This paper covers strategies that a prospective Ph.D. can use to enhance his/her success in the job market. The paper is based on the assumption that deciding what you want to be and are important then pursuit of a deliberate set of actions can enhance your job market prospects. Not all actions discussed are necessary, nor do all always work, but you increase your prospects if you do some of these things.

The discussion is organized into three sections

- thoughts on enhancing one's job market chances by planning degree training.
- thoughts on enhancing one's chances to be selected for a job interview while actively seeking employment.
- Thoughts on enhancing performance during the interview.

Readers should note that there is an academic job market bias here due to the author's lack of experience in other venues.

**Plan your Training so you will Fare Better in the Job Market**

Today and probably for the near future it is easy to assert that the job market is highly competitive. Stories abound of positions with 30 or more applicants. The question then is how does one rise to the top and be selected on the short list of 2-3 candidates to be interviewed. My thinking is that this takes a mixture of strong training, good recommendations, and a well presented application package. Such things do not just happen, some degree of deliberate action can enhance ones competitiveness. Consider doing things from the following lists.

**Plan Ahead -- Set Training and Job Goals Early in Your Program**

- Choose desired job areas early (agribusiness, resources, etc.) and target type of employment (i.e. industry, consulting, government, academic, research, teaching, extension, international).

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1 Thanks to Paul Ellinger, Kerry Litzenberg, Bill Nayda, A. Gene Nelson, Dan Padberg, and C. Richard Shumway for comments.
- Bias your A&M coursework and research experience to support efforts in those directions

**Training**

- Emphasize rigor and depth in coursework, do not settle for the minimum in your chosen area(s)

- Do not be afraid to get lower grades in rigorous courses, you can also take courses not on your degree plan on a pass/fail basis (it is important to have them listed on your transcript).

- Get deep theory and methods training

- Get applied courses in your area

- Enhance training during your dissertation work by taking a course per term (perhaps pass/fail)
  
  - Recognize that the classroom is not the only place you are trained, get out-of-classroom experience in your chosen job field - teach, do research, go on extension trips etc.

  - Remember that your dissertation is an important training exercise. Make sure it is complementary to your job focus areas. Make sure you are very knowledgeable of the subarea in which it falls

  - Recognize, if pursuing an academic career that teaching is becoming increasingly important so try to build a teaching component in your training

**Background**

- Have out-of-class experience pertinent to the job you seek. This can be gained through your M.S., on the job experience, or through non-academic jobs

- Volunteer for projects at A&M to gain experience and build a background even if it is beyond your funding obligations

- Get some exposure to extension so you know what it is all about. Go on a trip with a specialist.

- Do pre-dissertation out-of-classroom research, it can teach you equally as much as classroom experience while building background. It can also enhance your
dissertation performance.

- Try to get teaching experience either by guest lecturing, teaching a whole class, or aiding in class planning/testing/management. If you are a TA try to do more than just grading. Ask for and retain student and supervisor evaluations. Attend teaching improvement sessions if offered.

- If you are having trouble in finding a job, do a postdoc with the most talented people you can find on projects where you can write, and aggressively pursue writing.

- Improve your communication skills; give contributed papers, give seminars, teach, etc.

- Try to get grantsmanship experience. The world really wants those that can get grant funds, so why not try to have some proposal writing and hopefull successful application experience in the resume. Try to participate in the writing of a grant application or even to try to get a minor grant. Pursue
  i) partnerships with major professor
  ii) grants within university structure - maybe a grad student
      miniproposal of some type
  iii) partnering with other faculty

**Specialty**

- Specialties come in and out of vogue. You sometimes need luck of the draw at the time you are searching

- Choose job areas a priori and focus course work and research accordingly

- Diversify M.S. to Ph.D. research areas so you reflect a diverse set of specialty, subject matter, and methods expertise unless you are truly committed to one thing

- Recognize that you must have excellence in your chosen areas and that often the A&M degree plan "specialty" doesn't get you there. Pick your area early and use your time and electives to deliver a deep understanding of your field(s)

- Get to know everyone in your specialty area at Texas A&M.

**Advisors/Recommendation Letter Writers**

- Choose a major professor who will encourage rigorous training in your area and cause you to break new ground

- Compose your committee carefully. Choose people who will help you, who will push
you for rigor and problem understanding. Choose well known/capable people in your area that will be good references later. Actively involve them.

