

# Interviewing for Research Positions

## Petra Popovics, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Biomedical and Translational  
Sciences

Macon and Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences  
at Old Dominion University



**PopovicsLab.com**

PopoviP@ODU.edu

@PopovicsPetra



# My journey to the first faculty position

- Moderate publication list
- K12, K01, and one internal grant
- Pandemic / post-pandemic job market
- BPH animal models plus some human tissue studies

## **Target**

*Find a position with the resources to do the science well — animal work, strong clinical collaboration, and a manageable teaching load.*

## **Search priorities**

- Research infrastructure
- Access to animal studies
- Clinical collaboration
- Lower teaching burden
- Room to grow an independent program

## Issues that made me less competitive

- Limited appreciation at some institutions for the importance of benign urology research
- Some clinical urology departments viewed tenure-track position requiring an awarded R01
- No high-impact paper (hard to achieve in BPH research)

### Where to apply

General benign urology themes:  
Physiology/Pathology

UTI – Microbiology

Congenital urinary tract disorders –  
Developmental Biology

# Tips for getting an interview

*Show that your work fits the department, not just that you need a job.*

- 1 Make the significance of your science unmistakable — especially if your niche is not immediately obvious to every reviewer.
- 2 Tailor the application to the department's priorities, resources, and patient population.
- 3 Present a clear funding path and a feasible first grant strategy.
- 4 Explain why the institution is a logical fit for your program, not just a place you could work.

## **How I ended up in the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Cell Biology and in the Cancer Center**

- Prostate focus group
- Potential collaborations in inflammation
- BPH clinical collaborator was involved in the interview
- Large tissue repository

# Tips for the interview

*Everything counts — the science, the fit, and the person in the room.*

- Prepare for the research interests of each faculty member you member you will meet — and look for authentic points of collaboration.
- Emphasize why you are a strong long-term fit for the department and institution.
- Explain clearly how your work will be independent from your mentor's program.
- Be personable during lunches, dinners, and hallway conversations — the informal moments are still part of the interview.

## What committees are often asking themselves

Can this person

- build an independent program?
- work well with colleagues?
- attract funding?
- be someone we want to recruit and retain?

# Be ready to answer

*High-probability questions are worth rehearsing until your answers sound natural.*

What is your scientific niche?

How will your work differ from your mentor's?

Why should we invest in you?

What resources do you need?

What will your first grants be?

Why this department / institution?

# Ask, ask, and ask

*Interviews are also your chance to evaluate whether the environment sets you up to succeed.*

- What does success look like here in 3–5 years?
- How are junior faculty mentored?
- What is the teaching and service balance?
- What core resources are available?
- How are collaborations built?
- What support exists for grant submission and lab start-up?
- How difficult is it to set up protocols and order what you need?
- How much laboratory space is available now, and can it grow later?

## Best people to ask

- research faculty
- junior faculty
- core facility staff

---

*Small operational details  
often matter more than they  
seem on interview day.*