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Citation Information

Tolley, Rebecca; and Doucette, Wendy. 2020. Actions Speak Louder Than Resumes: How Performance-Based Interviews Facilitate Hiring the Best Library Candidates. *Tennessee Libraries*. Vol.70(3). https://www.tnla.org/page/70_3_Tolley_Doucette ISSN: 1935-7052

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Actions speak louder than resumes: How performance-based interviews facilitate hiring the best library candidates

by Rebecca L. Tolley and Wendy C. Doucette

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Abstract

This case study describes an academic library search committee's decision-making, practice, and assessment of using performance-based interviews as part of a national search for lecturer-level positions with a primary focus of reference and research services and minimal expectations of teaching information literacy in the classroom. The search committee determined performance-based interviews were successful in establishing candidates' depth of skill in simulated reference transactions. The authors recommend incorporating an element of unscripted job simulation to employment interviews in libraries of all types.

Keywords: employment interviewing, employee selection, professional competence, performance-based assessment and hiring, reference interview

During the spring semester of 2019, Rebecca Tolley, a tenured professor in the University Libraries was appointed the chair of a search committee for two non-tenure track lecturer positions at East Tennessee State University's Charles C. Sherrod Library. Dr. Wendy Doucette, a tenure-track assistant professor in the University Libraries, was appointed to the search committee as the other library faculty member. East Tennessee State University's 2018-2019 enrollment is 14,317 students. The university is located in northeast Tennessee in Johnson City. As of July 2020, the library currently has a mix of 20 staff and 12 faculty.

The search committee included another public services library faculty member, Wendy Doucette, and three staff members: one from the university's College of Medicine library and two from public services at the Sherrod Library, who would work closely with the positions upon their hire. A fall 2018 search for the positions was declared failed by the interim director of public services, and the search committee was uncomfortable with the presentation topic previously used by that committee, that of asking candidates to present a hypothetical information literacy session. The search committee decided that instruction-based "job talk," the norm for this type of position at Sherrod Library, had caused unnecessary confusion and provided us with little information to rate candidates' unscripted performance. In addition, an instructional literacy session risked misleading candidates regarding the expectations of the positions, which were primarily reference, not instruction.

After convening to meet and discuss the committee's charge, process, and division of labor, the committee arrived at the consensus that asking candidates to present an information literacy-based session to the committee was illogical, as the position was reference and research service-orientated. Therefore, the search committee determined that candidates invited for the campus interview would not demonstrate their teaching skills to the search committee. The search committee wanted candidates to demonstrate their skills in at least two and no more than four rounds of live reference questions. The candidates' performance in this area would greatly inform the search committee's decision-making process and help select the most qualified candidates for the position. Having no model for this practice, Wendy Doucette and Rebecca Tolley were asked by the search committee to develop questions and lead the critiques of the performance interview that included a live reference interview between the candidate and the search committee. In addition to the usual interview format in which the committee asked the candidate traditional questions, the day-long interview process now included a group discussion within the committee with each candidate concerning the reference interview performance, giving candidates an opportunity for self-reflection in terms of what they did well, what they did not do well, and what they did not do at all.

Literature Review

Much of the library literature on the topic of employment interviewing is easily divided by audience and features anecdotes, best practices, and tips. The two main audiences addressed in literature are librarians seeking employment and libraries seeking librarians. Authors of articles for librarians seeking employment tend to provide tips for leading with your strengths, either as a librarian or as an organization, and often offer advice such as what to wear or what not to say. Articles for libraries seeking to hire librarians generally cover technical issues like library practices and hiring processes, often focusing on soft skills and emotional intelligence during employment interviews, and suggesting potential directives for questions, answers, and behaviors.

Behavioral interviewing asks candidates to provide specific examples of relevant skills in response to open-ended questions such as "Tell us about a time when you... [were faced with a specific problem]". Also known as an evidence-based interview, the candidate must understand the question, select a relevant example from their past, and

present an appropriate scenario. “Answers to behavioral interview questions should provide verifiable, concrete evidence as to how a candidate has dealt with issues in the past” (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016, p. 3-4). Viewed as a standard practice by Human Resource professionals (Chapman, 2018), this method helps to establish a candidate’s level of preparation, familiarity with their own history, and ability to think on their feet. The conversational element helps to assess a candidate’s soft skills (Callahan, 2019), and gain a sense of whether the individual might be a good institutional fit (Gaspar & Brown, 2015).

