Résumé Content: Applicants' Perceptions

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The authors have reviewed many applications for academic library vacancies and have examined sources in the literature which instruct applicants in proper résumé construction. Having received résumés that were not well prepared, the authors surveyed academic librarians in the early years of their careers regarding items they perceive as important to include in a résumé. Results of the current study are compared with those of Thomas M. Gaughan's study, and a résumé model for academic applicants is suggested.

Since Gaughan's 1980 study of the essential items that academic librarians should include in their résumés,[1] numerous sources have discussed the importance of using a carefully constructed résumé when applying for professional positions in academic libraries.[2] These resources are helpful to applicants, providing advice from the experience of admissions or placement directors at schools of library and information science,[3] directors and personnel directors from academic libraries,[4] and librarians who have reviewed résumés when chairing or serving on search committees.[5] With the exception of Gaughan's survey of the ACRL Discussion Group of Personnel Officers of Research Libraries[6] and Kay Womack and Tyler Goldberg's survey of special libraries in Kentucky,[7] these publications are not based on original research.

Jeffrey S. Hornsby and Brien N. Smith[8] and Stephen B. Knouse[9] have noted a similar occurrence in the business literature. For example, Hornsby and Smith have stated: "Unfortunately, much of the assistance available to the job applicant is not in the form of empirical research, but relies on opinions of self-help manuals, educators, and résumé preparation services."[10] Furthermore, Knouse has reported: "Yet much of this advice is prescriptive; there is relatively little empirical evidence for the influence upon the reader of the various types of information contained in the résumé."[11]

Discourses on résumé construction and content written from the perspective of academic library employers generally attempt to address the problems they have found in the résumés they have received and are directed to individuals applying for positions in this venue. Although there

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is some variation in its suggested content, there is agreement that a résumé is an important component of the application for academic library openings.[12]

Despite attempts to guide individuals to the appropriate construction and content of a résumé, the authors do not know whether academic library applicants actually consult such resources when preparing an application. It may, however, be construed that articles continue to be written and workshops offered on résumé construction because applicants still leave important items out of their résumés.[13] Except for information reported by individuals who have reviewed applications, little is known about the applicants' perceptions of those items that are important to include in a résumé. Do they pay attention to any of the advice that appears in the literature, to discussions on listservs, or to the results of Gaughan's survey[14] as they prepare their résumés? Is there congruence between applicants' résumé content, or what they think is important to include, and the information on résumé preparation that appears in the literature? This article addresses these issues for individuals applying for positions in academic libraries.

Methodology

The survey population was selected from recent academic library appointees listed in the "People in the News" column of the July/August 1995 through June 1996 issues of College & Research Libraries News. Although this column does not include all academic library appointees, the authors believed it would provide a reasonably representative sample. In an attempt to survey librarians who are relatively new to the profession (whom the authors defined as those who have held professional academic library positions for five years or less), people with obvious administrative appointments such as deans, directors, assistant directors or deans, department heads, etc., were eliminated from consideration. This left a population of three hundred, from which one hundred were randomly selected for this survey. Because all academic libraries do not report their appointments to College & Research Libraries News, following the random selection, the libraries where these one hundred individuals worked were analyzed for representation. Libraries from each geographical region in the United States were included. In addition, public and private, large, medium-sized, and small libraries were represented.

The survey, mailed in October 1996, consisted of two parts. In the first part, respondents were asked to rate the relative importance (4, very important; 1, not important) of forty-six items that applicants could include in their résumés when applying for positions in academic libraries. To ensure that results were not affected by the order of the résumé elements, four different versions of the same list were used.

To Gaughan's original list of forty-three items,[1] the authors added "continuing education/conference attendance," "committee service (work and/or professional)," and "subject field of degrees (undergraduate or advanced)." From Gaughan's original list, "memberships in social organizations" was changed to "memberships/involvement in community/social organizations." The authors considered including additional items but decided against adding too many items that would make it difficult to compare their results with Gaughan's findings. Instead, in section two of the survey, respondents were invited to suggest other items they thought were important to include in a résumé. Section two also included two questions to determine if the survey population met the criterion of

