



AFTER THE DIPLOMA

THE JOB SEARCH IS ON

Best practices
for searching and
securing your first law
library position.

BY DUSTIN GREEN

Searching for a law library job just out of school can be a daunting task. With dozens of job searching sites, posting aggregators, and listservs providing information, it can be difficult to sift through all the uninteresting postings to get to positions you would actually want. This article aims to help you begin the job search process, with advice on how to use research institutions and professional networks to improve searches, use the job posting itself to create better application materials, and what to do to set yourself apart. To get you started, I interviewed four recently graduated and hired librarians about their job searching experience. Their responses as well as my own are included to serve as a best practice guide.



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a more attractive applicant. One librarian noted that after seeing a lot of electronic services positions available over the past few years, he leaned toward database curation and digital preservation coursework, which introduced him to tools used by his eventual employer. Others were surprised at the amount of teaching experience most academic libraries were looking for, so they took courses that specialized in developing lesson plans, allowing them to learn how to teach their peers. Having this background knowledge and experience is not only helpful for impressing employers, but it also builds confidence in one's abilities to perform the job's duties, which makes the applicant a stronger interviewee.

When beginning the post-graduate job search in earnest, it is important to understand that searching is a large time commitment, and much of that time will be spent browsing job boards. There are many online resources available that have postings for law library openings. Of the librarians interviewed for this article, all four used the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Career Center as well as an Indeed.com search for law library jobs. In addition, three librarians used websites for the regional law library associations of their desired areas; two used the Special Library Association (SLA) Career Center as well as the "I Need a Library Job" website, and one used state government job boards for states she wished to work in. Using multiple resources may take more time, but you limit your options if you do not branch out.

When opening the job posting, read the description, requirements, and duties to determine whether this is a job that meets your qualifications, sounds interesting, or both. Remember that most people will not find their dream job directly out of school, let alone be qualified for it. Be flexible on location or job type in order to broaden the potential job opportunities.

When using multiple job boards, it is important to keep track of the postings of interest in a personal list. One librarian aggregated jobs he was interested in into an Excel spreadsheet that included a link to the posting, application deadlines, when the job was posted, when his application was submitted, and dates of follow-up emails. This provides a one-stop resource for you as a job hunter to keep track of potential jobs and applications.

Building Your Professional Network

Once you have picked out job postings that interest you, the next step is to learn more about the hiring organization and its staff. This serves as a preliminary test of fit between the applicant and the institution, but also provides you with more information to bolster interviews and cover letters. The best place to start is the library's website. This showcases the size, demographic, and specialties of the library and its staff. Some websites will include scholarly publications of librarians, which offers a sense of what they are interested in and provides potential talking points for interviews or informal discussions of law librarianship. Each staff member that is also

The Search

To start, it is never too early to begin looking at job postings. For those still finishing up school and not yet ready to apply for that first professional position, the information contained within the postings themselves can help students gain a better sense of what jobs are out there and the qualifications employers are looking for. This can help students focus their library studies and professional development in order to become



FREE JOB SEARCH RESOURCES

There are many resources besides Google to find job openings. Here are some helpful sites to explore:

- AALL Career Center
bit.ly/AALLCareer
- Indeed.com
bit.ly/JF17Indeed
- Local law librarian chapters
- Special Library Association Career Center
bit.ly/JF17SLACareer
- 'I Need a Library Job'
bit.ly/JF17Needjob
- Library of Congress
bit.ly/JF17LLC

a member of AALL has a profile on the AALL website that can be found using the Member Search function. These profiles list their past and present leadership positions within AALL as well as their involvement in Special Interest Sections. However, personal research is only one method of finding information about potential employers. Utilize your professional connections and their experience to aid in your research.

One of the most important parts of entering into a new profession is meeting the people already engaged with it. With law librarianship being such a tight-knit and active community, getting involved with professional associations is a great first step for making contacts. If you know what geographical areas you would like to work in, join or get in contact with the

regional associations that cover those areas. The membership fees are typically quite low, especially for student members, and they serve as excellent jumping-off points for meeting people and getting involved. Law librarians are typically a very welcoming and helpful group, so don't be afraid to reach out and ask to talk over the phone, via email, or in person to build those relationships and meet new people, even if there are no openings at their institutions. Attending meetings and events is another great way to network and to set up times to meet via email or over the phone.

