Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum
Informal Advice from a Few Faculty
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Based on a Meeting of Faculty and Graduate Students
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As a reminder, here is a blurb on what "the hidden curriculum" means:

> *A pervasive concern among graduate students is that there is little transparency or explicit guidance about individual things that would help one succeed in academia. For example: How does one acquire an advisor, or find RA work? When is it best to work as a TA as opposed to work as an RA? How does one get involved in writing referee reports for journals? Which conferences are best to attend? Answers to these questions often rely on students having informal networks among themselves, which can encourage structural disparities in knowledge.*

In this document, we want to make things a little more transparent and equalize the playing field. The two primary topics are: how to find an advisor and how to get published.

<u>How do students find advisors?</u>

Take courses in your area of interest and work to establish relationships with faculty during your second year.

Go to office hours often.

Email faculty with a research topic/idea. It does not necessarily have to be well-formed. The faculty may offer advice about how to pursue it.

Forming relationships with faculty early in your graduate degree is key.

Narrow down fields of interest by fall of your third year.

Meet with faculty who are affiliated with your field of interest by attending related colloquia and workshops.

Go to all job talks (even if unrelated to your area of interest) in order to see how students on the job market engage with the audience, respond to questions, etc.

Go to seminars/workshops. Going to workshops is especially important as you will learn not only about research at the frontier of your field and potentially generate new ideas, but you will also see how faculty present their research and respond to questions from the audience. Every meeting is an opportunity to learn these essential soft skills, which are important for the job market as well as the rest of your career.

It is easier to develop a relationship with an advisor if you are interacting in a lot of places: writing papers, presenting in colloquia, attending workshops.

<u>Can my main area of research differ from that of my advisor?</u>

It is easier if your main advisor has research close enough to what you are working on so that s/he is familiar with the literature, at least broadly; this will ensure s/he is confident in providing advice about your work and can also write a strong recommendation letter about you and the contribution of your work.

However, independence from your advisor is of utmost important. Show individual thinking. It is ok to disappear for a period of time if you return with new ideas (but don't disappear because you are stuck!). It is important to have at least one other professor that you are communicating with regularly

Is it important to select a highly-ranked faculty member in the department as an advisor?

All of the Economics faculty members are well-recognized members of the profession. It is more important to have at least one advisor who is an active researcher. Also, if an Economics faculty member is working on topics quite related to your work, it would typically be expected that s/he would be on your committee, and write a recommendation letter for you.

Get in touch with faculty early in your graduate career. Faculty can advise based on areas of interest. By the time you schedule your prospectus defense in your 4^{th} year (Spring semester), you need to have 3 faculty in place who will be the core members of your dissertation committee.

Is it ok to have committee members whose research is somewhat different from my specific research area?

Not all committee members will be experts in your narrowly-defined field of study. In fact, that rarely happens. However, they may be willing to offer feedback and/or provide a different, complementary perspective to your main advisors. It is important to ask for advice and to talk to people who are not narrowly working on your research topics.

Furthermore, different advisors have different styles. Some request regular meetings. Others meet at non-binding, key moments to provide input. In any case, it is important to be explicit and ask a faculty member directly whether they can be your advisor or committee member; of course, this is not necessarily done when you first start talking to a faculty member, but you should take the initiative to do so at some point.

For the job market, are all three letters weighted equally?

All letters matter and all recommenders should be familiar with your work so that they can write a strong letter. Often the non-main advisors will identify the main advisor(s) in their letters.

If considering adding a fourth letter, be sure that it will be as strong as the first three. This is often not the case, as this is the marginal letter. Sometimes, the fourth letter is specifically written to advocate for your teaching skills, this can be particularly helpful when you are applying to institutions (such as liberal arts colleges) that put a lot of emphasis on teaching.

How do I get a paper published?

First talk to your advisor and verify that your paper is ready. Once the advisor says yes, check your writing and edit carefully before submitting to a journal.

Which journals should I send it to?

Don't worry too much about getting published now. For most, a strong job market paper and recommendations can help secure a job. Many people go on the job market without a publication.

Your advisor can help decide which journal/which tier of journals to submit your paper to.

