Hiring and Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries: Problems and Solutions

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abstract: Academic libraries need to change their recruiting and hiring procedures to stay competitive in today's changing marketplace. By taking too long to find and to hire talented professionals in a tight labor market, academic libraries are losing out on top candidates and limiting their ability to become innovative and dynamic organizations. Traditional, deliberate, and risk-averse hiring models lead to positions remaining open for long periods, opportunities lost as top prospects find other positions, and a reduction in the overall talent level of the organization. To be more competitive and effective in their recruitment and hiring processes, academic libraries must foster manageable internal solutions, look to other professions for effective hiring techniques and models, and employ innovative concepts from modern personnel management literature.

The ability to attract, recruit, and hire top candidates is the hallmark of a successful academic library. As Terrence Mech writes, "Personnel are the critical resource in any professional activity because the quality of work depends on the qualities of those hired."¹ While hiring decisions are difficult to reverse and mistakes prove costly in terms of time, resources, and service quality, the key to effective hiring on the macro-organizational level in academic libraries has shifted. The major hurdle in finding the right people has moved away from patiently sifting through dozens of resumes and slowly narrowing in on the right candidate through a deliberate process, to creating efficient and effective models to identify, to recruit, and to hire top candidates. Rather than solely worrying about making the wrong decision, academic libraries have to take a more risk-accepting hiring approach and focus on hiring the best people without losing the most viable candidates to other institutions.

While the challenges inherent in the search for academic librarians have shifted, the general purpose of the search and recruitment process remains finding as good a

match as possible between the needs of the institution and the talents, professional goals, and personality of the individual. The investment academic libraries make in a

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position search is substantial. An unsuccessful search is costly because significant resources are devoted to areas such as advertising, committee work, interviews, and travel expenses. The longer the search, the greater

the investment of resources. An extensive 1987 study by Tedine Roos and Diana Shelton found that a typical entry-level position search takes an average of five months, with an additional month to hire and to place the chosen candidate. They estimate the costs per hire from \$1,200 to \$2,000. If the outlay of staff time invested in the search is added to the calculations, the costs skyrocket to between \$12,000 and \$13,300.² The importance of efficiently filling a position with a qualified candidate is then magnified by the loss of productivity and the possibility of damaging relationships with library clientele while the position remains open.

However, these costs do not address the most significant problem affiliated with unsuccessful searches: a talent drain on the overall organization. Ineffective recruiting and hiring have a cumulative effect on an academic library that makes attracting top candidates more and more difficult. New hiring and recruitment procedures, such as: reducing the size of search committees, limiting bureaucratic impediments, moving more quickly through the review phases, creating flexible job requirements, hiring for traits and potential over skills and experience, using electronic dissemination of job advertisements rather than print, investing heavily in professional development, and emphasizing recruitment and attraction rather than waiting for top candidates will save libraries costs and simultaneously give them a competitive advantage in hiring talented librarians. The implications of moving to this risk-accepting hiring model that encourages creativity, aggressive decision-making, and efficiency are clear. Academic libraries that streamline recruitment and hiring, focus on retention of talented personnel, foster and develop local talent, and proactively recruit to fill identified needs will in turn have more talent and be able to use that advantage to attract additional top candidates. This article identifies the problems academic libraries have attracting and hiring top professionals, analyzes factors that exacerbate the problems, and discusses practical and theoretical advances libraries can implement to improve hiring and recruitment models.

Literature Review

A number of articles address the general nature and effective practice of traditional search processes, while others go further by describing optimal search techniques and making recommendations for the structure and conduct of an effective search.^{3 4} Al-

