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How I Hired My Own Boss: Tips for Running an Inclusive Search

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How I Hired My Own Boss: Tips for Running an Inclusive Search

Abstract

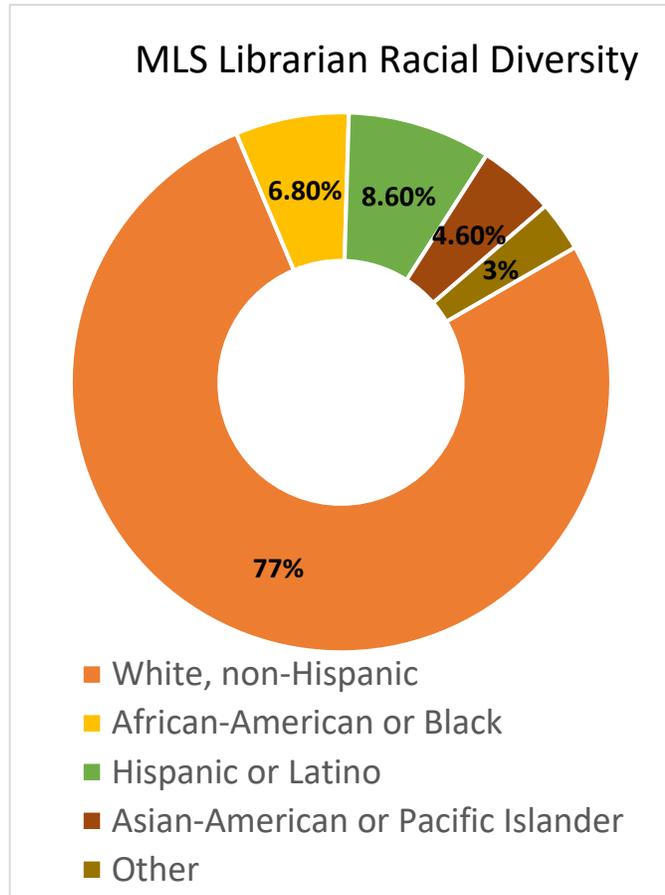
This paper contains ideas and strategies on how to run an organized and inclusive librarian search. Contents of the paper are based on the work of the search committee for the Furman University Director of Libraries. Topics covered include creating specific documentation, crafting an inclusive job ad, advertising the position to reach diverse audiences, screening applications, interviewing candidates, and making a final selection.

Keywords

human resources, hiring

Introduction

In 2018, I was selected to co-chair the Search Committee for the Furman University Director of Libraries, i.e. my boss. As I considered my charge, I knew I had to be deliberate and intentional to ensure an equitable, balanced, and truly inclusive search. This is no small feat considering that a 2019 report indicated "[t]he librarian profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity that shows few signs of abating." (AFL-CIO, 2019 p. 3). The report indicated that 77% of professional librarians are white (non-Hispanic) and 79% are women. The report didn't provide additional breakdowns related to historically underrepresented groups, but my hope was to attract a diverse pool of applicants through the intentional use of inclusive search practices.



Laying the Groundwork

Before embarking on the job search, I conducted research related to diverse and inclusive hiring at my institution. Furman University has a strong commitment to diversity including a Diversity and Inclusion Committee made up of faculty, staff, and administrators (The Diversity and Inclusion Committee, n.d); a Chief Diversity Officer that reports directly to the President (Institutional Commitment, n.d.); a well-stated diversity vision and statement (Diversity Vision and Statement, n.d.);

and a comprehensive guide on conducting an inclusive faculty search (*Best Practices for Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Faculty Members*, 2019). With so many resources at my disposal, it was easy for me to clearly understand and successfully articulate how the Director of Libraries search fit into the University's diversity visions and goals. If your institution doesn't provide easy access to such documentation and resources, I recommend meeting with your Human Resources department, and appropriate administrators to understand the role of diversity and inclusion in your institution's priorities. Understanding diversity at your institution is a critical step that will enable you to lead an inclusive search and to honestly communicate with applicants and candidates.

