

# Inclusive Hiring in Academic Libraries: A Qualitative Analysis of Attitudes and Reflections of Search Committee Members

Kathryn Houk and Jordan Nielsen

Academic librarian hiring processes are designed to allow hiring institutions to learn about candidates through a multiple-round process, but often these processes are not designed with the candidates in mind. This paper uses a qualitative approach to interpret and understand how the attitudes of search committee members shape on-campus interview practices, with a particular focus on how interview practices create barriers to inclusivity. Library employees who recently served on academic librarian hiring committees were recruited to respond to a questionnaire, and a text analysis of responses to open-ended questions was performed to identify themes in academic librarian hiring.

## Introduction

Academic librarian hiring practices vary between institutions and can even vary between positions within a library. While there is no standard set of interview practices followed when recruiting for an academic librarian position, many libraries follow a hiring process that mimics the processes of academic departments at their institutions. These processes typically culminate in candidates being invited to campus for a day-long final interview that often includes multiple interview sessions, social engagements, and a presentation to various stakeholders from the library and other university departments. These long-standing traditions in academic hiring produce exclusionary processes due to a lack of critical examination of how bias and attitudes inform the candidate visit and evaluation.

Every institution has its own approach to recruitment, informed and dictated in part by organizational parameters such as university human resources policies, collective bargaining agreements, and the functional status of the librarians. The authors have observed that these processes are consistently designed in a way that does not take the needs of candidates into consideration, especially as they relate to the on-campus interview portion of the process. It is our belief that the exclusionary nature of these processes contributes to the exclusion of people with marginalized identities from the profession.

---

\* Kathryn (Katie) Houk is an Associate Professor and Undergraduate Medical Education Librarian at the University of Nevada Las Vegas' School of Medicine Library, email [Kathryn.Houk@unlv.edu](mailto:Kathryn.Houk@unlv.edu); Jordan Nielsen is an Associate Professor and Inclusion & Education Librarian in the James E. Walker Library at Middle Tennessee State University, email: [Jordan.Nielsen@mtsu.edu](mailto:Jordan.Nielsen@mtsu.edu). ©2023 Katie Houk and Jordan Nielsen, Attribution-NonCommercial (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) CC BY-NC.

The library and information science (LIS) profession is nearly 87 percent white,<sup>1</sup> and though there is much discussion about how to diversify the profession, the authors see a lack of attention being given to the recruitment process. Critically examining the recruitment process and structures with a conscientious approach to inclusion for all applicants is one area where academic libraries could demonstrate a clear commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, and accessibility (DEIAA). The recruitment process is usually the first interaction potential hires have with an academic library. As such, the choices a hiring library makes about how to run a recruitment process, starting from drafting position announcements through the extension of job offers, should be critically examined. Academic libraries need to consider the purpose and value of each element of the process, how it hinders or helps to attract a diverse pool of applicants, and how it fosters or discourages an inclusive experience for candidates.

### *Positionality Statements*

The experiences and identities of each author have informed their interest in and approach to this research. The focus on identifying and eliminating barriers to inclusive hiring in academic libraries taken by both authors is informed by their individual professional and personal journeys and identities. The lens of each author influenced the development of the questionnaire used in this study, the choices of where to distribute the survey, the analysis of responses to questions, and the conclusions drawn from the data. The authors recognize that their specific sets of societal advantages and disadvantages impact their conscious and unconscious interpretations of the data, and readers may or may not agree with the findings as presented.

Kathryn Houk is white, middle-class, chronically ill with dynamic hidden disabilities, fat, queer, femme, and asexual. She grew up in the rural mid-Atlantic United States and has lived and worked in predominantly urban areas since obtaining a master's degree. Kathryn's race and the socioeconomic background of her parents granted her unearned privileges in housing, food, clothing, access to healthcare, education, and exposure to different cultures through travel. As a child of a tenured faculty-member, she has benefitted in her studies and career from understanding academic structure and culture from a young age. Kathryn has experienced stigma, invalidation of her identity, hostile behavior, social exclusion, and inadequate health care and accommodations in work settings due to her identity.

Jordan Nielsen is white, middle-class, non-disabled, queer, non-binary, and masculine-presenting. Jordan grew up in the rural southern United States but has spent the majority of their adult life in urban areas in the southern United States. Jordan was the first person in their family to earn a graduate degree, and has subsequently earned multiple graduate degrees. Since entering the library profession, Jordan has held steady employment in academic libraries, including multiple tenure-track roles. Jordan is currently employed as an academic librarian at a large, public R2 institution in the southern United States. Jordan's race and socioeconomic background provided them with privileges they did not earn in the form of access to housing, healthcare, clothing, food, education, and financial stability. As a queer, non-binary person, Jordan has experienced violence, exclusion, and trauma in personal and professional settings due to their identity.

Both authors approach this research from the perspective of believing that academic librarian hiring needs to change to be more inclusive, and that these changes can only hap-

pen when libraries commit to an ongoing critical examination of their recruitment practices to identify and remove barriers to inclusivity. The authors do not intend to create a real or imagined standard of practice for all academic libraries, since organizational structures and restraints vary so widely across institutions. This exploratory research is intended to serve as an environmental scan, which Brown and Weiner defined as “a kind of radar to scan the world systematically and signal the new, the unexpected, the major and the minor.”<sup>2</sup> It is the authors’ hope that this environmental scan will shed light on some current practices and perceptions in academic librarian hiring in order to highlight areas of improvement and for further inquiry in order to help the profession move toward inclusivity.

