Interviewing at an Academic Library

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WESTERN LIBRARIES

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Outline

- Getting the interview (resume/letter)
- What to expect
- How to prepare
- Strategies for framing and answering interview questions
- What to avoid
- Where to get help
What to Expect

Typical Itinerary @ Canadian Academic Library:
- Presentation (15 – 30 minutes plus questions)
- Formal Interview (45 minutes – 2 hours)
- Lunch
What to Expect

Other possibilities:

- **Meetings with:**
  - local unit
  - all librarians or all staff
  - the managers in the local unit
  - the university librarian
  - a senior administrator at the university
  - faculty/staff/students in the department(s) you would be supporting
  - A union representative

- **Tour of library/campus/city**
- **Business Office – expense reimbursement**
The Request for Interview

- Get excited! 😊
- Arrange logistics for interview
- Start your homework
  - Reread the Job Posting
  - Familiarize yourself with the institution and people (e.g., library/university website; strategic plan; collective agreement)
The Presentation

• Introduce yourself
• Carefully consider the question or problem and answer it
• Know your audience
• Stay on time
• Technology
• Be prepared to answer questions
The Formal Interview
Types of Questions

- **Tell us about yourself...**
  - Why are you the best candidate (or best fit) for this position?

- **Job related skills & experience**
  - Collections, Reference, Instruction
  - Cataloguing
  - Scholarly Communication

- **Scenario**
  - You’ve been asked to... Tell us how you might go about handling this situation.

- **Behavioural**
  - Tell us about a successful project that you’ve worked on...
  - Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a difficult situation/colleague/patron...
Job Skills Questions

“Tell us about your experience providing reference service.”

- Knowledge, skills, abilities
  - Understands scope of ‘reference’ (at desk, in office, online/chat, office hours)
  - Public service skills
  - Comfort with technology
  - Demonstrates some knowledge of key resources
  - Basic reference interview / negotiation with students
  - Give examples if appropriate
### Break it Down: Behavioural and Scenario Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavioural Question</th>
<th>Specific Example</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning</strong></td>
<td>Description/Overview</td>
<td>Project description and scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle</strong></td>
<td>Background/ Evidence/ Examples</td>
<td>Role and responsibilities, skills used or developed, awareness of stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>End</strong></td>
<td>Summary/Your Role/Success</td>
<td>Outcome of project, reiterate your contribution</td>
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**Question:** Please describe a particular work project you have been involved with where you worked as part of a team. What was your role? Was the team successful? How did you feel that you contributed to the success of the team?
Other Types of Questions

- What are your research interests / what research projects are you currently working on?
- What are some trends that you see in academic libraries or higher education that might affect this position?
- How do you keep current in your field?
- What kind of professional development have you done / are you interested in doing?
What are they looking for?

• Competencies
  ○ Self-awareness (strengths and weaknesses)
  ○ Problem solving skills
  ○ Leadership skills
  ○ Creativity
  ○ Recognition of others’ skills
  ○ Collaboration/cooperation/consultation
Questions for the Committee

• It’s a good idea...
• Considerations
  ○ Ask questions that you actually want an answer to
  ○ Ask straightforward questions
  ○ Between 1-3 questions (be conscious of time)
  ○ Is there something you’re interested in that hasn’t been discussed? If so, ask if there will be opportunities.
Things to Remember

- You are always being interviewed
- You are also interviewing them
- Be an active participant
- Be confident and professional
- Be ready to give a tentative start date
- Follow-up with a thank you
Things to Avoid

- Badmouthing current or previous colleagues or institutions
- Being overly confident
- Being too informal - language
- Under-dressing