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GROWING YOUR OWN: DEVELOPING NEW ACQUISITIONS AND COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT LIBRARIANS FROM WITHIN

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ABSTRACT

If necessity is the mother of invention, then perhaps the currently ubiquitous hiring freeze can be seen as an opportunity to develop new interest in technical service careers amongst librarians within your organization. Like many libraries, the Central Piedmont Community College Libraries have been under a system-wide hiring freeze that has left us unable to replace our current vacancy in Technical Services. With no end to the hiring freeze in sight and a difficult fiscal year looming, the CPCC Libraries embarked on a plan to “grow our own” Technical Services Librarian from amongst our existing staff. This raised a number of interesting questions. What knowledge, skills, and abilities did we both need and want in a new technical services librarian? Were there particular skills in our public services librarians that might bring something new to technical services? Could we spark interest in technical services in staff who had never thought of taking that career path? How would we train a new technical services librarian? This session will focus on the lessons learned during this year-long process, and present research into what skills, knowledge, and abilities academic libraries are looking for in new technical services librarians. Session attendees can participate in an interactive poll (using “clicker” technology) on what they would like to see incorporated into a training program for new technical services librarians.

Introduction

The current widespread employment of hiring freezes or significant hiring restrictions has both short-term and long-term implications for libraries. In the near future, libraries have to redistribute and reassess workflow in order to continue to serve patrons and protect core services, as well as adapt to staffing shortages. In the long term, positions or lines may be essentially ‘lost’ to ongoing hiring restrictions at the institutional or state level, leading to issues with morale, turnover, and recruitment. At Central Piedmont Community College, first an external hiring freeze (imposed by the state) and then ongoing limitations on external hiring led to a more studied consideration of internal hiring or internal appointments. The question we asked ourselves was, could internal hiring and appointment for our technical services vacancy help mitigate both the short and long term issues associated with an unfilled vacancy? Could someone from public services bring new skills to a technical services position? The ultimate success of our internal hiring and reorganization plan sparked an interest in both the current state of hiring in libraries, as well as general reaction to the notion of “growing your own.”

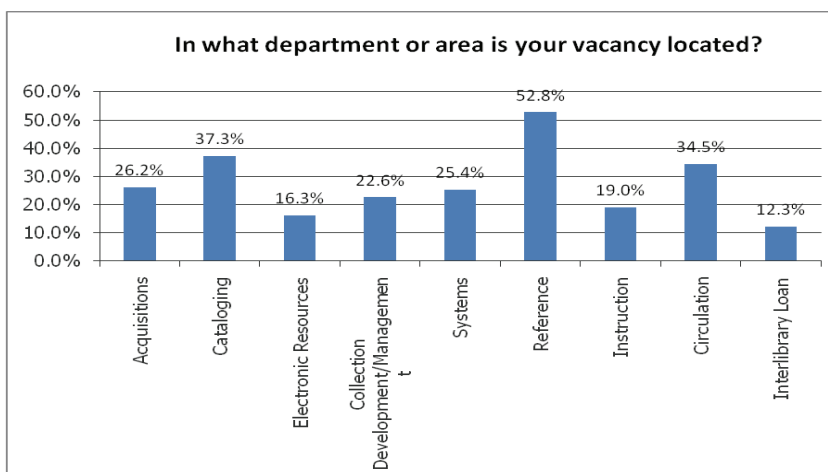
Hiring: Frozen or Thawing?

As a result of this interest, a 12 question survey on the state of hiring freezes and opinions on internal hiring was distributed in from September 22 through October 14, 2009. More than 500 responses were received from a wide variety of libraries:

- 2 year colleges: 17.2%
- 4 year colleges: 38.8%
- Private academic colleges: 29.5%
- Public libraries: 9.2%
- Special libraries: 5.6%

73.3% of respondents indicated that their institution was currently experience a hiring freeze or other restrictions on external hiring. “Other restrictions” typically involved needing approvals from the highest levels of college administration (provost, vice president, president, or the equivalent) to advertise and fill any vacant positions. In many cases, only positions deemed necessary to the essential functions of the college, most commonly administrative, instructional or financial, would be considered for external hiring. However, 64.5% of respondents were still able to hire internally or make internal appointments.