## Literature Review

This research study focuses on the structure of the on-site portion of the academic librarian job interview, as well as the beliefs that inform and shape how that portion of the interview is conducted. There is surprisingly little to be found in the LIS literature focusing on this stage of recruitment, and even less that focuses on this stage of recruitment from the candidates’ perspective. While the literature does contain articles that describe the recruitment process in academic libraries, they tend to focus on the process as a whole rather than specific stages (e.g., on-campus interview).<sup>3</sup> There are even calls in the literature to focus on candidates’ experiences holistically,<sup>4</sup> but in order to better support candidates during recruitment and hiring there is a need for more research examining and elucidating where specific changes to the process are needed. As such, the following literature review will serve to contextualize the beliefs and structures that frame the academic librarian recruitment process from a broader perspective, with specific references to on-site interview behaviors where possible.

There are numerous articles in the LIS literature written for librarians who are entering the job market, and they provide general advice for what candidates can expect and how they should conduct themselves.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that these articles tend to focus on candidate behavior rather than hiring committee processes and behavior, which speaks to the power dynamics at play in hiring. This literature suggests that candidates will need to conform to established processes rather than making recommendations for committees to reform these processes to be more supportive of candidates. The focus on conforming leads to two major themes in the academic librarian hiring literature: the idea of the interview as a test and the idea of a candidate’s fit. The concept and practice of hiring for fit is recognized and discussed as a barrier to diversity and inclusion in library literature, but the concept of the interview as a test is less examined from a critical standpoint. This literature review will explore each of the themes from the literature in more detail.

One of the biggest challenges in recruitment is addressing the concept of fit, and a key part of this challenge is defining what fit actually means. At the Association of College & Research Libraries Conference in 2019, Cunningham, Guss, and Stout presented the findings of their research, which focused on survey results of library directors who were asked about recruiting for diversity, and they specifically asked library directors to address the concept of fit.<sup>6</sup> The respondents used terms such as “collegial”, “confident”, and “friendly” to define fit, while others used phrases like “hitting it off” with potential colleagues in the hiring organization.<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, Guss, and Stout went on to say that “These descriptors recall the literature of ‘fit’ in hiring, which is often undefinable, intangible, and thus allows for libraries to stay within their comfort zones and replicate the status quo.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2003, Raschke examined the academic librarian recruitment process in an attempt to identify problems and offer solutions to those problems.<sup>9</sup> In writing about the recruitment process, Raschke described it as a “passive, slow, risk-averse system” and argued it should become an “aggressive, efficient, risk-accepting model.”<sup>10</sup> One of the solutions proposed by Raschke was to look for “traits and cultural fit over specific skills and experience.”<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that this article was published nearly two decades ago, and it highlights how the search for fit in academic librarian hiring has tended to overshadow all other evaluative criteria in a search—including whether or not candidates have the skills and experience necessary for the job. It is difficult to imagine “cultural fit” in this instance referring to anything other than looking for candidates who fit into what is likely to be a predominantly white culture, thus making it difficult for people with marginalized identities, especially Black, Indigenous, and people of color, to meet this unwritten expectation. The alignment between a candidate’s skills and experience and the position’s clearly articulated duties and expectations should be the basis for how a candidate is evaluated in a recruitment process, not their ability to fit into an existing culture that may or may not be reflective of the candidate’s identities, experiences, and background.

In 2010, Wang and Guarria surveyed former academic librarian search committee members, and nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) said fit was extremely important.<sup>12</sup> In addition to fit, Wang & Guarria surveyed about the importance of demonstrated performance of job requirements, the cover letter, candidates having knowledge of the latest trends/developments in the field, scholarship, service in the academic community, professional skills (e.g., teaching, technology), and previous academic library experience, and none of these other criteria were considered to be as important as fit.<sup>13</sup> These findings point to just how pervasive the concept of fit is in academic librarian hiring. Once again, a candidate’s ability to perform the job requirements and their experience in the field are less important to hiring committees than whether a candidate is the right fit.

The library recruitment literature also includes recommendations for candidates who want to demonstrate they are a “good fit” with the hiring library. In an article focusing on best practices for candidates, Franks, Budzise-Weaver, and Reynolds noted that many questions cannot legally be asked of candidates (e.g., questions about age, race, marital status), yet they acknowledged that “general curiosity takes over” for some involved in the interview process, and they suggested that candidates could share personal information as a way to demonstrate they are a good fit.<sup>14</sup> In this scenario, candidates are advised to divulge legally protected information in order to ingratiate themselves to those involved in the interview process. This is a clear acknowledgment of fit’s influence over the interview process, yet the definition of fit remains elusive. Does fit in this scenario mean a willingness to answer questions posed by interviewers no matter how personal or invasive? How does a candidate’s willingness to answer such questions demonstrate their ability to successfully perform the duties of the position they are interviewing for? This “advice” also points to the power dynamics at play. Candidates have very little power in these high-stakes situations, and they are often advised and expected to do what interviewers ask them to do in order to “fit in”—even if it means doing something they are not legally required to do—or risk not being offered the position.

Critical examination of fit as a barrier to diversity and inclusion in librarian hiring has been seen in the literature and as topics at library conferences for several years. In 2015, Galvan discussed the concept of whiteness in academic librarian recruitment and said, “Librarianship is paralyzed by whiteness. This will continue unabated without interrogating structures that

benefit white librarians, including the performative nature of recruitment and hiring."<sup>15</sup> Essentially, Galvan made the case that candidates for academic librarian positions were expected to perform whiteness, which she called, "repetitive gestures designed to mimic and reinforce white middle class values" in order to be seen as "fit" or "acceptable" by the hiring organization.<sup>16</sup> In 2015, Hathcock further examined the influence of whiteness in LIS by focusing on diversity initiatives in the field, and in their essay they defined the term "whiteness" as "not only ...the sociocultural differential of power and privilege that results from categories of race and ethnicity; it also stands as a marker for the privilege and power that acts to reinforce itself through hegemonic cultural practice that excludes all who are different."<sup>17</sup>