The Search Committee

My first step in putting my research into practice was the development of a diverse Search Committee. I was incredibly fortunate to have as my Search Committee co-chair, Dr. Onarae Rice, a professor of Neuroscience who had participated in and/or chaired many faculty searches, had attended training on diverse faculty searches, and was a member of the Faculty Recruitment, Advancement, and Tenure sub-committee of the University's Diversity & Inclusion Committee. His knowledge of and commitment to diversity, was instrumental in the creation of a balanced and inclusive Search Committee.

We agreed that our Search Committee should have 7 members with 3 library employees, 3 tenure-track faculty members, and 1 employee from our IT Department. Because of the timing and length of our search, we chose not to include students on the Committee itself, but to instead engage them in the interview process.

Once we knew the composition of the Search Committee, we established criteria for identifying potential members of the Committee (*Best Practices for Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Faculty Members*, 2019. p.4). These criteria included:

- A demonstrated commitment to diversity
- A diversity of races, ethnicities, genders, and ages
- A range of disciplines, expertise, and knowledge
- A mix of staff and faculty of various ranks
- A variety of perspectives and backgrounds

Once we had the criteria established, we solicited recommendations from Library employees and other on-campus colleagues for potential members of the Search Committee. We received over 50 recommendations, and ranked them based on the criteria above. Those that best met the criteria were e-mailed and asked if they would be willing to serve. As part of this e-mail, we outlined their expected responsibilities and the timeline for their participation. I would also recommend including information about the focus on diversity and inclusion in the Committee's work.

Once the Search Committee was selected, we collectively agreed upon inclusive practices that informed the organization and leadership of the Search Committee. These practices included:

- A well-articulated charge and deliverables
- Mandatory diversity training for all Committee members
- A set of inclusive expectations, responsibilities, and practices
- Communication methods and decision-making processes

We established these practices to ensure the Search had the support, tools, and flexibility needed to guide the search process in an intentionally inclusive way.

Documentation

The Search Committee's first major deliverable was to determine and document methods for inclusive practices throughout the search. This documentation provided us with a common understanding, helped us avoid conflicts or misunderstandings, and allowed for an open and

transparent process. Below is an outline of the documents we created during our search process. To the extent possible, each area of the documentation addressed inclusive practices:

1. Search Committee Procedures

These procedures included:

- Committee make-up, responsibilities, and expectations
- Decision-making process e.g. minimum number of members needed to make a decision; process for reaching consensus; how to address split decisions or disagreements
- Internal communication. e.g. preferred formats of communication; where Committee documents are stored
- External communication e.g. when/how to communicate about the status of the search and the applicants

2. Advertising and Recruitment Documentation

This documentation sought to answer these questions:

- How will the Search Committee address questions and/or information requests from potential applicants?
- Will the Committee seek to recruit applicants? If so, how will those applicants be identified? How will they be invited to apply?
- How long the job will be advertised?
- Where will the job position be advertised?
- Will there be a different process for internal and external candidates?
- What happens if applicants do not submit all the required documents in their application?

3. Selection Criteria

Before reviewing any applications, the Search Committee developed the selection criteria we would use to assess candidates. Our selection criteria was pulled straight from the job ad. The document also included the following:

- How to avoid unintentional bias
- Rubric for screening applicants
- How to communicate with applicants who were not selected for consideration
- How to communicate with applicants who were selected for the interview process

4. Interview and Reference Checking Process

This document included:

- The number and format(s) of interview(s) to be conducted e.g. virtual, in-person
- When references will be checked in the search process
- Whether the Committee will conduct off-list references checks (Dowdall, 2013)
- A list of campus stakeholders to include in an in-person interview
- The criteria for asking questions in the interview
- Any presentation or interactive elements to be included in the interview

5. Final Selection, Job Offer, and Negotiation Process

The Search Committee addressed the following as part of this process:

- How will the successful candidate be selected? Is the decision made by the Search Committee or do they simply provide a recommendation?
- What happens if the Search Committee cannot agree on a single candidate?
- What happens if the Search Committee agrees that none of the final candidates should be offered the job?

