

The Academic Job Market

Michelle Zhao

2025-2026

Context: Reflections and Notes

- These slides contain notes and potentially helpful information following my experience on the 2025–2026 academic job market. They are intended to be an additional resource for PhD students and postdoctoral researchers preparing to enter the academic job market.
- Please note that these materials are not comprehensive and are primarily focused on tenure-track assistant professor positions.
- I would also like to acknowledge and thank Andrea Bajcsy (CMU) for generously sharing her experiences, which inspired me to compile and share my own reflections.

What goes into the application?

Application Package Materials: Primary

- Research Statement: A 3–4 page document outlining prior research contributions (e.g., dissertation work) and a well-defined agenda for future research.
- Teaching Statement: A 1–2 page statement describing teaching philosophy, pedagogical approach, and relevant instructional experience.
- Letters of Recommendation: Typically three to four confidential letters from academic references.
- Curriculum Vitae (CV): A comprehensive record of academic, research, and professional accomplishments.
- Cover Letter: A tailored letter addressing the specific institution, articulating fit, expressing interest in the department, and, where appropriate, identifying potential collaborators.

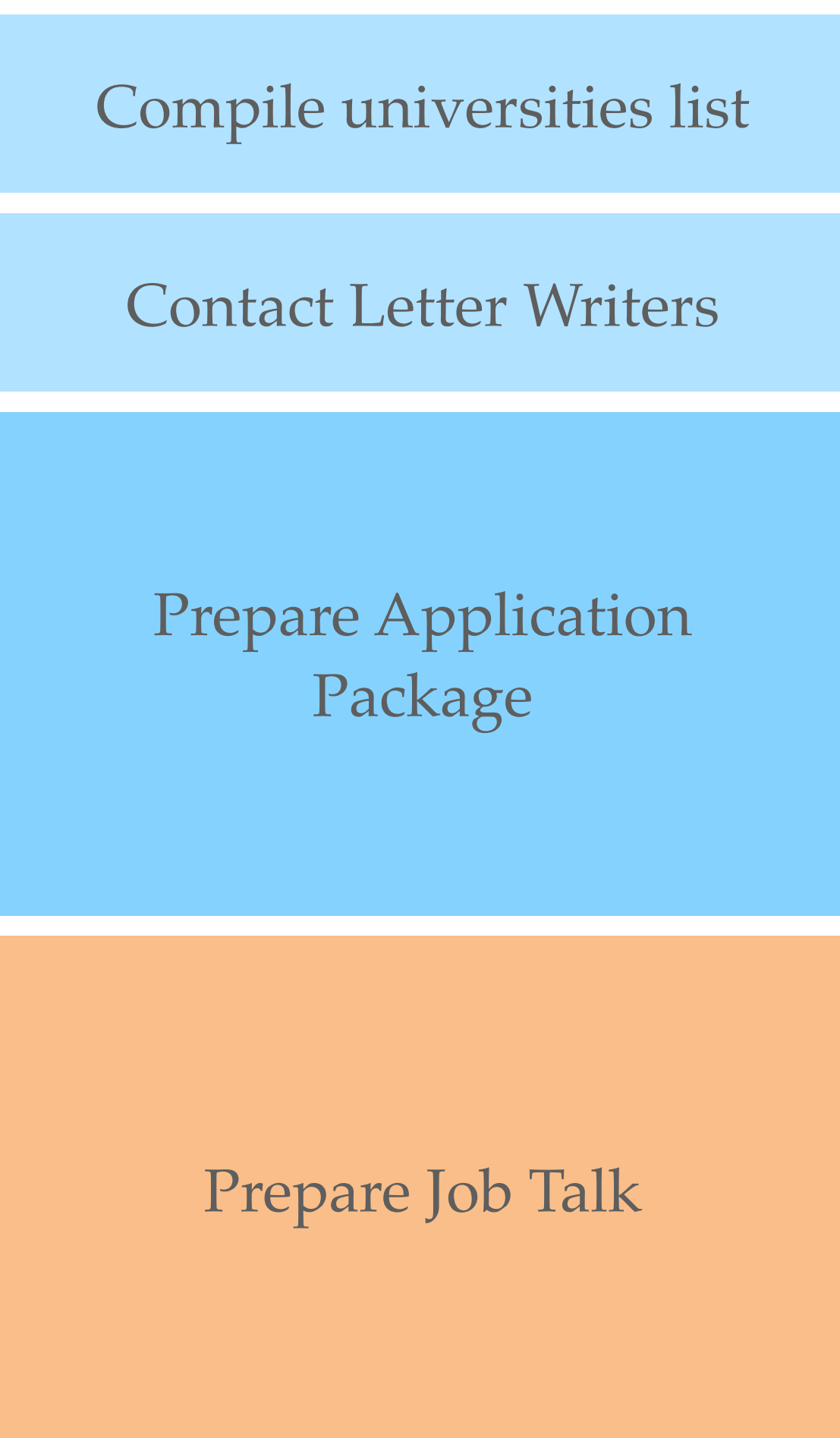
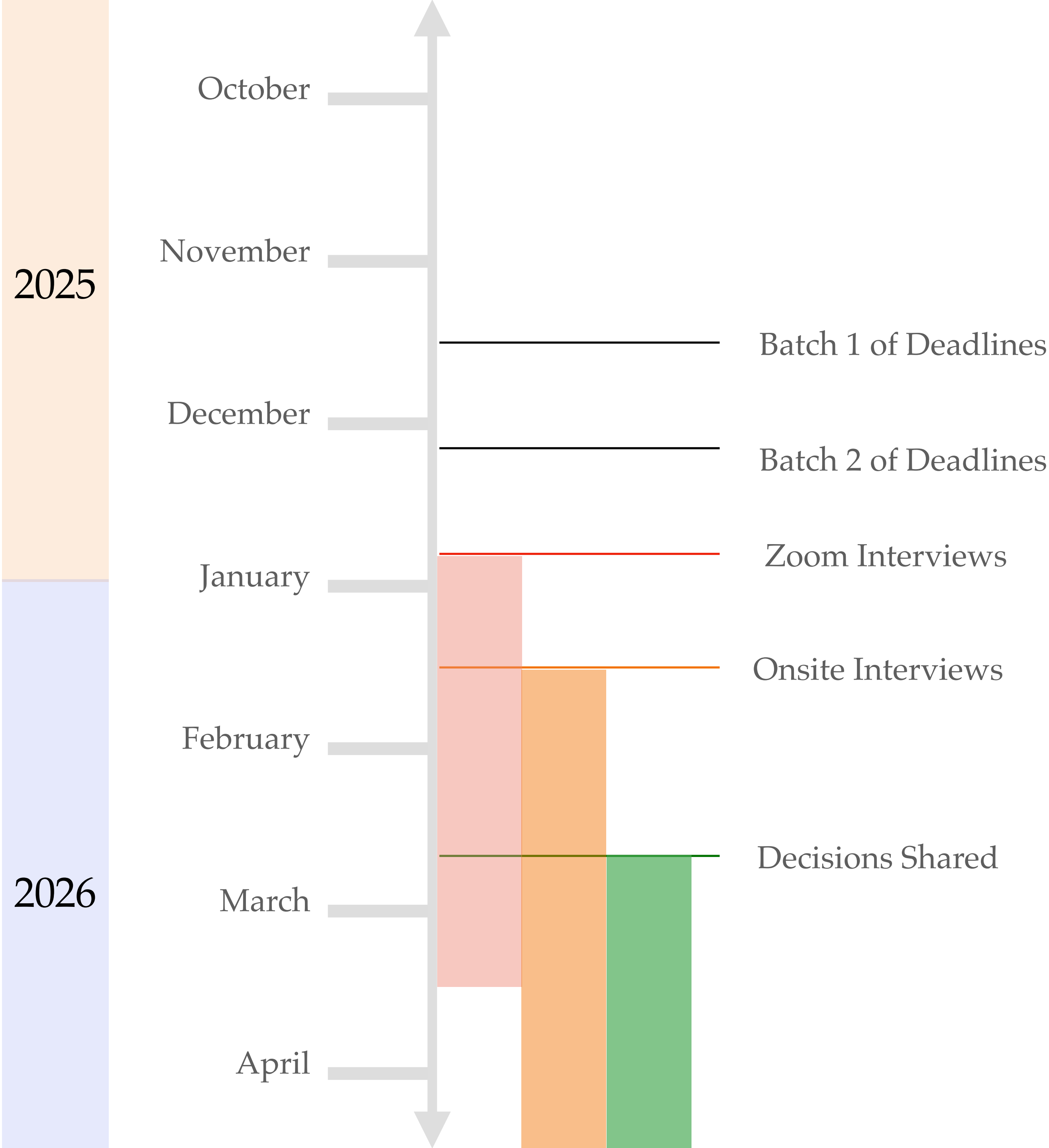
Application Package Materials: Supplementals