though the current literature recognizes the challenges of finding and hiring qualified librarians in the modern information age, it fails to adequately address the causes driving the difficulty in hiring talented academic librarians and provides limited solutions to remedy the problem.⁵ In addition, the library and information science literature does not resolve the issues inherent in making search processes more efficient to allow individual academic libraries to gain a competitive advantage in the hiring process. As John A. Lehner argues in his 1997 article, "Personnel Selection Practices of Academic Libraries," traditional academic library search models based on search committees and related processes are ineffective in selecting candidates.⁶ He suggests that academic libraries look to human resources management and organizational psychology literature to find and to incorporate new selection methods into hiring processes. Lehner also focuses on adapting devices from outside academia that improve "predictors of candidates' job success" and assist academic libraries in making better selection decisions.⁷ While personnel selection and psychology literature is full of techniques, discussions, and models to improve selection practices, the intent here is not to cover the range of personnel psychology literature on improved selection.⁸ This article focuses on improving hiring efficiency and increasing the individual academic library's ability to attract top candidates.

A related and large body of literature exists that advises candidates on applying for, interviewing for, and obtaining professional positions.⁹ The emphasis of recent hiring and employment literature has shifted significantly. Articles that once provided advice for potential applicants, discussed the prevalence of applicants that do not meet the minimum requirements, and generally reflected large pools and selective hiring practices now discuss the difficulty in filling positions and call for improved hiring and recruitment practices. The literature reflects the fact that academic libraries are no longer dealing with large, patient candidate pools and need to rethink hiring and recruitment strategies. A significant body of literature also addresses recruiting promising talent, particularly minorities, to the profession.¹⁰

Problems

Academic libraries take too long to recruit, to interview, and to hire librarians. This results in an inability to hire and retain talented candidates, and the outcome too often leads to positions remaining open for excessively long periods, the selection of less qualified candidates, and existing staff stretching their energies to cover the resulting deficiencies. The lack of talented staff has long-term implications that permeate the entire organization and its effectiveness. A scan of the literature reveals a number of examples reflecting the conservative and inefficient standards for hiring in academic libraries. Mech provides an example when he states, "The time needed to conduct a search is frequently underestimated. Waiting and delays are unavoidable. A properly conducted search will take months, even without unanticipated delays."¹¹ Contrast Mech's statement with Kathleen Heim's assertion that, "The foundation for excellent library service continues to be excellent personnel, but today we are faced with shortages that mean many libraries are not able to replace staff in the course of natural turnover. Just as society seems to be accepting the truism that 'information is power,' there

are not sufficient numbers of information professionals to fill the need that this recognition has generated."¹² John Haar concurs: "There appears to be a new and growing personnel problem: the difficulty of recruiting capable collection management staff."¹³ Mary Nofsinger and Betty Galbraith support this notion by stating, "As the academic librarian job market becomes tighter competition for hiring well qualified candidates becomes more intense. It is not uncommon these days for many of the top candidates in an academic search pool to receive employment offers from competing employers before the traditional recruitment process can be completed."¹⁴

Why has this ongoing problem gone largely unresolved by the larger academic library community? The answer lies partially in a reliance on traditional search processes, partially on entrenched aspects of the academic culture, partially in institutional bureaucracy, and partially in our inability to recognize and to adapt techniques from other segments of society. While each institution is unique and has its own systems and set of challenges, there is a multitude of difficult hiring scenarios with which libraries have become all too familiar. A search results in a small pool of candidates, few of which are qualified for the position; a candidate accepts another offer from an institution that was able to move more quickly and aggressively; a candidate decides to remain with his or her home institution; and after exhausting efforts to attract a talented professional, an academic library settles for a marginally qualified candidate with limited abilities. Diluted pools lead to frustrating searches and the loss of talented candidates, creating "a prescription for mediocrity if not incompetence."¹⁵ As noted, the hiring process involves substantial commitments of time and resources. These commitments are well worth the investment if a library can attract and hire top candidates. Therefore, academic libraries must adapt their hiring and recruitment strategies to meet a new marketplace that, like others in the new economy, "... is an industry in the midst of a metamorphosis. The ingredients for change are all there: high demand for talent vs. low supply; the development of technology that instantly connects people to opportunities that interest them; new technologies to manage the hiring process; and the opportunity for real savings in time and money."¹⁶

