



### European Accounting Association Newsletter – Interview series

**“How to get a job after your PhD in Accounting: Experiences from attending the first EAA Talent Workshop”**

**Interview with Claudia Imperatore on her experience from attending the first EAA Talent Workshop in November 2015 in Madrid**



**About the interviewee:**

*Claudia Imperatore* recently finished her PhD in Accounting at IE Business School and in September 2016 just started to work as a tenure-track Assistant Professor at Bocconi University in Milan. Claudia began her PhD in 2011 and researches financial reporting quality during periods of financial crisis and in family firms. From 2014, she spent two years at the University of Chicago for an exchange program. In the last year of her PhD, she entered the job market and attended two job market conferences: the annual “AAA PhD Rookie Recruiting & Research Camp” from December 4-6, 2015 in Miami as well as the first edition of the “EAA Job Market for Accounting Academics”, a.k.a. the “Talent Workshop” from November 6-7, 2015 in Madrid. Given its great success, the “Talent Workshop” will be held again this year at IE Business School in Madrid (<http://www.eaa-jobmarket.ie.edu/>) from November 4-5, 2016 (submission deadline: September 30, 2016). Thus, I thought it was a great opportunity to talk with her as a first-hand participant in order to share her experiences with PhDs who are in the job market right now or in the future!

**Sebastian:** Claudia, you were obviously very successful in finishing your PhD and in attending the AAA and EAA job market conferences. First of all, congratulations for your achievements! Second, thanks a lot for agreeing to share your insights with us!  
As far as I know, there are three important elements when attending a recruitment

conference. There are typically a) the presentation of your research, b) interviews with potential employers (universities/schools), and c) in the aftermath of the conference, the arranging of “flyouts” for a job market talk at universities/schools.

Can you tell us a bit about the overall structure of the two days you spent at the “Talent Workshop” in Madrid?

**Claudia:** Sure, I’d be very happy to do so! First of all, I would like to thank you for making me part of this initiative. Last year, I was going on the job market and I was looking for tips and suggestions from people that went through it. I still remember my excitement! Hence, I am glad to share my experience and perhaps help other PhD candidates approaching such an important stage of their career. As a small remark, I can obviously only speak about my personal experience and my own view, so things may be different for others but I hope to be useful regardless.

The conference lasted for two days in the beginning of November. The job applicants were mainly PhD students close to the end of their PhD (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year). All candidates participated for the full two days although each candidate presented his/her job market paper on one of the two mornings only. Presentations were organized in parallel sessions. About 4 to 5 candidates presented at the same time for a total of 20-25 candidates per day.

On the first day, the conference started at 11.45 with the first presentations from 12.15 to 14.20 followed by lunch and interviews in the afternoon until 19.30. The day after, it started at 8.00 with interviews until 10.00, a coffee break, and a second round of presentations from 10.30 to 12.30. After lunch, interviews took place until 16.00 when the conference ended. So altogether, expect two quite intense days ahead of you!

**Sebastian:** I can imagine this to be intense! Let’s start with the first element, can you tell us a bit more about the presentations that participants are expected to do?

**Claudia:** Of course! The presentations are to be done in 20 minutes. Each session has a chair that introduces the candidate and takes the time (e.g. indicating when only 5 minutes are left). There is no time for questions so you are uninterrupted.

On the one hand, this is nice as you can fully concentrate on your speech, but, on the other hand, you do not receive feedback on the presentation right after. Yet, once you have the interviews, recruiters may start these by asking questions on the paper that you have presented. From that, you can somehow understand whether they liked it or not.

I presented about 12-15 slides but there is no explicit limit. Hence, at the end of the day, the way you design the presentation is up to you. The website of the AAA Rookie camp has some advice and suggestions about the presentation that might be useful in this regard. You do not need to send the slides in advance, just bring a pen drive.

As I said, 4 or 5 candidates present at the same time and it is up to you to also go and see other candidates’ presentations. In terms of research topics, the Talent Workshop is truly in the European and EAA spirit: all types of accounting research and methods can be found. Indeed, many candidates were from non-archival financial accounting research. I think that this is good for the candidates, especially for those that are not “mainstream”.

**Sebastian:** That’s very interesting! I guess 20 minutes is a format that the participants may be familiar with from some conferences that they attended. If you had to give advice on how to prepare for the presentation, what would that look like?

