

**Innovators Needed: Workforce Development
in the 21st Century Academic Library
ACRL Conference Presentation
April 12, 2013**

Slide 1 – Title Page

- **Sound check.**

Slide 2 – Introductions and Welcome

- Myself
- Emily
- John
- Pat

Slide 3 - Objectives

- Show the three objectives
- Indicate that Emily and I will share what we have learned about valued skills
- John will address the second objective
- Pat will address the third
- Will have Q&A at the end of all three presentations – jot down your questions

Slide 4 – Spiral Staircase

- Like many research interests, Emily and I took an indirect path to the topic of the skills valued by forward thinking administrators.
- Over a year ago, we conducted a content analysis of first person narratives about the academic recruitment process that appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education between Jan. 2007 and April 2011 – mostly from the On Hiring column. The narratives are war stories written by job candidates and hiring committees – and they frequently have a basic subtext of What Were They Thinking. Emily and I found this interesting because despite all the incredible resources there are about how to run an effective search or how to be a good candidate, there continues to be a significant number of candidates and hiring institutions who experience the process in a negative way.

Slide 5 – Do Your Homework

- Our sense from a casual review of the narratives was that there was a quite a bit of overlap in the stories, so we decided to do a more formalized content analysis to see if the patterns that we thought we were seeing really held up under closer scrutiny. We also wanted an opportunity to use Atlas.ti, a software package for qualitative analysis that Emily had just learned about.
- Because we only analyzed 36 narratives, we did not generate enough data to produce generalizable results, but we did determine that there were distinct common themes in the narratives, the majority of which were about candidates and their lackluster performance. The primary complaint about them was lack of preparation. Some of the specific complaints were about cover letters that did not address the specific job requirements, evidence that interview candidates did not spend any time learning about the organization, evidence that job candidates did not anticipate questions and didn't seem to have any questions of their own about the hiring institution. Running through all the comments was the sense that candidates needed to have a better grasp of the job or of the hiring institution.

Slide 6 – Lack of Communication

- Although the majority of the columns dealt with candidates, hiring committees also received their share of complaints. Summarizing the specific issues raised, it appears that hiring institutions could do a better job of communicating with applicants. Specific complaints were primarily about not effectively communicating expectations and lack of timely communication about the process itself.
- What we began to surmise from our initial data about candidates and search committees, is that there is often a disconnect between what hiring institutions want and what candidates bring to the table – and a considerable amount of surprise on both sides about that experience. More specifically what we were seeing is that candidates apply for jobs based on experience and technical skills, but that they interviewed and hired based on their ability to demonstrate a very different set of skills and abilities. This is often expressed in the narratives as finding the person or being the person who is the “best fit”.

Slide 7 – Jigsaw Puzzle

- That led us to issue of what do we mean when we say that someone is a good fit for our organizations? Is that simply code for we want someone just like us –

someone we can get along with? Is it a cover for bias? Although it could be either or both of those things, Emily and I came away from our research believing that fit was actually a useful concept that needed to be better understood in order to enhance recruitment and potentially other areas of human resource or workforce development.

- In our reading up to that point, we had found one article that directly addresses the issue of fit however briefly - the Wheeler, Johnson, Manion article in the handout. They talk about understanding the culture of your library and looking for matching qualities in candidates. They state this is difficult to do and admonish readers to focus their attention on job-related qualities or behaviors and not on unrelated qualities/behaviors that reflect personal preference.
- This description intuitively made sense to us, but still found it difficult to operationalize. More recently I heard a consultant working with my university summarize the research of Robert Levering, which very concretely address the issue of fit. Levering wrote a book in 1988 called *A Great Place to Work* which is based on his research of high-performing organizations. A key characteristic shared by these organizations is that they explicitly hire for fit – which he defines as the skills, behaviors and values that allow the employee to be successful in the organization. Levering’s book is also referenced in the handout and along with the website for the Great Place to Work website which has references to more current research.

Slide 8 – Light bulb

- Levering’s definition allows us to operationalize the concept of fit in a much more tangible way and to understand how it can be constructive tool for all aspects of human resource development – everything ranging from recruitment to succession planning. And in fact, the whole movement toward competencies in academic libraries is based on the same theoretical framework of explicitly identifying the full set of skills – both the technical and the so-called “soft skills” - that are expected for successful performance. The article on the resources list by Huff-Eibl, Voyles and Brewer is a good overview of competencies in academic libraries and an in-depth discussion of how they’ve been used in their own organization.

Slide 9 – Rocket ship

- Going back for a moment to our original research, a better understanding of what fit really means and the development of competencies allows organizations to overcome the disconnect that Emily and I observed in the Chronicle narratives.

- Our research could have ended at that point with an article or presentation and some recommendations about developing competencies for our own organization, but as it so happens, we had a new Dean at UofL around the time we were doing this work. Given new organizational leadership, it won't be a surprise to you that we also had a new strategic plan that very explicitly outlined a changed organization by 2020. In one of the chapters from *The Expert Library*, David Lewis writes that strategic plans memorialize what we each believe the future will look like – in terms of collections, services facilities and staffing.
- That led us to a whole new set of questions about whether library leaders could use the idea of fit to leverage strategic change and assuming the answer was yes, what are the skills or competencies that would help them move forward.
- And related to that – was there anything approaching a core skill set that leaders in the profession see as especially important – a future-oriented skill set, as it were.

Slide 10 – What do Library Leaders Want?

- To look for answers to this question, Emily and I reviewed what others had written of course, but we also pulled ideas from conference presentations and from an interview with Robert Fox, Dean of Libraries at the University of Louisville.
- Using this very unscientific approach, we came up with a list of skills and attributes that were common among our sources
- Any guesses what they might be?

Slide 11 – Content Knowledge

- Content knowledge/ Foundational skills of the profession still matter – commitment to values such as access, intellectual freedom, preservation, lifelong learning and expertise in a given area of librarianship
- MLS – maybe not so much

Slide 12 – Strategic Thinker

- Someone who is not only creative, but also makes decisions about how they focus time and energy based on the strategic goals of the organization.

Slide 13 – Inquisitive/Entrepreneurial/Seeks Solutions –

- Someone who asks questions and constructively seeks answers

- Entrepreneurial in this context is someone who identifies and seeks solution to unmet needs

Slide 14 – Initiator/Collaborative/Inclusive

- Self-directed but also brings others into the process; someone who knows how to a leader and a follower
- Someone who can work well with all a diverse set of colleagues and user groups

Slide 15 – Confident/Emotionally intelligent

- Self assured; willing to try a new approach and go outside of their own comfort zone; someone with a positive outlook; Is not synonymous with being an extrovert.
- Self-aware; capable of regulating emotions; displays empathy toward others and is adept at managing successful work relationships.

Slide 16 - Organizational/Workforce Development

- In our informal survey of library leaders, these skills came up over and over as critical for the 21st century library. Does this list make sense for your organization? If not, what are the skills that will be allow librarians and staff in your organization to be successful not only today but five years from now? This is a fundamental question that our libraries must answer in order to conduct effective workforce development and move organizations toward strategic goals. John will now talk about our second objective, effective recruiting.

THANK YOU.