The academic job interview

Experiences of Leigh McCue
(actual results may vary)
Learn something about the University/College/Department

- Re-read the job posting and make sure you’re presenting yourself in a way that meets the needs of the department.
- Know how you’d fit (courses to teach—with course numbers, research possibilities, potential collaborators, etc...)
- Be able to state what you’d bring to the table
- Be aware of unique facilities that would be of use to you (VT examples: ICTAS, System X, etc...)
Learn something about everyone you will meet

- Browse the department’s website, learn people’s faces, and at least one interesting tidbit about everyone you’re going to meet.
- Browse other departments’ websites and come up with names of a couple folks in outside departments you’d like to meet with.
The academic job interview

Have a plan

- Research
  - Funding
  - Collaborators
  - Research beyond your PhD
- Teaching
  - What existing course numbers are you excited to teach?
  - Do you want to create a new course?
- Service
The seminar

- You want to show that you can communicate, teach, and excel at research.
- Start preparing your job talk when you start applying for jobs. Don’t wait until you’re invited somewhere to prepare the talk.
- Assuming an hour talk, figure:
  - The first 5 minutes your kid brother should be able to understand
  - The next 10 someone with an engineering degree should follow
  - The next 20 someone with a grad degree in your field should follow
  - In the last 10 wow 'em with something only a few people in the room will sort of understand
  - Save the remaining 15 minutes for Q&A.
- If you’re given a choice, try to give your seminar in the morning of the first day; that way you avoid giving mini-versions of your seminar every time you meet someone new.
Don’t make decisions for the search committee

- You’re qualified to apply for a lot more than your instinct will tell you too. Just apply. What’s the worst that will happen?
- Everything you’ve done can be viewed in a positive light. If you think something’s questionable (time to graduation, advisor shifts, etc...) either let the committee raise the question or affirmatively describe it as a positive. Don’t cast things negatively. Let the search committee do that 😊.
- Be realistic, but don’t be defensive no matter what you’re asked.
What to wear

- Dress appropriately, better to be a bit overly formal than the other way around.
- Wear dressy but comfortable shoes. (I broke a heel on one interview).
- I may be paranoid but I almost always interviewed in an ankle-length skirt-suit rather than a pants-suit. I figured if there was some conservative full professor who might be consciously or subconsciously against hiring a woman, a pants-suit wasn’t going to help.
Illegal questions
(I have been asked each of these!)

- How old are you?
- So will you be bringing anyone with you when you move?
- I see you are not wearing a ring...
- Do you have a boyfriend?
- Do you have any tattoos?

It is almost guaranteed (in industry or academic interviews) that you will be asked something illegal at some point. Decide in advance how you want to respond so that you’re not blindsided.