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## Chapter 17. Approaches to Inclusive Recruitment: Practical and Hopeful

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## CHAPTER 17

# Approaches to Inclusive Recruitment

## Practical and Hopeful

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## Introduction

San José State University (SJSU) is located in downtown San José, a city of over one million residents in California's San Francisco Bay Area. Established in 1857, SJSU is the oldest public university on the west coast of the United States. It is also the founding campus of the California State University (CSU) system that comprises twenty-three campuses, making it the largest four-year public university system in the country. SJSU has nine colleges and sixty-seven departments, which offer bachelor's, master's, and a growing number of doctoral degree programs. It enrolls over 36,000 students and employs more than 2,100 faculty members. The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, also known as the SJSU King Library, is the only SJSU library that serves the campus. It is a joint library, partnering with the San José Public Library to serve the Bay Area community.

Like most universities, SJSU has a mixed record when it comes to social justice. In the 1950s–1960s, Jim Crow practices prevented the campus from providing campus



housing and scholarships to Black athletes even though the campus actively recruited Black students. The university also had a history of minority student movements in the 1970s and 1980s as well as more contemporary racist events that have caused it to rethink its approach to social justice, human rights, and community service. Much has changed in fifty-plus years due to the challenges from students, faculty, staff, and community members and the university to address the value of supporting and retaining its diverse population as a crucial part of its mission to strive for social justice and equality. Consequently, it invested in establishing an Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and different student success, identity, and cultural centers on campus, as well as the SJSU Black Leadership and Opportunity Center, Chicana/Latina Student Success Center, Native American Indigenous Student Success Center; PRIDE Center, and UndocuSpartan Student Resource Center. In the library, the Africana, Asian American, Chicano, and Native American Studies Center (AAACNA) is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the diversity of the campus. Although the creation of AAACNA was complicated, it is a center that is now continually supported by students, faculty, and the community.

At SJSU, librarians are unionized faculty members and have ranks parallel to faculty in SJSU's other academic departments. California is one of eight states that have banned the consideration of race in its employment of state workers (Calif. Const. art. I § 31), and statistics make plain that SJSU's student body continues to be more diverse than SJSU's faculty in terms of race and ethnicity (Institutional Research and Strategic Analytics, n.d.). However, SJSU faculty are called on to serve as mediators and educators to students from a range of backgrounds (Wong, 2017), and research shows that student-faculty racial and ethnic matches can have an impact on student learning and graduation rates (Fryar & Hawes, 2011; Llamas, Nguyen, & Tran, 2021; Lowe, 2005; Stout et al., 2018). In addition, SJSU's 2020 campus climate survey revealed that "racial identity, ethnicity, gender/gender identity, position status, and nepotism/cronyism were the top perceived bases for many of the reported discriminatory employment practices" (Rankin & Associates, 2020, p. 281).

The university realized that it was time to reflect on its institutional value of social justice and be proactive in overcoming the influences of larger systemic oppression. In order to be intentional in addressing bias at the organizational level, SJSU created initiatives that were tailored for specific activities, operations, and populations. One such initiative was to adopt new strategies for the faculty hiring and faculty retention, tenure, and promotion processes and to implement increased faculty mentoring opportunities (Office of the President, 2021). The strategies involve collaboration between various campus units such as University Personnel; Faculty Success; Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Library Administration; and library faculty search committees. This chapter will discuss how the University Library implemented—and enhanced—these new strategies.

# Advertising and Recruitment Training

As a CSU campus, SJSU is part of an even larger higher education ecosystem in the state that includes the University of California (UC) and the California Community College systems. The three systems adhere to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines, which ensure “all qualified individuals have a full and fair opportunity to compete for hiring and promotional opportunities, as well as to enjoy the benefits of employment with the respective employer” (Chancellor’s Office, 2022, p. 5). Another commonality is the mandate to advertise widely in order to obtain a large and diverse applicant pool. Together, the UC and CSU systems also implemented the Moving beyond Bias program in 2019 (<https://movingbeyondbias.org>). Now part of CSU employee training, this initiative provides instruction on how to recognize and mitigate the effects of implicit bias in hiring.

