Possible Interview Questions

University Libraries

University of South Carolina

March 2012

General

1. Why should I hire you? What makes you the best candidate for this position?
2. What would you change about your last job?
3. Tell me about yourself.
4. What would the person who likes you least say about you?
5. What motivates you to do the type of work that you do?
6. What is particularly important to you in looking for an academic position?
7. Are there any deadlines, constraints, or other issues that we should know about as we consider your application?
8. Describe your experience working in libraries.
9. Why did you choose librarianship as a career?
10. Why are you interested in this particular position?
11. Why did you apply for this position?
12. What about this position and USC interests you?
13. Describe the most significant achievement or written project/presentation/report which you have had to complete.
14. What are your strengths? Weaknesses? Areas to improve?
15. What are your current research interests and tell us about what you have done in the past? (In class examples are ok.)
16. Our tenure criteria require us to be excellent in our primary job of librarian, plus contribute to the university, community, and the profession. We are also encouraged to contribute in some way to scholarship and/or research. In the areas of Service and Scholarship what interests do you have that might help you fill the requirements in these areas?
17. Give us an example of an experience you had at your current job or another job that you found personally rewarding.
18. Describe what you would consider your ideal work day?
19. Describe your ideal job.
20. What is your dream library job?
21. What draws you to an academic library rather than another type of library, for example, public or special?
22. Describe how you work under pressure. Do you anticipate problems effectively or just react to them?
23. What have you learned from your mistakes on the job?
24. What questions do you have for us?
25. How do you prefer to be supervised?
26. What is the most unusual job you’ve ever had?
27. What did you do to prepare for your interview?
28. How do you handle system changes such as ILLiad client updates? Are you flexible?
29. Give an example of a mistake you made on the job and tell us what you learned from it.
30. What do you see as your role – as a _____ Librarian – in the USC community?
31. Are you comfortable working outside the written policies in order to help a patron in need? Give an example of a time you had to think on your feet and improvise.
32. Give us an example of a problem where you had to come up with a non-standard solution, and tell us how it was resolved.
33. What combination of work experience and education do you have that sets you apart from the other candidates?
34. What ideas do you have for improving the ___ Department at this library?
35. What do you see as the greatest challenge(s) for ___ in the next 5-10 years?
36. What motivates you to get out of bed in the morning?
37. Talk about some of the most significant memories you have from throughout your career, and what got you through those times, either good or bad.
38. Tell me about a time when old solutions didn’t work.
39. Have you ever had a supervisor challenge a decision? What was your reaction, and how was the situation resolved?
40. What will you bring to this position? How will you achieve your personal goals and how will you help the library to reach its goals?

Team Work

1. Tell us about a team or group project you have worked on and how you contributed to it.
2. What would you do if you heard another librarian give an incorrect answer to a patron, not just a case where you would have referred to another source first but flat out wrong, e.g. the library does not subscribe to the Chicago Tribune?
3. Give us an example of a time in which you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or fellow students in school.
4. What role do you tend to take when you are involved in group or team projects?
5. How do you motivate yourself and those around you?
6. How do you contribute to positive morale in the office?
7. How do you establish and maintain effective working relationships with teaching and research faculty members?
8. Give us an example of something you did in a former job that contributed toward a teamwork environment?
9. What are your perceptions of the way library departments in your current library work together well or don’t work together well? If you had the power, what would you do to improve inter-departmental cooperation?
10. Describe the culture of the ___ Department and the University Libraries, and then ask how the candidate sees him/herself fitting in.

Specific Departmental/Role Questions

1. The role of the ___ librarian and the ____ department has changed significantly in the past five years and will probably continue to change. How do you see ____ service changing in the next five years?
2. Tell us about your experience with Bibliographic Instruction, Collection Development, and Online Searching
3. What would you do if you were at the desk and both phones were ringing and there were 3 or 4 patrons already waiting and a demanding professor interrupted?
4. What would you do if you were unsure how to answer a reference question?
5. What is your teaching philosophy/approach?
6. What projects are you currently working on that will affect _____ service over the next 12-18 months?
7. What qualities do you have that would make you an exceptional _____ Librarian?
8. What do you see as the greatest challenges for _____ over the next 5 years?
9. What new services should the Thomas Cooper Library _____ Department consider adding?
10. How is ILL both a public service and a technical service and how should ILL interact with these areas?
11. Is the _____ Library a branch library or a special collections library?
12. Should you be given the duty to serve as liaison to an academic department for instruction and collection development, what ideas do you have on initiating and maintaining contact with the department?
13. We actually received this question over the phone at our Reference Desk. Someone from the governor's office called and asked "Do they eat shellfish in Somalia?" Imagine you were the librarian who had answered the phone. What would you do with that question? Describe your thought process and what steps you would take in answering the question.
14. What training experience do you have?
15. What do you consider your strengths and weaknesses in a classroom instruction setting?
16. Librarians are not interacting directly with many of our library users because of remote access to our resources. What ideas do you have for creating a personal connection with this remote audience?
17. Which of the sciences is your favorite? Which of the sciences do you find most intimidating?
18. In an ideal world, how do you prepare to teach a research instruction class? Is there a universal theme that you always include?
19. What is your experience with digital resources and licensing/copyright issues?
20. What is your philosophy of the role of technology services in an academic library?