**Claudia:** With pleasure! My advice would definitely be to practice, practice, practice. Although you don’t need to send the slides in advance, it is good to prepare them earlier so that you can show them around to others or do a brownbag in your home institution. Indeed, arranging two or three prep presentations might be very useful to gain confidence. You can invite young scholars who have just been on the market and more senior ones who are more experienced. Presentations with just PhD students can also be helpful to have more friendly suggestions on your presentation style.

The timing is crucial. My suggestion is to target 15 minutes for the presentation even if you have 20 minutes as you may need longer under stress. Moreover, start with research questions, main findings and contribution in the first three slides so that it is clear from the beginning what you are doing and why the audience should listen to you. It is also nice to conclude the presentation with your future research ideas and working papers.

Remember that the schedule is quite strict and there is no break between presentations. There are just 2-3 minutes for switching/logistics. Hence, be on time! Last year, there was no need to bring water as it was present.

**Sebastian:** So how many people have attended the presentations when you participated last year? And does the audience have any information about the presenters beforehand?

**Claudia:** The number of people in the room varies a lot. Universities send on average two people but they may send more professors to attend more candidates' presentations and/or make more interviews at the same time. Hence, it is difficult to make an estimate and I guess it also depends on the "attractiveness" of the candidate. In my case, there were about 20-30 people. Most of them were from European schools, perhaps two or three were from US, Asia or Australia.

Regarding your second question: Yes, the schools do have information about the presenters as you need to send your CV, job market paper, and research statement in advance in order to be selected for participation. Thus, the schools know quite a bit about you which is obviously necessary for them to schedule an interview with you.

In 2015, the material (i.e. CV, job market paper, and research statement) was to be sent by the end of September. The conference organizers then screened the application and decided on invitations by mid-October. Once you receive the e-mail that you have been accepted, you will have access to the list of the schools attending the conference. Not all universities that were in

the list attended the conference in the end but the organizers promptly updated us about the changes. Perhaps I should also mention that it might be the case that you meet a university without them having seen your presentation. For instance, you may be interviewed in the afternoon of the first day while you only present in the morning of the second day.

**Sebastian:** Great, I think this would answer most questions I had concerning the presentations. Thanks a lot. Can you tell us more about what to expect regarding the second element? So how does it actually work that both parties decide to meet for an interview?

**Claudia:** Well, each PhD candidate has access to a personal website on which both parties mention that they are interested in meeting the other. It is like a match basically where you see green lights appear when both parties want to meet. You can select all schools or just some of them, it is up to you. And even if you did not select a given school, the school may still select and contact you. All the interviews are arranged before the conference but be prepared to be contacted at the last minute. It may also happen that people speak to you during lunch or coffee breaks and that you meet them quickly and spontaneously.

About the selection of the schools, I looked at the department and the profile of faculty members to evaluate the fit with my research. The location is another criterion. I knew I only wanted to work in Europe or the US so I excluded certain schools for that reason. Perhaps official rankings might also be relevant, but in my case, the research fit was more important.

**Sebastian:** And how many interviews can you have and how are they structured?

**Claudia:** During the two days, you can do about 15-20 interviews. That is actually very stressful as you have little time between one and the next interview. The interviews happen in offices located at different floors in the same building. Hence, you run around quite a bit. So a bottle of

water and sources of sugar are very important! You do not even have time to wait for the elevator but rush up the steps!

During a day, you may have 3-4 interviews in the morning and about 6 in the afternoon without a break. The slot per interview is 30 minutes but the school may ask just for 20 minutes (so for example instead of 17.00-17.30, they may say 17.00-17.20), as they may want to see more candidates or discuss the interviews. Schools can also ask to schedule interviews outside the arranged slots (e.g. during lunchtime or other candidates' presentation). In this case, you have less interviews close to each other.

**Sebastian:** What are the interviews about and how do you think one could best prepare for them?

**Claudia:** It depends on the schools. As I mentioned, some may start talking to you about your presentation with specific questions about the paper while others ask more general questions about your background. For sure, they will talk with you about the job market paper, your working papers, and your research interests. Often, they will ask questions about the target journals for your working papers. It is a way to see your ambition in a subtle way, I guess.

Teaching is also another topic: Do you have any experience? If yes, which classes? Which student audience, undergraduate, master or MBA? Indeed, they may want to see whether you are more of a research or teaching oriented person. Altogether, the interview is very much focused on academic aspects.