At SJSU, this employee training program takes the form of a course in the campus learning management system. Titled Faculty Search Committee Training, the course sets the tone by beginning with an acknowledgment of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, whose land the campus occupies. The class consists of five modules:

1. *Advertising and Outreach*: Best practices on how to promote the job opening to attract a diverse applicant pool.
2. *Reviewing Initial Applicant Pools*: How to screen applicants with an eye toward equity and diversity, common hiring myths, and how to recognize and prevent implicit biases throughout the evaluation process.
3. *Contours of the Campus Visit*: Creating interview questions and an assessment rubric that provide equitable evaluations of candidates.
4. *Evaluating Finalists and Making an Offer*: The procedural nuts and bolts of recommending the final candidate.
5. *Support for the Recruitment Process*: Campus services that support the search committee tasks.

Before being advertised, position descriptions are reviewed by SJSU’s Office of Faculty Success for the presence of inclusive diversity and equity language. Additionally, initial applicant pools are reviewed by the Vice Provost for Faculty Success to ensure non-White candidates have been given fair and careful consideration. To further ensure candidates have experience in a multicultural environment, the first two criteria on SJSU’s Academic Finalist Interview Evaluation Form, which all search committees must complete, are

1. Demonstrated awareness of and sensitivity to the education-

al goals of a multicultural population (note any preferred cross-cultural experience and/or training: e.g., bilingual, bicultural background).

2. Demonstrated ability to address needs of ethnically diverse students through course materials, teaching strategies, and advisement.

While SJSU has a solid foundation in a system that values diversity, the SJSU King Library faculty have worked to improve their recruitment processes to be even more inclusive.

## Recruitment Webinars and Library Position FAQs

In early 2021, two librarian search committees met to discuss how to make recruiting more inclusive and open for interested librarian candidates. One librarian had attended the CORE webinar *Building a Holistic Employee Engagement Framework* (Ippoliti, 2020) and suggested adopting the recruitment ambassador model mentioned in the presentation. The search committee members served as library ambassadors, welcoming interested participants by creating a safe online environment to ask questions about the library, work life, and the recruitment process. Hosting a webinar as librarian ambassadors was a new, exciting opportunity to recruit potential candidates to the library, and it allowed the library to reach more candidates geographically than would have been possible in a physical meeting.

Committee members made important decisions to make the webinar accessible to everyone. One was that pre-registration was not required—anyone could attend. This was done for two reasons. First, committee members knew candidates might be working in a library already and would want to avoid creating tension with their current employers. Second, the committee wanted candidates to be as anonymous as they desired, giving them a chance to ask hard questions about the library's culture or the position's responsibilities. For this reason, webinar participants could remain anonymous or choose to identify themselves.

Other considerations for the webinar were platform and scheduling. The committee chose Zoom for these recruitment webinars because many librarians were already familiar with the platform and it offered accessibility features, such as captioning. The committee decided to schedule two webinars to make them accessible to candidates in different time zones. One webinar was held at 9:00 a.m. PST and the other at 1:00 p.m. PST. Candidates could choose the webinar that worked with their schedules. However, these schedules excluded candidates who could not meet during work hours. For the next recruitment,

plans have been made to schedule an evening webinar in order to further increase access. The timing will also be reconsidered so that the webinars are not scheduled too soon after the job is posted.

The library's recruitment announcements included the webinar's link and were sent out across multiple library e-mail discussion lists (for example, ULS-L, ILI-L, ACRL) as well as to these affiliate groups:

- American Indian Library Association (AILA)—<https://ailanet.org>
- Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA)—<https://www.apalaweb.org>
- Black Caucus American Library Association (BCALA)—<https://www.bcala.org>
- Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA)—<https://www.cala-web.org>
- Joint Council of Librarians of Color (JCLC)—<https://www.jclcinc.org>
- REFORMA—<https://www.reforma.org>

When the day of the webinar came, slides were presented by the recruitment committee chairs with the assistance of committee members. The recruitment webinar slides followed this general format:

- introductory slide
- land acknowledgment
- agenda
- Zoom's Q&A features
- recruitment committee members
- about San José State University
- about the SJSU King Library
- organizational charts
- position highlights
- required qualifications
- details specific to each opening
- questions
- contact information for recruitment committee chairs

Committee members pasted relevant links into the chat, monitored questions, and answered them directly or forwarded them to the presenters to answer for the audience. The library's most recently hired librarians were invited to give their perspective about their recruitment and new faculty experience. All librarians contributed to questions about retention, tenure, and promotion to give candidates multiple perspectives.