No matter how well candidates respond, the inherent danger of all interview questions is that they focus exclusively on past actions often verifiable only by the candidate. Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina (2014) analyze the phenomenon of “impression management,” noting that “applicants may honestly describe their competencies and experiences, but also distort their responses in job-desirable ways to resemble the profile of the ideal applicant an organization is looking for” (p. 142).

Rather than passively accept candidate responses to behavioral questions, Corlett (2019) recommends asking follow-up questions such as “How did you do that? With whom? What was the outcome? What did you measure?” While these interventions may provide further clarification, Corlett (2019) acknowledges, “the best predictor of whether someone can do the work is having them do work.” Brittain (2012) concurs:

all interviews are essentially backward looking. They can show you an individual's past potential and whether this has been realized, but to find out how much more potential the individual has left, you need to use aptitude tests, measures of learning agility and business simulations that really stretch candidates. (p. 33).

Although most academic libraries require some element of performance (“the job talk”) or roundtable discussion (Cosby, 2017; Johnson, 2014), library literature and research on performance-based interviewing is notably sparse and may indicate that is not a popular practice by search committees when interviewing candidates.

Despite little treatment from library researchers, the practice of demonstrating skill during the interview is the standard in other professions. In computing, software engineers are asked to write code on a dry erase board to demonstrate their skills to the search committee during their interview. The search committee reviews their coding for mistakes, or to analyze the architecture and any quirks of thinking the coder may reveal in this process (B. Armistead, personal communication, January 19, 2016). Nursing, a profession closer to reference librarianship because of the primacy of the client interview, includes a “simulation scenario” (p. 45) in evidence-based interviews (Strout, Nevers, J., Bachard, D., & Varney, S. p., 2016).

As a profession, librarianship is intensely concerned with competencies and assessment. There are well defined standards in the profession through the American Library Association (ALA) and subdivisions such as the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) and the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), but little discussion of assessing these competencies in formal job interviews. Dodd (2019) and Huff-Eibl, Voyles, & Brewer (2011) are notable exceptions.

The ALA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers (ALA, 2013) and the ALA RUSA Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians (ALA 2017) provide concrete benchmarks to gauge the responsiveness, adaptability, and performance of candidates in real-time performance of reference duties. The Guidelines for Behavioral Performance (ALA 2013) address “visibility/approachability, interest, listening/inquiring, searching, and follow-up,” with sequential steps included for each task. The Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians (ALA 2017) define competencies as “Behaviors that excellent performers exhibit consistently and effectively. A behavioral basis is necessary because effective assessment of competencies depends on observed behavior [emphasis added]” (p. 3).

While still on the spot, face-to-face candidates in performance-based reference interviews do not encounter the challenges of virtual reference conducted online, or via email, chat, phone, or text. With attention concentrated on one (fictitious) patron only and no other distractions or patrons waiting, candidates should be able to demonstrate their expertise as information professionals. For performance-based reference interviews, the *Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians* (ALA 2017), competencies 5a-5c are most relevant:

5A. Accesses relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information (Offers services responsive to individual expressed user needs); 5B. Evaluates, collects, retrieves, and synthesizes information from diverse sources (Identifies and presents highly recommended sources); 5C. Interacts with colleagues and others to provide consultation, mediation, and guidance in the use of knowledge and information (Collaborates and partners with the user in the information seeking process) (p. 3-4).

One important consideration in striving for fairness in employment interviews is managing the perceptions of interviewers. Vogel (2013) urges search committee members “talk to the other members of the search committee about what they are looking for in a successful candidate and how they are approaching their own evaluation” (p. 29). Honest interactions among the diverse members of a search committee help to allay the opinion of any one member becoming dominant. Focusing on examples provided by candidates during the performance interview requires committee members to ground their reasoning within the context of the performance given. This can lead to a more objective assessment of candidate competency and increased consensus.