- Representative Publications: One to three selected papers that best reflect the quality, impact, and direction of your research contributions.
- Service Statement: A 1–2 page document outlining contributions to mentorship, academic service, and efforts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. While not required by all institutions, having this material prepared can be very helpful.
- Teaching Evaluations: Teaching evaluations for courses in which you have served as a teaching assistant or instructor.
- Where permitted, I recommend to include these supplementary materials, as they provide additional evidence of your broader contributions and strengths as a candidate.

Timeline

Timeline

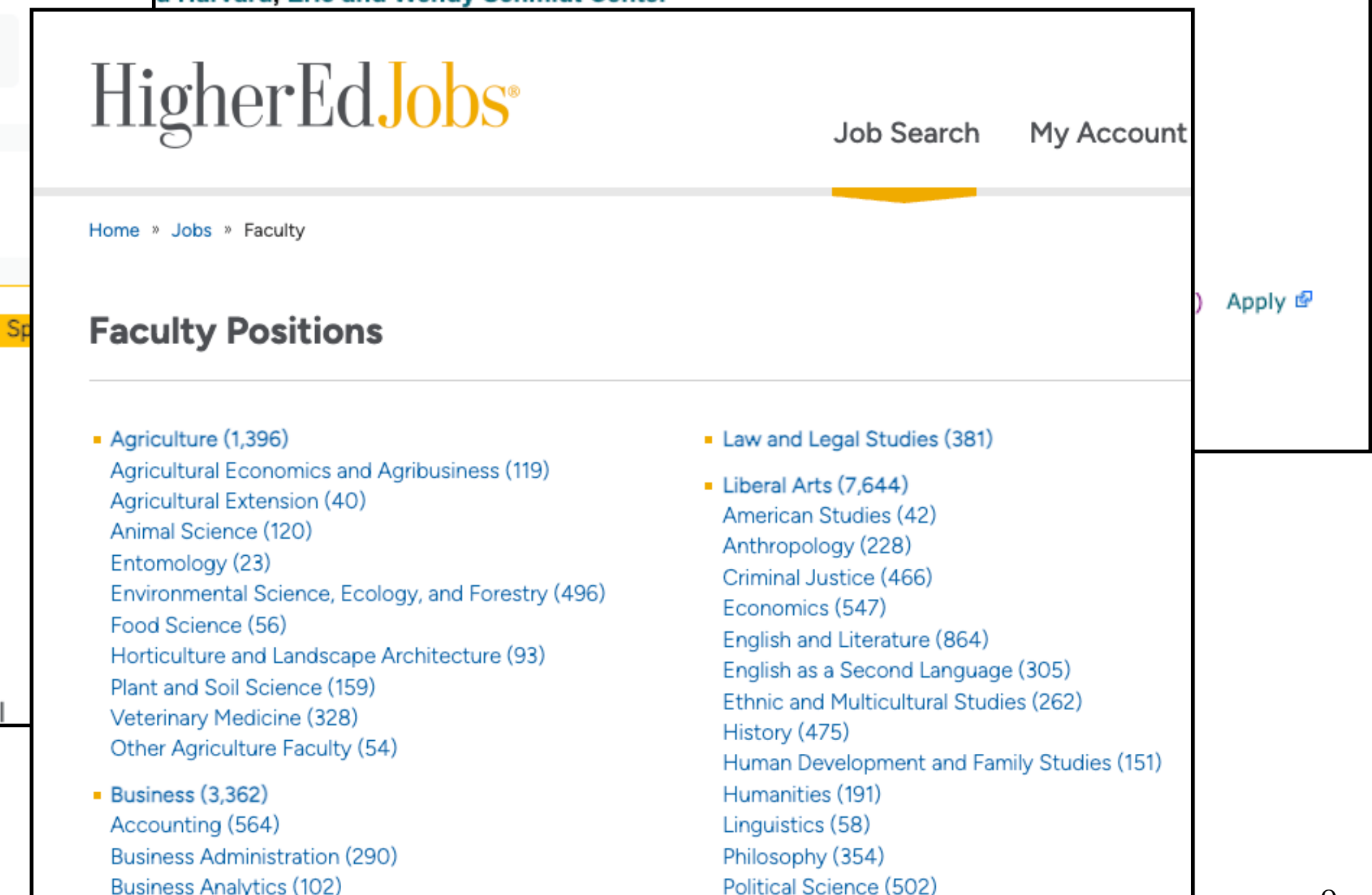
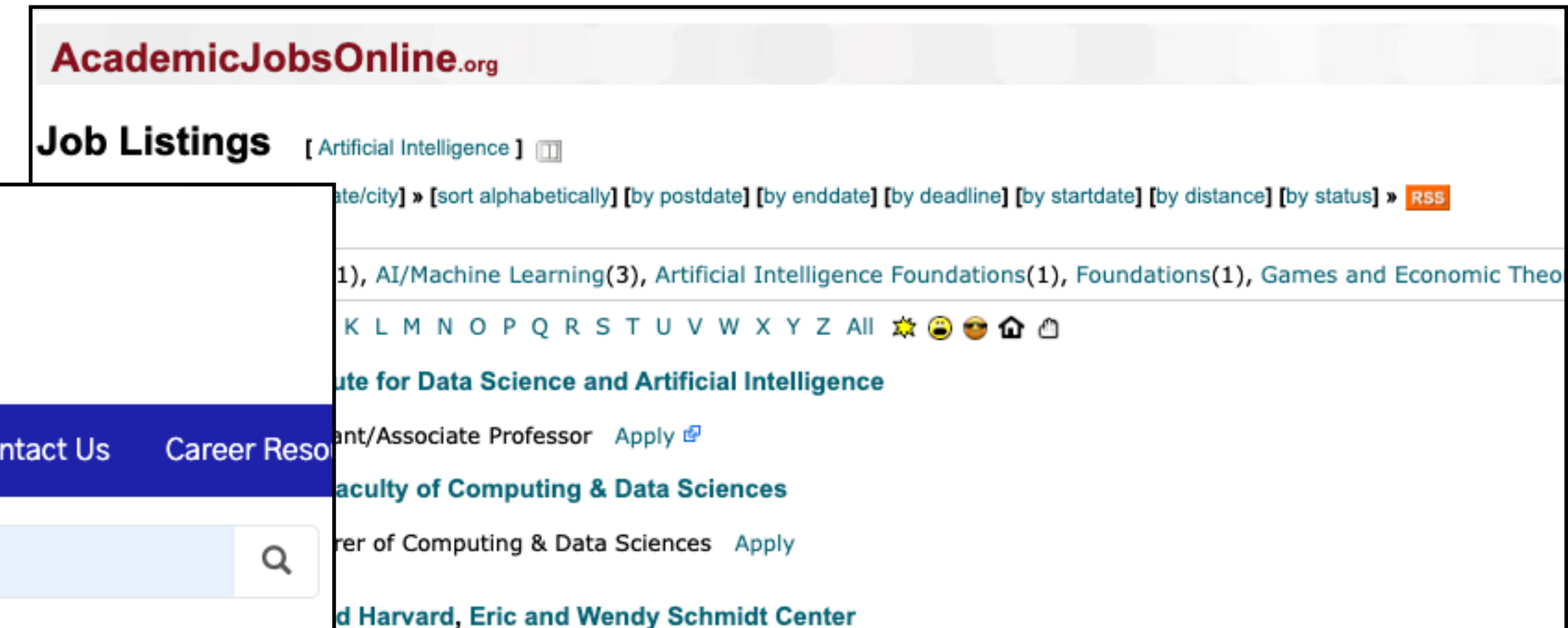
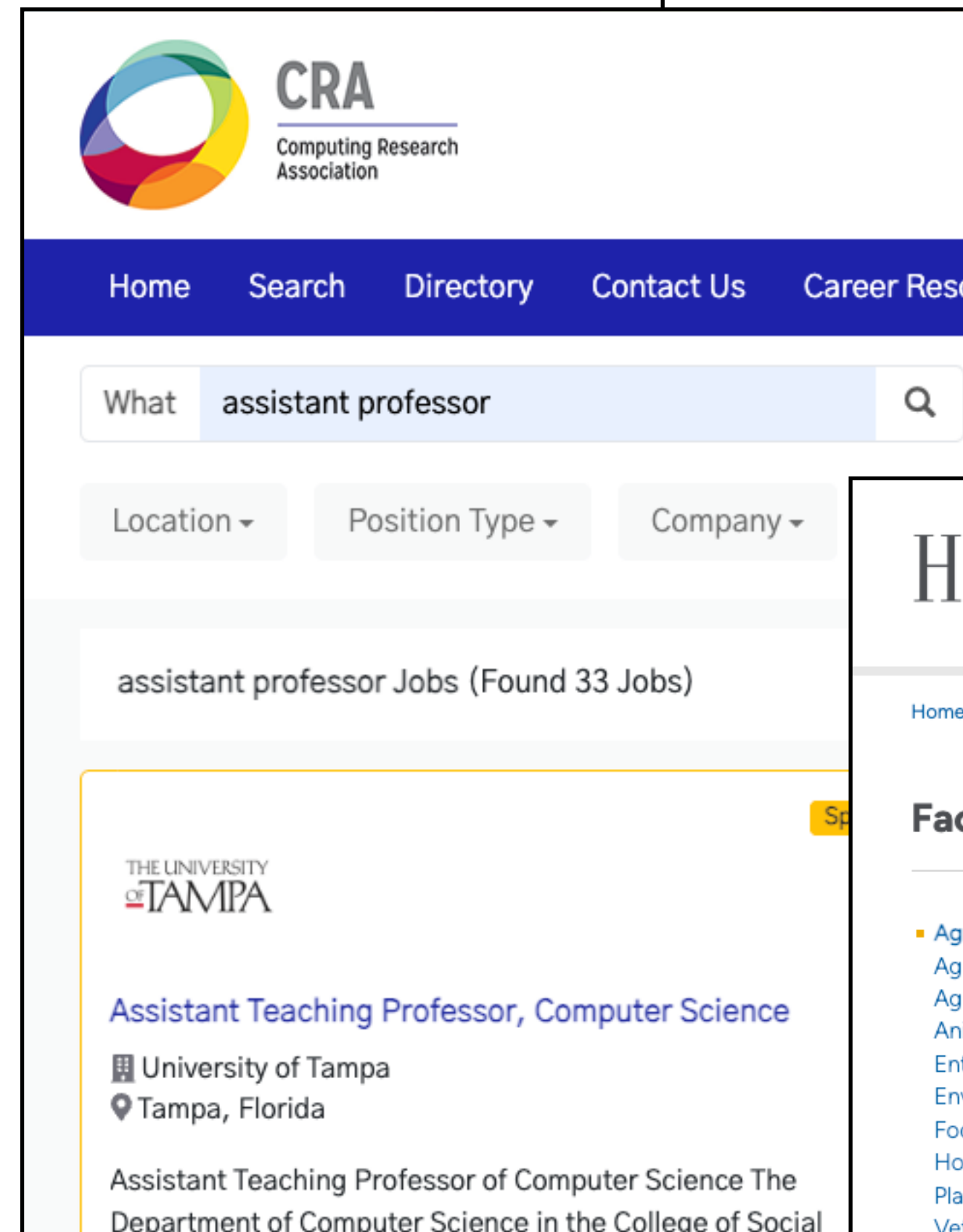
- This timeline reflects my experience during the 2025–2026 academic job market cycle.
- Please note that timelines may vary depending on the specific role and institution, and are subject to change.