Evaluating and hiring candidates are learned skills. Experienced decision-makers are often accustomed to traditional search processes. Any change or significant disruption of these processes may lead to alienation from the process and a lack of confidence in making quality choices. Mistakes in hiring can be painful and costly for any institution, but the benefits of a more efficient and aggressive process outweigh the occasional mistake. In the context of collection development, James G. Neal states that, "Academic libraries have behaved fundamentally as anticipatory libraries..."¹⁷ However, in the context of hiring and retaining employees academic libraries generally behave reactively, with techniques such as matching offers, interim appointments to cover long search processes, and adjusting personnel after retirements and major change rather than before. The modern academic library needs to reverse its major roles, moving from anticipatory to responsive in collecting materials and resources while moving from responsive to anticipatory in handling change, hiring and retaining personnel, and developing strategic goals. Academic libraries are entrenched in traditional hiring models when "the tenets of traditional selection theory and practice remain rooted in an era of bureaucratic work organization, where stable, specialized jobs in large numbers were

prevalent and which largely supported assumptions key to the paradigm. Post-bureaucratic forms of work organization have shifted the ground under the feet of personnel psychologists, resulting in the dominant paradigm becoming increasingly maladaptive.”¹⁸

Let us look at a hypothetical example. Library A has a traditional academic library search and hiring process. The staff form a large search committee, construct an overly detailed job description and advertisement, publish the ad in print publications, painstakingly review applications, spend weeks dealing with scheduling conflicts, checking references, debating the merits of each candidate, and arranging interviews, and after months of searching make a selection and offer. Library B has an efficient risk-accepting hiring model characterized by small search committees. The staff use technology to overcome scheduling conflicts, offer flexible and concise job descriptions, employ Internet and word-of-mouth recruitment-based advertising, display an emphasis on professional development and organizational success to attract top candidates, move quickly through the review phases, make a swift selection, and provide a strong offer. While Library B’s model occasionally results in mistakes, it is able to target and hire top candidates in a large majority of cases. In contrast, Library A rarely makes a failed hiring decision, but it has positions remaining vacant for months, consistently fails to hire its top choice, and has trouble maintaining its overall talent level. Libraries A and B have each had seven open librarian positions in the past two years. At Library A, two positions remain open after nine months, four hires were not one of the top three candidates, and one position was filled by the top candidate. Library B has filled all seven positions, four by top candidates, two with the second choice, and one who was a mistake and will need to be replaced. In the modern environment, Library B is clearly better positioned for success.

Factors That Exacerbate the Problems

The factors that drive the shortage of talented academic librarians include an aging profession, competition from other markets, an educational emphasis on careers outside academic libraries, and outmoded hiring strategies. While salaries are an obvious and important issue, the notion that salaries are the only or even the main problem in recruiting and retaining academic librarians is misguided. Salaries are one of many issues in the complex structure of recruitment, hiring, and retention. General employment surveys consistently find that work environment, opportunities for growth and promotion, and positive feedback are more important than salaries in retaining employees.¹⁹

An aging profession makes hiring and recruiting top personnel more difficult. Academic librarians, along with the rest of the baby boom population, are approaching retirement in record numbers.²⁰ With fewer professionals choosing careers in academic librarianship, the prospects for replacing the large num-

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ber of expected academic retirees over the next decade are remote at best. Competition for qualified librarians from outside academic libraries places even more pressure on an already strained marketplace. While the dot com implosion will ease employer pressure over the next couple of years, the demand for information professionals from outside of academic libraries remains strong. Corporations with higher salaries, bonus plans, and stock options can lure potential candidates with information technology skills from the academic market. Corporations also have the flexibility and decision-making structures to quickly identify and hire candidates that meet their needs.