Background

In summer 2018, Rebecca Tolley chaired a search committee comprised of another reference and instruction library faculty and a university staff member with experience serving on the local public library’s board of directors. Two other library staff resigned from the committee quickly, citing overwork as the reason. Ostensibly, the goal was hiring two people to staff service desks to free up tenure-track faculty librarians for classroom instruction and collaboration with discipline-specific faculty. Eventually, the goal was shifted so that these positions provided reference help from a librarian during

evening and weekend hours, which did not free up tenure-track librarians for classroom instruction and collaboration with discipline-specific faculty. It bound everyone to a research consultation desk where seven librarians and two staff answered more complex reference questions that the AskUs desk could not (our service model parameters generally has AskUs staff handle Reference Effort Assessment Data (READ) scale questions one-three and refer four-six to librarians). Further, these positions would replace two faculty librarians who retired in the previous two years. At least fifty people applied for these two positions. Via the Human Resources department, the hiring process at our institution gives the search committee access to candidates who uploaded the job application, resume, cover letter, and transcripts. After rating the pool of candidates, the search committee submits names to Human Resources so that they may be validated before we can interview via phone or online. After a phone interview, the committee checks references and determines which candidates will be invited to a full-day interview on campus.

Candidates were required to present a faux instruction literacy session as part of their campus interview. Rather than have the candidates present a vague, generic session, Rebecca emailed candidates the syllabus for BGSD 4950, "Torture and the Culture of Pain" and asked them to prepare and present an information literacy session for a fourth-year audience. The Bachelor of General Studies degree offers special topics in interdisciplinary studies courses each semester, and the program is designed for mature students 21 and older. Johnson writes that while some candidates are given "a clear focus" with their instructional sessions, others receive "topical presentations [that] are too often vague" (Johnson, 2). This latter experience is what Rebecca wanted to prevent by providing a syllabus around which candidates should structure presentations. Rebecca set up guest access to Sherrod Library's databases so that candidates could familiarize themselves with the resources available to ETSU students, have time to practice their search strategies, and incorporate those within a slideshow.

This search failed, in part because of poor communication. The position description was re-written and changed mid-search, due to questions posed by applicants during telephone interviews that the search committee was not authorized to answer. The committee and the interim director of research and instructional services were split in their decision about candidates, therefore, the search committee chair and the interim director declared the search failed and begin anew shortly.

Between the failed search and the revised search, the Dean of Libraries retired, and a new Dean was hired. The interim director of research and instructional services established in 2016 designed and approved the new job description with a few changes. The librarians hired to this position would focus on staffing reference and research services during weekend and evenings, with some eventual opportunity for library instruction, as well as participatory role in planning and assessment. The new Dean's objective for these positions was offering entry-level opportunities to recent MLIS graduates who wanted to work in an academic library, but who did not want tenure-track obligations.

Planning

The search committee was appointed by the interim director of research and instructional services. We used the job description as the basis of our operations. Most of us had recent past experience on search committees and we quickly divided the committee's labor into several parts that worked well with our individual workflows. Early in our discussions regarding the role of the positions and their job responsibilities, we all agreed that the typical information literacy session was unsuitable for determining the best candidates. Our experience with the failed search improved our decision-making. We considered it unreasonable to ask a candidate to give an instruction session as though it were the major job determinant when it would only be a minor part of their job duties. We decided that having the candidates respond to live reference questions was more appropriate. But devising the best way to do that took some planning and forethought.

All search committee members reviewed the pool of candidates and we used a rubric to individually rank nine applicants with whom we wished to schedule initial interviews. After Rebecca scheduled online video interviews with these initial candidates, we met with them. We developed three to five questions to ask each candidate and left time so that they could ask questions of the search committee. The three most pertinent ones were: 1. Describe your interactions with international students or patrons for whom English is not their first language?; 2. What type of physical environment suits you best? ; and 3. How do you personally evaluate the success of your reference interview?

Afterward, the committee talked about their strengths and weaknesses on paper and during the online interviews. The search committee invited four to campus for a traditional academic job interview.

The search committee asked Wendy and Rebecca to prepare questions for the reference performance interview because they were most familiar with the reference interview and academic research processes. In emails that Rebecca sent to candidates, she described how the interview differed from the typical experience. For the first part of the presentation, the search committee requested a slide presentation lasting 10-15 minutes. We informed candidates that we were departing from the typical information literacy model of presentation for another model more focused on assessing candidates' research, reference, and referral capabilities. Each candidate received two questions in advance of the interview, one from a theoretical graduate student and one from a theoretical undergraduate student. The first question was from an undergraduate student whose topic was 3D printing of weapons and the second question was from a graduate student whose topic was the opioid crisis in Appalachia. During the on-campus interviews, Rebecca role-played as the undergraduate student and the candidate conducted the reference interview with her. Wendy role-played as the graduate student and the candidate conducted the reference interview with her. We prepared up to four additional questions for each level of student that we expected persons working in these jobs to be skilled in answering.