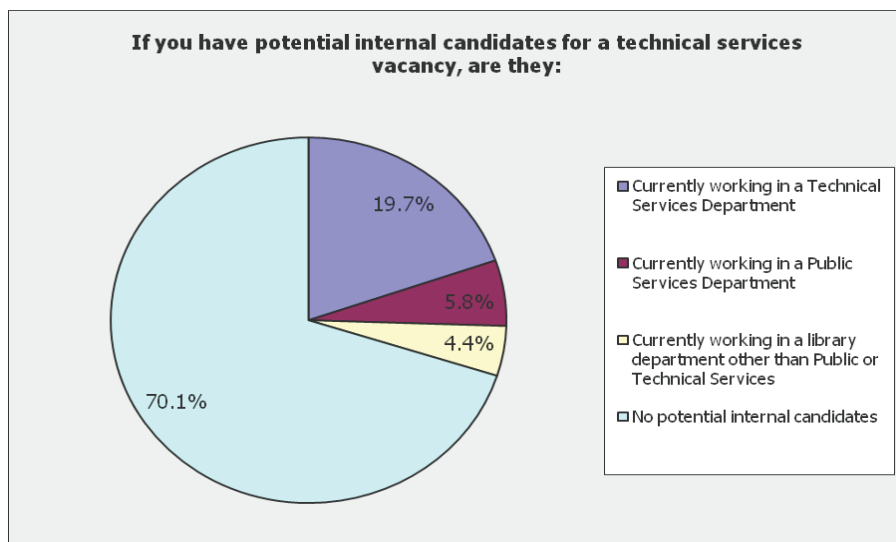
The next line of questioning in the survey was aimed at current vacancies in libraries. 74.6% of respondents indicated that their library had one or more current vacancies. The chart below illustrates the departmental locations of the reported vacancies:



As the data indicates, a not insubstantial number of vacancies were reported in traditional technical services areas, including acquisitions, cataloging, electronic resources, and collection development/management. Survey respondents with a vacancy in a technical services department were then asked to consider if they had any potential internal candidates for the position. 13.4% responded that they did have a viable internal candidate, while 38% percent responded that there we no potential internal candidates for their opening.

Internal Candidates: Possibilities and Training

The respondents who indicated that they did have at least one possible internal candidate were then asked to identify which library department that potential employee currently worked in, and were given four basic categories of responses, illustrated in the chart below:



Those respondents who did identify a potential internal candidate were also asked to report what characteristics they used to determine the candidate's viability. These responses ranged from direct technical services experience (i.e., cataloging) to more general skills deemed important in technical services work (i.e., attention to detail). For example, several respondents specifically cited experience cataloging in previous jobs, while another cited "knowledge of bibliographic information in current job." Examples of more general skills that respondents were willing to consider included:

- "Management and time management skills"
- "Methodical mindset"
- "Show attention to detail"
- "Familiar with library, people, and catalog"
- "Experience working with our ILS"

The survey next raised the issue of training for internal hires or appointments. First, the respondents were asked to identify what general kind of training program they would like for an internal placement: formal (8.1%), informal (10.6%), or a combination of both formal and informal (82.2%, the clear favorite). The second question related to training was open-ended, and asked respondents to indicate topics they would like to see covered in a training program for new technical services staff. 209 survey respondents responded to this particular question, and their responses included specific technical skills, soft skills, organizational culture, and political skills/knowledge, in addition to the expected Technical Services training areas – use of the ILS, cataloging, acquisitions, serials, etc. The table below details the most common responses in each of these categories:

| <u>Technical Skills</u> | <u>Soft Skills</u> | <u>Organization Culture</u> | <u>Political Skills/Knowledge</u> |
|--|---|--|--|
| -Metadata Schema -Digitization -Standards (MARC, AACR2/RDA, etc.) OCLC -Network security -E-resource management and troubleshooting | -Conflict management -Customer service -Problem-solving -Communication -Leadership -Time management -Priority setting -Telephone skills -Supervisory Skills | -Workflows -Local policies/procedures -Service and instructional mission orientation -Weeding | -Relationship of the library to the institution -Relationship of the department/unit to the library -Department hierarchy -Departmental history |

Thoughts on Growing Your Own:

