

Brett Spencer

The first sparks of collaboration

Participating in job interviews for faculty candidates

As shown by many inspiring articles in *C&RL News* over the past few years, academic librarians are energetically seeking ways to spark collaborations with teaching faculty and build partnerships that enrich the learning experiences of our students. Librarians often have their first opportunity to meet a new faculty member when the prospective professor comes to campus for an interview. Perhaps you're a liaison to an academic department, and the department brings faculty candidates over to the library so that you can give them a quick tour and highlight the array of information resources they could access if they accepted positions on your campus. I think these library visits are great opportunities to kindle relationships with new faculty. This article offers some questions to consider when preparing for faculty interviews, based on tips and advice that I've received from outstanding teaching faculty and seasoned library colleagues over the years.

What are the candidate's interests?

Take an active interest in the potential faculty member's work. Often, you can obtain a copy of the candidate's curriculum vitae from the host department before the interview, and you can search for the candidate's publications in your databases. Reading the abstracts of the candidate's dissertation and articles can help you converse with them about his or her interests. Finding out what journals he or she has published in (and edited for) will help you determine what journals the candidate hopes to see in your library's collection. Reviewing the website of the candidate's current library can also help you prepare, because the candidate

might ask if your library has some of the same services and resources.

Be prepared to cover the key points about your library, but be flexible and strive for a conversational, faculty-centered approach. On the day of the interview, ask the faculty member what library-related topics would most interest him or her, and take it from there: What kinds of research plans do you have? What tools will you need for your teaching? Are there specific library services that you would particularly like to hear about? What resources have you found most useful in your past projects?

How should I present my library's resources?

Avoid giving an in-depth instruction session. Instead, aim for a short showcase that helps highlight the unique strengths of your library's collections, and get a bird's eye view of the content that you offer in their areas. While on the one hand we may hope to "wow" them with all the rich resources in our libraries, our main goal is to provide an accurate appraisal of the relevant collections that would be available to them as teachers and researchers on our campuses. Be both enthusiastic about the strong points of your collection and realistic about any limitations.

Demo a few of the specialized databases by allowing the candidate to suggest search topics; spotlight the relevant e-journals for his or her field; and note the citation software that

Brett Spencer is reference librarian at University of Alabama's Gorgas Library, e-mail: dbspence@ua.edu

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your library offers. Are there parts of the book stacks that the candidate would also like to walk through, if time permits? Are there special collections of unpublished and unstudied manuscripts that might intrigue faculty looking for potential research projects?

Special tip: Prepare portfolios of library information to give to the candidates so that they can read more about library services at home when they have plenty of time, since our time slots during the interviews will be limited. Include print-outs of relevant subject guides, database/e-journal pages, and library newsletters.

Which liaison services should I discuss?

Give an overview of the major services you offer as a liaison. Many faculty may be familiar with these services from their previous institution, while others will be hearing about subject-specialized services for the first time. Most faculty know about walk-in reference services, but you can explain that the library also offers research consultations by appointment for them and their students.

Bring up library instruction services for classes in your conversations, too. Some candidates may have only experienced library instruction as a generic tour, so be sure to emphasize the subject-specialized nature and active learning aspects of your library's teaching program. In addition, point out LibGuides and tutorials tailored to specific courses—a few samples of these online teaching tools can spark excitement and ideas for future collaboration.

We also want to publicize our collection services. Stress that you can purchase books by request for patrons on your campus. Offer to buy videos, too. Many faculty are increasingly interested in teaching through media. If there are “big ticket” items (such as databases or e-journals) that the candidate would like your library to add if he or she is appointed, you can explain that you will be glad to consult with your administrators and check into the possibility. Some libraries offer supplementary funds for new faculty, and you'll definitely want to highlight those, particularly if your library

doesn't already offer substantial collections on the candidates' topics. Of course, we want to avoid overpromising when we're promoting our purchasing services, especially if we have limited budgets. However, we can stress that we will maximize the funding that we have to meet their needs.

You may not have time to cover all of your liaison services, but you can bring to light several of the ways that you can serve faculty. All in all, explain that your goals as a liaison are to provide a customized package of library services to them and to serve as a primary point of contact who will be glad to assist them or refer them to others in the library whenever they have questions.

