

# New librarians and job hunting

## Patience is a virtue

by Philip C. Howze

**P**icture this: You are finishing up your course work and exams so you can graduate from library school next week. You sent your résumé to a number of academic libraries advertising positions in *C&RL News* months ago, knowing that applying early would ensure you a job after graduation. As you walk to the bookstore to pick up your regalia, you wonder if you are going to get a job before your first student loan payment comes due.

About four years ago, I wrote a piece for *C&RL News* entitled, "10 Job-Hunting Tips for New Librarians."<sup>1</sup> In the article, I mentioned ten rules to follow when applying for a position in an academic library. Having continued to serve on search committees since then, it has been good to see that much of this advice has been followed by a number of candidates.

So now, while trying on your cap and gown to make sure they are the right size, you begin to think that applying for that job with the public library isn't such a bad idea. After all, one of your classmates applied there last week. The classmate was interviewed two days later, and hired then and there, on the spot. Frustrated, you may ask yourself, "What's wrong with me?" The likelihood is that nothing is wrong with you—getting a job in academic libraries takes time. Here are some of the process issues that eat up time.

### A look at the process

• **Watch for the cutoff date for receipt of applications.** Every job advertisement contains language that signals the cutoff for submitting applications, which is interpreted by the applicant(s) to mean that review of applications will begin shortly thereafter. Pay close attention to the language in the advertisement. Does it say "Applications must be postmarked by (date)," "Applications received by (date) will be guaranteed consideration," or "Review of applications will begin (date)?"

If any of these firm, cutoff statements appear in the ad, the likelihood is that the hiring library wants to move along with the search process, and probably has also indicated a starting date for the position in the advertisement.

If you have a need for speed, however, watch out for job ads containing the sentence, "Review of applications . . . *will continue until the position is filled.*" It is not being suggested that you avoid applying for positions for which this caveat is included in the advertisement; however, it is important that you understand what it means. In short, the library reserves the right to continue to receive and review applications, and even interview candidates, for *quite a long time*—as long as it takes, in fact, to find someone suitable for the position. Does this mean that

---

### About the author

Philip C. Howze is associate dean for Public and Collection Development Services at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, e-mail: phowze@lib.siu.edu

your application, which you dutifully submitted long before the due date, could still “come to life” at any time, even though it’s been more than three months and you haven’t heard anything? Don’t hold your breath. Well, maybe.

- **The larger the search pool, the longer it takes to decide whom to interview.** Entry-level librarian positions attract greater numbers of applicants than positions for which experience is required, and each application (cover letter and résumé) must be read carefully by a number of people who have other things to do, such as practice reference, catalog books, and develop collections. Before the applications are placed in the hands of the search committee, the personnel officer ensures that all applications in the pile are complete. This is where applicants themselves slow down the process.

It never ceases to amaze me that there are soon-to-be-master’s-degree-holding librarians who genuinely think that the information requested in the job ad was meant for everyone else but them. If the job ad calls for a letter of interest, a résumé, and the names of three references with complete mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses, believe with all your heart that leaving anything out will result in a call or a letter asking you to supply the missing information. Unfortunately, the whole pool of applicants suffers because of the folly of a few.

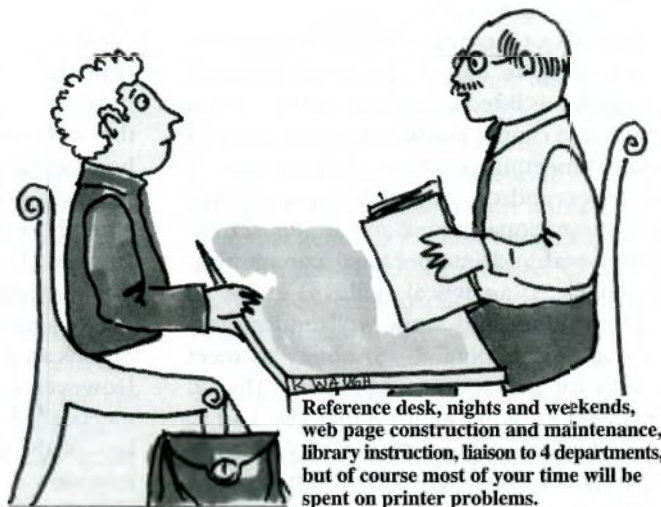
- **Failure to address each and every one of the job requirements slows down the search.** Having tried my best to avoid writing a “rule” for this time-consuming, search-killing behavior, it simply cannot be helped, so here it is: if you cannot address the job requirements, either in your cover letter or your résumé, think long and hard about whether the position is for you. In my last writing, applicants were advised to write only to the job description. What may not have been clear is that the job description, and the requirements, applies to all applicants, including you.