TABLE 1
Items in Applicant's Résumé and Mean Importance Rating

Résumé Items	Mean Importance Rating	Résumé Items	Mean Importance Rating
1. Previous experience in librarianship	3.95	20. Research interests	2.66
2. Telephone number	3.73	21. Full chronological accounting for time after completion of education	2.61
3. Brief description of duties in previous positions	3.71	22. Memberships in honorary societies	2.52
4. Colleges and universities attended	3.65	23. Specialization in library school	2.50
5. Current address	3.58	24. Career objectives	2.47
6. List of references (names, addresses, phone numbers)	3.47	25. Names of previous supervisors	2.15
7. Subject field of degrees (undergraduate and/or advanced)	3.44	26. Memberships/involvement in community/social organizations	1.87
8. Dates of employment in previous positions	3.42	27. Citizenship	1.73
9. Offices held in professional organizations	3.27	28. Salary requirements	1.72
10. Committee service (work and/or professional)	3.23	29. Transcripts from other institutions	1.69
10. Membership in professional organizations	3.23	30. Grade point average	1.68
12. Permanent address	3.18	31. Transcript from library school	1.60
13. Foreign language skills	3.10	32. Physical limitations	1.56
14. Complete list of applicant's publications	3.03	32. Military experience	1.56
15. Awards, honors, and scholarships received	3.00	34. Hobbies, leisure interests	1.46
16. Tenure in previous positions	2.99	35. Class standing	1.39
17. Previous experience in other occupations	2.95	36. State of health	1.34
18. Years degrees awarded	2.92	37. Social security number	1.27
18. Continuing education/conference attendance	2.92	38. Age and/or date of birth	1.16
		39. Sex	1.12
		40. Race	1.11
		41. Height and weight	1.06
		41. Spouse's occupation	1.06
		43. Photograph	1.05
		43. Religion	1.05
		45. Marital status	1.03
		46. Number of dependents	1.02

being relatively new to the profession and four questions to find out what sources of information may influence individuals as they prepare application materials.

Results

Sixty-four responses were received. Two respondents had not rated résumé items that appeared on the second page of the survey. Thus, their responses were not included, giving a response rate of 62 percent on which the following analysis and discussion are based.

Because the purpose of this survey is to focus on applicants relatively new to the profession, two questions were asked to determine if the population surveyed met this criterion. The respondents' years of experience ranged from nine months to twenty years. Seventy-seven percent of

the respondents had five years or less of experience; 23 percent had between six and twenty years of experience. The average (mean) years of experience were 3.83, and the median was 3. Forty-two percent of the respondents indicated that their current position was their first professional academic library position; 58 percent noted it was not their first professional academic library position. Although only 42 percent of the respondents were employed in their first professional academic library position, the authors believe that the individuals surveyed met the criterion of being early in their academic library careers because 77 percent had five years or less of experience.

Table 1 lists the survey results in order of importance (4, very important; 1 not, important). As shown in table 1, the ten items that applicants rated as having the highest mean importance rating were:

• previous experience in librarianship;

• telephone number;

• brief description of duties;

• colleges and universities attended;

• current address;

• list of references;

• subject field of degrees;

• dates of employment in previous positions;

• offices held in professional organizations;

• committee service (work and/or professional).

The ten items that received the lowest mean importance rating were:

• social security number;

• age and/or date of birth;

• sex;

• race;

• height and weight;

• spouse's occupation;

• photograph;

• religion;

TABLE 2
Comparison of Academic Library Applicants and Gaughan's Study

Résumé Items	Ranking Applicants	Gaughan
Previous experience in librarianship	1	1
Telephone number	2	3
Brief description of duties in previous positions	3	5
Colleges and universities attended	4	6
Current address	5	2
List of references (names, addresses, phone numbers)	6	10
Subject field of degrees (undergraduate and/or advanced)	7	*
Dates of employment in previous positions	8	4
Offices held in professional organizations	9	12
Committee service (work and/or professional)	10	*
Membership in professional organizations	10	17
Permanent address	12	16
Foreign language skills	13	8
Complete list of applicant's publications	14	13
Awards, honors, and scholarships received	15	14
Tenure in previous positions	16	22
Previous experience in other occupations	17	11
Years degrees awarded	18	7
Continuing education/conference attendance	18	*
Research interests	20	20
Full chronological accounting for time after completion of education	21	9
Memberships in honorary societies	22	24
Specialization in library school	23	23

	TABLE 2, cont. Comparison of Academic Library Applicants and Gaughan's Study	
	Ranking	
Resume Items	Applicants	Gaughan
Career objectives	24	18
Names of previous supervisors	25	21
Memberships/involvement in community/social organizations	26	32
Citizenship	27	19
Salary requirements	28	15
Transcripts from other institutions	29	29
Grade point average	30	28
Transcript from library school	31	26
Physical limitations	32	25
Military experience	32	31
Hobbies, leisure interests	34	34
Class standing	35	36
State of health	36	27
Social security number	37	30
Age and/or date of birth	38	37
Sex	39	35
Race	40	33
Height and weight	41	38
Spouse's occupation	41	42
Photograph	43	41
Religion	43	43
Marital status	45	39
Number of dependents	46	40

* = not measured.
Rankings for academic library applicants are based on the results found in table 1 of this article; rankings for Gaughan are based on Thomas M. Gaughan, "Resume Essentials for the Academic Librarian," *C&RL* 41 (Mar. 1980): 124.