How do I apply?

Step 1: How do I know which schools are hiring?

- Computing Research Association
(careercenter.cra.org/job)
- HigherEd Jobs
(higheredjobs.com/faculty)
- Academic Jobs Online
(academicjobsonline.org)
- Individual University Websites:
Many institutions post openings directly on their departmental or university careers pages.



Step 1: Compile list of universities

- Introspect on Your Priorities: Carefully consider the conditions that are important for you when deciding where to apply (e.g., research support, teaching load, institutional culture, work–life balance).
- Clarify Role Preferences:
 - Tenure-track Assistant Professor: Typically emphasizes research productivity and grant acquisition.
 - Teaching Professor / Professor of Practice: Places greater emphasis on instruction, curriculum development, and student engagement.
- Geographic Considerations: Identify any location preferences or constraints.
- Organizational Fit: Seek out departmental and institutional structures that align with your working style, collaboration preferences, and long-term career goals.
- Keep yourself organized with an organizational structure that works for you.

A	B	C	D	E	F
Schools to Apply To					
Column 1	Interview Status	Onsite Status	Offer Status	University Name	Job Title
	Online Interview	Onsite		Missouri University of Science and Technology (S&T)	Assistant Professor, Computer Science
	Rejected	Rejected		University of Oregon	Assistant Professor Data Science

Step 2: How do I write a research statement?

- **Page 1: Overview (Self-Contained)** This page should provide a clear and complete snapshot of your research statement. Include:
 - Title and name
 - An overview figure (if appropriate)
 - A concise summary of your thesis work
 - A high-level research agenda

Step 2: How do I write a research statement?

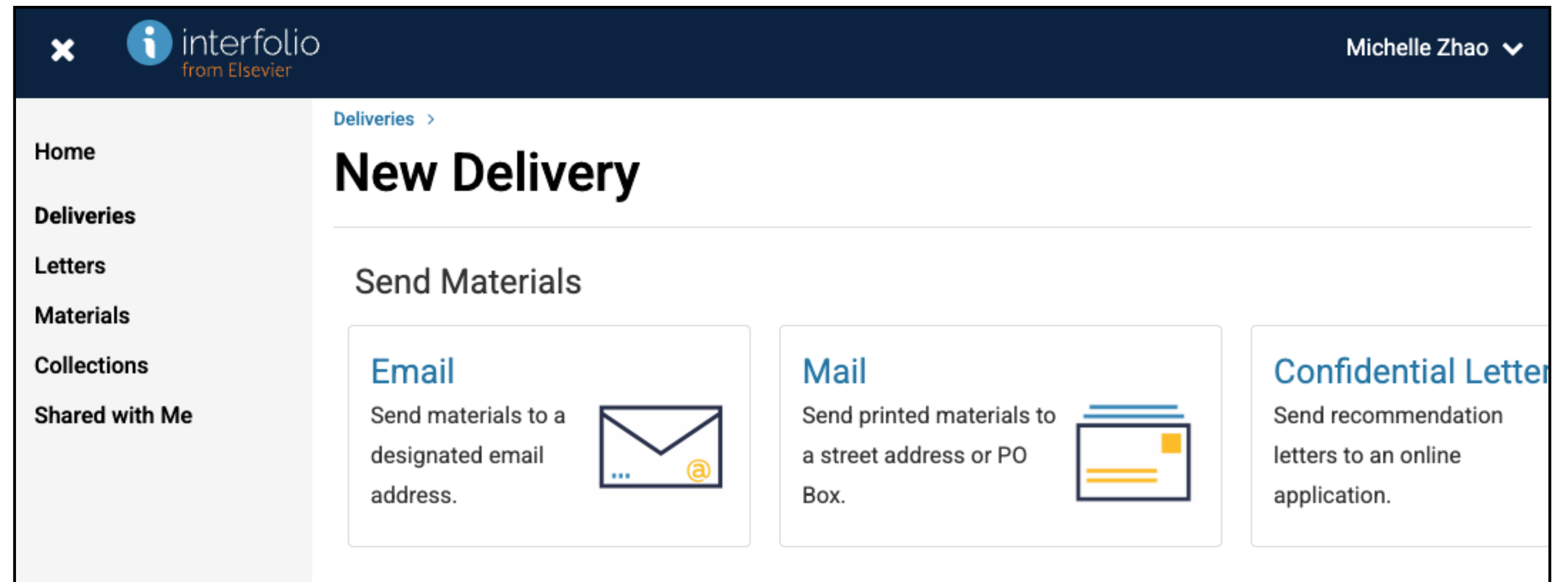
- **Pages 2–4: Detailed Content:** Use these pages to expand on the core ideas introduced in the overview:
 - Thesis work (key contributions and insights)
 - Future research agenda (specific directions and plans)
 - Summary statement tying themes together
 - Impact and potential for future funding
 - Citations
- Revise your statement through multiple rounds of feedback. Share your document with researchers from different fields within CS, to ensure that your statement is digestible to diverse readers.

