

Streamlining the hiring process

How to get the best candidates for the job

by Mary M. Nofsinger and Betty J. Galbraith

As the academic librarian job market becomes tighter, competition for hiring well-qualified candidates becomes more intense. It not uncommon these days for many of the top candidates in an academic search pool to receive employment offers from competing employers before the traditional recruitment process can be completed. Academic libraries are now being forced to streamline their hiring practices and procedures to survive in this competitive job environment. As Benjamin Franklin so aptly wrote, "Lost time is never found again."¹ Here are a few suggestions for making the academic library search process less frustrating and time-consuming.

Jump-start the job advertisement

Frequently there is a six-week to two-month delay between the time a paid advertisement is submitted to a journal and the date the ad actually appears in print. To shorten the time frame for a search, many academic libraries are supplementing their traditional print avenues of publication with electronic dissemination of their job ads. Here are some suggestions for publicizing vacant academic job openings in a timely manner.

- Send announcements to the ALA's electronic job listings at <http://www.ala.org/education/>, including the *American Librarian*

and *Late Job Ads Online*, the *Career Leads*, the *C&RL NewsNet*, and the *LITA Job Site*.

- Explore ALA's *Guide to Employment Sources in the Library and Information Professions* at <http://www.ala.org/hrdr/guide/main.html>, which offers Web access to numerous regional and state joblines and library associations.

- Ask search committee members to send copies of the job announcements to electronic lists to which they personally subscribe and to acquaintances who will disseminate the information to other librarian networks.

- Post job advertisements at local and regional employment Web sites for academic libraries, library schools, colleges, and universities.

In today's Web environment, astute information professionals seeking employment in specific geographic areas will probably search out local job Web sites. Younger applicants are usually familiar with leading-edge technologies and "would prefer to conduct all of their job search research from their home or the computer lab."²

Streamline search committee tasks

Search committee members must perform numerous tasks, including analyzing all applications received, screening applicants who do not meet the minimum advertised require-

About the authors

Mary M. Nofsinger is a humanities and social sciences reference librarian and bibliographer at Holland Library, Washington State University, e-mail: mnofsing@wsu.edu; Betty J. Galbraith is head of collection development, Owen Science & Engineering Library, Washington State University, e-mail: bettyg@wsu.edu

ments, ranking qualified applicants, and interviewing the best-qualified applicants. During this process, search committee members must always keep in mind the unique constraints of each position's requirements and their own institutional practices. Here are additional suggestions for speeding up the search process.

- Shorten the length of advertising time required before the job application deadline or review-begins date. Consider keeping the position open "until filled" to allow more time for potential applicants to apply.

- Convene the search committee one week prior to the advertised deadline or the review-begins date. Discuss the overall search process and procedures, and clarify expectations for performance of committee members. Emphasize the necessity of completing each step in a timely manner and establish tentative timelines for tasks.

- Complete an applicant comparison chart or another evaluation tool, based on the minimum requirements and preferred qualifications as stated in the job advertisement. Discuss methods of rating applicants and come to group consensus on one preferred method of ranking applicants' requirements and preferred qualifications. As a group, discuss and clarify any job requirements or desirable characteristics, which may be more subjective or leave room for interpretation.³

- Accomplish as much committee business as possible via e-mail or phone, since the chair must communicate rapidly to ensure that required tasks are completed within the agreed-upon timelines. For example, individual committee members may be asked to review job applicants' files and to create an applicant comparison chart, while the chair solicits draft questions to be asked during telephone interviews with the best-qualified applicants and their references.

- Schedule search committee meetings only when it is necessary to get input from members as a group or to discuss issues requiring joint decisions. For example, a search committee meeting will usually be required to discuss the individual rankings of applicants, and then to reach group agreement on which applicants should be interviewed.

- Narrow the pool of best-qualified applicants by interviewing them via phone with a minimum of two search committee members present prior to an on-campus visit. This en-

sures that phone interviews are completed in a timely manner, since some committee members will have schedule conflicts, and it helps to obtain objective evaluations of applicants' responses. The same principle applies if interviews are conducted during a professional conference instead of by phone.

- Request timely comments from applicants' references via fax or e-mail. Obtaining these comments within a week will allow the search committee to further hone its pool of top-ranked candidates and make faster recommendations to library administrators. This speeds up the process of obtaining institutional approval to bring the best-qualified applicants to the campus for a final interview with potential colleagues. If necessary, conduct telephone interviews with references to verify applicants' accomplishments and character.⁴

- Select interview dates that best meet the earliest time availability of applicants, since one of the crucial factors for a successful hiring process is timely, competitive job offers.

