Jim McDonald: Oh, one thing for us. In years in which we're only hiring one to three people agency-wide in an agency of about 330, fit will dominate. In those years in which we're hiring perhaps eight or 10 people, we have a lot of room to look to the best people we can find. Unfortunately, I don't know yet which position we'll be in come January.

Jon Brandt: I'll use the word...

Rob King: Repeat the question.

Jon Brandt: Oh, yeah. So how does this meeting play into the aspirations of job-seekers, graduate students who are soon going to be finishing forward?

I would say to use this meeting to network to the extent that you can. You're all here from various departments. Use the faculty that you know are here to help introduce you. Having a face and a name to put on an application that may come along later or at any time. We really have-- our department has really moved to the ASSA meetings as the main targeting spot for job hunting, job hiring. It's been a long time since we've actually recruited at these meetings. That's not to say that we won't do it again, but it never hurts-- and I encourage our own graduate students from our department, and I suspect others from other departments do, as well-- to use us if you have somebody that you want to be introduced to at the reception, at the reunions. So next year at this time when these meetings show up, just take advantage of the time that's available to you and begin that networking process. Start talking to people.

And I think as Steven said, get yourself on a paper presentation or a poster presentation. Those things help to elevate you relative to the graduate student who hasn't done any of those things yet. Publications or presentations are very important in this very fierce and competitive market that you're going to find yourselves in.

Jim McDonald: For ERS, we interview at this meeting every year. We don't hire that many people out of it. We look at it as a good way to meet people, sometimes meeting them very early in their graduate school career, form some contacts with them, and get to know them better. Occasionally, we find someone that fits us well and is well along towards their degree, perhaps even having completed it, and in that case, we'd love to be able to hire someone in October or November and save us a lot of trouble and save you a lot of trouble of moving around in the winter. So we still do occasionally hire out of this meeting.

Jim McDonald: The question is, does ERS hire non-US citizens. Unfortunately, the answer is no. We only hire US citizens. We do have occasionally three-year appointments on which we can hire people from a fairly long list of selected countries. Those are temporary positions. They are a lot of trouble for us to get approved, so we occasionally get one, but it does not happen a lot, and the primary market for us is US citizens.

Rob King: I want to mention that the presentations, both the audio and the PowerPoints from today, will be on the AAEA website. So you've had a lot of material come at you, and we want to let you look at that in a little more leisurely fashion. We'll also try to put some links to some resources that are on the AAEA website on navigating the job market. There's some excellent guides to that there, as well. I want to thank our three presenters: Steve Sexton, Jon Brandt, and Jim McDonald, and I wish you well in the rest of the meetings. So thanks.