---

**Frustrated, you may ask yourself, “What’s wrong with me?” The likelihood is that nothing is wrong with you—getting a job in academic libraries takes time.**

---

By way of explanation, when the search committee receives the “pile” of résumés (including yours), each member also receives a grid sheet with each and every qualification listed in the advertisement on one axis and the names of the applicant(s) on the other. Not all forms are designed the same, but the point is that each and every qualification is listed on every type of form. If you do not meet all, or most, of the required



qualifications, know that you are likely competing with those who do. And here you are approaching graduation without having heard anything. Hmm.

By the way, the grid sheet previously mentioned lists only one absolute qualification that I know of—possession of the ALA-accredited MLS. As far as a search committee is concerned, if you don’t have one, or won’t have one by the start date for the position, you are out of the pool. It’s that simple.

The jury is still out on whether it is helpful for a new librarian to list course work taken; take your cue from the position description and the required qualifications. All

---

## Who and how we hire will have a tremendous impact on what libraries are to become in the new century.

---

other qualifications are subject to interpretation.

• **Ambiguous position requirements can slow down a search.** Ambiguous job requirements slow down a search, largely because there hasn't been a meeting of the minds concerning what they really mean. If you, as the applicant, are having a hard time with what "sensitivity to the vital relationship between the library and computer services" really means, rest assured that there is someone on the search committee who also hasn't a clue. That such phraseology is used in a job ad to cue an experienced librarian about a political land mine notwithstanding, there simply are some required qualifications listed in a job ad that the search committee cannot possibly know about you without meeting you first. They include: 1) awareness and/or understanding of national and international issues and trends; 2) excellent oral and interpersonal communication skills; 3) analytical skills; 4) ability to organize work and work well under pressure, and, the "biggie"—5) ability to meet criteria for promotion and tenure. The ad requirement didn't indicate that you had to come tenure-ready, with ten articles published in refereed journals and service as an ALA councilor, only that you possess the ability. So, how can one know such a thing during prescreening?

• **Will there be a quiz later?** There are also some required qualifications listed in a job ad that the search committee cannot know about you whether they meet you or not, unless a test is given. They include demonstrated skill in planning, organizing, and coordinating the work of others, or demonstrated skill in anything for that matter. "Knowledge of" requirements cannot be checked on the grid for you unless you write the statements from the job ad in your cover letter or résumé. The search committee cannot read into your résumé that which is not there, even if you possess the skills required.

"Knowledge of" skills also serve as a warning to the applicant that he or she can expect to be asked to demonstrate knowledge of, or at least discuss intelligently, the issues enumerated in the qualifications. If there is a presentation, whether a topic is assigned or not, the candidate needs to find a way to cover some or most of these items during the presentation. Many search committee members will take careful notes and use them to fill in any blank areas on the grid. It also helps to address, and clarify, job requirements during the question-and-answer period following the presentation, as well as during any meeting with the search committee.

• **Preferred qualifications.** Many library job ads list preferred qualifications. Preferred qualifications are supposed to assist the search committee to further narrow down the list of applicants to only the best-qualified people. This rarely happens, however, because preferred qualifications, with the exception of a specified number of years' experience, are also often stated so vaguely that it is difficult to know whether someone has the trait without meeting the person.