In a 1988 article, Phyllis Hudson argues, "In the broader arena of marketplace factors of supply and demand, the academic librarian market can be shown to be a distinct one, reacting to influences from both the library and the academic marketplace."²¹ However, this is no longer true as special and corporate libraries have broadened the distinct marketplace for academic librarians. Academic librarianship remains a distinct sub-field in the profession, but the lines have blurred as skills become more transferable and in demand from the information economy and society. The net effect is less of a market to draw from and increased competition for talented professionals. Corporate libraries, special libraries, and information-based companies move more quickly, make stronger offers, and are better positioned to attract and hire candidates. While the Association of Library and Information Science Education's most recent survey of library and information science graduate programs reveals that these programs are quite healthy and enrollments remain strong, the difference is that graduates are now pursuing a range of careers through increasingly diverse educational offerings.²² Programs such as the University of California-Berkeley's School of Information Management and Systems and the University of Michigan's School of Information are a further indication of educational systems supplying more diverse offerings outside of academic librarianship and more graduates for corporate information systems, special libraries, and knowledge management programs. A recent ARL Spec Kit reveals what every administrator and personnel officer in academic libraries already knows: applicant pools are decreasing. For example, entry-level positions that once brought over fifty applications now bring an average of just over twenty.²³

The final, and most important, factor that hinders the ability of individual academic libraries to hire talented professionals is the use of traditional hiring strategies that are too slow, outmoded, and noncompetitive in the current market. Hiring strategies and methodologies developed over the past forty years in academic libraries are still deeply entrenched in the culture of academia. These include: 1) the search committee; 2) development and approval of the job description; 3) advertising the position; 4) responding to and gathering initial applications; 5) analyzing cover letters and resumes; 6) checking references; 7) telephone interviews; 8) on-campus interviews; 9) selecting a final candidate and making an offer; and 10) negotiating and settling with the final candidate.²⁴ These basic components form the foundation for a deliberative, participatory approach to filling professional positions. While these deeply ingrained systems have a number of merits, they simply take too long and do not allow libraries to compete effectively for top professionals. A search committee assignment should be to market the library assertively, to recruit effective candidates, and to drive the hiring process to find the best talent. Instead, Ruth Person's and George Newman's 1990 research con-

cludes that, “In fact, in spite of the overall success of the recruitment effort in terms of the quality of final candidates, a number of interviewees cited the lack of assertiveness on the part of the committee as the single biggest weakness in the search process.”²⁵ Recent data from a September 2000 ARL study indicate:

Libraries spend a considerable amount of time on the hiring process. The average length of time for the hiring process is 41 days from the time the first candidate is interviewed to the time that the successful candidate is contacted. The average number of days between the interview with the first candidate and the last is 26 days. There is an average of 16 days after the interview with the last candidate before the successful candidate is contacted. In an extreme case, one library reported 281 days between interviewing the first candidate and notifying the unsuccessful candidates.²⁶

It is important to note that all of these times are after the start of the first interview. The ACRL “Model Statement for the Screening and Appointment of Academic Librarians Using a Search Committee,” highlights a number of positive aspects of using the traditional system, including promoting consultative decision making, soliciting a breadth and range of opinions, promoting objective decision making, promoting participation among different constituencies, and allowing candidates to see a range of prospective colleagues and obtain a range of perspectives.²⁷ It also highlights the amount of bureaucracy, procedural impediment, and general lack of expediency in the traditional search process. The proposal here is to develop a combined approach that taps into the best elements of the traditional hiring process while adopting a more modern, assertive, and competitive model. By adapting and updating hiring procedures, using creative solutions from the personnel management literature, and learning from other organizations, academic libraries can develop a balanced approach that moves from a traditional risk-averse hiring model to a more aggressive risk-accepting model (see table one for a comparison of the two hiring models).

Table 1

Traditional Risk-Averse Model	Innovative Risk-Accepting Model
1. Large search committees	1. Small empowered search committees
2. A deliberate process	2. An efficient process
3. Bureaucratic impediments	3. Administrative support for moving quickly and aggressively
4. Expecting large quantities of candidates	4. Attracting and recruiting top candidates
5. Expecting top candidates to wait for deliberate processes	5. Moving quickly to identify, interview, and hire top candidates

Table 1 cont.