A few days prior to the on-campus interview, Rebecca sent usernames and passwords so that candidates could access our university resources, if needed, for the

presentation. In theory, candidates' access to our databases would mitigate their unfamiliarity with our integrated library system (ILS), which is Alma and Primo, and vendor platforms. In their presentations, candidates were instructed to walk the committee (and other librarians and staff invited to the presentation) through the reference interview and their thought process in serving the students' query. For the second part of the presentation, candidates would receive up to six additional questions (one from a graduate student and one from an undergraduate) spontaneously so that everyone could gauge their thought process and assess candidates' skills. A total of forty-five minutes was allotted for the candidates' presentation and the additional questions.

When Rebecca, the chair of the search committee, verbally shared the committees' plan and process for conducting the interviews, the Dean of Libraries objected to the search committee's proposal. The Dean verbally expressed that asking candidates questions during the presentation part of the interview that all library faculty and staff were invited to would put candidates on the spot, and recommended eliminating that requirement. Rebecca countered that the interview process was designed to challenge candidates for the duration of their campus visit. Given that reference questions happen without planning, the search committee maintained the need to assess candidates' performance of impromptu reference questions. The Dean agreed to a modification: candidates would present their known questions (canned searches) for 3D printing of weapons and the opioid crisis in Appalachia to the public session, open to all library staff. Questions from the internal prepared list would be asked in a follow-up session open only to search committee members. The committee met and agreed to this change.

Practice

Visiting candidates met the minimum requirements for the position, and the search committee was eager to meet with them and host them at our library. They ranged from a recent MLIS graduate with little reference experience to librarians who had worked professionally post-MLIS. All candidates knew their presentation requirements, the given topics, and were advised about answering live questions during the interview process. Rebecca emailed each candidate details about the questions, giving them the same number of days' advance notice. Answering unplanned questions was known as a precondition of the interview. The agenda included a public presentation, a pastry "meet and greet" open to all, lunch with the search committee, a 15-minute break, a meeting with the Dean of Libraries, and a closed reference presentation. The public sessions began with candidates talking through their slides which addressed their search strategies for the two assigned topics: Opioid abuse in Appalachia and 3D printing of weapons. Upon concluding their slide presentation, the candidates were questioned by staff and faculty attending the presentation. The committee had prepared three undergraduate questions and three graduate questions for the private reference session with the search committee, but it became apparent during the first interview that each question would take approximately fifteen minutes to answer. Rather than vary the questions, the search committee decided to ask all candidates the same questions in order to more fairly compare their responses afterward. Working with a thirty-minute

time slot, we chose two questions. In these private reference sessions, candidates were asked to demonstrate helping an undergraduate student working on smoking cessation programs and a graduate student working on burnout in nurses. As in the public sessions, the authors played the role of the undergraduate and graduate student with the specified research need.

Presentation Slides: As the public session would be a demonstration on a known topic, slides were required to provide the audience a sense of the candidates' oral and written presentation skills as well as their philosophy of reference and librarianship. Two of the librarians began their slides with conversation pieces about themselves, which were crowd-pleasers. All candidates met this requirement.

Three out of four candidates cleverly created fictitious student avatars, which they used to demonstrate the path of their constructed reference scenarios. This provided context for the audience as candidates assisted the hypothetical student. The use of avatars demonstrated candidates' emotional intelligence and their practical knowledge gained from working with student populations and exemplified how understanding student information needs within their response is based upon the context of their assignment. The creation of avatars was not obligatory, but the search committee recognized how this aspect of candidate presentations signified holistic understanding of reference and research theory and practice. Further, this assisted in providing context for the audience of librarians and staff lacking experience with reference and research.

The more successful candidates employed reality-based scenarios constructed from their past research interview experiences and allowed for student knowledge and ability levels, including accessibility. They also incorporated clear screenshots from the library catalog and databases within their presentation.

Social Skills: Candidates distinguished themselves immediately by paraphrasing the question, then asking questions of their own to better understand and narrow the topic. They were more likely to compliment the question as interesting and shared their own thoughts about the topic. One candidate, for example, reflected that replica weapons could be used for history or archaeology rather than being viewed primarily as a potential security threat. They worked to engage the student from the beginning by demonstrating enthusiasm while maintaining a calm professionalism.