Are there collaborative projects with other faculty on campus that I can mention as examples?

Share anecdotes of how other faculty have taken advantage of liaison services in order to illustrate the variety of ways that librarians and faculty can team up on projects. Perhaps you've worked alongside a professor to build a tutorial, or maybe a fellow librarian on your campus has co-taught an information literacy course with a faculty member. Conversing about these past examples of collaboration can set the stage for future partnerships.

Are there access services for faculty that I should mention?

In addition to covering reference-related services, you can further “sweeten the pot” by pumping up the faculty circulation and inter-library loan (ILL) privileges available at your library. We won't want to flood candidates with too many details about access service policies during an interview, but hitting on a few of the most useful services can reveal just how much our libraries can facilitate research and teaching.

For example, many academic libraries participate in the Association of Research Libraries' Reciprocal Faculty Borrowing Program via OCLC,¹ which allows a faculty with borrowing privileges at one library to check out books from other member libraries across the United States. Perhaps your library offers this service or similar kinds of specialized ILL services

that you can boost to a candidate. Interviews are also great times to promote lesser-known faculty perks like video equipment check outs, patron-driven acquisition systems, fine waivers, and digitization on-demand. Be prepared to answer such questions as: What kind of turnaround time does ILL have? How long can faculty check out books? Can I designate a graduate assistant to act as a proxy for me? Will the library deliver materials to my office? Are there carrels available?

Are there research services outside the library that might interest the candidate?

As you are discussing library services with a faculty candidate, he or she may ask you about related services. For example, science faculty might ask you about campus resources for grant-writing; social science faculty might be interested in research labs that offer software like the IBM SPSS Statistics program; and humanities faculty might want to talk about local archives. Sharing information about some of these complementary resources can help you showcase the full powerhouse of research services available on your campus and in the surrounding area.

Is it possible to follow-up with the newly hired faculty member?

After the hiring process is finished, ask the department's chairperson if you can send a congratulatory e-mail the newly hired faculty member. In your welcome note, offer to start purchasing materials that they might need for their courses. Most colleges make hiring decisions in the spring, and, if you know who is hired by then, you can order materials for the new faculty over the summer months so that the items will arrive by the start of fall classes. Many faculty may have class reading lists from their old institutions that they plan to use once they start teaching at your campus. Would it be possible to request copies of these lists and begin buying the materials in advance, rather than waiting until the new instructor arrives in the fall? In this way, the new instructor (and his or her students) won't have to wait several weeks after the start of the fall semester for a

needed reserve book to make its way through the library's acquisition pipeline.

You can also build a library launch pad for their research projects by asking your new faculty colleagues to point out publishers, websites, catalogs, or book series that can help you select materials in preparation for their arrival. Please remember that the sooner they have a critical mass of library materials in their area, the sooner they can start publishing and earning tenure. Plus, preordering resources for new faculty is a simple way to show some good old-fashioned hospitality. Once they arrive on campus, pay them an office visit or take them out for coffee to keep the collaborative momentum going.

Conclusion

I hope some of these questions can help us all brainstorm ways to reach out to faculty during their interviews. If your library does not participate in faculty interviews, consider offering this service. We can learn a lot about new ideas and trends in our liaison fields by talking to prospective faculty. In addition, we can more deeply connect with our liaison departments by supporting their recruitment efforts.

Participating in faculty interviews also helps candidates gain an overview of the unique resources on a specific campus while familiarizing them with the general kinds of faculty services that they can expect to receive at most college and research libraries. Of course, interviews are whirlwinds of meetings and tours, and we can only cover so much in the limited times available. However, we can express our willingness to serve faculty in various ways and pave the way for library-faculty partnerships. The meetings that we have with faculty during their interviews can kindle the first sparks of collaborations that will ultimately reap benefits for our students.

Note

1. Association of Research Libraries' Reciprocal Faculty Borrowing Program via OCLC can be found at www.oclc.org/content/dam/oclc/membership/Reciprocal-Faculty-Borrowing-Program.pdf. *ZZ*