Rhetoric and advice within academic librarian recruitment literature often frame the process as a test. Wheeler, Johnson, and Manion wrote about the academic law librarian recruitment process, and when writing about developing and asking interview questions, they stated, "The more candidates talk, the more you are likely to learn about them. So every effort should be made to keep the candidates talking throughout the interview process."<sup>18</sup> Durán, Garcia, and Houdyshell compiled best practices for the academic librarian interview and suggested that search committees have "candidates provide a public presentation as a means of performance testing."<sup>19</sup> These two examples highlight how academic librarian interview processes tend to be framed as tests, whether of endurance or of skill, but this notion appears regularly throughout the LIS recruitment literature. To that point, a survey of academic library search committee members revealed that some respondents saw a correlation between a candidate's ability to manage the stress of a day-long academic library interview and their ability to "deal with the stresses and hectic pace of the job."<sup>20</sup>

### *Research Questions*

A significant portion of literature on academic librarian recruitment focuses on providing guidance to candidates about what to expect and how to perform. There are gaps in examining hiring committee perspectives, similarities and differences in processes across institutions, and the impact of on-campus interview practices for DEIAA hiring efforts. Given these large gaps in the scholarly record, this study was designed to generate more specific areas of research for the future through a broad exploration of the following questions:

- What practices are hiring committees currently using in their on-campus interviews, and do any create a more inclusive interview process for candidates?
- How do the attitudes and perceptions of hiring committee members influence the structure and inclusive practices of the on-campus portion of the academic librarian recruitment process?
- What other factors influence the structure of the on-campus portion of the academic librarian recruitment process?

This paper is based on the thematic analysis of free text responses in a survey conducted in early 2021. Participants were asked about the on-campus portion of the academic librarian hiring process at their institutions. The authors were particularly interested in any candidate-centric or inclusive practices implemented by hiring committees, and in gaining insight into the perspectives of hiring committee members regarding these practices. This research will provide needed information about the varied perspectives of academic librarians who serve on search committees, and provide a map for further research into recruitment and hiring practices and their impact on DEIAA.

## Methods

### *Participants*

This study was reviewed and given expedited approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Social Sciences Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Ideal participants were academic librarians who had served on academic librarian hiring committees within the five years prior to and including 2020. Recruitment emails were sent to several academic library listservs, including BUSLIB-L, RUSA-L, MEDLIB, and survey links were shared over Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter in mid-February 2021. The survey closed in mid-March 2021; 222 participants agreed to participate and 166 completed the entire survey.

### *Study Design*

A questionnaire was designed as an environmental scan of hiring practices, particularly focused on in-person interviews, at academic libraries in North America.<sup>21</sup> Prior to submission to the IRB, the questionnaire was sent to two individuals outside of the author team and unaware of the work for review. Feedback from the reviewers led to edits for grammar, clarity, and consistency throughout the questionnaire.

The study was specifically designed to not collect any identifying information—including demographic information—in order to protect identities as well as encourage full candor from participants without fear of repercussions from institutions or colleagues should any data be lost or breached. In addition, the questionnaire software did not record IP addresses of participants.

The questionnaire included a click-through informed consent and thirty-three individual questions divided into eight categories. Questions were a mixture of multiple selection and short answer questions to ask survey respondents about specific practices at their institutions and then their personal reflections on those practices. The eight categories were as follows:

- Purpose of Interviews
- Personal Information about Candidates
- Itinerary Planning Practices
- Cognitive Stress Accommodations
- Bias Reduction Strategies
- Meal Scheduling
- Physical Accommodations
- Communication Practices & Additional Support for Candidates

The questionnaire approach was chosen over semistructured interviews in order to gather a larger number of responses and wider reach. The design of the questionnaire also allowed the authors to include examples of practices that may not have been previously known to participants, often providing opportunity for deeper reflection in the open responses. No questions were mandatory aside from the consent to participate. The survey was open for one month, and two reminder emails were sent to listservs and social media accounts after initial calls for participation.

### *Analysis*

A preliminary analysis of the questionnaire was presented at ACRL 2021 Conference, and included visual representations and discussion of the results from multiple choice questions. Only the results from a thematic analysis of free text responses are presented in this paper.

Grounded theory thematic analysis was first described by Braun and Clarke in their seminal 2006 article, and forms a basis for our approach.<sup>22</sup> However, the analysis of the open response questions was not neutral, and interpretation was biased based on the authors' own positionalities, as previously described. While Braun and Clarke's method provides a useful framework for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data, their method was modified for this study due to its exploratory nature and the need for flexibility. The authors drew inspiration from the methodology used by Hathcock and Vinopal for their research focusing on feminist praxis in library leadership.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, their methodology was more intuitive and relational in interpreting qualitative data rather than focusing on a series of finite steps to complete, and this approach informed the authors' modified thematic analysis methodology used for this study. The authors' methods included individually analyzing all short answer responses from the questionnaire and creating their own codes for clusters of responses. Codes and corresponding quotes were recorded in a spreadsheet by each author. The authors then met and discussed to come to consensus on codes. Further reading, reflection, and discussion of the codes and their relationship to each other led to consensus on a final thematic map of the questionnaire data.

## Findings

Thematic analysis led to the creation of six independent themes that appeared throughout short answer responses. One of these themes contains two distinct subthemes, which are focused on how the theme is operationalized during interviews. The six themes and two subthemes are seen in Table 1.