- Get to know the faculty in your interest areas so that they can help you when you are applying and can speak knowledgeably about your qualifications for jobs.

- Use people who know you well to write letters

- Feel out letter writers, if they can't support you, then use someone else.

- Keep the department head, nationally known people, and faculty in your area informed concerning your progress. Ask them to suggest you to prospective employers (should the web site be more current on candidates?, At least make sure it is for you.)

**Research Project**

- Identify your dissertation area early so you are well along after prelims and at job search time. See if you can work on the topic in term project contexts and during off periods (Christmas or summer breaks).

- Work on a good economic problem using state-of-art methods and theory.

- Make sure you have practical significance to the problem and understand what it is, who cares, what you will contribute, etc. Work through the implications do not stop with a "statistically significant" result.

- Do not overly focus on method or implementation technique.

- Strike out on something new, do not just use someone's model.

- Select a project that will yield journal type writings, design it to yield them as you go and do some writing.

**Writings**

- If you can, publish in your area showing employers a willingness and ability to write. Use poster sessions and selected paper opportunities to write.

- Take on class or other projects that are publishable.

- Work on writing simultaneously with course work.
- Diversify your resume' writings across your interest areas.

**Now You are Ready to Seek Employment -- Enhancing Your Chances**

Part of the message in the section above is that your job search should be on your mind throughout the course of your studies. Nevertheless, your efforts should intensify as you progress through the program. Some thoughts are in order about contacts with prospective employers both during the application process and even before.

**Start Early Making Contact with Employers Before They Define Jobs**

- In your second year express interest in places where you wish to work. Make AAEA or other meeting contacts with potential colleagues and department heads. During these meetings express interest. Do not expect too much from these activities nor should you expect a lot of attention from prospective employers.

- Do not be a pest.

- Use major professor, other advisor, faculty and department head contacts, ask them to mention you to prospective employers if they feel comfortable (should GSA publish a pamphlet?).

**Applying**

- Do not be snobbish or geographically limited in deciding whether to apply. Choose where you will work after you have offers.

- Apply widely to positions you are reasonably qualified for even in areas that stretch your specialty.

- Wait until your thesis topic is known and work is underway before doing much in the way of applying. You must be past the conceptualizing stage when you interview so you have a decent seminar topic.
Resume

- Make it clean, professional, grammatically correct
- Tune it to the job
- Include:
  - Professional interests including interests in the job specialty area(s), and if relevant teaching
  - Papers
  - Course work summary pertinent to job and specialty area(s)
  - Teaching evaluations by students and supervisors
  - A brief narrative on completed and in-progress research projects including significance of findings (possibly anticipated). Note significance is in terms of the problem, method, economic theory and society not in terms of output (numbers of papers)
  - Grantsmanship efforts

Letter of Application

- Write a letter of no more than 2 pages accompanying your resume in which you
  - Name the position you are applying for
  - Review why you think you could do the job describing how your training background and professional interests match the job requirements
  - Express sincere interest in the job
  - Are not overly specific about what you would do if you got the job. Remember that the position description is theirs not yours
- Notify your references. Give them a copy of your application letter and vita.
- Check that all required information is provided.

**Timing**

- Apply for jobs with closing dates which will occur after you thoroughly understand your research topic as well as associated literature, theory and methods. Be part way done at your potential interviewing dates. Do not go in with a half baked idea.

- Try to interview for several jobs at about the same time.

- Interview at the AAEA or other professional meetings as soon after prelims if possible.

**Follow-up**

- Show interest in jobs you have applied for after applying, (call and/or write but no more than once a quarter and not until after closing date). Your calling does not really benefit you. Contact is tolerated but if excessive it can cost you

**Enhancing Interview Performance**

You will not interview very often, so spend time preparing. Small blunders or a lack of preparedness can cause job prospects to be diminished greatly. Remember everyone at your prospective employment location may have a hand in your hiring.

**Familiarize**

- Get information a priori about the place you will be interviewing (staff lists, short vitae, programmatic literature, look at web pages), if you do not receive such materials from the department head or cant find it on the internet ask for them

- Familiarize yourself with that place

- Ask faculty here to tell you about the place identifying people in your area, departmental leaders, people, problems, etc.