Step 3: How do I write a teaching statement?

- While the structure of a teaching statement can vary, the following outline may serve as a useful starting point:
 - Overview: A brief introduction to your teaching philosophy and approach.
 - Teaching Pedagogical Strategies (1–3): Clearly articulate your core teaching philosophies and how they inform your instructional practices.
 - Teaching Interests: Summarize courses you have taught or assisted with, and outline courses you would be interested in teaching in the future.
- CMU's Eberly Center Future Faculty Program provides structured guidance and early feedback on teaching statements.

Step 4: Use Interfolio for Letter Writers

- **Request Letters via Interfolio:** Submit and manage recommendation letter requests through the platform.
- **Confidential Uploads:** Letter writers upload their letters directly and confidentially; applicants do not have access to the contents.
- **Centralized Distribution:** Letters can be sent to multiple institutions efficiently using Interfolio's delivery system and shareable links.



Interviews

Step 5: Zoom Interviews

- **Expect 3-5 faculty present at this interview. Be prepared to answer:**
 - Research
 - What is your research and vision?
 - Can you describe and highlight the impact of one or multiple of your works?
 - Why this school
 - Why did you apply to this school? How does your research fit into the department?
 - Teaching
 - What existing courses or new courses could you add?
 - What is your teaching strategy for students with diverse backgrounds?
- What questions do you have about the position?

Step 5: You also get to ask your own questions

- What are you curious about with respect to the job, department, university?
 - *What are the department's priorities for growth in computing over the next few years?*
 - *What does tenure/promotion look like? What feedback do you receive along the way?*
 - *How is teaching load structured for new faculty, and are there particular courses or areas the department is especially interested in expanding?*
- Plus any more you might have

Step 6: Onsite Interviews

- **Typical Components of an Onsite Visit:**
 - A seminar slot for your job talk
 - Lunch and / or meetings with students
 - ~30-minute one-on-one or small-group (k-on-1) meetings with faculty
 - Meetings with the department chair and / or administrative leadership
- Remember: it's also a chance for you to get to know the department!
- Have fun, and view the onsite as an advertisement for your work. Worst thing that can happen is now more people are aware of your work!
- It's a long day, so ask for bathroom breaks as needed.

Step 6: How do I make a job talk?

- **A Typical Structure:**

- Intro and Motivation (5-10 minutes)
- 2-3 Project highlights (20-30 minutes)
- Future Work (5-10 minutes)

- **Advice I received and will share**

- It should be clear what the state of the art was before and after your research.
- Highlight numbers when you can (k% improvement over baselines).
- 1 project can be a deeper dive than the rest, but remember the audience will come from different backgrounds, so make sure your talk can be accessible to as many folks as possible!

Step 6: How do I make a teaching demo?

- **Two Common Formats (Usually ~30 minutes):**
 1. You are given the freedom to choose your own topic
 2. A topic is assigned by the department
 - Example: In my case, I delivered both formats:
 - An assigned lecture on Heuristic Search (e.g., A*, Greedy Best-First Search)
 - A self-selected lecture on Theory of Mind
- Draw from your existing lecture notes and prior teaching materials
- Adapt and cut content to fit the time constraint and audience
- Incorporate your own teaching style and personality

Good Luck!

And please reach out if you would like to chat or have any questions!