Theme	Subtheme
Interview as a Test	Intentional Testing Situational Observation
Ambiguity of Fit	
Need for Intentional Inclusion	
Varying Commitment to DEIAA	
Reflective Practices	
Navigating Bureaucracy	

### *Theme 1. Interview as a Test*

The first section of the survey asked participants to indicate and reflect on the purpose of in-person candidate interviews, and a common theme uncovered was the idea that it was a test of the candidates, which echoed the recruitment literature. While many quotes may not specifically contain the term, the described intentions clearly fell into this theme.

*"I also think that the in-person interview tests the interviewees' ability to think on their feet, answer off-the-cuff-questions, and interact with many different groups of people, not just a core group of people within their potential future department. They need to work with many different people and be able to handle different groups, so this is a good test of that."*

Two important subthemes center on the fact that testing can be both intentionally created and done through situational observation. Intentional testing involves actions such as deciding not to send questions prior to the interview, designing a long day without sufficient breaks, and including activities designed to assess skills. This kind of testing is often a conscious approach to candidate interviews by the survey participants.

*“Also, allows for a skills check regarding professional competencies.”*

*“You may also learn, specifically, about their ability to both respond under pressure, but also their stamina. What a candidate does and says at the end of the day can be informative about how they will respond to the pressures of our workplace.”*

*“In some respects, the presentations are to see how well the candidate read our website.”*

Testing candidates based on situational observations was often described as getting a sense of the candidate beyond their application materials, or seeing their interpersonal skills in action. In this instance, survey participants may or may not be consciously aware that they are testing the candidate.

*“The on-campus interview helped us ask more questions, get to know them better, see how they interact with current staff and other university stakeholders. I have seen candidates who were great on paper be rejected because they behaved disrespectfully in an in-person interview; likewise, not all excellent candidates represent themselves well on paper.”*

*“For me, there are things that need to take place in person that cannot be replicated virtually, such as interactions that happen over a meal, or seeing a person’s responses and interactions including body language and facial expressions.”*

*“I get to see how they teach, handle questions, and interact with potential colleagues over the course of a day’s in-person interviews.”*

The authors believe most candidates understand that they are being tested by potential colleagues and managers through situational observation, and that not all testing is inherently negative or unnecessary. However, testing becomes negative and exclusionary when intentional testing situations and situational observation are undertaken in ways that set candidates up for failure rather than success. One survey participant described an example of how testing can have a negative impact on inclusion and diversity in libraries.

*“I don’t think testing folks “on the fly” is useful for librarianship. This is more often than not a trap that negatively affects people with disabilities or varying language skills.”*

## **Theme 2. Ambiguity of Fit**

A pervasive theme throughout the survey is the idea of a candidate’s “fit.” Unfortunately, as already explored in the literature, “fit” can be used for measuring all manner of characteris-



tics, is rarely explicitly defined, and often reinforces whiteness in librarianship. The authors' analysis reinforces these critiques, with most who support the idea of "fit" as part of the interview describing its use as evaluating some combination of interpersonal, communication, and behavioral characteristics of candidates.

*"The way a candidate fits with the team is an essential aspect of the interview process.*

*Personality, affect, general ability to mesh with the team are key to success in my workplace."*

*"Otherwise, I feel interviews are more about trying to determine 'fit.' We know from the candidate's resume, vita & cover letter that the person has the right qualifications and 'chops.' Now, do we feel that we could work with them (and vice versa)?"*

When discussing "fit," the lack of defining and understanding the exact qualities being looked for and how they will be measured became apparent. The authors saw the idea of "fit" grow to encompass a myriad number of different qualities or skills of a candidate in a committee member's mind, with no clear indication that they measure them individually, or do so in a way to reduce bias.

*"I see some legitimate reasons to consider fit (and/or personality, depending how those are defined): determining whether a candidate's particular skills and experiences fill an important gap on the team, identifying whether a candidate's approach to the role or their work aligns with the organization's expectations and needs, and identifying areas where a candidate's behavior or statements might not align with organizational values, e.g., around equity, diversity and inclusion."*

### ***Theme 3. Need for Intentional Inclusion***

During our evaluation of free text responses, a clear theme arose around the lack of intentionality of many search processes as described by the survey participants. There were several examples where committee members or chairs themselves described reactive, rather than proactive, scenarios and dismissed ownership of planning or change by claiming it was not their responsibility. This lack of intentionality leads to a lot of assumptions and uneven or unquestioned implementation of practices that may hurt DEIAA efforts.

*"We have members of the hiring committee who require accommodations and thus are attuned [sic] to the needs of interviewees."*

*"Much of these questions are more something that the chair of the search committee would likely be dealing with, and I have never served as a chair."*

*"We do [provide pronouns] in our names on Zoom and many of us do in our email signatures when we communicate with the candidate. But it is not required of the committee or the candidate."*

Most concerning when there is a lack of intentionality around interview processes is that the candidate ends up not only having to prepare for a job interview, but also has to act as their own advocate to try and ensure they can perform at their best. There were many assumptions made that candidates would be comfortable asking for what they need from organizations that are historically racist, ableist, and exclusionary without some indication that it is safe to do so.

*“I imagine that for most of these, candidates will request what they need; vegans will ask for appropriate food, and people who use different pronouns will state them. Or at least I would assume this.”*

*“I would generally say that our institution takes the stance that they will “happily” make accommodations when requested but that they see no need to explicitly ask candidates about accommodations.”*

*“But the onus is currently on the candidate to bring forward any accommodations they need, nothing about our process is proactive.”*

If organizations and search committees do not take time to review their practices and be intentional about inclusion or what they are specifically looking for in a successful candidate, it leads to continued use of hidden agendas and implicit expectations, which ultimately reinforce whiteness.