As in every interview, it is not only about the employer getting to know you but also vice versa. Hence, as a candidate, you may also want to ask questions about the school and the recruiters for sure expect that you do that as a signal of interest. For example, you may want to know more about teaching loads, research resources, or seminars amongst other things.

Not only for knowing which schools to select for interviews, looking at the school website in advance is one thing to do when preparing for

the interviews. In this way, you will know something about the department as well as your interlocutors. It is also useful to keep in mind some topics to discuss or questions to ask during the interview especially in case of silence.

**Sebastian:** What do you think the recruiting professors expect of you?

**Claudia:** I believe it is important that you are able to handle the interview, speak, ask questions and be engaged for half an hour. Appearing interested and committed helps to leave a good impression. Don't make them think you are wasting each other's time.

It is not easy to get a feeling about how the interview is going: sometimes you have a smiling and a non-smiling professor if there are two. This can demotivate you but keep calm! Actually, meeting two people from the school might be better as you can see the dynamics between them and the culture of department.

**Sebastian:** Thanks a lot for these comments regarding the interviews; I am sure this is highly valuable for those doing the interviews soon. My next set of questions would regard what happens after the conference, what are the next steps?

**Claudia:** After the conference, everything happens per email. One thing that I did was to send emails to thank the recruiters for their time and interest. This allows you to keep in touch.

After a while, I guess once they have discussed internally, schools contact you if they want to give you a flyout which is, of course, completely up to them. I never agreed on a flyout right away although you can get a feeling after the interviews whether you will see your interlocutors again for a job talk. For instance, sometimes European schools asked me quite concrete questions about my schedule over the next months as I was in the US at the time. If schools also participate in the AAA Rookie Camp, they may wait for the Miami conference (beginning of December) but this may not always be the case. Some schools were quite early in

scheduling the flyouts while others were late. Hence, don't worry if 2-3 weeks after the conference, you do not get a flyout! Don't freak out and wait! By the end of December, you will have heard from them.

Schools may contact you even if they are not giving you a flyout. This may be in the form of a standard email but it may also be more tailored explicitly explaining you their reasons.

**Sebastian:** Beyond the potential arrangements of flyouts and meeting your future employer, what are other outcomes of the conference from your perspective?

**Claudia:** Definitely, this would be the networking with professors and schools. Even if you do not end up working at the school, this is your community and the conference is a way to get to know people that you will meet again in the future. You will also meet the other candidates a bit and, hence, your future peers in our community.

Whilst you do not really receive much feedback on the research – which is not the aim of the conference – the presentation can help you to condense the key message of your paper in a few minutes. This can be useful for the subsequent flyout presentation as you want to convince the audience at the very beginning of a longer presentation. Moreover, the interviews during the Talent Workshop are helpful for when you meet faculty members at the school during the flyout as the format is quite similar.

**Sebastian:** If overall you had to assess the Talent Workshop compared to other ways of finding a job, would you recommend attending?

**Claudia:** Yes, definitely! It was a great experience! And this is also how I got my job! The EAA Talent Workshop is smaller than the Miami Rookie Camp. Hence, you have more opportunities to network with the faculty. Above all, you gain visibility which is very important when you are looking for a job. The small size of the conference helps a lot from this point of view

as the possibility of getting in touch with someone is higher.

Moreover, it is really well organized. The conference is in one of the IE buildings, presentations happen in classrooms, and interviews are in offices rather than in a bar or on a couch. Thus, it is more formal and you have more “privacy” as you do not overhear others who may be speaking next to you at the same time. It is also a good preparation for Miami if you want to attend both events.

Noteworthy, PhD candidates pay no fees to attend the conference. They just need to arrange the flight and the accommodation. The fact that Madrid is well connected and not that expensive is definitely a plus. IE is located at the center of Madrid so there are many solutions at a reasonable price.

Lastly, the environment is really friendly. Candidates are not competitive. We were all in the same boat trying to find a job. Hence, we were very supportive sharing information about the conference and also gave us feedback on the papers. The staff of the school is also very helpful. They know that you are looking for a job so they will help you also with small things like getting water or charging your phone. They are really nice.

For all these reasons, I really liked the experience and I highly recommend it to everyone!

**Sebastian:** Claudia, thanks a lot for sharing your insights with us! I think we have highlighted and teased out some important insights into what the challenges are when participating in a recruitment conference and how to turn it into a valuable and successful event. I am sure our readers will appreciate these insights! So thanks again and all the best to you for your next steps!