Library faculty pretending to be students were not allowed to offer information without being asked but roughly half of the candidates had the wherewithal to seek more details. When pressed, for instance, about the reason for pursuing "burnout in nurses," the student confessed that she was in nursing administration. This enabled the candidate to quickly shift focus to administrative rather than practitioner journals.

The more successful candidates continued to ask open-ended questions throughout the interview, referred to professors, asked about class rules or paper restrictions, due dates and timelines, and the importance of verifying details with the course instructor. Simpatico with basics of the RUSA guidelines for behavioral performance of reference and information service providers, they asked questions such as:

- "Have you ever used the library before?"

- “Where have you looked so far?” (One candidate impressed the committee by adding, “And how successful have you been?”)
- “What do you mean by...?”
- “What do you think?”
- “Is that something you’d like to explore in more detail?”
- “Are you able to use any types of sources?”
- “Is this for a class or your thesis?”
- “Which department are you in?”

More successful candidates negotiated the information need, asked for clarification before looking, searched for results, and then confirmed patron’s needs. They also took notes and wrote down what students said.

Less successful candidates seized upon an idea and pursued it without checking in with the requestor. The least experienced candidates asked no questions at all during the entire 15 minutes of the graduate public reference scenario.

Reference Knowledge: All of the candidates clearly possessed a base amount of reference knowledge. The search committee found it extremely interesting to compare the candidates’ resource suggestions. While all had been given prior guest access to the library databases, some had obviously spent more time becoming familiar with them than others.

The committee was looking for thoughtful, focused searches appropriate to the user’s level and the time allotted. We expected language used with students would be straightforward. Overall, as previously stated, the candidates followed the basics of (RUSA) guidelines well: most explained what keywords were; showed how to truncate a search; that most relevant results display first; and explained peer review. Two candidates discussed how to use citation software and export citations. One went to the federal Health and Human Services website to show data types and policy, maps, demographic data, and grant information on opioids. The committee regarded the ability to match information to a factual level as highly desirable. While some of the searches were beyond what a student might need, we understood that this was a full performance, and made allowances for surplus or tangential information, within reason.

All candidates began with multidisciplinary databases for the 3D printed weapons undergraduate search, with three out of four candidates then selecting Gale’s “Opposing Viewpoints in Context.” The fourth remained within the multidisciplinary database and began reading (versus searching for) articles. They selected the first choice, which was unsuitable and finally gave the student an article from 1992.

A candidate who had done extremely well in the public reference session became flustered after several poor choices, including becoming trapped at a dead end in BrowZine during the closed session on burnout in nurses. The loss of confidence was apparent: “I don’t usually use OneSearch. It’s a little overwhelming” and “I’m not very familiar with nursing.” In this instance, the statement about not usually using OneSearch indicated that the candidate did not spend enough time in our ILS preparing for the interview and suggested that their planning skills needed strengthening. Nonetheless, the candidate did know when to refer out to a specialist

librarian, explained Interlibrary Loan and Open Educational Resources, and understood database fundamentals. Performance-based interviewing, in this example, allowed the search committee to assess the candidates' thinking, workflow, problem solving, and ultimately the strength of their skills.

The least experienced candidate fared worst overall, and was nearly unable to function during the unscripted search without leading directions from the librarian playing the role of the student. After using no filters, the candidate was trapped in a poorly selected database. When the student politely rejected an article from 2001, the candidate moved to Google (not Google Scholar), ignoring the student's recommendation that the professor would accept only sites ending in .edu or .gov. These actions could be from nerves, but the failure of the candidate listening to user input is telling. The performance-based interviewing illuminated the candidate's inadequate listening skills. The graduate reference example was weak as well and demonstrated the candidate's poor questioning skills, no use of filters or limits. This candidate was mired in subject headings, exported citations individually, and ran over the time limitations specified for the exercise. Performance-based interviewing raised red flags to the committee and suggested that this candidate may require many hours of in-house training and close supervision.

