

Teresa Y. Neely and Megan K. Beard

Recruiting and retaining academic research librarians

Post-MLS residency programs

Recruitment and retention are major issues for all academic library managers and components of Julie Todaro's ACRL presidential initiative. Historically, residency programs—found at many junctures in library education—have provided opportunities for librarians to explore academic environments to determine where their best match might be. In addition, these programs have provided opportunities for institutions to assess potential, add critical expertise to projects, and energize current staff.

Post-MLS residency programs are also excellent recruitment and retention tools for academic and research libraries. These programs generally offer competitive salaries, exposure to many aspects of academic libraries, and the opportunity to make informed career decisions without the pressures of a tenure track or otherwise permanent position. Residencies are offered by a variety of academic libraries including community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and larger research schools.

At the University of New Mexico (UNM) University Libraries, we have found that most recent library school graduates who apply for our Library Resident in Research and Instruction position¹ are less concerned with finding a permanent position, but actually seek out opportunities that will give them the best all around experience, even if it is only for a year or two.

For example, the first resident to be appointed after the residency program was revamped in 2005 arrived at the cusp of a li-

brary-wide reorganization and the retirement of a dean; the second resident arrived soon after the 2006 fire at Zimmerman Library and participated in disaster recovery, renovation efforts, and the reopening of a newly remodeled reference department.

The current resident's arrival coincided with the arrival of a new dean and was a critical member of a team to reopen the library basement after the fire. Residents have public services (reference, collection development, instruction) as their primary job duties, but are also required to complete projects and serve on the search committee for the next resident. A view from the other side of the faculty search process is an eye-opening and valuable learning experience, which ultimately informs their next job search. Unfortunately, they are fast learning the wrong way to apply for a position.

Wading through the pool of applicants

It is unclear if applicants are novices at writing cover letters for a particular position (if they write one at all), or if they are dealing with such volume that they recycle previously used narratives. What we are finding is that the process of identifying viable candidates from a large pool is much easier when applicants don't bother to read the job description,

Teresa Y. Neeley is director of Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico, e-mail: neeley@unm.edu, and Megan K. Beard is library resident in research and instruction services, at the University of New Mexico, e-mail: mbeard@unm.edu

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address minimum qualifications, or write letters that point to their strengths in areas not covered by the job description. Each year, we critically review the job description to determine how best to direct applicants to address the minimum requirements.

This year we put the instructions in all caps and bolded them. We are finding that this change has not had the impact we would have liked. Some applicants can't seem to remember the name of the institution they are applying to and actually type in some other school. One of our perennial favorites is the expressed notion that applicants will have the opportunity to learn Spanish by working at UNM.

The telephone interviews for the search for the 2006–07 appointment commenced one day late due to the basement fire. Only one applicant asked about the fire when given the opportunity to ask the search committee questions. Telephone interviews for large pools are scheduled in advance, and candidates are given the opportunity to choose from a variety of time slots. We generally schedule about 25 telephone interviews as a result of our large pool.

We have called applicants who were working on the reference desk and driving in their cars or doing other distracting things. One even admitted that she “probably shouldn't be doing this other thing right now during the interview.” We have called applicants who talked too much or those who didn't talk much at all. Interviews are scheduled for 15 minutes, and some have lasted only 5. Some applicants seem alert and energetic, and some applicants seem to be bored and not interested in participating. All applicants are asked the same questions, which are generally based on the preferred qualifications, and some applicants are completely unprepared when queried.


Academic and research libraries can reap numerous benefits from the influx of a fresh, new perspective, new ideas and approaches, without the baggage of historical precedent. The residents at UNM have been significantly instrumental in contributing to the overall

positive work environment in Zimmerman public services. They receive valuable training and experience in library instruction, reference and collection management, and in other areas which contributes to the overall service mission of the university libraries.

Many applicants have not heard about residency programs until they happen upon our advertisement. Academic and research libraries with such programs should aggressively recruit and use as many opportunities as possible to spread the word about their programs. Since 2005, each search for a new resident has yielded at least 100 applicants for 1 position.

For more information and resources on recruitment and retention, see the ACRL Recruitment and Retention wiki at wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/RandR.

Note

1. See elibrary.unm.edu/residentprogram for more information about the UNM resident program. 



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