Traditional Risk-Averse Model	Innovative Risk-Accepting Model
6. Excessive requirements and restrictions	6. Flexible requirements
7. Hiring for existing skills and experience	7. Hiring for traits and potential as well as skills and experience
8. Reactive	8. Anticipatory
9. Expecting loyalty and retention	9. Creating employability and promoting professional development training

Solutions

Incorporating increased aggressiveness and flexibility into hiring models is an essential first step towards improvement. Macro-level solutions, such as recruiting more potential academic librarians into and out of graduate school, raising salaries across the profession, and developing more minority librarians have been discussed at length in other areas of the literature and initiatives are ongoing. The focus here is on what individual academic libraries can do to compete effectively and to hire top professionals. Some solutions are internally driven while others come from outside the academic library community. The idea is not to hire a less capable librarian faster, but to initiate efforts to expedite the process leading to the identification and hiring of top candidates, thereby increasing the overall talent level and production of the entire organization. The business, management, and personnel literature offer promising alternatives to the traditional hiring processes that are worth examining. There is a clear body of examples and research from private industry that academic libraries have not yet employed to improve the process of hiring professionals. In the current marketplace for librarians, lack of efficiency has gone beyond costing valuable resources to resulting in a loss of talent for individual libraries and the profession as a whole.

Expediting the Search Committee

Internally driven solutions must begin with the core of the academic hiring system, the search committee. The simple logistics of bringing search committees together must be improved. Reducing the size of committees to limit scheduling conflicts, minimizing artificial delays in the process, and using technology to communicate with potential candidates and within the organization are the best places to begin. It is important to give the affected constituencies a say in the process, but excessive inclusiveness leads to delays and must be eliminated. Simple techniques such as using full committee in-person meetings sparingly, working independently to review and rank resumes, skipping formal written references in favor of quick telephone and e-mail correspondence, and reviewing applications as they arrive rather than waiting for an arbitrary deadline

date are all effective steps and are easily implemented. Moving more quickly through the review phases is essential. The need for expediency is primarily important during the resume review, reference checking, and interviewing stage as candidates begin to hear from other institutions and develop their own list of possibilities.

Developing Flexibility

Flexibility is equally as important as efficiency in developing a competitive risk-accepting hiring model. Developing organizational flexibility in the hiring process begins with making job requirements more flexible. Increasing flexibility does not indicate lowering standards or diluting the quality of the candidate pool. However, academic libraries have a tendency to set artificially high or unrealistic requirements that are counterproductive in developing a candidate pool. Academic library job requirements, whether required or preferred, end up as a potpourri of Olympic-size standards thrown in by an administrator or search committee trying to meet everyone's needs and please every constituency. Personnel psychology literature and practice have already recognized that, "The result of unrealistic specifications is that the universe of candidates becomes very small."²⁸ Nothing will shrink a pool of candidates more than a laundry list of requirements followed by a low or unadvertised salary range.

Flexibility is equally as important as efficiency in developing a competitive risk-accepting hiring model.

Universities conforming to equal opportunity guidelines should write flexible required qualifications and move arbitrarily restrictive qualifications to the preferred section. This flexibility will allow less experienced, but talented and fully capable candidates to become part of the applicant pool. As Claudio Fernandez-Araoz describes, "A second strategy for generating candidates involves adopting a 'boundary-less mindset.' An open, creative attitude is, frankly, exceedingly rare among executives in the midst of the hiring process. The whole thing feels so difficult and risky to begin with, their gut tells them it is better to stick close to the rules."²⁹ Rather than focusing on what an individual has done and already knows in an era of rapid technological and organizational change, it is more important to find individuals with desired traits: capacity to learn, ability to adapt to change, and willingness to innovate. Traits open up candidate pools and speak more to the long-term success of a candidate than skills. Would an academic library rather have a cataloguer who is experienced with MARC but unwilling to learn new metadata formats or someone with limited experience who will expand their knowledge of MARC along with a variety of metadata standards? While the answer partially depends on the individual library's needs, an environment of constant change requires hiring the learner rather than the learned.