Teaching Ability: As academic librarians, even when we engage in one-on-one reference, we are still giving instruction and role modeling research behavior. The committee was particularly receptive to candidates' teaching students while they assisted them with searching. The most successful candidates addressed basics like filtering, Boolean searching, thesauri, citation tracking, and the Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose test, then explained how to apply these, and why one would want to do so, which aligns with ACRL framework for information literacy in higher education. When discussing peer review (the first ACRL frame, authority is constructed and contextual), they explained authority and bias, noting the possibility of biases in databases and in the research question. They highlighted the need for cultural awareness (the first ACRL frame, authority is constructed and contextual) throughout the search process and the interview. Discussion of Appalachia's opioid crisis required cultural awareness and sensitivity of candidates. One candidate mentioned the cultural norms and attitudes of the region that may affect information seeking behavior. Another candidate spoke of the racial disparities in data collection, analysis, and dissemination while demonstrating their facility with external data sources. One candidate mentioned using American Sign Language (ASL) as well as their many years' experience of communicating with people with intellectual disabilities.

They made statements such as:

- "Do you know what a longitudinal study is?"
- "This is why we read the abstract."
- "Here's when to put quotes around something."

One candidate used the relatable analogy, "It's like driving a car...". The same candidate, when given additional information, went back and started the search again with different terms, saying "sometimes, we need to do this." This type of behavior

shows students that there is no one way to do something, and that changing course when necessary is a fundamental part of the process rather than a failed search. This candidate later stated, "This doesn't work for everyone but it's a suggestion," again reinforcing the message that there are multiple possible paths instead of one "correct" search.

One candidate provided the audience with a printed handout, a reference cheat sheet for students to fill in. The candidate explained that they did this when meeting with students to engage students in note-taking and collaboration within the reference interview. Spaces indicated where the student noted names of databases searched or mentioned, specific terms to use or avoid, and room for general note-taking. After leaving the meeting with the librarian, students have tangible documentation to guide them when they replicate the search for information on their own. The candidates' practice impressed the search committee and indicated a level of planning and forethought that other candidates did not display in this manner. This is another example of how the performance-based interview unearthed valuable positive information about a candidate's skills, planning, workflow, and how their presence on the reference and instruction services team would benefit our students.

Time Management: The reference scenarios provided to our candidates were designed to mimic the actual setup at our library, where drop-in reference appointments are limited to 15 minutes. Students with longer or more complicated problems are referred to hour-long appointments with a librarian. The ability to switch topics on the fly and move from student to student is essential for drop-in reference. Good time management is especially critical to keep appointments targeted and flowing.

All our candidates managed some type of conclusion to the reference interview, even if it was a clumsy stop, because they had run out of time. One search committee member acted as timekeeper who announced when the time ended for the question. Several candidates volunteered to get back to the student if they discovered more pertinent sources, which is appropriate. The performance-based interview revealed that some candidates were stymied by the first experience and seemed incapable of time management in the second experience. It also revealed varying degrees of presence when the candidate did or did not focus on the patron's research need. The search committee was disappointed as we witnessed the divide between theory and practice in one candidate. In three out of four scenarios, the candidate asked many questions and provided much context so that they consistently ran out of time, asking for the student's email so that the candidate could conclude the research offline.

Reference librarians at our institution do not provide concierge service; our role is to teach students to navigate the processes themselves. When a librarian conducts research for a student, it robs them of this critical life skill and teaches them nothing. Another candidate did an excellent undergraduate public search, but was so far over time, they could not attempt the graduate one.

Self-Awareness: The reference interview with the search committee took place in the same environment as the public reference interview: in a classroom-style room with low lighting and the candidate standing at the podium with full control of the computer and monitors. Computer assistance was available if needed. After the reference interview

with the search committee, the group moved to adjacent tables in the same room. Lights were raised and the search committee took turns asking all candidates the same set of prepared questions. These included the ACRL Framework, handling conflict, and ADA compliance. The search committee asked candidates to discuss how they incorporate the Framework into their reference and instruction work. As most were recent MLIS graduates, the search committee expected familiarity with the frames. One of the questions towards the end the 14-item list was “Please critique your presentation this morning. How did it go? What are you proud of? What could you improve on?” Although very little time had passed from instructor to practitioner, we were expecting candidates to have calmed down from the immediacy of live performance to give us a rough assessment of their performance.

We structured the question to begin neutral, include a positive and then a negative (the voluntary “needs improvement”). The negative is important here, since admitting a mistake demonstrates self-reflection and awareness and can make up for going down the wrong path in the heat of the moment. Far from being a demeaning question, it is a charitable one. None of us are perfect but being able to identify our mistakes is important. It allows us to change course, and to learn what to do differently the next time.

