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Negotiating: Just Do It!

If the job offer you have is your first or your fifth, negotiating your contract offer is often one of the more nerve-wracking experiences you'll have in taking a faculty job. As the applicant, the only leverage you have in the negotiations is that you have the ultimate power to say "Yes" or "No." It is clear the university wants you, or they would not have chosen you to become a part of their academic community. Once you sign the contract, you lose that leverage because you have then legally committed to be a part of that academic community. So you want to make sure that you're as happy as you can be with your contract while you have the leverage to negotiate (i.e., before you sign the contract!).

As I note in *Finding the Best Faculty Job for You,* Department Chairs and Deans are well aware that happy faculty make the best faculty, so they want to make sure – within reason – that you are satisfied with your contract.

As part of your happiness, you need to understand the long-term financial ramifications of your decision to sign that contract. While the type of pension offered can have long-term ramifications, your salary will be a more immediate financial consideration. However, your beginning salary will also have long-term financial ramifications.

In general, your beginning salary will set the scale for your pay for the rest of your career. For example, given the assumption that a higher salary will translate to higher salaries if you change jobs, even a negotiated increase of $1000 in your starting salary can result in an additional $42,000 throughout a 30-year academic career! And you can quickly see that if you get more than that $1000 increase in your starting salary, there can be tremendous long-term benefits. An extra $5000/year in your starting salary is equivalent to almost a quarter of a million dollars across your career!

If you negotiate (which you should), make sure your salary requests are based on hard data, including the department's and your college's current salaries. The Dean and Department Chair will appreciate your research skills and are more likely to work hard to fulfill your request if those requests – especially a salary request – are based on justifiable facts.

Don't be afraid to negotiate; the worst they can say is "No." Unless you are unreasonable and difficult to deal with, there is little chance that your original contract offer will be withdrawn if you negotiate, so you have little to lose and potentially a lot to gain by negotiating!

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