- specific job-related experience and skills;
- supervisory skills;
- qualifications that uniquely suit the individual for the position;
- "special skills" that are not required for the position but that make the application stand out.

Comparison of the Authors' and Gaughan's Studies

Table 2 compares the results of the authors' survey of academic library applicants with the results of Gaughan's survey of personnel officers of research libraires. It denotes considerable agreement between academic library applicants and the personnel directors Gaughan surveyed regarding those items that are important to include in a résumé and those that are not. Résumé items that both survey populations ranked in their top ten included:

- previous experience in librarianship;
- telephone number;

- marital status;
- number of dependents.

Only 29 percent of the respondents suggested résumé items they thought were important in addition to those items they were asked to rate. The additional items listed were:

- computer skills or experience with technology;
- e-mail address or URL;
- job titles;
- teaching experience;

- brief description of duties in previous positions;
- colleges and universities attended;
- current address;
- list of references;
- dates of employment in previous positions.

Other résumé elements that applicants included in their top ten were "subject field of degrees," "committee service (work and/or professional)," and "offices held in professional organizations." Neither

"subject field of degrees" nor "committee service (work and/or professional)" was included in Gaughan's survey. Other résumé components ranked in the top ten in Gaughan's study were "years degrees awarded," "foreign language skills," and "full chronological accounting for time after completion of education."

Résumé items that both survey populations included in their ten least important items included:

- number of dependents;
- marital status;
- religion;
- photograph;
- sex;
- spouse's occupation;
- height and weight;
- age and/or date of birth.

Other elements that applicants ranked among the ten least important résumé items were "race" and "social security number." Included among the ten least important résumé components in Gaughan's study were "military experience" and "class standing."

The survey population was asked to answer yes or no to the following four questions which were designed to ascertain what sources of information, if any, influenced them in constructing an application and résumé:

• Have you ever attended a job application or résumé workshop oriented toward library applications?

• Have you read any professional articles on library job application procedures or construction of an application?

• Have you read any postings on listservs regarding library job application procedures or construction of an application?

• Have you asked other librarians for assistance or advice when constructing an application?

Table 3
Application Construction:
Sources of Information Applicants Consult

Source	% Consulted Yes	No
Library application/resume workshop	23%	77%
Professional articles	31	69
Postings on listservs	32	68
Other librarians	73	27

Table 3 summarizes the respondents' answers to these four questions. Although the applicants surveyed have consulted all sources included in the four survey questions, asking other librarians for assistance or advice is the resource used by the vast majority.

Discussion

Although there is a sixteen-year difference between the current study and publication of Gaughan's research,[16] table 2 demonstrates that there is considerable overlap between the résumé items that both survey populations listed as the ten most important and the ten least important. This comparison suggests that applicants have more insight into the important and unimportant components of a résumé than the authors anticipated based on the résumés they have reviewed while serving on academic library search committees.

In studying the top ten items of both populations, an obvious conclusion is that it is important to list identifying information, job experience, and education. The most important item identified by both applicants and personnel directors is "previous experience in librarianship." As Knouse notes, "The job experience section may be the most important part of the résumé."[17] Other items relating to job experience included in the top ten elements by both populations are "brief description of duties in previous positions" and "dates

of employment in previous positions." Identifying information ranked high by both groups included "telephone number" and "current address." Educational information included "colleges and universities attended," ranked in the top ten résumé items for each population.

The additional item included in the top ten by both groups is a list of references. When this common requirement is listed in a vacancy notice, it is important for applicants to provide a list of references with accurate addresses and phone numbers.

A few items, however, on which the two populations differed in their top ten rankings also deserve discussion. Surprisingly, three items rated in the top ten by personnel directors but not by applicants were "foreign language skills," "years degrees awarded," and "full chronological accounting for time after completion of education."[18] Two items, "years degrees awarded" and "full chronological accounting for time after completion of education" were ranked seventh and ninth, respectively, in Gaughan's research and eighteenth and twenty-first, respectively, in the current study. In addition, applicants rated these two items lower than "committee service (work and/or professional)" and "membership in professional organizations," which were ranked tenth and eleventh, respectively. Although these latter two items may be valuable elements to include in a résumé, it is essential that an applicant list the years his or her degrees were received. The dates are used to determine whether the degrees are accredited and, in combination with "dates of employment in previous positions," to determine whether an applicant meets a requisite number of years of experience.