- Make airline reservations for top applicants quickly. To shorten the usual two-week delay for obtaining cheaper airfare rates, consider using an online booking service, such as www.priceline.com, which may offer reduced rates within shorter time spans.

- Maintain close contact with the top applicants throughout the interview arrangement process. The chair of the search committee should keep in touch electronically, answer applicants' questions, and work through inevitable problems via phone or e-mail as they arise.

- Send pre-interview packets of information to applicants prior to their campus interviews via e-mail file attachments, fax, or priority or courier mail. Fast delivery allows the applicants to be better prepared for their interviews and provides valuable information. Use this opportunity to stress the best aspects of the library work environment, the university, and the community.

Use the campus interview to persuade applicants

Assuming that the top applicants have not already accepted other job offers, it is now time for search committee members to quickly acknowledge that the few remaining applicants should be given the red carpet treatment. After investing hours of time and extensive ef-

After investing hours of time and extensive effort, the search committee must now switch from a screening role to a recruiting, persuasive role if it is to complete its task of successfully hiring a new colleague.

fort, the search committee must now switch from a screening role to a recruiting, persuasive role if it is to complete its task of successfully hiring a new colleague. A well-executed interview combines the art of public relations, rules of etiquette, and rituals of courtship.⁵

- Plan the campus interview schedule so that an applicant has ample time with potential supervisors and co-workers, as well as strategic break times. Even with adequate time between meetings, employment interviews are inherently hectic and somewhat stressful for everyone involved.

- Escort an applicant throughout the visit, and make sure that a host is designated to make appropriate introductions, to reserve time for questions, and to allow enough time to eat. These small courtesies help make an applicant feel comfortable and appreciated.

- Allow time before an applicant's presentation to set up equipment and rearrange the room. Have technical support on-call and try to respond swiftly to an applicant's needs and concerns. Support from search committee members is crucial for an applicant's self-confidence and performance during a presentation.

- Schedule time for an applicant to tour the community and to explore available housing. Make an effort to create a memorable interview experience for a potential colleague. The search committee escort can also use this opportunity to solicit the applicant's perceptions and to respond to any concerns or misconceptions about the position, the work environment, or other factors.

Follow-through for successful hiring

After the campus interviews, search committee members need to immediately take the following actions:

- Solicit comments after each interview from colleagues via e-mail regarding their perceptions of the applicants' skills and abilities in regard to the position requirements.

- Make a timely recommendation to appropriate library administrators, accompanied by a ranking of the top applicants, requesting that the position be offered or that the search be closed and reopened at a later date.

- If an employment offer is made to an applicant and accepted, the chair of the search committee may choose to keep in touch with the new employee to facilitate moving, housing, and other arrangements. Other search committee members may also want to follow-up and stay involved with helping their new colleague make a successful transition to a new community.

Conclusion

The academic library search committee plays an increasingly crucial role in hiring the best applicant for a specific position. Search committee members must now complete their work much more swiftly than in the past, frequently using electronic means, to keep attractive applicants within the search pool, to entice applicants to consider joining an academic environment, and to persuade applicants to accept a job offer. "Organizations that create exceptional interview experiences will increase the likelihood of successfully hiring the best candidate for the job."⁶

Notes

1. Benjamin Franklin, "Poor Richard's Almanac," June 1746. In John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 16th ed (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992): 310.

2. Catherine A. Lee, "Characteristics of Generation X and Implications for Reference Services and the Job Search," *The Reference Librarian* no. 55 (1996): 57.

3. Kay Womack, "Applying for Professional Positions in Academic Libraries: Meeting Minimum Requirements," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 23 (May 1997): 206.

4. Philip C. Howze, "10 Job-Hunting Tips for New Librarians," *CGRL News* 7 (July/August 1997): 491.

5. Stacey Kimmel and Scott R. DiMarco, "Planning an Interview: What Do Candidates Want?" *CGRL News* 58 (April 1997): 249.

6. Ibid, 253. ■

No Borders.

A large suspension bridge, similar to the Golden Gate Bridge, is shown spanning across a globe. The globe is depicted with a blue and white color scheme, representing the Earth. The bridge's towers and cables are visible, and the scene is set against a dramatic, orange and red sunset sky.

A world without borders — that's exactly what you get from a global information services provider like EBSCO. We have 32 fully staffed offices on six continents, electronically connected to provide you access to the information you need, no matter where you are or what language you speak. And we've made accessing that information simple. Our online services provide seamless linking between full text articles in electronic journals and online databases, and notification of articles available in your library's print collection.

At EBSCO, the world of information is a world without borders — we've eliminated them.

EBSCO
INFORMATION SERVICES

www.ebsco.com

170 Box 1943 • Birmingham, AL 35201-1943 • (205) 991-6600