- Read resume's of your potential peers

- Identify those in your area that are associated with the job area, try to familiarize yourself with their work by reading recent papers

**Prepare questions**
- Ask about position expectations.
- Show interest in personal and professional conditions at that location
- Do not ask detailed questions about benefits or housing until you have the job offer
- Prepare questions on work areas by others and on possible collaboration
- Prepare questions on major items of interest -- do not be too picky
- Ask some of the questions, make sure you include both professional and personal ones

Know the major whats and whys and hows about your experiences and desires

- Why did you apply for the job and what can you contribute if hired?
- What do you want to do in the future?
- Why did you go to A&M?
- Why did you choose the particular A&M advisor and your thesis problem? (Have professional and problem significance reasons not only monetary reasons.)
  - Never say you did your thesis on a topic because someone told you to have professional reasons about it's significance.
- What are your shortcomings relative to the job and how would you overcome them?
- What are the first few things you wish to work on and why?
- What is the eventual significance of your thesis research?
- What things are their faculty doing which interest you and you could contribute to?
- What could you teach?
- What literature does your work relate to and how does your work contribute?
- What do you think of a nine month appointment?
- What do you think of a non tenure track position?
- How and from where will you attract outside funding?
- What interdisciplinary things might you be interested in?

- What are your feelings about international programs?

- What are your feelings about extension, teaching and research as well as your ideal split?

- What would your ideal job be?

- How do you feel about work areas outside your dissertation field?

**Prepare and practice your seminar**

- Present material on your problem and its significance

- Do not be overly technical, show you know the theory, methods, data, assumptions, major strengths, shortcomings, and prior literature background of your research problem. Show you know where the cutting edge is and explain how you are on it. But do not stay there for the whole seminar.

- Tell where your problem and method fits in the literature

- Give actual and/or anticipated socially and professionally significant contributions. Show how your findings relate to the problem.

- Use computer supported visual aids including graphs and figures with large type that are readable and simple. Make sure all are grammatically correct and concise. Do not include too much detail

- Bring background writings you can leave behind which include technical backup (make sure they are professionally well done and grammatically correct)

- Plan for a maximum 30-35 minute presentation

- Do not read the seminar

- Have your major points on the visuals to help you remember them. Do not have any more visuals than 1 per minute of presentation perhaps one for every 2 minutes. (so between 15 and 30 overheads). Use a size 20 or more size font and don’t crowd it up.

- Don’t overwhelm them with numbers or formulas or derivations
- Practice the seminar and the presentation including taking questions, Present the seminar 2-3 times, ask for feedback

**Practice one on one and one on five or six Interviewing**

- Go to faculty here you are not close to and ask them to hold a "prospective" employment interview for a position like that you are interested in. Get feedback on your performance.

- Practice a small group interview.

**Conduct yourself professionally and show interest**

- Be yourself

- Be personable

- Be knowledgeable, but humble

- Be cautious about expressing interests that are not in the domain of the position requirement don't leave the impression that you really want a different job than the one you are looking at. Make sure you express interest in the major elements of the job.

- Be attentive, listen and take notes. Listen particularly well when the department head is telling you about prospective colleagues and administrators

- Be sure to express interest in professional work of potential future colleagues

- Recognize that, being fresh out of graduate school, you are more theory and method oriented than the average professional. Communicate to all. In many contexts, nothing can kill your chances faster than leaving the impression that you are overly technical and will not relate to the position's applied mission

- Ask questions on professional matters

- Seek out how you would fit in and what expectations people would have of you

- Express why you want that job

- Cautiously express uncertainties you have relative to the job. Do not leave the impression you would not take this job if offered or that this is a second choice job

- Be knowledgeable, concise, offer to elaborate, but do not go too far initially,
especially on detailed technical matters

- Ask questions about the community and living matters

- Do not dwell on finances except with department head and benefits representative

- Identify and discuss potential collaboration with other faculty if you were hired

- Know your whys and whats from above

**Follow-up**

- After the interview thank them for their hospitality in writing. Express interest in the job and how you might fit in

- If there are people there that you have congruent interests with that you felt you connected with consider making a follow up phone call expressing interest to one of them.

- Ask them about their general time table and don’t start inquiries of the department head until after the process is likely to have come to a choice point.

- Do not call to inquire about your status for at least 3 weeks

- Try to make inquiries only when people at that place originate the phone calls

- DON'T BE A PEST!

**Concluding Comment**

Finding employment can be tough. You have limited time and financial constraints. You do not know what the employment prospects will be like at the time you finish. I think deliberate action, planning, and hard work can enhance your prospects.