Also, there tends to be some ambiguity about how preferred qualifications are used. Fairness, from an affirmative action standpoint, seems to be evident when only those persons meeting all of the required qualifications are then examined for preferred ones. However, it does happen that a person who meets all of the preferred qualifications, but few of the required ones, is invited for an interview anyway.

• **Some lessons are learned while the search is in process.** Some libraries don't really know what they want, from either the applicants or the position itself, particularly if the position is newly created. Watch out for snappy, vogue position titles, such as professional development librarian, digital librarian, metadata librarian, or diversity librarian. These are often experimental positions, written to select individuals or to be symbolic seed planting for future organizational change.

Also, we who write job descriptions have a long way to go in honing our craft. After all, there is a group of you out there who need jobs, and a lot of academic libraries need librarians. We need to begin to work

with new language in our job ads in order to meet dynamic, interesting, and friendly people who love librarianship, who are not fried or otherwise impaired, and who understand, agree with, and are willing to fulfill the requirements of the professorate. Instead of asking for vague qualifications that are not easily demonstrable, we should be looking for people who like people. That would cure our diversity woes, once and for all.

We should be looking for people who like finding things. That would bring our collections to life. We should be looking for people who are friendly and approachable. That would single-handedly revitalize reference. We should be looking for people who love to learn and love to teach. That would end all antipathy toward faculty status and tenure for librarians. Instead, we reuse old job descriptions that do not reflect the degree and type of change experienced by a given library over time.

Who and how we hire will have a tremendous impact on what libraries are to become in the new century.

• **Additional observations on why searches take too long.** One of the main reasons searches seem to take so long is that applicants often go weeks, and sometimes months, without hearing anything about the status of their application. Why does this happen? The short answer is that the search is still active. What does this mean to the applicant? Nothing. What does this *really* mean from a library standpoint? It means many things.

The library may be experiencing difficulty with scheduling search committee meetings. It also may be having difficulty scheduling candidates for interviews (something you probably don't want to hear at this point). A university-mandated hiring freeze, glitches with paperwork to secure the required permissions (most common), or some new insights gained by the library, such as what the job or person hired for the job should be like, may be occurring. The search could be at a standstill (stalled because no qualified applicant has been identified and no new applications have been received), or what your gut tells you has happened, the position has been offered to someone else.

And so you may ask, "If the position was

---

**If you are reading this article, you . . . just happened upon one of the best sources for job listings in the business.**

---

offered to someone else, why did it take so long to notify me?" The naked truth is that until an offer is extended, accepted, and approved by the university administration, the search is far from over. In fact, the process could fall apart at any point along the way, and sometimes does. When searches fall apart, sometimes over something as rudimentary as the frontrunner changed his or her mind or accepted another position in a library that responded faster with an offer, the library wants to keep the pool as "clean" as possible in order to continue selecting from the remaining candidates.

Does this mean that you should avoid applying for jobs in academic librarianship? Of course not. If you are reading this article, you probably already have one, or just happened upon one of the best sources for job listings in the business. Be forewarned, however, that getting a job takes time. Librarians who are new to the profession should be prepared for the prospect that a response to your résumé will rarely be immediate.

Now, having covered some of the reasons why searches take time, there is a more optimistic view of the world vis-à-vis the time it takes to get a job in academic librarianship. So, before you give up on what could be a great career, read this: Far more often than not, much of the process involving the establishment of your viability as a candidate doesn't really take very long. And that's what most applicants want to know—that they are still in the running for a position. It's the "not hearing anything" that's so nerve-wracking.

• **How do you know if you're in the running?** There is only one sure way to know if you are a finalist for a position: You receive a call from the personnel officer informing you that the library wants to invite you for an interview. Beyond this, the rest is guesswork.