Finally, the survey posited an open-ended question soliciting responses to the idea of internal hiring, or “growing your own.” A total of 213 responses were received, and they expressed widely varying opinions on internal hiring. Many of the responses clearly indicated a positive opinion on the subject:

- “I am a firm believer in the developing the talents and skills of my library colleagues and to promote them whenever possible into new roles and responsibilities”
- “Very important to groom, mentor, and train internal staff and give them the opportunity to advance”
- “Very important to job satisfaction and the retention of good employees
- “We believe very strongly in growing your own – ensuring internal staff have opportunities for advancement, as well as developing leadership potential in all employees.”
- “With the strict budget cuts we’re facing, it is important to grow and train your current staff for positions that are critical to the organization”
- “I personally think libraries have changed so dramatically in recent years that we need to seriously consider restructuring and retraining to make better use of our resources. I would much rather see current employees rewarded and allowed to grow than to just fill a position when it becomes vacant.”
- “I love „growing my own’ as I know the qualities of who I am hiring...Hiring outside, you can get a disaster without knowing, as flaws rarely come out during the hiring process”

However, a not insignificant number of respondents - 24% - clearly indicated either a negative view of internal hiring, or a reluctance to support hiring in this manner:

- “I prefer a fresh point of view – hire an outsider to add something new to the mix”
- “I am against hiring internally unless it is an emergency and the library is so understaffed it cannot fulfill its duties...”
- “I would rather hire external candidates”
- “All hires should be advertised outside the institution because better candidates may be out there”
- “It gets to stale and too introspective to keep within your library”

Responses to this question also provided excellent advice for how to manage an internal hiring process, and to make the process both fair and successful:

- “Plan ahead and identify prospects. Be formal about determining areas that could be improved then set about finding experiences and education to bring staff along. Be patient and be aware that you’ll not always be right.”
- “Regular mandatory shadowing increases the odds of identifying people who are interested in new opportunities”

- “Strong informal mentoring by supervisors and peers; opening learning opportunities to all levels of staff; regular staff meetings for each level of staff where feedback and ideas are encouraged and implemented as much as possible; open communication about upcoming projects and trends. Basically, encouraging talent to reveal itself, then consciously developing it through learning opportunities, interesting project work, valuing of feedback, and generating excitement about future goals.”

The survey seems to illustrate some ambivalence about internal hiring practices. For me, this raised additional questions about the state of hiring and hiring practices in librarianship. A quick literature review revealed a number of articles that addressed the balance between internal and external hires, between essentially hiring and promotion. In his article “Hiring and Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries: Problems and Solutions,” Gregory K. Raschke writes, “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” (54). Raschke argues that libraries need to become more anticipatory in their hiring practices, rather than reactionary. He encourages libraries to consider hiring for traits rather than particular qualifications, skills, or experience:

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 cataloger 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? (61)

Long Term Issues: Retention and Employee Development

Retention and employee development are issues that libraries must consider as they balance internal and external hiring, particularly during economic downturns. General employment surveys suggest that opportunities for professional growth and advancement are crucial (and perhaps more important than salary) in retaining good employees. In the corporate world, promotion and internal hiring play an important role. In “Balancing Promotion vs. Hiring,” Barry Leskin suggests that executive search firms’ view that 65-75% of hiring be internal. Cisco hires 60% from within, while GE strives for 80% internal hires. In reference to external hires, Leskin reports “there are three reasons for external hires’ lack of success: their inability to fit into the culture of their new organization; they lack the internal contacts and global network of internal promotions; and good performance data on external hires is hard to obtain.” Library literature makes some of the same points. In “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm – The Problem of Retention,” Mary Stanley argues that one of the major reasons why employees leave is “being passed over for promotion” and one of the major reasons that employees stay is “opportunities for personal and professional growth.” Raschke sees libraries moving in the direction of the corporate world on this topic:

...academic libraries increasingly are employing another tactic from the corporate world: identifying and aggressively developing homegrown 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. (64)

Conclusion

Issues of internal and external hiring are clearly important to libraries in all circumstances, but economic downturns seem to make these issues more pressing. While a certain amount of natural and useful reluctance exists regarding internal hiring, both the survey and recent library literature on the topic suggest that internal hiring has an important role to play in both short-term mitigation of staffing shortages in an era of restricted hiring and long-term development of a pool of talented staff.

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