*“Agreed upon standards for attire—no. Assumed agreed upon standards—probably. I often don’t find out about these until I or someone else has failed the standard.”*

*“The process consists almost entirely of both explicit and implicit internal expectations that are never shared with the candidate, which leads to a hiring process that is highly arbitrary and that consistently fails to do anything to increase the diversity of new hires, particularly with regard to race and its accompany [sic] economic/class related hierarchies.”*

#### ***Theme 4. Varying Commitment to DEIAA***

The authors were unsurprised that a theme of varying states of commitment to DEIAA in both the education of committee members and in hiring practices emerged from the responses to the survey. There were statements that discussed inconsistent practices within committees and between different searches at an organization. There are also wide variations of practice across different organizations in hiring procedures. Some practices are variable due to the ability to exert personal preferences (e.g., sharing pronouns), some due to how hiring is practiced at different institutions (e.g., different standards for different types of positions, level of involvement of HR), and many are due to lack of training or intentional commitment (e.g., not showing candidates gender neutral restroom locations, taking stairs unless asked to take the elevator).

*“Unsure how much information is provided [to candidates] but it seems not much as candidates are often surprised to find they are expected to walk around campus for a tour or to the dining locations, very little regard taken for physical accommodations [sic] for any space, and I realize how ableist [sic] these have been and I myself have contributed to [this] without being aware (oh let’s just take the stairs since the elevator is inconvenient) am much more aware now!”*

*“All gender restrooms are available but I don’t know if we are explicit about that option for all interviews.”*

*“A lot to think about here, I definitely need to do better on this front and our University needs to do better too.”*

The lack of education on DEIAA and its implications for hiring committees was most apparent in discussion about accommodations for functional differences, both visible and invisible, and the idea of providing options for candidates to allow for an experience that better accommodates their needs. Many participants indicated a lack of understanding the intent of equitable experiences for candidates versus providing equal experiences.

*“We don’t offer many options for the candidates, I think mostly because it creates too much variability between candidates for the same position (what we do for one, we have to do for all).”*

*“In order to ensure equitable interview experiences, all itineraries are kept as identical as possible.”*

*“I think at my last POW, since we were a public university, it would have been frowned on not to have all candidates have the same experience....”*

### ***Theme 5. Reflective Practices***

A theme the authors saw running through responses that aligns closely with the idea of intentionality in designing inclusive hiring processes is the need to incorporate reflective practices. There were several comments touching on the need to review current practices and reflect on their purpose.

*“My institution keep [sic] saying they will develop practices but for the 10 years I have been here, there’s an attitude of ‘everyone KNOWS how to do interviews/hiring so we just proceed.’ I would have loved to have a discussion about what is the purpose of the CV screen, the phone interview, the in person interview, etc., on any of the hiring committees I [sic] have been a part of.”*

When search processes are reflected upon and decisions become more intentional, the purpose of on-campus interviews seems to begin to shift toward mutual benefit and away from reinforcing the organization’s power over a candidate.

*“Being on campus also allows the candidate to get a feel for what the campus is geographically like, its size, how many students are around, what the facilities are like. These kinds of intangible experiences are important, especially if there is a big move involved.”*

*“The in-person interview allows the candidate an opportunity to expound on his/her experience and how it relates to the position, allows the interviewers to observe reactions to questions and interactions between the candidate and other members of the university community, and provides the university and library a chance to showcase what they have to offer the candidate.”*

*“The on campus interview is a chance for the candidate to learn more about the culture and city of their potential new work environment.”*

Instead of approaching interviews as a test of a candidate’s “fit” in the organization, intentional reflection can lead to more inclusive hiring practices that allow for a more equitable distribution of power in the process.

### ***Theme 6. Navigating Bureaucracy***

A persistent theme in the comments was the bureaucracy involved in hiring and how, in many instances, it is a hindrance to inclusive practices. This often appeared in statements regarding the amount of power HR had in hiring, or in their interpretation and communication of legal requirements. This also appeared in comments where responsibilities for creating welcoming processes were pushed onto the chair or HR department.

*“At our institution, the chair of the search committee and the HR department ensures [sic] that the candidate’s needs are met.”*

It appears that HR can often be a barrier to creating more inclusive and welcoming hiring processes due to their generally conservative stance. This appears in comments describing that all candidate experiences need to be the same and instances of a lack of appropriate or timely communication where candidate needs are concerned.

It is also apparent that many institutions expect candidates to pay for their own travel and hotel expenses and then request reimbursement from the institution. This places an undue burden on job candidates to cover the costs of interviewing. It is common for academic libraries to conduct national searches, which leads to a higher likelihood of having candidates for positions coming from outside the hiring institution’s immediate geographic area. The nature of these national searches may disadvantage candidates by making them responsible for large purchases like flights and hotel stays. Even when institutions reimburse candidates for these costs, candidates potentially carry these costs for months on credit cards that accrue interest. This burden could be multiplied if candidates are actively searching for a position and interviewing at more than one institution.

*“Our university used to pay for candidate travel up front, but the policy changed a couple years ago and now candidates have to pay up front and get reimbursed. If I am the chair*

*of a search committee I make sure I give candidates plenty of notice about this if they have an online interview, so they can plan accordingly."*

*"I think in-purpose interviews are frequently used to exclude or other potential employees. The expectation of travel can be difficult on [sic] many, especially if the library is not paying for things ahead of time and operates on a reimbursement model. That combined with an in-person interview often leading to the disclosure of privileged information (e.g., disability status that cannot be hidden in person, pregnancy status), the experience gives those at the library doing the interviewing ample opportunities to judge based on non-job-related factors."*

The authors recognize that reimbursement may be a decision that is made at a state level, but it is an opportunity for advocacy that librarians should embrace in order to truly be welcoming to a diverse pool of candidates. The authors encourage HR employees, along with search committee members, to take training in diversity and equity issues in hiring to ensure that they are balancing compliance to legal requirements and regulations with best practices for more inclusive hiring. In particular, more training should be undertaken to more fully understand accommodation under the law, including barriers to receiving candidates versus accommodating specific requests of candidates and how bias and invisibility hinders inclusivity.