Among the "top 5" journals, QJE is known to desk reject or provide reports within a short period of time. If your paper is not desk rejected, QJE is often considered a good source to get the quickest feedback. So, if you have a strong paper, one option could be to submit that to the QJE (or any other top-5 journal; most have substantially reduced their response times in the last 5-10 years). If desk rejected at a top journal, you have to think carefully, and discuss with your advisors, about what to do next. There are cases in which a paper is published in a top-5 journal after having been desk rejected elsewhere. Field journals may be an option to get detailed reports and feedback. Many great papers are published in field journals!

Note that there are risks to sending your proposed job market paper in for publication before the start of the job market, and typically this is not done. Candidates get a lot of feedback about their papers during the job market process and incorporate all of this feedback into their revisions prior to submitting for publications. This will improve your paper both intrinsically and in terms of its publication prospects. Furthermore, working to get a (non-job market) paper published may sometimes distract attention from writing a strong job market paper.

If you get an R&R on your paper, try to do everything the referees recommend (unless the editor explicitly indicates otherwise) before sending the revision back. It can still get rejected. Keep in mind that the R&R recommendations may be unreasonable. You should consult with your advisors on the R&R, both when you first receive it—so that you can plan your revision (and the timing, if you are working on a different job market paper)—and also check with them before sending the paper back.

Is it important to present at conferences?

Yes, every field has some main conferences to which students should submit their papers. Your advisors will be able to tell you which conferences are the most important conferences in your field. There is no downside to getting a paper rejected.

However, if it is a high-profile conference, check with your advisor about presenting your job market paper. Many job market papers are not polished until October, so there is some risk presenting at a high-profile conference like NBER the summer before the start of your job market. Most of the potential hiring team attend NBER, so if the paper is not well received there, it could compromise your job market success.

If instead the paper is a non-job market paper this is co-authored with faculty, it is more likely to get accepted and the faculty member will be sure that the paper is ready to be presented at the conference.

If a student has two or three faculty advisors, it is a good idea to get additional feedback?

How many is too many advisors?

Normally, faculty are happy to help and provide feedback. It is helpful to reach out to faculty in other fields in preparation for the job market. You will receive questions that are different from those within the field.

Some calls for papers give the option of submitting a long abstract. Is this a good idea?

This is an option that faculty sometimes select if they have the slides or completed field work but have not written up the paper. For graduate students, this may be a risky option if the paper gets selected but has not yet been written.

How does one select which top-5 journal to submit the paper for consideration?

The top journal may vary by field. For example, for theory or econometrics, the top journal is often considered to be *Econometrica*. However, the same is not true for all fields.

When considering which top-5 journal to send your paper to, the number one factor is the editor and the co-editors. What usually happens at journals is that the (lead) editor takes a quick look at a submission and decides which co-editor (or the lead editor him/herself) to assign the paper to. This is both based on intellectual fit and things like current workloads. The person who hands your paper can matter. So, you should send your paper to whichever top-5 journal has an editor/co-editor who has written papers in and is familiar with your field, has the ability to choose suitable referees, and can make an informed decision about your work.

Consider an AER or Econometric Society satellite journal—i.e., one of the AEJs or Theoretical/Quantitative—if rejected from one of the top 5. The JPE has also recently introduced its own version of these.

Be strategic with the introduction to the paper. Start with the main question in order to make the paper bigger and establish its importance. Avoid an introduction that is too narrow and literature driven.

Another mistake is to cite too many papers. Write an introduction tailored to the right audience, including the editor and the right referees. Cite papers so that it would make sense for the editor to send the paper to those people for review.

Does it matter to have an online presence for the job market?

It is not helpful to have an online presence for the job market. It can only hurt you. Job committees read papers and recommendations. They do not consider a candidate's online profile.

What are the best strategies to generate research ideas?

Work for at least one month on a topic before consulting related literature.

Go to workshops.

The third year of the graduate program has no structure. Plan for that fact. Control what you can by creating a positive work environment and managing stress.

Can the job market paper be co-authored with another student?

Yes, in fact it is quite common. However, both have to agree that only one person will use the paper as the job market paper. If using co-authored work as the job market paper, it is important to have other papers as well.