Management/Leadership

1. Describe your management style.
2. Describe your decision-making style.
3. How do you handle controversy within the organization?
4. Tell me about the hardest decision you've ever made, and how you reached it.
5. What work achievement are you most proud of?
6. What has been your greatest success at work?
7. What has been your greatest failure at work?
8. Tell me about your planning style.
9. Describe your toughest personnel problem. How was it resolved, and what steps did you take to resolve it?
10. Talk about your communication style, both to those you report to and to those who report to you.
11. What's the biggest risk you've ever taken? What did you learn from the experience?
12. What characteristics do you like to see in staff members you hire?
13. Please talk about your supervisory experience. For example, what experience do you have maintaining the daily operations of an office? Do you currently supervise full-time employees?
14. How do you help maintain positive office morale?
15. Have you ever had to work with an employee who was making errors on the job, and what strategies did you use to correct the problem? If not, how would you handle that situation?
16. How do you bring out the best efforts of individuals so they become effective and enthusiastic members of the team?
17. What experience do you have with supervising and training professionals and paraprofessionals?
18. Describe a time when your team didn’t agree.
19. How will you find funding for the library, or repurpose current funding for changing technology needs?
20. What do you see as the role of a Library Director or Dean?
21. How would you become familiar with the staff and librarians you supervise?
22. How would you support the library staff in terms of professional development?
23. Given the growth in electronic resources, and the corresponding change in library workflows to support these resources, how would you (re)allocate resources and personnel to accommodate this growth?
24. How do you balance external activities – such as committee memberships or scholarship – with your work? How would you assist staff to handle the same challenge?
25. How do you develop and implement strategic plans for the library? How do you measure outcomes and results?
26. Now that you’ve had a tour of the building, how would you reimagine the library’s functionality?
27. How would you engage students in the library and its services?
28. What is the role of the library in outreach and in working with alumni?
29. What partnerships would you seek to form with other on-campus or off-campus entities?

**Future Goals**

1. Where would you like to be professionally in ten years?
2. Where would you like to be professionally in five years?
3. What are your career goals or plans in librarianship?
4. What are your future goals? Would you like to stay in ______, move up to management, work toward your PhD, or...?
5. What are your long-term goals for your career?
6. What initially interested you about this position? How does it fit into your career goals?

**Skills**

1. What is your favorite reference source and why?
2. How would you handle a hostile customer?
3. Tell us about your experience with information technology.
4. There are many times when we are asked a reference question that really baffles us. How do you go about resolving this particular issue?
5. What class have you particularly enjoyed teaching? What about that class was particularly satisfying?
6. In the morning, you receive a call from a Professor begging you to teach a class that afternoon. It seems that he has it for today on his syllabus but forgot to tell you. How would you handle that situation?
7. A student comes to you asking for access to a specific database, one that we have. What are your next steps?
8. What experience do you have communicating with patrons and other staff members in person, over the phone and in writing?
9. What experience do you have with trouble-shooting computer, scanner and printer problems?
10. Tell us about your experience with general, social science, and humanities reference sources.
11. How do you track ongoing assignments – both for yourself and assignments that you give to your employees?
12. What experience do you have with Ariel, Odyssey or other article delivery software?
13. One responsibility of this position is to liaise with staff members who perform ILL duties at the other USC campus libraries. These staff members have different skill levels and personalities, and will come to you with ILLiad problems and general ILL questions. What experience do you have in a role such as this? If none, ask how each candidate would serve this group.

14. You will serve as backup to the Head of the Department on server maintenance, trouble-shooting and new client installation. What experience do you have with these tasks?

15. One of your duties will be maintaining the ILLiad web pages for this campus, plus the other 8 sites on our shared server. What is your experience with maintaining ILLiad web pages and using the various ILLiad tools – the Customization Manager, the User Manager, and the Billing Manager?