## **Discussion**

There were several major themes that emerged from this survey that are important to consider in order to create more inclusive academic librarian hiring processes at our institutions. Central to every theme is the need for intentionality in creating environments where candidates, particularly candidates from marginalized communities, feel welcome and set up for success during their interviews. It takes work from every individual to build their awareness and understanding of implicit and explicit bias and to examine every aspect of the hiring process and see where it is failing to allow every candidate the opportunity to succeed. It will take advocacy and consistent effort to change systems of bureaucracy and inertia found in established processes. This is important and critical work in order to design interviews where candidates do not have to take on the dual roles of proving their expertise and skills as well as advocating for their needs in order to perform to their best abilities.

The other themes and responses from this survey highlight issues and areas for research and improvement of practice. Incorporating reflective practices in the hiring process will be important in efforts to create intentional, positive changes. This process of reflection also appears to lead to a reevaluation of the purpose of on-campus interviews toward one that is a more mutual exchange and away from the idea of testing candidates. The belief that interviews are a test of the candidates was common, and appeared either through explicit testing of their skills through presentations and responses to interview questions or hidden testing through observation of their behavior, communication skills, or "fit." Harm is created when the process is set up so that candidates do not know what they are being evaluated on, or when there are parts of the process that are intentionally included to be traps or stumbling areas for candidates.

This interview-as-test dynamic is most clearly seen when respondents were asked if candidates were sent interview questions ahead of time. There were several responses that

indicated an unwillingness to do this because respondents valued the lack of preparation as a trap to ostensibly “test the candidate’s ability to think on their feet.” However, sending questions ahead of time does not preclude committees or individuals from asking additional questions of candidates to measure their ability to answer unknown questions on the spot. Providing questions in advance signals to the candidate that a) you recognize that not every candidate processes and responds to information in the same way, b) you value candidates who are reflective and take time to consider how they will respond before acting, and c) you are interested in setting candidates up for success during their interview.

Commitment to training all library staff on diversity and equity, including how implicit bias impacts hiring decisions, is critical. For instance, there were recurring responses to the survey that highlighted misconceptions about how equitable practices could be incorporated into interview processes without privileging one candidate over another. This misconception that equity is equivalent to providing the exact same experience for all candidates appeared in discussions of providing candidates with options for different aspects of the process. Several respondents suggested that candidates had to have the exact same experience for it to be “fair,” and that by offering candidates different *options* for which stakeholders they met with or which activities they took part in (e.g., campus tour, dinner with committee) would result in an inequitable process. In many cases, respondents seemed to be conflating *equity* with *equality*. Search committees are creating an equal process by providing the same array of options to candidates, whereas they are creating an equitable process by encouraging candidates to choose the option that allows them to fully engage in the process in a way that is most comfortable and supportive of their needs. For instance, giving all candidates the option to have dinner with the committee or on their own is building equity into the process by allowing candidates to make the choice that best fits their needs, and it ensures equality because all candidates will be offered the same options, even if they were to choose different options.

Examination of the systems and bureaucracy in place at academic institutions is also necessary in order to change hiring practices. This would likely include close examination of relevant by-laws, employee handbooks, and federal, state, and local laws. This cannot be undertaken by one or two people: it takes a coordinated and concerted effort by an organization to make recommendations for training, reinterpretation, and process changes. It will take committed advocacy to change institutional practices, particularly if it involves changing how money is used. This research uncovered that many institutions have moved from paying for candidate visits up-front to a reimbursement model, which is a barrier to increasing diversity as it places undue financial stress on candidates of all backgrounds.

The authors believe that intentional practices and reflection will also lead to either a reduction or an explicit understanding of interviewing for “fit.” By not explicitly defining how you evaluate the fit of a candidate, you will be reinforcing whiteness. Only through defining the qualities and characteristics that fit stands for and determining how to evaluate these characteristics with as little bias as possible will “fit” lose its power to exclude.

### ***Limitations***

The specific findings from this research are not broadly generalizable as hiring practices vary across institutions, and each participant has particular attitudes and interpretations of practices and policies. The survey used in this study asked no demographic information, so

it is not possible to distinguish between the hiring practices across different academic library types or for geographic differences.

## Conclusions

This research contributes to the LIS profession by discovering areas of needed research in recruitment and hiring, particularly for DEIAA, and by providing a starting point for individual organizations to begin examining their own practices. Topics for further exploration include questions around the two distinct frames of the ethics of interviewing and the need for long-term and empirical studies investigating the impact of candidate interview experiences on their perceptions of the hiring institution, hiring statistics, and retention. The authors also see a critical need for better training and research into how to reduce ableist attitudes and practices in candidate interviews. A balance between disclosure of personal medical information and conscientious responsibility of search committees will be necessary to become proactive rather than reactive to the diverse needs of candidates, whether or not they fall under Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protections.

There is a need to operationalize the word “fit” in academic librarian hiring. As a pervasive term and idea that varies widely from one individual to the next, it creates unwritten expectations for candidates, and causes search committees and future colleagues to look for characteristics and qualities in candidates that will help them assimilate into the dominant white culture of the hiring library. Recruiting for fit without an operational definition creates a level of subjectivity in the hiring process that disadvantages those who do not, or cannot, perform whiteness. Research or case studies into the process and impact of defining fit, or attempting to remove it entirely from hiring decisions, is necessary to move DEIAA in hiring forward.

Finally, the authors urge academic libraries to critically evaluate their entire interview process and determine what practices are truly necessary, and how those can be made to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible to ensure all candidates can perform at their best.