After the first webinar, an online Librarian Position FAQs page (University Library, n.d.) was created to answer more general questions. If an FAQ is developed to support librarian recruitments, it is important to update it for new recruitments so the information



reflects the current positions. The committees' goal of serving as recruitment ambassadors in the webinar worked. They received positive feedback on the webinars from participants, and the librarians recruited in the initial search participated in subsequent recruitment ambassador webinars. While it is time-consuming for committee members to host such events, they offer an opportunity for potential candidates to learn more about the institution and the surrounding community and to do so anonymously, if they wish. By providing this nonthreatening introduction to the institution, recruitment ambassadors and recruitment webinars create an inclusive space where everyone is welcome.

## Sharing Interview Questions before the Interview

Candidate interviews are an essential part of the faculty hiring process, but they are also an occasion when the explicit and implicit biases of search committee members can exert a strong influence on hiring decisions. Institutions are in a position to help faculty who participate in hiring become more aware of their own biases through training focused on inclusivity and anti-racism, but interventions that aim to change institutional cultures or personal attitudes may meet resistance or take time to reach their full impact. A complementary and well-established approach to minimizing bias in the interview process is to structure the interview in such a way as to provide as few opportunities as possible for the biases of search committee members to play a role in the process.

At SJSU, all faculty hiring committees are advised to follow a structured interview format for both preliminary screening interviews and candidate interviews during in-person or virtual campus visits. The committee writes questions for these interviews in advance and submits them to the relevant dean for approval. SJSU's Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Faculty Success are also available for consultation on the wording and contents of interview questions. Before campus visits, hiring committees are encouraged to identify and discuss the components of a strong answer to each of their interview questions and to compare candidate answers to the ideal responses that the committee has identified. These practices place an emphasis on the way candidates address specific interview questions, which are selected for their relevance to the position, and discourage an interviewing approach that focuses on the personal characteristics or self-presentation of the candidate.

In addition to these methods of creating structure in the interview, the library has adopted the practice of sending interview questions to all candidates at least twenty-four hours before scheduled interviews. Sending interview questions in advance of the interview is an additional way to create structure in the interview process and to encourage hiring committees to focus on the content of a candidate's responses, rather than on other aspects of their performance during the interview. In particular, sending interview



questions in advance decreases the importance of the candidate's ability to respond on the spot to difficult or unexpected questions. Unless the ability to work well under pressure is a listed qualification for a particular position, it should not be a primary focus of the hiring process. While a job interview is always a high-pressure situation, sharing the interview questions in advance gives candidates a chance to prepare for the challenge and increases the likelihood that the committee will hear their best possible answer to each question.

As an illustration of the benefits of this structured approach, consider a typical interview question such as "Describe a time you completed a project as part of a team or group." The hiring committee would have chosen a question like this because working as part of a team is necessary for the position, and hearing the candidate talk about their experience is one way of assessing the candidate's ability to work effectively in a group context. If a candidate freezes or has difficulty answering the question in this format spontaneously, all the committee has really learned is that the candidate struggled in the interview setting—a setting where the committee itself has set the ground rules. The committee may actually have missed the opportunity to learn anything about the candidate's experience working in groups.

Additionally, requiring spontaneous recall favors candidates who are familiar with the types of questions that a particular library asks during the interview. Rewarding familiarity with common interview questions is likely to introduce bias into the hiring process, particularly in the case of entry-level positions. Conversely, if the candidate receives the questions in advance, traditional interview skills such as the knowledge of a broad range of typical questions and the ability to appear calm in very high-pressure situations become less important to the candidate's success, and the committee is able to focus on the way the candidate's responses demonstrate their ability to succeed in the position.

