

Rachel Cannady and Daniel Newton

Making the best of the worst of times

Global turmoil and landing your first library job

I did it, we did it, and many more of us are going to do it soon: graduate. The big difference is that today we are faced with one of the toughest economic climates since the Great Depression: layoffs are taking place, budgets are being cut, and some positions are no longer being filled. The American Federation of Labor's Department of Professional Employees has projected some new trends concerning today's librarians. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of librarians is expected to increase 3.6 percent, and while this might sound encouraging, this figure is actually down 1.3 percent from their previous projection.¹ Of course that was back in 2006, before Ben Bernanke announced that the United States was in a financial crisis that was second only to the Great Depression.² All of this means that there will be more competition in an already tough job market, and job seekers will be facing a unique set of challenges.³ It is now more important than ever to make you and your application stand out, but the question of how to do this remains.

Applying for any job is a multi-step process, and you are probably familiar with the basics: searching for jobs, applying for positions, and interviewing. The academic librarian application process is more strenuous than completing an average job application. Recently, we completed a total of eight face-to-face interviews and 22 phone interviews. We hope that our experience will help others begin the job search process a little wiser than we did. Some of these insights we learned the hard way, some were passed on to us, and others still were learned by reflecting back on our job searches.

Application phase

Applying for positions is a long process. To assist you, there are numerous places on the Internet to search for jobs. Three of the sites we found most useful were: ALA's JobLIST,⁴ University of Texas' JobWeb,⁵ and the Lib-Jobs.com⁶ Web sites. When looking at lists of available jobs, do not apply to too many positions. By *too many*, we mean the positions you are not qualified for, and those positions that do not have your full interest. David Thew emphasizes this point saying, "the market remains volatile Focus and realism are the qualities I would stress here: focus in terms of identifying the right opportunities; and realism in highlighting genuine skills and achievements as opposed to scatter-gunning CV's at all and sundry."⁷ Failure to focus is a mistake that will take time and energy away from the applications for positions you truly desire and match your qualifications. Discouragement and negativity will often impact the quality of your letters of interest and any modifications you make to your résumé (or CV). Confidence and positivity are two characteristics to embrace because they will lead to better individual applications.

Additionally, how you appear on paper should positively reflect your interest in the position. Having your CV/résumé critiqued by several people enables you to present the best

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version possible. Check with your school (or local library organization) as they may have a résumé review service or offer résumé workshops. You can also use ALA's New Members Round Table (NMRT), which has an excellent résumé review service.⁸ Moreover, it is important to have a professional-looking e-mail address; use your university's e-mail account or an address that uses your name, initials, or some combination. Including a contact e-mail address similar to booklupa4eva@hotmail.com makes you look ridiculous. Remember, professionalism is important, and your e-mail address can make a difference.

The job search and hiring process takes time. To someone in need of a job, this process moves at a tortoise-like pace. In the academic library world, it is not uncommon for six or more months to elapse from the date of application to the day a job offer is made. Patience is key while searching for a job, and if you are not a patient person, the best time to learn patience is during a job search. Because the hiring process can take so long, it does not hurt to begin applying to positions during your final semester in library school.

Phone interviews

The next step after completing a successful application is the phone interview. Phone interviews, initially, might seem like a handicap because you are unable to read the interviewing panel's nonverbal cues. This lack of physical interaction can work to your benefit, however, as it allows you to have a list of accomplishments, experiences, and other notes that you want to mention sitting right in front of you. Use this advantage to stay confident and relaxed. Additionally, complete some research on the library and university. By knowing their mission and vision statements, you are demonstrating that you are interested, prepared, and serious about the position.

You can also prepare by practicing interview questions. If you do a simple Internet search for "commonly asked librarian interview questions," you can find a few comprehensive lists. Regardless of whether you

use one of these lists or another, be sure to practice answering questions about yourself prior to the interview. The more you practice, the more comfortable you will become talking about yourself and your accomplishments. The most commonly asked question is something akin to "Why are you the best candidate for this job?" Be ready with a few reasons for why you are the best applicant.

Phone interviews require a quiet setting where you can concentrate, hear, and be heard. If you have animals, be sure to put them in another room so that they will not distract you. If you have roommates, children, or spouses, put out a sign so that they will not interrupt you. You might also want to put a note on your door so that postal or maintenance workers do not ring your doorbell. If you are working, the same general rules apply, but first double-check that your supervisor approves of your time spent, and then find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted.

Now that you have found a quiet spot for the phone interview, try to find a place of mental calm before the phone rings. The search committee members will call within a minute or two of the designated call time, so be prepared and waiting. Regardless of your preparation, it is hard to judge the search committee's reaction to your answers. Take advantage of your personality and sense of humor, when appropriate, to set you apart from the other candidates. Always make sure you know who is interviewing you so that you can write an e-mail thanking them for their time after the phone interview. If you do not know the names of those on the search committee prior to the interview, print out the library's faculty and staff directory and highlight the search committee members' names as they introduce themselves.

From our experience, phone interviews ranged from 13 to 90 minutes, and, in both instances, face-to-face interviews were offered. The length of time for the interview is not a determining factor for how successful it is. On average, most phone interviews lasted around 30 minutes. In most cases, if

the university or college was interested, they usually followed up within two weeks of the phone interview.

