

LOOKING FOR AN ACADEMIC POSITION
DURING A PANDEMIC:
SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

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THE UNIVERSITY & SCHOOL

- Located in Atlanta, Georgia
 - 9th largest metro area in the US
- Emory University
 - Druid Hills neighborhood
 - Private University
 - \$831M in federal funding in 2020
 - 9 Schools
 - Woodruff Health Sciences Center
 - Emory Health Care, Winship Cancer Institute, Yerkes National Primate Center, Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Public Health
 - CDC next door
- Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH)
 - 6 departments
 - 4th in nation in NIH funding



- 35 current faculty
 - Current research expertise includes:
 - Bioinformatics, machine learning, competing risks and survival analysis, imaging, high-dimensional statistics, functional data analysis, spatiotemporal statistics, clinical trials, infectious disease, causal inference
 - Current areas of application:
 - Almost any area of basic or applied health science you can think of
 - Vaccine evaluation, climate change and environmental health, mental and behavioral health, genetics, microbiome, neuroscience, cancer
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- PhD program enrolls about 8 students per year
 - All have a full fellowship for the first 3 years
 - Alumni work in pharma (e.g. Merck), information and biotechnology (e.g. Google, Genentech), government (e.g. CDC, NIH) and academia (e.g. Duke, Yale)
 - MPH and MSPH degrees in Biostatistics
 - About 60 students per year
 - MSPH and certificate in Data Science pending Provost approval
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OPEN TENURE-TRACK POSITIONS

- Two open tenure-track assistant or associate professorships
 - Search committee looks for the best candidate, but there are two areas of particular interest:
 - Applied machine learning and bioinformatics
 - Infectious disease and spatial statistics
 - Typically teach 1 graduate course per year
 - Are expected to develop and lead a methodological research program
 - Are expected to develop collaborations, ideally related to methodological interest
 - Are expected to eventually mentor graduate students, both master's and PhD
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OPEN RESEARCH-TRACK POSITION

- One open research assistant professorship
 - Expected to become a lead applied statistician working on
 - HIV studies
 - Longitudinal and clinical trial data
 - Expected to work partially through the Biostatistics Collaboration Core
 - Expected to teach about 1 graduate course per year
 - Expected to eventually mentor graduate students, in particular with regards to collaborative biostatistics
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PLANNED PROCESS

- Have started reviewing applications.
 - Can still apply.
 - Initial invitations for the tenure-track position are expected for early January, for the research-track position potentially sooner.
 - First round of interviews will be remote.
 - Reduce traffic coming through RSPH (have 30% in person instruction).
 - Remote seminar.
 - Will meet with department faculty, students and potential collaborators remotely.
 - Still deciding on the best format:
How many hours per day? How many days? Group meetings?
 - Potential for later in-person visits.
 - Up to everyone's comfort level and safety.
 - See the beautiful campus and department despite not many people around.
 - See Atlanta.
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WHERE I AM COMING FROM

- Where I've been:
 - BS in Math and Dance, SUNY Stony Brook
 - MA in Math, University of Pennsylvania (Arts & Sciences)
 - PhD in Biostatistics, University of Pennsylvania (School of Medicine)
 - Faculty in Statistics, University of Pittsburgh (Arts & Sciences)
 - Faculty in Statistics, Temple University (Business School)
 - Faculty in Biostatistics, University of Pittsburgh (Public Health)
 - Started as Chair and Professor of Biostatistics & Bioinformatics at Emory's RSPH in September.
 - I moved during a pandemic!
 - First interview was in-person in February.
 - On-site visit in June.
 - A lot of Zoom calls between March and June.
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THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT

- Remember that you have a lot to offer.
 - Make sure that you think about what you want in both your career and your life.
 - In “normal” times:
 - How much and who do you want to teach?
 - Where do you want your research to be on continuum of theory, methods and applications?
 - Do you have geographical restrictions or preferences?
 - Do you work best in a small or in a large department?
 - During the pandemic:
 - Questions such as geography might be more complicated.
 - Consider now but think towards the future.
 - How do you feel about moving this summer?
 - Can something be worked out where you don’t have to move this summer if you have concerns?
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SHOULD I GO FOR IT?

- If a position is not right for you, don't apply!
 - Hate teaching? Don't apply to a position where you teach a lot.
 - Hate collaborating? Don't apply to a biostatistics job.
 - School is in an area you would be miserable living in? Don't apply!
 - If a position seems it might be a good fit for you:
 - In "normal" times:
 - Apply!
 - Ask mentors, colleagues or others if you want to know more about places. It's a small field.
 - Don't be afraid to reach out.
 - During the pandemic:
 - Uncertainty seems to increase fear and hesitation. If you think its right, go for it.
 - Think about what you are comfortable with in terms of in-person visits. If you get an interview, be open to the search committee about this. Remember that every institution will have different rules.
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WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

What is the search committee looking for in an application and during an interview?

- In “normal” times:
 - Current and/or potential for producing high-quality, impactful, independent research? Scientific and technical rigor?
 - Do they know who they are or want to be as a scholar?
 - Can they communicate? How was their seminar?
 - Do they appear to be excited to join and contribute to the department?
 - Will they be successful and happy here as a faculty member?
 - During the pandemic:
 - Search committees know how to do this in person and are working hard to overcome the remote challenges.
 - They understand and will try to make it as easy as possible for you.
 - Do the same for them, and for yourself.
 - Do a practice seminar on Zoom.
 - Practice your “elevator speech” and making small talk on Zoom.
 - Make sure you are in a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted.
 - If your room is messy, find a fun background.
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WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

They are interviewing you, but you are also interviewing them. Some things to consider:

- In “normal” times:
 - What’s the teaching load? What’s the funding expectation? Other expectations for promotion?
 - Does this place provide the recourses to do the work you want to do?
 - Computing, collaborators, protected time, students
 - If you are junior, what is the mentorship plan?
 - Do you see yourself being happy there?
 - During the pandemic:
 - If the on-line format made it difficult to ask all of your questions, do not be afraid to reach out.
 - Think about the things that are important to you.
 - If you are junior, talk to both junior and senior people about mentoring and the environment.
 - Get to know the people and environment as best you can. We all have different comfort levels, think about yours with regards to how good of a feel you can get given the circumstances.
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Good Luck!