- How will feedback provided to the Committee be incorporated into the decision-making process?
- Who is responsible for the salary negotiations?
- Are there contingencies to the offer and what are they? e.g. a criminal background check
- How will the successful candidate be contacted?
- How will the unsuccessful candidates be contacted?
- Who is responsible for announcing the name of the successful candidate (within the library, within the campus, and externally to the world)

The Job Description

The one document not listed above is the single most important document of the entire process: the job description (Director of Libraries Search Committee, 2019). We determined that our job description should contain the following:

- Institution's clearly articulated views on diversity and inclusion
- Responsibilities of the position
- Qualities and characteristics of the ideal candidate
- Minimum experience and education requirements
- Preferred experience and education
- Timeline for search
- How to apply
- Documents required for application

We also determined that a successful job ad must have the following characteristics:

Honest: Be genuine and be honest. People will be excited by your position and apply to it if you are truthful in your job ad and in your interview process.

Realistic: It's tempting to ask for everything when hiring for a position, but temper your enthusiasm with a healthy dose of reality. Focus on what is critical to the position.

Specific: Avoid vague language. Whenever possible, be specific, so that applicants truly understand the focus of the job ad.

Distinctive: Be sure to articulate what sets this job apart from others. Talk about unique collections, services, projects, or programs within the library and at the institution level that would generate enthusiasm among applicants.

Advertising the Position

We spent a long time crafting a job ad, and we wanted the ad to be seen by as many potential applicants as possible. As such, we advertised in the following venues:

Higher Education Venues: The Chronicle of Higher Education; HigherEd Jobs; Inside Higher Ed; Higher Education Recruitment Consortium

Library Focused Venues: American Library Association; Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA); Chinese American Library Association (CALA); Asian/Pacific American Library Association (APALA); Reforma: The National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking; The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Local Venues: South Carolina Library Association; South Carolina State Library; Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries (PASCAL)

Library School Mailing Lists and Website: We advertised with local library schools, and also library schools that had more diverse alumni populations and/or offered special programs for historically underrepresented groups. These included: University of South Carolina; University of North Carolina; North Carolina Central University; University of Arizona; Wayne State University; Florida State; University of Pittsburgh; ALA Spectrum Scholarship

Other: We also targeted more specific venues that fit in with the scope of our job including the Oberlin Group website, the Council for Undergraduate Research job board, etc.

Recruiting Applicants

Once the job ad was posted, our Search Committee also took the extra step of actively recruiting applicants. A Committee member attended the job fair at the American Library Association to meet potential candidates face-to-face, and promote Furman's Library. This was not as fruitful as we had hoped, because most of the attendees of the job fair were recent graduates seeking their first professional job. A more fruitful course of action was sending out personalized e-mails to specific library administrators who might be interested in the job or know someone who might be interested. We began this process by identifying the Top 50 Liberal Arts Colleges and Top 50 Historically Black Colleges and Universities according to U.S. News and World Report's Best Colleges rankings (U.S News and World Report, 2019). We then supplemented this list with members of the Oberlin Group Libraries and the Associated Colleges of the South. Next we identified library directors and assistant library directors from each institution, and sent them the following e-mail:

Furman University is currently recruiting for the open position of the Director of Libraries.

My name is Christy Allen, and I am co-chairing the Search Committee. We are seeking a

confident leader who passionately supports diversity, collaboration, and personalized student experiences in a private liberal arts environment.

I am hoping that you or someone you know matches this description and would consider applying for the vacancy. More details are available here:

<https://libguides.furman.edu/library/jobs/director>

Please share this position with any colleagues that would be a good fit, and don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to know more. I hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you for your consideration.

This process allowed us to promote the vacancy more widely within our community, particularly among those librarians who were not actively looking for a job. This process yielded several recommendations whom we then contacted with the e-mail above. Employing these recruitment methods may not work for all searches, and depending on the audience contacted, could unintentionally result in a less diverse pool of candidates. I recommend vetting any recruitment efforts with Human Resources and personnel responsible for diversity, equity, and inclusion at your institution to avoid unintentional bias.

Reviewing Applications

Applying for the Furman Director of Libraries required the submission of several documents: a cover letter; a CV/resume; a list of three references; a statement of leadership philosophy and experience; a statement of scholarly or professional interests; and a diversity statement that described how their professional experience, scholarship, mentoring, and/or service might contribute to a liberal arts and sciences college community that includes a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as one of its core values (Director of Libraries Search Committee, 2019). This may seem like a lot to require,

but each document provided a deeper understanding of how the applicant could meet the goals and expectations as outlined in the job ad.