## Appendix A. Conscientious Hiring in Academic Libraries

### Purpose of Interviews

In this section, we ask you to reflect on the purpose of in-person or on-campus interviews.

What do you feel is the purpose of a face-to-face/on-campus interview? (check all that apply)

- Determine candidates' "fit" with current library employees
- Learn more about candidates' personality
- Learn more about candidates' work experience
- Allow candidates to learn more about the library
- Gauge the candidates ability to think and appropriately respond under pressure/on-the-fly

We would value your deeper thoughts about and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution's practices, and your personal opinions regarding the "Purpose of Interviews" section:

### Personal Information about Candidates

In this section, we ask about your practices and thoughts on gathering and providing personal information pertinent to the candidates.

Do you ask candidates to provide their pronouns?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Don't Know
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Do hiring committee members share their pronouns with candidates?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Don't Know
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Is anyone on the hiring committee notified when candidates need ADA-specified accommodations?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Don't Know
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you encourage candidates to request accommodations regardless of ADA-definitions?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Don't Know
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

What additional accommodations do you encourage candidates to request? (check all that apply)

- Dietary needs
- Physical needs
- Neurodiverse needs
- Mental health needs
- Unsure/Don't Know



We would value your deeper thoughts about and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution's practices, and your personal opinions regarding the "Personal Information about Candidates" section:

### **Itinerary Planning Practices**

In this section, we ask about your practices and thoughts as they relate to planning candidate itineraries, including the economic costs associated with searching.

My library does the following for candidates (check all that apply):

- Books travel accommodations
- Allows candidates to choose flights
- Arranges transportation to and from the hotel from the airport
- Arranges all other transportation (i.e., hotel to work site)
- Pays for candidates' travel & accommodation upfront
- Reimburses candidates for travel & accommodation
- Unsure/Don't Know

My library does the following for candidates (check all that apply):

- Provides interview itineraries to candidates in advance of their interview
- Accounts for candidate's home time zone or travel times in the creation of interview itineraries
- Tells candidates who they will be meeting with (i.e., specific names) throughout the interview
- Provides candidates with options for interview day start times
- Provides candidates with options regarding which meals will be part of the interview process
- Includes at least one meal with candidates during the interview process
- Gives candidates a choice about meetings with units/organizations/groups on campus external to the library (e.g., academic departments, student groups, etc.)
- Unsure/Don't Know

How long are your interviews?

- Half day
- 1 day
- More than 1 day
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

We would value your deeper thoughts and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution's practices, and your personal opinions regarding the "Itinerary Planning Practices" section:

### **Cognitive Stress Accommodations**

In this section, we ask about practices your hiring committees use to reduce the cognitive load and mental stress candidates carry throughout the interview process.

My library incorporates the following stress and cognitive load reduction strategies into the interview process (check all that apply):

- Provides interview questions to candidates prior to interview day
- Schedules breaks for candidates during the interview day

- Provides space for candidates to be alone during breaks
- Provides opportunities for informal mingling during the interview day
- Provides candidates with access to a meditation/interfaith space during the interview day
- Provides evaluation and/or promotion criteria to candidates
- Schedules time in the interview itinerary to discuss evaluation and/or promotion criteria with candidates
- Provides paper copies of interview questions to candidates during each session of the interview day
- Provides a paper copy listing the members of the search committee and key staff whom candidates will be meeting throughout the day of the interview

Does your library require candidates to give presentations during the interview day?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

What types of presentations are candidates for librarian positions at your institution expected to give during the interview? (check all that apply)

- Presentation directly related to job function (e.g., teaching demo, mock outreach demo, technical best practices)
- Research presentation (i.e., presenting the candidate's own research)
- It is left up to the candidate to decide
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

We would value your deeper thoughts and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution's practices, and your personal opinions regarding the "Stress & Cognitive Load Reduction Strategies" section:

### **Bias Reduction Strategies**

In this section, we ask if your hiring committee(s) use strategies that have been shown to help reduce implicit bias in hiring decisions.

My library incorporates the following bias reduction strategies into the interview process (check all that apply):

- Uses rubrics to evaluate candidates' responses to interview questions
- Provides training or reminders to employees regarding appropriate interview questions
- Requires members of the hiring committee to participate in training that focuses on bias reduction in hiring
- Takes steps to ensure the composition of hiring committees is diverse and reflects the diversity the library wants to recruit
- Uses rubrics to evaluate candidates generally/evaluate overall performance during the visit
- Uses rubrics to evaluate a candidate's presentation

We would value your deeper thoughts and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution's practices, and your personal opinions regarding the "Bias Reduction Strategies" section:

## Meal Scheduling

In this section, we ask about your practices around scheduling and participation in meals during interview day(s).

My library does the following for candidates (check all that apply):

- Includes at least one meal during the interview day
- Allows candidates to choose meal locations
- Accounts for dietary restrictions for all meals

Do candidates get a choice in the number of meals that are included in the interview?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Who typically participates in the meals? (check all that apply)

- The position's supervisor
- Hiring committee members
- Other library employees
- University employees outside of the library
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

How are meal participants chosen? (check all that apply)

- The hiring committee selects participants
- Volunteers are solicited
- Library administration selects participants
- Candidates are given a choice
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

We would value your deeper thoughts and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution's practices, and your personal opinions regarding the "Meals & Dietary Accommodation" section:

## Physical Accommodations

In this section, we ask you to describe any ways you regularly make the physical environment more accommodating to candidates—whether they have an ADA-recognized accessibility request or not.