Two candidates, including the one whose performance went over time, said they were happy with their performance and offered no further comment. The candidate who had fumbled the graduate nursing search took the opportunity to clarify “what I should have done,” walking us through major parts of the search again and allowing the committee to accept many of the previous errors as attributable to nerves. Strikingly, the least successful on-demand candidate stated that they were wholly pleased with their performance, and would not have changed anything.

Results

The search committee met during breaks when the candidates’ agendas had time with others, such as when they toured the building and met with the Dean of Libraries. We debriefed, shared impressions, and came to consensus about the candidates’ skills, and how those could be applied broadly to our organization and specifically to our reference and research services.

We reviewed scoring rubrics (see Appendix A) handed out to attendees during each candidate’s presentation so that we could see how library faculty and staff assessed their presenters’ skills or lack thereof. Generally speaking, the only candidate presentations that faculty and staff from outside the library are invited to are at the Dean level, so this was an internal affair. Often, the scoring mirrored the search committee’s observations and notations about going down rabbit trails, or problems with time management, or choosing the wrong database, or failing to close the reference interview. Tellingly, however, while the public assessments generally rated candidates’ prepared interviews highly, some of these same candidates’ unscripted sessions were abysmal. Additionally, public attendees, particularly those not in public services, were less capable of evaluating candidates’ method and content and saw the reference

exercise purely as a performance. Consequently, they focused on more general questions, such as their prior library positions and overall library experience with mediated technology such as chat. Faculty and staff with no knowledge of instructional design or pedagogy based their ratings on whether the candidate seemed like a nice person or good future co-worker, which are important concerns, but tertiary given the committee's emphasis on skills and performance.

As front-line reference professionals, candidates hired for the positions need to perform on demand to whatever real-life reference need arises. It was patently clear to members of the search committee who was turn-key and who would require an unexpectedly high initial investment of faculty time with training, coaching, and handholding. While the Dean specifically welcomed recent graduates for this entry-level position, the pool was competitive and the search committee ranked those with more skills higher than those with less skills. Overall, search committee members felt that the exercise came together brilliantly, as we gathered evidence of each candidate's skillset, philosophy of librarianship, how open they were to training and mentoring, how self-reflective they were of their strengths and weaknesses, and how they may fit into our organizational culture.

Each committee member was grateful for the performance interview portion of each candidate's visit, as we noted problems with time management, issues with the reference interview itself, superficial approaches to databases, and other concerns in real time. Having real-life examples at hand enabled everyone on the search committee to agree with the ranking and rating of candidates. We suggest that performance interviews and the ability to confer with each other throughout during the candidates breaks or time spent meeting with the Dean, helped us arrive at our recommendation of the top two people for the vacancies much more quickly than without. Those who have served are familiar with the toll that search committee work takes on workday productivity; we wanted ways to abridge our deliberations while relying on real data and not feelings or impressions. Performance interviewing was the practice that allowed it.

Conclusion

Performance interviewing provided valuable information on the demonstrated skills of candidates for reference positions in an academic library. It helped the committee identify potential problems like poor listening and incomplete focus during the reference interview, poor time management, lack of differentiation between undergraduate and graduate-level queries, as well as typical considerations about organizational fit. Our experience leads us to recommend this practice as a part of employment interviewing for reference services. The performance interviews we conducted, along with traditional aspects of professional interviews and evaluation of candidates' demonstrated social skills were integral to our search committee's decisions. We expect that future vacancies at our library include a performance-based interviewing component appropriate for the position's responsibilities and duties.

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Appendix A
[University-Library] Lecturer Positions June 2019
Teaching Presentation Evaluation Form

Candidate's Name: _____

Evaluator:

- Faculty
- Staff
- Other

1. The candidate made audience aware of expected learning outcomes for the class session.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Comment:

2. The candidate was knowledgeable of the subject matter.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Comment:

3. The candidate was well organized.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Comment:

4. The candidate's presentation style kept audiences' attention.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Comment:

5. The candidate was able to answer questions posed by everyone.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Comment:

8. The candidate achieved the expected learning outcomes for the presentation.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Comment:

9. Overall rating of the candidate's ability.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
4	3	2	1

Comment:

10. List strengths of the candidate's class presentation.

11. List any weaknesses of the candidate's class presentation.

12. Provide any additional comments about the candidate and/or candidate's presentation.