



Nambirajan Rangarajan

Home Country: India

Degree: Ph.D., Chemistry

Graduation Date: December 2015

Employer: University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill, NC)

Position: Post Doctoral Research Associate



What do you do in your current position?

The primary focus of my current position is research on the effects of age on intracellular signaling. This involves developing new experimental methods and data analysis strategies, and learning from the expertise of colleagues with the ultimate goal of addressing the specific aims of my project. In addition to research, I am also involved in grant writing, mentoring undergraduates, and organizing events on campus.

How did you find your position?

Several universities maintain a listing of open post-doc positions. I did an exhaustive search of these pages and identified openings that aligned with my research interests and skill set. This is how I found the ad for my current position.

Which career services did you find helpful at UW-Madison?

The workshops on how to write a research statement, cover letter and CV/Resume conducted by the Writing Center were incredibly helpful. The graduate student services coordinator of my Department at UW would send out weekly emails with academic and industrial job ads - these were a great resource too.

Other than your degree, what skills or experience made you competitive in the US job market?

In my experience, employers in the US look for two kinds of skills: 1) Technical - working knowledge of a method, technique, assay, process, software, etc; and 2) Intangible ('soft') skills - collegiality, ability to work in a team, communication skills (both verbal and written), leadership skills, etc.

I possessed several technical skills that were transferable from my graduate research to the jobs I was interviewing for. However, I think my current employers also paid a lot of attention to the 'soft' skills that I brought to the table. In hindsight, these turned out to be as important, if

not more, as my technical expertise. I believe it was the combination of core expertise and soft skills that made me competitive in the post-doc job market.

What advice do you have for current international students?

Each job search is unique, so the points I make here are reflective of my experience alone. Take these with several grains of salt.

Job searching - (1) The post-doc job listing webpages are a great resource. I would recommend job seekers to start here. However, bear in mind that these pages may not be updated every day, so some of the information that you see may be old. (2) Word-of-mouth - Although all universities require job openings to be advertised on their websites, it is quite common to hear about an opening by word-of-mouth. It helps to speak with friends and colleagues and let them know that you are looking for a job. (3) Several labs have funding and space for a post-doc but do not advertise for it officially. It doesn't hurt to reach out to a group leader whose research interests you, and enquire if they have a vacancy. You may not receive a reply soon (or at all!), but patience is the key!

Resumes and cover letters - In addition to the Writing Center workshops, you can find several resources online. For the life science careers, Science magazine has some free articles that guide you on writing a resume. Do take feedback from colleagues, your advisor and thesis committee as well - these are invaluable resources! Preparing for interviews - For academic jobs, it helps to know what your prospective employer's lab works on. Think about which skills you possess can be transferred to the new job. With some thought, you might come up with a new perspective on the lab's research. This demonstrates creativity and curiosity - employers find these very attractive in a candidate.