

Veronica Fu

Forging Paths to Career Advancement

An Early/Mid-Career Librarian's Perspective on Professional Engagement

In the world of library professionals, career development encompasses a wide range of pathways, with engagement in professional services being a common avenue. For librarians, engaging in professional services presents invaluable opportunities to bolster their professional acumen, expand their networks, find professional fulfillment and contribute to the advancement of the profession.¹ While some early/mid-career librarians find themselves actively engaged in professional services within their own institution through appointments, volunteering, or nominations, securing similar opportunities beyond the institutional level may present a significant challenge.

As an early/mid-career librarian, I've found in my own journey of professional engagement that the primary challenge lies in the initial step of securing entry to committees in professional associations, editorial boards of library journals, or working groups in academic partnerships, rather than in the nature of the service itself. However, it's important to note that engagement in professional services involves navigating nuanced intricacies as well as substantial challenges along the way.

After a couple of years of entry-gaining efforts, I am eager to share my reflections, not only on what I have done but also on what I could have approached differently as I continue this progressive journey. This introspective exploration aims to offer an account of my experiences, aspiring to contribute to a reservoir of knowledge that fosters growth and success for emerging library professionals.

Ongoing Career Planning

In the landscape of professional growth, one aspect that's often overlooked is the power of ongoing career planning. To many new graduates, the notion of career planning often ends or at least pauses once they secure a job, having primarily focused on it beforehand. However, career planning is an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. It involves not only the initial steps of identifying career goals and securing employment but also continuous reflection and strategic decision-making to navigate through various stages of one's career. In other words, the concept of career planning extends far beyond job attainment—a lesson I, regrettably, learned firsthand in my own journey.

The elation of securing a stable full-time position in a prestigious public university, achieved two years post-graduation from library school and seven years post-immigration to Canada, perhaps clouded my perception for too long. Amidst the whirlwind of family life with two children, adapting to life in the United States, and acquainting myself with the professional

Veronica Fu is East Asian collections librarian at the University of Virginia Library, email: rf4cv@virginia.edu.

landscape, time swiftly slipped away. It wasn't until I had been in my role for five years and learned about the new institutional career ladder requirements that I began contemplating my career trajectory.

While it's natural for emerging professionals to require time to acclimate to a new position, it's important to recognize that the process of planning for their career advancement can occur simultaneously. Rather than waiting until the pressures of career development are at their peak, this approach of ongoing career planning encourages individuals to strategically consider their path from the outset. Reflecting on my own experience, although I eventually pursued opportunities for growth, I realize now that earlier awareness and strategic planning could have accelerated my professional development to some extent, if not significantly.

Embracing Proactivity

As an East Asian Collections Librarian, when I began exploring ways to expand my professional involvement beyond my workplace, I naturally turned to the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) for opportunities. The CEAL official website explicitly encourages its members to actively participate by serving on committees, taskforces, and even running for office on the Executive Board. However, opportunities for active participation in committee services are not as readily apparent as one might hope. Delving into the online bylaws revealed that committee members serve a three-year term, but there is no specific information or guidance on the recruitment of new committee members, leaving the process unclear and leaving me disappointed.

In April 2022, a pivotal moment unfolded as a CEAL listserv email, issued by the chair of the Membership Committee, beckoned for volunteers to serve on the Membership Committee, 2022–2025. This marked the first call I had encountered since joining CEAL in 2017, sparking immediate excitement and prompting an unwavering response on my part. Following the submission of my résumé and several communications with the committee chair, I eagerly awaited the result. The process turned out to be efficient, culminating in a welcome email approximately twenty days after the call, signifying the approval from the Executive Board for the selected committee members. As I began my term on the Membership Committee, I had the opportunity of collaborating with seven librarians in the East Asian field and assuming the role of a subgroup lead.

Considering my experience with CEAL, I recognize that there was an opportunity that I could have leveraged more proactively. Instead of being deterred by the lack of recruitment information, I could have taken the initiative to reach out to committee chairs via email, expressing my interest and inquiring about potential openings. While the specific answers might not have been readily available, conveying my eagerness to contribute could have sent a positive message and demonstrated my commitment. Additionally, by inquiring about the recruitment process, I might have subtly highlighted the transparency issue, potentially contributing to a more open and inclusive environment in the long run. Actively seeking ways to engage and contribute, rather than waiting for perfect conditions, is crucial for navigating such challenges.

In hindsight, I have come to understand that career development is an evolving process, flourishing with foresight and initiative. Applying these insights has earned me the opportunity to serve on a regional editorial board and contribute to a working group for international academic partnerships, thereby enhancing my professional growth and impact. In conclusion,

forging paths to career advancement necessitates a commitment to ongoing planning and a proactive mindset. By continuously setting new goals and actively seeking opportunities, professionals can navigate their career trajectories with purpose and resilience. *≈*

Note

1. Megan Bresnahan and Patricia B. Condon, “Librarians and Research Integrity Committees: Finding Professional Joy and Fulfillment in Practice and Service,” *Journal of eScience Librarianship* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): e629, <https://doi.org/10.7191/jeslib.629>.