Once you have developed your professional network, keep in contact with them throughout the job searching process. If you have made contacts in the geographic areas you are looking for work, those contacts will have

ample information about institutions and other librarians in that area. It can be difficult to get an idea of the day-to-day culture of an institution and its employees from a formal interview, so talking with other librarians who have previously worked with the staff on committees or other jobs gives you a more in-depth perspective of culture and management style. In addition, your professional contacts are excellent resources for interview and presentation preparation, and will oftentimes be happy to provide feedback based on mock interviews and practice presentations.

Creating the Perfect Application Packet

The first thing a hiring committee sees, in most instances, is your application packet, which includes a resume or curriculum vitae (CV), a cover letter, and list of references, so it is important that these documents make an impact. The documents should be tailored to each job, and not be simply boilerplate, especially the cover letters.

Utilize the knowledge from the research phase of the search to customize the application and make the documents match the requirements in the posting. For example:

- If the job you are applying for involves working with particular software that you have experience in, be sure to point out that you have such experience in your resume and elaborate on that experience in your cover letter.
- Use keywords from the postings in the application to show an understanding of what the institution is looking for and how you can fill that need.
- Include relevant coursework in your CV to show background knowledge in pertinent areas of responsibility for the position.

Additionally, do not over-emphasize achievements or experience that is unrelated to the position you are applying for. There is a limited amount of space in a cover letter, so be sure to

include only the most valuable information for the hiring committee.

As with any important document, send it out to others for review and feedback, especially professional mentors who have hiring and job search experience. Be sure to leave plenty of time for revisions and edits to ensure your documents have no spelling or grammatical errors, as the hiring committee will surely notice them. While completing applications is a time-sensitive activity, it is equally as important to put care into drafting application materials. Putting as much care as possible into what you have control over, including cover letters, resumes, networking, and other communications shows that you are committed to producing high-quality work and that you are dedicated, both of which will help you stand out.

The Waiting Game

Once the application has been submitted, the job search process is largely out of your hands, which can be quite frustrating. In academic and government job searches, there can be months of waiting between updates, causing anxiety and nervousness, but it is important to remain positive about the process. Katherine Marsh and Nathan Preuss referred to this process as “active waiting” in their April 2008 *AALL Spectrum* article titled “Answering ‘Now What?’: How to Find and Interview for Your First Law Library Job.” Active waiting involves thanking the people who interviewed you, staying positive, and continuing your job search. This idea can be incorporated throughout the entire search process, not just after the interview.

One of the simplest ways to stand out amongst other applicants is to maintain contact with the chair of the search committee or another person at the library. Soon after your application is submitted, contact the point person for the search to ensure that your materials are readable and properly uploaded. Not only does this provide peace of mind regarding the receipt of your application, but it serves as an opening to begin a dialogue with the head of the hiring

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committee. There is also nothing wrong with periodic check-ins on the progress of the job search. Do not bombard the contact person with weekly emails, but if you have not heard back or received any information in three to four weeks, then checking in shows an interest in the position and will help keep your name in front of the decision makers. As with all job application materials, ensure that all your networking emails, follow-up emails, and any discussions with librarians are both cordial and professional.

Utilizing the Interview

If you are invited to a personal interview, it is important to realize that the interview is as much for you as it is for the hiring committee. This is your chance to visit your potential workplace, meet with peers and superiors, and get a sense of how you fit into the work environment. For many academic jobs, the personal interview can be a long process in and of itself, often taking place over the course of multiple days. Oftentimes, you will have several meetings with different groups and classes of employees, so have a variety of questions ready. For a more detailed discussion of interview strategies and possible questions, see Jennifer S. Murray’s Spring 2004 *Law Library Journal* article titled, “The Zen of Law Librarian Job Interviews: How to Interview for a Job and How to Interview the Job.” During the interview, try to get the names of the people doing the interview and take notes on key talking points and questions.

The interview process allows for a reset of the active waiting concept discussed earlier in this article. After completing the interview, you will surely be exhausted and excited that it is finished, but there is still work to be done. If you were able to learn the

names of the people in the interview, it is good practice to compose an email or letter thanking them for the opportunity to interview. It is also beneficial to reference a discussion or something that occurred in the interview to add a personal touch. Again, this shows a professional disposition and keeps your visit fresh in the interviewers’ minds.

Final Thoughts

Welcome to the wonderful world of law librarianship. Though the first professional job search can be stressful for a recently graduated law librarian, persistence and positivity will lead to opportunity. There is a wealth of knowledge and resources at your fingertips—using it will make the searching process much easier and less stressful. ■

READ

“Ask A Director: Successful Hiring” for tips on what employers are looking for on page 40.

“Practical Tips for Your Best Resume” from the January/February 2016 issue of *AALL Spectrum* at bit.ly/AALLJF16Resume.



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