Sending questions in advance may mitigate some of the particular biases that neurodivergent candidates face during the hiring process. Norris, Crane, and Maras (2020) highlight the challenges that autistic people may face in recalling specific autobiographical memories, as required by interview questions that ask for examples of personal experience or achievement. Though that study did not find that receiving the questions in advance had a quantitative impact on the performance of autistic participants, the authors did report that both participants with autism spectrum disorder and typically developing participants found having the questions in advance to be beneficial. The adaptations which that study found most effective were changes to questions to provide more specific prompting about the expected format or relevance of the response. The conclusions in this study highlight the extent to which job interviews can test for skills that are not required for a particular position, in particular the ability to spontaneously recall autobiographical memories. Sending the questions in advance is one part of creating a structured job interview that is more focused on the requirements of the position, and therefore more resistant to bias on the part of the interviewers.

While sending the questions in advance can contribute to a more inclusive interview process, it is important to be mindful of the total amount of writing, research, and other preparation that is required of candidates during the application process. Candidates, librarians, and administrators have all raised concerns about the amount of labor required of candidates, leading to ongoing discussions about both the application and the interview process. While it is important to have enough information to evaluate candidates, an overly onerous process may discourage applicants and create barriers to inclusive hiring. Within the SJSU King Library, these discussions have focused on the substantial amount of writing required of candidates at the beginning of the application process, including separate statements on teaching, research, and diversity and inclusion, as well as on the most appropriate format for the candidate's presentation.

It is possible that requiring too much preparation may unnecessarily disadvantage candidates who are not able to devote as much time to their job search due to work, caregiving, or other responsibilities. Some candidates may even interpret certain presentation prompts, such as prompts that ask them to tailor their presentation to a specific institutional context, as demands for free labor and unpaid consulting. Many academic libraries use a hiring process that superficially resembles the process used to hire disciplinary faculty, but that lacks the standardization that is typically present within academic disciplines. As an example, disciplinary faculty who are interviewing on multiple campuses are often able to repeat a standard job talk sharing their recent research activity. In contrast, librarian candidates are likely to encounter a wide variety of presentation prompts and simulated teaching assignments, adding to the demands of a job search. When making decisions about the application and interview process, it is important to keep in mind the demands being placed on the candidate by an academic job market that is rigorous and competitive but at the same time lacks standardization and coordination between institutions.

## Creating a Sustainable Pipeline of Job Candidates through Mentorship

As librarians work toward equity, diversity, and inclusion and assess inclusive employment procedures, they should consider a sustainable pipeline for advancing and hiring job candidates within their own institutions. In 2017, an Ithaca S+R and Mellon Foundation survey verified that 61 percent of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) library employees were female and 71 percent were White, making the lack of diversity in the library profession unavoidably apparent (Schonfeld & Sweeney, 2017). The survey noted that only 8 percent of ARL library employees were Black, 6 percent were Hispanic, fewer

than 1 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native, and less than 1 percent were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Schonfeld & Sweeney, 2017). In contrast, 47 percent of students enrolled in four-year public universities are people of color (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The American Library Association (ALA) Spectrum Scholars and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Diversity Alliance promote diversity through residency programs and mentoring. However, these programs are competitive and offer opportunities that are limited in number. Over time, the impact of such programs may become evident, but they should be supplemented with professional development and mentoring programs offered through individual institutions to give library personnel upward mobility (Sanchez-Rodriguez, 2021).