Highly successful service organizations such as Southwest Airlines and Enterprise Car Rental have implemented systems that hire for traits essential to organizational success over limited sets of skills.³⁰ These companies hire for attitudes, values, cultural fit, and ability to adapt to change, rather than skills that candidates can learn. While

experience is certainly not something academic libraries should ignore, it is not a reliable indicator of future success. Furthermore, it provides no indication of an individual's ability to adapt, to thrive, and to make substantial contributions in a new organization. "Previous experience, once the 'sacred cow' of successful hiring, can be meaningless in an era when organizational forms are continually being invented and reinvented and job responsibilities sometimes change overnight."³¹ Identifying potential and assessing traits are more difficult than analyzing specific skills and verifying experience, but these are necessary steps in a tight labor market. Such an approach does not eliminate the need for specific criteria. Criteria remain an essential piece of the hiring model; they are just more broadly defined and more compatible with the reality of a changing environment. As personnel theorist Robert Guion advises, "Of many possible criterion constructs, give special thought to trainability and adaptability, constructs of response to change. Speed of learning to perform a new set of job tasks is an important construct and becoming [sic] more important, especially where people must frequently adapt to changed technology or assignments. Change happens, in organizations and in their environments; adaptability to change should be a more common criterion construct."³² By developing a mix of desired traits and skills, academic libraries can hire professionals who will grow to meet changing needs while supporting new strategic directions.

Creating an efficient risk-accepting hiring model requires administrators to encourage calculated risk-taking and creativity from search committees and managers. By avoiding some of the steps and pitfalls of the traditional hiring process, managers can look for people who do not necessarily fit the traditional mold of the organization.³³ Identifying and hiring exceptional candidates that break organizational constructs takes courage and foresight, but pays dividends by advancing the organization. As Billy Wilkinson argues, "After all, it requires courage to hire those who are more talented than ourselves, even though doing so is the hope of the future. Each new appointment should be made only after this question has been answered in the affirmative: Will this individual add strength to the staff and increase the overall caliber and effectiveness of the staff?"³⁴

Advertising Effectively

Another component of an effective hiring model is breaking away from traditional advertising methods and conventional ad formats. Print magazine and journal job advertisements are a good way to reach a breadth of the profession, but they are ineffective vehicles in a competitive market. Space, budget, and time limitations are making traditional journal print ads obsolete. Instead, libraries can distribute full-scale ads that sell the job, institution, library, and community to prospective candidates via listservs, Web pages, targeted e-mail, and word-of-mouth recruitment. Technology allows institutions to overcome time, space, and budget limitations to sell the best of what it has to offer candidates. Whether these strengths include geography, special professional development opportunities, salary and relocation allowances, the quality of the academy, or a dynamic organizational culture, a library can quickly and easily convey them through non-traditional advertising. While some academic libraries make extraordinary use of electronic tools for recruitment and dissemination, there has not been a substantial shift

that recognizes, "The Internet is causing a fundamental revolution in the hiring process, for both the corporation and the job seeker."³⁵ A combination of Web advertising, e-mail, and word-of-mouth can be just as effective (or more so) as newspaper or journal advertisements, without the added delay and expense of publishing in conventional venues. The virtual lack of cost, unlimited opportunity to include positive information about the organization and area, quick dissemination of advertisements, and the management efficiency associated with electronic recruitment make it an invaluable tool. The health care industry, experiencing one of the worst labor shortages in the world, is an example of a profession that was originally slow to utilize the Internet as a hiring tool, but that is now using it as a key element in reinventing its hiring and recruitment process.³⁶

Training, Organizational Development, and Employability

Heavy investments in training and professional development are hallmarks of dynamic organizations that libraries have yet to fully embrace. Corporate training models illustrate how substantial investments can lead to growing returns in overall performance, production, and reputation. The average company trains 78 percent of its employees while top corporations train over 98 percent.³⁷ Some estimates state that training and development should comprise at least 4 percent of any organization's budget.³⁸ Through training, continuous learning becomes a key element of the overall effort to create a high achieving organization. Top organizations hire and keep talented professionals because they are usually better funded, provide more opportunities for growth and achievement, and create a dynamic and challenging environment. "Any library that makes the decision to provide and promote continuing technology education will reap the rewards of better hires, increased retention of qualified staff, and improved customer service."³⁹ Help make your professionals famous, and hiring problems will dissipate as quality steadily increases and recruitment becomes easier.