Face-to-face interviews

You have made it through the first two hurdles to landing your first library job. Now it is time for one of the last hurdles: the face-to-face interview. This part of the job search process often feels like an endurance contest. The more preparation completed prior to visiting campus, the better you will appear to the library faculty, staff, and search committee members. Read *all* of the materials that the college or university sends you before you arrive. This information alone can provide a nice list of clarifying questions you can ask while you are touring and traveling across the campus. These questions will also help you avoid awkward silences and make a better lasting impression on those interviewing you.

Once you arrive (either by car or plane) and meet a search committee member, it is game time. Remember that you are being interviewed during your entire visit. Yes, lunches and dinners are more relaxed, but those dining with you are still mentally noting what questions you are asking and how you are answering their questions. Do not order alcohol unless they do. Most people taking you out will not order alcohol because they are not reimbursed for it.

Academic interviews often require that you give some sort of presentation. The subjects are usually vague and open to interpretation so that the search committee members and library faculty can gain an insight into both your personality and intelligence. One way to make your presentation stand out is by using research. It could be as easy as reworking an earlier library school research paper. The more you can tailor research into your presentation, the more thoughtful, interested, and thorough you will look. Having research in your presentation will also be helpful as you are answering the questions that will follow. Before arriving on campus, find out what computer equipment will be made available to you. If you do create a

PowerPoint presentation, offer to send it to a search committee member so that he or she can disseminate the information to those unable to attend your presentation. Also, be prepared if the projector does not work. Sometimes machines break, so have an alternative planned if such a circumstance arises. Even if this situation occurs, smile and use open body language; the more relaxed you appear, the better your presentation will be.

Interview days are long, usually lasting eight or more hours. By the time 5:00 comes around, you will be exhausted from being constantly "on." Remember that being excited and engaging is just as important at the end of the interview as it is at the beginning. To help combat interviewing fatigue, try eating an energy bar or a snack to remain fueled. Another way to combat this fatigue is to wear comfortable shoes. Your feet will thank you for foregoing style in favor of comfort.

Once you have made it through the on campus interview, there is one last step before you have completed the entire process: writing the thank-you note. Handwriting a thank-you note leaves a good, personal, lasting impression. Once you have finished this step, take the time to congratulate yourself for completing the interview. At this point, the hiring process is now out of your control. You may be offered the job or you may find yourself starting the interviewing process over again.

Conclusion

Job searching is difficult, especially in this economy, but it is not impossible. Your future position might not be what you initially expected, so strike a balance between being open-minded and narrow-in-focus when searching. By looking at yourself and your talents from many angles, you will be able to find something that fits you. We both received numerous rejection letters before we found the jobs that fit us well. Despite the global turmoil, it is still possible to find a library job that suits you. You might face disappointment and frustration, but stay positive and
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already created. The pay-off validated their efforts, for many noted that the project led to enhanced communication and increased instructional opportunities with faculty and students in their departments.

Maintaining, sustaining, assessing

To an even greater extent than in previous semesters, the task force assessed the use of both automatically and manually linked Library Guides at the end of spring 2009. Students who accessed the Library Guides menu item were surveyed, and 89 percent of the 106 respondents reported that course-specific guides were “somewhat useful” or “very useful” for their research, while 90% of those surveyed believe that guides should continue to appear in Blackboard course sites.

Hits to guides were also scrutinized. There were a total of 16,379 hits to the 74 course guides and a total of 5,947 hits to the subject guides/Web pages automatically linked within Blackboard, confirming librarians’ suspicion that manually linked course guides—often accompanied by face-to-face library instruction—are more heavily used than the more general, automatically linked Web pages.

So while the automated process ensures that every Blackboard course site includes

a general introduction to library resources, a subject-specific LibGuide or a professional library’s Web page or list of research tools, librarians are still encouraged to foster and maintain relationships with faculty and students in their disciplines, developing course-specific LibGuides in much the same manner that they did in the early semesters of the project. In manually linking specialized guides to the Library Guides menu item, they overwrite the automatically generated URL and, as before, become privy to course communication, syllabi, and assignments.

The task force disbanded in June 2009, but a representative has continued to market the Library Guides feature both to students and faculty and to provide support for these embedded librarians—librarians who have accepted the challenge to show up where Duke’s undergraduates are and when they need them.

Notes

1. Association of Research Libraries (2007), LibQUAL+ 2007 survey, Washington, D.C.
2. Springshare, LLC. (2009). Springshare. Retrieved March 10, 2010, from www.springshare.com/.
3. Django Software Foundation (2009), Django. Retrieved March 10, 2010, from www.djangoproject.com/. ♪

(“*Making the best . . .*” cont. from page 207)

focused so you can make the best out of the worst times.

Notes

1. Department for Professional Employees, “Library Workers: Facts & Figures,” AFL-CIO, www.dpeaflcio.org/programs/factsheets/fs_2009_library_workers.htm.
2. Ben S. Bernanke, “Four Questions about the Financial Crisis,” Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, April 14, 2009, www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/bernanke20090414a.htm.
3. Carolyn Jones, “Hard times hit home; Scenes of this recession evoke images of nation’s darkest era; Out of work: Lines of those

seeking jobs grow longer,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23, 2009, www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/08/23/MNL819134C.DTL.

4. ALA, JobLIST, joblist.ala.org.
5. University of Texas School of Information, Job Web, www.ischool.utexas.edu/jobweb/Search.php.
6. LibJobs, www.libjobs.com.
7. David Thew, “How to get a job in a downturn,” *Information World Review* 180, (2002): 32.
8. ALA, “New Members Round Table,” Resume Review Service, ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/nmrt/oversightgroups/comm/resreview/resumereview.cfm. ♪