An applicant also should not overlook the importance of indicating how time has been spent between the completion of his or her education and employment history. A "full chronological accounting for time after completion of education" is important because, as Margaret Meyers points out, "Résumé content may show time gaps in employment that will be questioned by the employer."[19] Although "previous experience in other occupations" was not ranked in the top ten items by either population surveyed, personnel directors ranked it eleventh,[20] whereas applicants ranked it seventeenth. Noting "previous experience in other occupations" is important, particularly if it accounts for time spent after completion of a degree, fills in gaps in the applicant's educational and/or employment history, or is relevant to a specific position for which he or she is applying.

"Foreign language skills," included in the ten most important résumé items in Gaughan's study, ranking eighth, was ranked thirteenth in the current study. Foreign language skills are important to include, particularly when responding to an advertisement listing them as a required or preferred qualification. Applicants should take note when specific languages are required and recognize that other foreign languages, as well as computer programming languages, are not considered acceptable substitutes.

Two items, "subject field of degrees (undergraduate and/or advanced)" and "committee service (work and/or professional," which respondents in the current study ranked in their top ten items, were not included in Gaughan's survey. Including the subject field of one's degrees in a résumé is rather obvious, particularly when responding to advertisements that request specific subject backgrounds as a requirement or preference. Because "offices held in professional organizations" ranked twelfth in Gaughan's study and "membership in professional organizations" ranked seventeenth, the authors suggest that "committee service (work

and/or professional)" would not have been included in the personnel directors' ten most important items. Although committee service is important to include in a résumé, applicants should not give it higher priority than education or job experience.

The items that fell to the bottom of both survey populations' rankings certainly can be omitted from a résumé. The authors suggest that "military experience," ranked low in Gaughan's study, also can be omitted unless it accounts for a gap between the applicant's education and employment history or is a source of acquired skills relevant for a particular position. "Race" and "social security number," ranked low in the present study, also can be left off a résumé. In effect, most of the items ranked in the bottom ten are not only unnecessary but also illegal to use in hiring decisions, as some respondents pointed out in their comments. However, one applicant surveyed did note that "religious affiliation might be important if you are applying for a position at a religiously affiliated school."

Of the additional items that respondents noted as important to include in a résumé, "computer skills or experience with technology" was the one listed most often, although the wording of this element varied considerably. Obviously, libraries have changed a great deal since Gaughan published his study,[21] and new technologies have brought about many of the changes. The authors are not surprised that respondents felt that this is an important category to include and concur that this information is valuable to include in a résumé. However, the authors encourage applicants to pay attention to the type of "computer skills or experience with technology" that is advertised as a required or preferred qualification in a specific vacancy notice and to be sure their résumé reflects the appropriate type of skills or experience. For example, a listing of database management, word processing, and operating systems software is not especially helpful when "experience with providing electronic database services" is required. Similarly, an extensive listing of online vendors and end-user products such as BRS, STN, Knight-Ridder, SilverPlatter, Newspaper Abstracts, and Expanded Academic Index, which would be useful in judging the requirement just mentioned, will not be particularly pertinent when responding to a vacancy notice requiring "experience with a major bibliographic utility such as OCLC or RLIN" or "use of an integrated library system, NOTIS or Innovative Interfaces preferred."

Table 3 indicates that some applicants have attended workshops to help them prepare applications for positions in academic libraries and have read professional articles and listserv postings about library job application procedures and application construction. However, the majority of applicants consult other librarians about proper résumé construction and content. For those who are concerned about the quality of the résumés and applications they receive, enlisting colleagues' assistance appears to be the source most likely to influence individuals who need to improve their résumés and application materials.

Conclusion

Although Gaughan concluded that "no single résumé will be found to be ideal by everyone who reads it,"[22] the authors conclude that comparing the results of Gaughan's research with the applicants' responses suggests that there are common elements that both populations consider important to include in a résumé. Examining the top items of the two populations for both similar and dissimilar responses, the minimum elements in a model ré-

sumé are information that identifies the applicant and his or her educational and employment history.

Identifying information includes the applicant's:

- name;
- current mailing address;
- current phone number.

Educational information includes:

- names and locations of colleges and universities attended;
- subject field of degrees received (undergraduate and/or advanced);
- years degrees awarded.