Not all library personnel aspire to become librarians, but some do and are still waiting for the opportunity. Therefore, libraries with diverse student populations or diverse library employees could offer mentoring and possibly recruit future librarians from within their institutions. In general, libraries do not prioritize internal hiring, particularly among part-time librarians who frequently perform many of the day-to-day responsibilities and duties of full-time librarians. For example, at the SJSU King Library, part-time librarians, especially those hired to cover subject areas, provide information literacy sessions, assist students and faculty in research consultations, fulfill course reserves and acquisition requests, and hold regular reference hours. In addition, some part-time librarians go above and beyond to serve on library working groups or support library programming. Furthermore, part-time librarians may have the opportunity to present or write about the work that they have done at their institutions. To attend conferences, however, many of the same part-timers do not receive release time or financial assistance. Libraries must stop discouraging those who exhibit an interest in governance and scholarly activities if they are to serve as a pipeline for diversifying the profession from the existing workforce—not to deprive tenure-track or full-time faculty librarians of resources, specifically travel stipends, but to demonstrate the value of all roles within the profession. One recommendation would be to allow release time to present at a peer-reviewed conference or to support travel grant applications. This recommendation has recently been implemented at the SJSU King Library, but the impact has yet to be determined. It is, however, a step in the right direction. If research and scholarly activities are essential qualifications for tenure-track librarians, libraries should assist candidates in meeting this requirement, not create hurdles.

To those colleagues who argue that there is a lack of skill among the institution's pool of potential applicants, such as teaching or communication abilities, other colleagues can offer the counterargument that these talents can develop with experience. How can libraries diversify the profession if they continue to seek out candidates with the same characteristics as the current workforce? First, let us support those who are interested in learning more. The same training tactics, such as observe-assist-solo methods for teaching instruction techniques, can be utilized by libraries to improve and develop the abilities

of potential candidates. Suppose an institution has diverse staff members with a graduate-level degree in information science or part-time librarians who do not lead library instruction sessions. Both of these groups would be excellent sources of future librarians. Libraries should allow prospective internal candidates to observe and participate in library instruction sessions. This invitation could serve as an introduction to the profession and lead to additional conversations and mentoring opportunities.

Creating a systematic program to mentor part-time librarians and library staff across institutions will allow every library employee to receive guidance and support regardless of their background or experience. The Oregon Library Association, UC Berkeley Library, and several libraries in Victoria, Australia, all provide models of staff mentoring programs (Berkeley Library Staff Web, n.d.; Burke & Betts, 2014; Oregon Library Association, n.d.). This approach also allows several libraries to collaborate on a single mentoring plan with the same objective, especially when there is a lack of structured mentoring programs available. As Hussey and Campbell-Meier (2017) noted, only 38 percent of participants in their study described their mentoring relationship as a formal mentorship program. A systematic approach would help establish libraries' accountability for achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion within the profession and at their institutions.

## Conclusion

To make its recruitment practices more inclusive, the SJSU King Library focused on targeted advertising, created recruitment ambassadors, held informational webinars, provided interview questions in advance, and worked on mentoring in-house talent. However, while recruitment remains a primary focus, this is not where librarians and libraries should stop. Once recruitments are done, the next steps must be the promotion and retention of librarians of color.

As a profession that remains primarily White, the role of academic librarian reflects the ongoing conversation that many universities are having with their teaching faculty. At SJSU, not just the library but all academic departments are changing the culture of how they reach out to potential recruits. Many universities have gone to great efforts to examine the biases recruitment committee members intentionally or unintentionally bring into the conversation when deliberating on candidates. At SJSU, an instrumental position has been developed and hired to lead the campus in training and discussion: the associate vice provost for faculty success. The role of this individual is to help hiring committees avoid any mishaps that the recruitment process can present.

However, once hiring committees have gotten candidate pools approved by these individuals, it is the committee members who are left to prioritize the candidates who have the capacity to achieve tenure and promotion. Often committee members must see beyond what the institution has trained them to acknowledge as obvious attributes that say "success," such as publications and strong evaluations. But it does not end there. After

recruitment, this same effort to look beyond the obvious must be exhibited by tenure and promotion committees in order to retain librarians of color. To this end, at SJSU, retention, tenure, and promotion committee members must go through training that discusses biases and how to view the contribution of faculty of color and faculty that fall within other categories of diversity. Recruitment, retention, and promotion of librarians of color must be intentional, but for many committee members a level of discomfort can still exist when encountering changing policies, procedures, and ways of thinking about hiring and evaluating faculty members. Because of this unease, there remains a lot to do to make the cultural changes in our organization and institutions that go beyond recruitment and reach across the full careers of librarians of color.

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