Here are a few "educated" guesses, or indicators (hint, hint), that your application is, at the least, not dead yet. 1) Your refer-



---

**So, if it takes two to three months to hear anything, don't be surprised; things are probably progressing at a normal rate.**

---

ences have been contacted only days after the search officially closed. This is a good sign because it usually means you made it through the first, and in some cases the only, cut. Or it means that references are being contacted for everyone in the pool. Either way, the fact that the search committee is moving so quickly is a good sign. 2) You receive a call from the personnel officer or chair of the search committee asking if you are still interested in the position. Although it is possible that such a call is being made to everyone in the pool, it's highly unlikely, especially if the caller takes the time to outline the search process and the timetable. Take this as another good sign; contact is better than no contact. 3) You receive a call from the chair of the search committee asking if you are available for a preliminary telephone interview. This is also a good sign because the indication is that you are definitely on the short list and there's a 50/50 chance the committee members will like the sound of your voice. Life can be such a crapshoot, at times, especially for people with regalia and no jobs.

### **Advice for new job seekers**

Now that you understand some of the reasons why getting a job in academic librarianship takes time, the following advice is offered for prospective job seekers.

- **Start early.** It doesn't hurt to develop a search strategy. Plan when to send out résumés by acting as if the search committee wants to move along with the process. Take note of the closing date for applications, and plan your interviewing schedule four to six weeks after the closing date. This is based on the assumption that the search is moving along quickly, which means allowing for a month to hold search committee meetings, read résumés, receive and evaluate references, and secure the necessary administrative approvals.

Add two weeks' lead time for the purchase of a plane ticket at a cheaper fare than it would cost if you were on the next flight out. In the same two weeks, add having a hotel room booked for you and arrangements made to have most (if not all) of the staff on standby for a whole business day to feed and interview you. We're talking lightening fast, even though to you it's been six weeks. So, if it takes two to three months to hear anything, don't be surprised; things are probably progressing at a normal rate.

- **Be willing to travel, and consider both private and public institutions.** A wide net catches many fish. Some new librarians experience job search anxiety because they are unwilling to travel. Go where the work is, particularly if a number of positions are being advertised by the same institution. Also, don't forget your privates! Many private institutions have the ability and resources to move along with a search faster than a lot of public institutions, particularly if they identify a person who meets the qualifications.

- **Be prepared to pay now and be reimbursed later when it comes to expenses.** One of the first, and most lasting, shocks of my professional life was when I was politely informed that I was being invited for an interview, with the expectation that I had to pay my own expenses and submit all receipts for reimbursement. This was particularly troublesome for me, given that all I had to my name was my regalia—and even that was rented. When I got over the shock, I paid my expenses. And then I submitted the receipts and patiently waited for reimbursement. And then I waited some more.

Thank goodness, more libraries are becoming sensitized to the new librarian's plight, and many do prepay plane tickets and other expenses for candidates. Still, be prepared to face the reality that many places expect you to pay first.

- **Don't slow down the process.** Provide all of the information requested in the job ad, such as a cover letter, résumé, names of references, transcripts, and so on. Watch out for spelling errors and typos, and be advised that your cover letter is the only evidence, in most cases, that the search

*(continued on page 634)*



“I am still learning...”  
— Michelangelo



## LITERATURE RESOURCE CENTER JOINS FORCES WITH THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

There's no way Michelangelo could have known the impact his paintings would have. But he did know that even with so much accomplished, there's always more to do. We agree. The Gale Group announces that its *Literature Resource Center* is now available with the premiere tool for academic researchers in the humanities — the Modern Language Association (MLA) International Bibliography.

### TRANSFORMING RESEARCH

Making research more convenient wasn't enough. We wanted to revolutionize research. For the first time anywhere, *Literature Resource Center* users can conduct

comprehensive research in one database with these benefits:

- Simultaneous searching and results
- Links to more than 145 full-text literary journals — many of which appear in the MLA International Bibliography — a Gale Group exclusive

### CONTACT US

For more information on how to order *Literature Resource Center* with the MLA International Bibliography, please call your Gale Group Representative at **1-800-877-GALE** or visit us at [www.galegroup.com](http://www.galegroup.com).