Employment information includes:

- previous experience in librarianship, including names of
- organizations and job titles of positions held;
- dates of employment in previous positions;
- brief description of duties;
- full chronological accounting for time after completion of education.

Professional information also can be important as a component of a résumé and includes:

- list of references;
- professional memberships, including offices held and committee service;
- list of publications.

New items reflecting the technological changes that have occurred since Gaughan's study are important additions to a résumé. These include elements such as computer skills, e-mail addresses, and URLs created, which were suggested by some respondents.

The comments of some respondents who suggested that the items to include in a résumé may vary depending upon library experience, length of time in the profession, and type of position sought have merit. However, the authors' comparison of the respondents' ratings with Gaughan's findings indicate that both populations have similar expectations regarding the inclusion of certain basic résumé items. Application of the model suggested in this article provides guidance in constructing a résumé that contains those basic components, yet allows an applicant the flexibility to add varied experiences and skills relevant to the specific position for which he or she is applying.

Notes

1. Thomas M. Gaughan, "Resume Essentials for the Academic Librarian," *College & Research Libraries* 41 (March 1980): 122-127.

2. Suzanne T. Larsen and Joan S. McConkey, "Applying for Professional Positions," *College & Research Libraries News* 56 (June 1995): 415-416; Carol MacAdam, "Job Hunter's Workshop: How to Find and Land the Right Job, and Survive the Transition," *Serials Librarian* 25 (1995): 359-360; Kay Womack and Tyler Goldberg, "Resume Items for Special and Academic Librarians," Special Libraries 85 (spring 1994): 96-103; Rita Broadway, "Job Descriptions Vis-a-Vis Job Applications: A Match Often Not Made in Heaven," *Serials Librarian* 21 (1991): 199; Tyler Goldberg and Kay Womack, "Academic Applicants: Make a Good First Impression," *College & Research Libraries News* 51 (September 1990): 702-703; Clark C. Wong, "Job Search: Strategies to Improve Your Success Rate," *Ohio Media Spectrum* 40 (spring 1988): 40-41; Barbara I. Dewey, "Writing and Analyzing Resumes and Cover Letters," in *Library Jobs: How to Fill Them; How to Find Them* by Barbara I. Dewey (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Pr, 1987), 62-71; Robert F. Delzell, *Finding a Position: Strategies for Library School Graduates* (Occasional Papers no. 153) (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1982) 6-8; Jane F. Spivack, "Finding a Job," in *Careers in Information* by Jane F. Spivack (White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., 1982): 183-197.

3. Dewey, "Writing and Analyzing," 60-80; Delzell, Finding a Position, 2-26; Spivack, "Finding a Job," 173-204.

4. Wong, "Job Search," 40-43; James M. Hillard, "Advice from an Employer to Applicants," *American Libraries* 12 (October 1981): 559.

5. Larsen and McConkey, "Applying for Professional Positions," 415-417; Goldberg and Womack, "Academic Applicants," 701-705.

6. Gaughan, "Resume Essentials," 122-127.

7. Womack and Goldberg, "Resume Items," 96-103.

8. Jeffrey S. Hornsby and Brien N. Smith, "Resume Content: What Should be Included and Excluded," Society for Advanced Management Journal 60 (winter 1995): 4.

9. Stephen B. Knouse, "Impressions of the Resume: The Effects of Applicant Education, Experience and Impression Management," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 9 (fall 1994): 33.

10. Hornsby and Smith, "Resume Content," 4.

11. Knouse, "Impressions of the Resume," 33.

12. For discussions on resume content see Larsen and McConkey, "Applying for Professional Positions," 415-416; Goldberg and Womack, "Academic Applicants," 702-703; Dewey, "Writing and Analyzing," 62-71; Delzell, *Finding a Position*, 6-8; Spivack, "Finding a Job," 183-107; Gaughan, "Resume Essentials," 122-127.

13. MacAdam, Job Hunter's Workshop", 359-360.

14. Gaughan, "Resume Essentials," 123-127.

15. Ibid., 124.

16. Gaughan's study was published in 1980 and the survey on which the current publication is based was mailed October 1996.

17. Knouse, "Impressions of the Resume," 34.

18. Gaughan, "Resume Essentials," 124.

19. Margaret Myers, "Job Hunting Strategies for Power Interviews and Resumes," in *Culture Keepers: Enlightening and Empowering Our Communities. Proceedings of the First National Conference of African American Librarians*, September 4-6, 1992. (Columbus, OH: Black Caucus of the American Library Association, November 1993).

20. Gaughan, "Resume Essentials," 124.

21. Ibid., 122-127.

22. Ibid., 126.