The position was open for 6 weeks, and in that time the Search Committee received over 2 dozen applications. Our intentionally inclusive efforts yielded applicants who represented different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities. We were delighted to note the percentage of racially diverse applicants were higher than the national averages in the AFL-CIO report (2019, p. 3). In retrospect, I should have shared these results with our Chief Diversity Officer, and engaged him in conversations about the diversity within the pool prior to our review of applications. His insight would have been helpful in determining the relative success of our inclusive advertising and recruitment efforts.

As part of the review process, every member of the Search Committee read all the application materials and ranked the applications using the selection criteria we had established. We employed the following inclusive practices during our review:

- Read all application materials fully
- Compared applicants against the job criteria
- Did not compare applicants against one another
- Avoided assumptions

Throughout this process, we found it beneficial to keep referring back to our selection criteria based on our job ad. This helped us stay focused on our end goal and prevented, to the extent possible, unintentional bias in ranking applicants. After the review, the Committee met and talked through the applicants, and unanimously agreed to interview 9 applicants that most closely met the criteria.

Conducting Interviews and Checking References

The Search Committee used a three-tier format for engaging with candidates. First we conducted virtual interviews, then we checked references, and finally we invited applicants to interview in-person. Each step of the process further streamlined the pool of possible candidates until we reached our final selection.

The virtual interviews were conducted using Zoom conference software and followed the same format for all candidates. Each interview lasted 30 minutes and included the same 7 questions asked by the same members of the Search Committee. In retrospect, we should have budgeted 45-60 minutes for each interview to provide more time and space for the candidates to thoughtfully reply to each question. We also should have let the candidates know, up-front, how many questions we planned to ask, so they could pace their responses accordingly. The questions we asked were based on requirements described in the job ad, to keep the focus on what we needed in a Director of Libraries.

After the virtual interviews, we identified 4 candidates for reference checks. The Search Committee agreed on a set of questions that we asked of all references. We sent these questions to each reference via e-mail in advance and then had scheduled phone meetings to discuss the questions, and took notes. We found that providing questions to the references ahead of time allowed for more thoughtful and robust responses.

After the reference checks, the Search Committee agreed upon three candidates to bring to campus for in-person interviews. The full applications of these candidates were circulated to library employees in advance, and the CVs/cover Letters were sent out to the entire campus. As part of the two-day interview, candidates were asked to give a presentation and to facilitate a brainstorming session with the library employees. Communication was an important aspect of the job, as articulated in the job ad, and these extra activities allowed each candidate to demonstrate their abilities. As part of the interview, each candidate met with the same campus stakeholders to discuss the same topics

including representatives from the University's Diversity & Inclusion Committee to specifically discuss diversity. Each candidate also had dinner with a small group of students made up of representatives from the Student Diversity Council, library student employees, and other student groups.

Final selection

The final selection of the candidate was fueled by input from many different sources. Here are the factors that led to the final decision:

Candidate Feedback Forms: The Search Committee created a feedback form for each candidate.

Campus members who participated in the interview were asked to rate the candidate against the criteria listed in the job ad, and also provide their general impressions.

Candidate Ratings Form: Members of the Library staff and faculty as well as the Search Committee were asked to rate all three candidates against the ideal candidate qualifications described in the job ad.

Vote from the Library Employees: The content of the feedback and ratings forms were compiled and presented to the library employees. After a robust discussion, each library employee rated the candidates using a preferential ranking method. Votes were calculated and a clear front-runner was identified.

Recommendation from Search Committee: The Search Committee reviewed all of the information from the forms and the library employee vote, and crafted their recommendation for the successful candidate. This recommendation was provided to the University Provost and Dean of Faculty.

Final Selection: The final decision was made jointly by the Provost and the Dean of Faculty, informed by the recommendation of the Search Committee, the vote of the library employees, and the data collected from the feedback forms.

Once the final selection was made, the work of the Search Committee was officially concluded. From start to finish, the process took nearly 12 months. However, ensuring a successful and inclusive search was well-worth the extra time and planning.

Conclusion

Conducting an inclusive search requires deliberate and intentional planning throughout every stage of the process. The Search Committee for the Furman University Director of Libraries prioritized inclusion in their process which resulted in a more transparent process, a more diverse pool of applicants, and ultimately a successful effort in hiring a new Director of Libraries.

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