



Selecting the Right Size of Institution for an Academic Career

Are you almost done with your PhD and considering a future as a faculty member? Well, as fun as it is to hunt for the perfect place for you, there are important issues to consider when selecting an institution to work for. This is because one size does not fit all. Institutions are different sizes and depending on your preferences, you have to select the size that fits you. This sheet outlines important tips to help you select the perfect place for you.

1. Classroom size

In small institutions the classroom size can be 60-70 students for entry level courses, as opposed to 130 or more students in large institutions such as University of Alberta. Remember, a larger number of students in the lecture hall could lead to more grading, more appointments that need to be scheduled, and a more impersonal environment. If this sounds daunting for you then a smaller institution is the way to go.

2. Know your students

Are you interested in knowing your students by name and getting to know more about them? Well, in small institutions this comes more easily and chances are you will be able to return their greeting gestures in the department hallways. In larger institutions it is possible to know your students by name but it will require more work.

3. Department Size

In small institutions there are less faculty members in the department, which means the teaching load per faculty member is higher. If you love teaching that will be great, but it could reduce your research productivity during the academic year. In a larger institution there will be more faculty members in the department and it is more likely that you can select courses that relate directly to your areas of expertise. There is also less chance for collaborative work with faculty members in related disciplines, however today many academics find themselves collaborating with colleagues around the world. In smaller institutions, you will find more opportunity for interdisciplinary collaborations.

4. Students' Academic Level

Large institutions are more able to attract high academic level students through scholarships and prestige. However, for many professors who like to work closely with their students and enjoy seeing their students improve throughout the semester, working in smaller institutions is also rewarding and personal.

5. Campus Facilities

Larger universities tend to have more facilities on campus than smaller institutions. So if you like to hit the water after a long day of work, climb a wall, play tennis or squash then such facilities most likely will be available on large campuses. In a small institution there will be fewer facilities on campus but at least you will have more chance of finding a parking spot, develop colleagues from various disciplines and it will be cheaper too.

6. Library

Were you overwhelmed with the libraries at the University of Alberta and their quality of service? Well, larger universities have larger libraries; this means more books, more journal subscriptions, more services and more staff who will process your requests at a higher pace. In smaller institutions the library facilities and services

will be less than in a larger institution, however, the resource sharing agreements among libraries could help bridge the gap.

7. Research Facilities

If your research requires the use of equipment that costs a quarter million dollars and the availability of high-tech facilities, then consider joining a large institution. Larger institutions will have more labs, technicians and more resource sharing opportunities among different departments than at smaller institutions. However, if you are still interested in joining a small institution, look for a more specialized institution in your area of interest because you could find more opportunities for collaboration.

8. Support Staff

If you do not mind doing some administration work or building on your computer skills, then you won't have too much trouble if you join a small institution because there could be few support staff available. In a larger institution there will be more support staff and more sophisticated software systems, but there is also administration work that you will end up doing. Think supervisory committees, hiring committees, advisory committees, etc.

9. Graduate Studies

Do you plan on having a large research group with postdoctoral fellows and graduate students? Well, in this case selecting the institution to work for is important because at large institutions having such a research group is achievable. Most small institutions do not offer graduate programs, or the highest graduate program offered is a master's degree. Small institutions rely heavily on undergraduate students for research, which on a positive note; have lower salaries than graduate student stipends.

10. Salary

An important issue to consider when applying for an institution is the salary level. In larger institutions you can make on average 25% more than in a smaller institution throughout your tenure track.

11. Capital Funding

An important issue that will strongly determine the progression of your research is capital funding. Smaller institutions receive less capital funding from the government compared to larger institutions.

Activities to do on your own

- Make a list of your criteria for selecting an institution to work for.
- Search for institutions that meet your preferences.
- Try to make contact with someone in these institutions. If not, then check with your supervisor or professors if they can help you make contact to get detailed information.
- Speak with your supervisor about your criteria for selecting the institution to work for and ask him/her for advice.
- Watch out for the Professional Development opportunities offered by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Alberta because some sessions host professors from different institutions who speak about their experience.
- Check the University of Alberta Schedule on the front page of the university website to check if there is anyone visiting from another institution that is of interest to you.

Additional Resources

- Public Sector salary disclosure for university professors in Ontario for 2009 by the Ontario Ministry of Finance
- <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/publications/salarydisclosure/2010/>
- Financial Information of Universities and Colleges by the Canadian Association for University Business Officers (CAUBO)
- http://www.caubo.ca/pubs/pub_colleges_e.cfm

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