INFORMATION INTEGRITY

*While at ALA, visit us at  
booth #3107*

**GALE GROUP**  
THOMSON LEARNING™

# Change, Hi-Tech, Speed, Compete, Ahead, Data, Fast, New, Time, Future, Trust...

Swets Blackwell takes these as words to live by.

We are launching our new web-enabled subscription service at two upcoming conferences. Visit our booths to see where we're heading, and where we can take you.

Special Library Association Annual Conference

San Antonio, Texas on June 11

Swets Blackwell booth # 333

American Library Association Annual Conference

San Francisco, California on June 16

Swets Blackwell booth # 3339

Visit us at [www.swetsblackwell.com](http://www.swetsblackwell.com)

For further information  
please contact:

Swets Blackwell

160 Ninth Avenue, P.O. Box 1459

Runnemede, NJ 08078

T: 800-645-6595 • F: 856-312-2000



Swets Blackwell



## Science and Technology (STS)

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect: William M. Baer (109);

**Barton M. Lessin** (188).

Secretary/Member-at-Large (2-year term): **Nancy**

**J. Butkovich** (184); Teresa U. Berry (111).

## Slavic and East European (SEES)

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect: Nadia Zilper (17);

**Jared S. Ingersoll** (26).

Member-at-Large (1-year term): Diana Greene

(15); **Marek Sroka** (28).

## University Libraries (ULS)

Adoption of Proposed Bylaws (Article IV)

No (28); **Yes (911) ADOPTED**

Adoption of Proposed Bylaws (Article V)

No (32); **Yes (846) ADOPTED**

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect: Frank Andraia (398);

**Louise S. Sherby** (507).

Secretary (2-year term): Mary H. Munroe

(358); **Barbara E. Kemp** (470).

Member-at-Large (3-year term, 2 to be

elected): **Betsy Baker** (535); Phelix B.

Hanible (297); **Doris Ann Sweet** (381);

Linda K. Terhaar (372).

## Western European Specialists (WESS)

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect: **Gordon B. Anderson**

(57); Beau David Case (52).

Secretary (1-year term): Bruce W. Swann (39);

**Sarah G. Wenzel** (68).

Member-at-Large (1-year term): Richard R.

Ring (37); **Sam Dunlap** (71).

## Women's Studies (WSS)

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect: **Dolores Fidishun**

(100); Write-In Candidate (2).

Secretary (1-year term): **Sue A.**

**McFadden** (99); Write-In Candidate

(0).

Member-at-Large (1-year term): Julie Ann

Nachman (49); **Brita Servaes** (55). ■

*("New librarians . . ." cont. from page 600)*

committee has to judge the excellence of your written communication skills, or lack thereof. And for heaven's sake, please do not list as references people who cannot be contacted (library school professors during the summer, for example) or people who have not given you permission to use their names.

### • Join ALA and New Members Round

**Table.** Take advantage of the student membership rate, and plan on attending a Mid-winter or Annual Conference before or when

you graduate. The Placement Center is one of the most efficient and effective places to meet potential employers, and many of our number have been hired on the spot. While you're there, stop by New Members Round Table. You'll find you're not alone, in so many ways. And the socials are a blast—regalia optional.

### Note

1. Philip C. Howze, "10 Job-Hunting Tips for New Librarians," *C&RL News* (July/August 1997). ■

Now available—ACRL's newest electronic book!

## Directory of Curriculum Materials Centers

*edited by Fred Olive*

This directory, now in its fifth edition, lists and describes curriculum materials centers or collections at 203 institutions. Includes location, contact information, budgets, physical space, collection size, staff size, hours of operation, and other descriptive information.

The electronic edition is designed to provide easy access and to assist the user in quickly locating a CMC listing by state, by institution name, or by any other parameter that is desired.

\$35.00; \$31.50 ACRL members

Order directly online at <http://acrl.telusys.net/epubs/>