Training and opportunity are major elements of a developing concept in the corporate arena, employability. Employability refers to the process by which organizations provide tools and opportunities for professional growth while allowing employees to manage their own careers. The optimal result is a "career-resilient workforce" that is dedicated to growth, keeps pace with change, takes responsibility for their own careers, and is committed to the organization's success.⁴⁰ A career-resilient workforce is created through training, provision of opportunity, strong support for professional development, career management support, and allowing all employees to share in the strategic vision and development of the organization.⁴¹

Nurturing career-resilient employees leads to increased productivity and to a more attractive organization that is able to continually draw talented professionals from other institutions. In an era where lifetime employment in a single organization and complete loyalty from employees are dying notions, the alternative is a situation in which talented employees are lost to better organizations and only the middle of the pack remain. The best way to counter this reality is through employability and a strong reputation that fosters successful recruitment.

Targeted Recruiting

While creating a culture that attracts top candidates and moves to identify and to hire them as efficiently as possible is of primary importance, a supporting factor in improving academic library hiring methods and increasing talent within a library is recruitment. Some academic libraries are successfully employing one established technique from the corporate world to attract and recruit talent: internships. Internships and residency programs attract talented graduates and give the hosting library an opportunity to develop and to retain exceptional librarians through permanent positions. Programs at North Carolina State University and Cornell University serve as models for libraries to identify, to attract, to develop, and to retain talented librarians.⁴² In addition to internships and residency programs, academic libraries increasingly are employing another tactic from the corporate world: identifying and aggressively developing home-grown talent. Providing staff with professional opportunities and instituting programs such as tuition assistance and formal mentoring have short-term costs, but the long term potential for gain is substantial. Identifying talented staff and encouraging careers in academic librarianship are cost-effective ways of recruiting top quality professionals.

Recruiting efforts, of course, do not need to be entirely internally focused. While top academic libraries generally are able to attract talented professionals, they are also willing and able to selectively recruit from other institutions. The best candidates are often happy with their current positions and must be enticed to pursue other opportunities. A willingness to seek out and to convince top candidates to pursue positions is essential in developing top quality candidate pools. Academic libraries already recruit and cultivate candidate pools for high-level administrative positions. Why not expand that effort and initiative throughout the organization? Recruiting allows libraries to identify desirable candidates who may not have otherwise sought the position, and who may prove to be more qualified than active seekers.

Conclusion

The essential transition in improving hiring and recruitment practices in academic libraries involves moving from a passive, slow, risk-averse system to an aggressive, efficient, risk-accepting model that attracts top professionals. Academic libraries cannot wait for candidates to come to them, nor can they expect candidates to wait for them to deliberately move through traditional hiring processes. Attracting and recruiting talented professional candidates and moving efficiently to interview and to hire them will give academic libraries a competitive advantage in the current market. Investing in changing hiring models to attract talent is a key element of organizational success and vitality. The return on investment in new hiring models comes from more efficient use of resources to increase the talent level throughout the organization, which in turn makes it easier to attract and to recruit other talented professionals. Internally-driven solutions such as modifying the search committee process, eliminating bureaucratic impediments to efficiency, and moving more quickly through the interview and negotiation phases require some cultural change, but can be reasonably implemented. Externally-driven solutions such as fully embracing technology in the hiring process, in-

creasing job requirement and search process flexibility, looking for traits and cultural fit over specific skills and experience, increasing professional development training, instituting the concept of employability, and creating an organization that attracts top candidates are more difficult to institute, but have great promise for reducing hiring problems. To remain competitive in the overall academic library marketplace and to be vital contributors within our respective institutions and our profession, academic libraries must embrace solutions that work today, and must build for the future with new hiring and recruitment models.

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Notes

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