My library incorporates the following strategies to address physical accessibility, regardless of any required ADA accommodations, in the interview process (i.e., these are always available or available on request without "proof" of need) (check all that apply):

- Ensures the interview itinerary is fully accessible (e.g., all rooms and travel routes are at a minimum ADA accessible)
- Ensures the presentation space is accessible
- Gives candidates the option to sit during presentations
- Provides microphones for candidates to use during presentations
- Provides American Sign Language interpretation for candidates
- Considers physical accommodation needs prior to scheduling meals
- Provides candidates with information about the accessibility of all interview spaces (including restaurants/meal locations)
- Ensures candidates have access to an all-gender restroom

We would value your deeper thoughts and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution’s practices, and your personal opinions regarding the “Physical Accommodations” section:

**Communication Practices & Additional Support for Candidates**

In this section, we ask for your practices and thoughts about intentional communication with candidates, and additional support you might provide for them.

Does your library have agreed upon **internal expectations**/guidance for candidate attire during the interview day?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Does your library **communicate attire expectations**/guidance to **candidates** prior to on-campus interviews?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Does your library provide any guidance to or assistance for candidates who have limited access to standard interview attire?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

My library does the following to communicate with and about the candidate during the interview process (check all that apply):

- Communicates regularly with candidates before their arrival
- Communicates after the interview with candidates (e.g., provides feedback if requested)
- Keeps candidates up to date about their status in the search, before and after the interview
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you request and review candidate references prior to their on-campus interview?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

We would value your deeper thoughts about and experiences with the activities mentioned in this section. Please tell us about your reaction to the presented options, your institution’s practices, and your personal opinions regarding the “Communication with and about Candidates” section:

Do you have any other thoughts about creating a welcoming and inclusive on-campus interview process for academic librarians?

## Notes

1. Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, *2017 ALA Demographic Study* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2017), 1–2.
2. Arnold Brown and Edith Weiner, *Supermanaging: How to Harness Change for Personal and Organizational Success* (United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill, 1984), p. ix.
3. Dennis R. Defa, "Recruitment of Employees in Academic Libraries: Advice from the HR Perspective," *Library Leadership & Management* 26, no. 3/4 (2012).
4. Kimberley Bugg, "Best Practices for Talent Acquisition in 21st-Century Academic Libraries," *Library Leadership & Management* 29, no. 4 (2015).
5. Scottie Kapel, Elizabeth M. Skeene, and Whitney P. Jordan, "Nothing Happens unless First a Dream: Demystifying the Academic Library Job Search and Acing the Application Process" (paper presented at the 2018 Charleston Conference, Charleston, SC, November 5–9, 2018), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston/2018/upandcoming/2/>; Angela R. Davis, "Searching for an Academic Librarian Job: Techniques to Maximize Success," *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice* 3, no. 2 (2015): 136–43; Philip C. Howze, "New Librarians and Job Hunting: Patience is a Virtue," *College & Research Libraries News* 62, no. 6 (2001): 596–634; Megan Hodge and Nicole Spoor, "Congratulations! You've Landed an Interview: What Do Hiring Committees Really Want," *New Library World* 112, no. 3/4 (2012): 139–161; Suann Alexander, Jackie Dowdy, and Sharon Parente, "Demystifying the Academic Search Process, or Getting That Academic Librarian Position," *Tennessee Libraries* 59, no. 2 (2009).
6. Sojourna Cunningham, Samantha Guss, and Jennifer Stout, "Challenging the 'Good Fit' Narrative: Creating Inclusive Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries," (paper presented at the Association of College & Research Libraries 2019 Conference, Cleveland, OH, April 10–13, 2019), <https://alair.ala.org/bitstream/handle/11213/17632/ChallengingtheGoodFitNarrative.pdf>
7. Cunningham, Guss, and Stout, "Challenging the 'Good Fit' Narrative," 17.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Gregory K. Raschke, "Hiring and Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries: Problems and Solutions," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 3, no. 1 (2003): 53–67.
10. Raschke, "Hiring and Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries," 64.
11. *Ibid.*, 65.
12. Zhonghong Wang and Charles Guarria, "Unlocking the Mystery: What Academic Library Search Committees Look for in Filling Faculty Positions," *Technical Services Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2010): 66–86.
13. Wang and Guarria, "Unlocking the Mystery," 73–76.
14. Tina P. Franks, Tina Budzise-Weaver, and Leslie J. Reynolds, "Unlocking Library Search Committees at ARL Public Universities: Techniques and Best Practices for Getting Hired," *Information and Learning Science* 118, no. 5/6 (2017): 252–65.
15. Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, (2015): <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/>, para. 4.
16. Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias," para. 1.
17. April Hathcock, "White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, (2015): <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/>, para. 4.
18. Ronald E. Wheeler, Nancy P. Johnson, and Terrance K. Manion, "Choosing the Best Candidate: Best Practices in Academic Law Library Hiring," *Law Library Journal* 100, no. 1 (2008): 117–35.
19. Karin Durán, Eric P. Garcia, and Mara L. Houdyshell, "From the Inside Out and the Outside In: The Academic Library Interview Process in a Tight Economy," *College & Research Libraries News* 70, no. 4 (2009): 216–19.
20. Candice Benjes-Small, Eric Ackerman, and Gene Hyde, "Job Hunting: What Search Committees Want You to Know," (paper presented at the Association of College & Research Libraries 2011 Conference, Philadelphia, PA, March 30–April 2, 2011), [https://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/conferences/confsandpreconfs/national/2011/papers/job\\_hunting.pdf](https://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/conferences/confsandpreconfs/national/2011/papers/job_hunting.pdf), 247.
21. See Appendix A.
22. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
23. April Hathcock and Jennifer Vinopal, "Feminist Praxis in Library Leadership," in *Feminists among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*, eds. Shirley Lew and Baharak Yousefi (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017), 147–71.