The Candidate's Perspective on the Academic Library Interview Experience during COVID-19

Summer Krstevska, Elizabeth Ellis, and Mary Beth Lock

Abstract

Academic libraries have made varying changes to the librarian interview, owing to the swing to more virtual interviews that were necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We surveyed recent candidates for academic librarian positions about their academic library interview experiences during the pandemic and received responses from 137 individuals who had applied for positions between March 2020 and April 2022. Our respondent feedback captured candidate perceptions that applying candidate-centered design concepts to interviews, centering the process around the needs of the applicant, and increasing transparency is worth considering to provide a better, more accommodating experience for the candidate and greater accessibility in academic library hiring practices.

Introduction

This research explores how the academic librarian interview itinerary was experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly how hiring processes throughout the pandemic may have been changed from on-campus to online, and in duration, to keep both candidates and employees safe. It also explores how candidates perceived their experience of these interviews. A survey tool was created to measure how academic library interviews were experienced by job candidates and how interviews conveyed an understanding of the position and institution during the pandemic. The survey also asked if candidates liked interviewing for academic library positions virtually and what potential limitations or challenges candidates faced when interviewing during the pandemic. The findings from this survey indicate that candidates like interviewing virtually and that candidate-centered interview practices could make the interviewing process better for candidates and allow them to have a more thorough understanding of the position and hiring institution, especially when interviewing virtually.

Literature Review

At the time of our survey tool distribution, few sources addressed modality-related interview practices in librarianship in the literature, so sources that we consulted for this study draw from academic librarianship but also from other disciplines and departments within higher education. Some of the literature consulted addresses interview modality while others challenge the traditional academic interview process. We initially consulted these sources as part of a library task force to evaluate existing interview practices and their inclusivity and accessibility, which led to the research questions posed in this study.

Rethinking Traditional Interviews in Higher Education

Literature from higher education administration over the past several years has emphasized the importance of humanizing the traditional days-long, on-campus interview process. Faculty members who interviewed before 2020 pointed out the on-campus interview process "can be biased, taxing, expensive and time-consuming" and place undue burden on candidates who are parents of young children (Rebeiz 2023). A segment in *Disability Compliance for Higher Education* suggests candidates with disabilities be sure to ask for necessary accommodations when interviewing virtually (McCarthy 2020). Because of the pandemic, higher education institutions are evaluating the feasibility of eliminating on-campus interviews partially or entirely and using other methods to become familiar with candidates. A recent study on hiring student support personnel in higher education found that "the traditional on-campus interview also provides challenges that may be effectively mitigated by virtual interviewing" (Brazelton and Becker 2021). The benefits of virtual interviewing identified in the article include reduced travel costs and time and that they are easier to schedule, more convenient for candidates who are caregivers, and more affordable for students or underemployed candidates.

In "A Candidate-First Model of Faculty Hiring for Cruel Times: How Do You Recruit Faculty Members during a Pandemic, to a Campus They've Never Set Foot On?" (2021), Wendy Lucas and David Welky discuss how their department found effective ways to convey their institution's uniqueness and community-oriented culture despite their disappointment over the pandemic shift away from on-campus interviews. Their article advocates for the adoption of a "candidate-first model" for recruitment that includes seeking candidate input on schedules, allowing plentiful breaks, and being intentional about how institutional culture is communicated, which they chose to do by sending candidates goodie boxes with information about the department, campus, and

wider community, as well as swag and recommendations from faculty members within the department.

Virtual Interviews in Academic Libraries

Changes to the interview process in academic libraries may be addressing issues with the traditional on-campus academic library interview discussed previously, particularly how exclusive and inaccessible this process is. A 2022 survey of hiring managers in academic libraries found that 59% of the 131 libraries they surveyed conducted entirely virtual interviews between March 2020 and January 2022 (Grandy et al. 2022). This survey also found that a percentage of hiring managers believed that the shift to virtual interviewing could help with their institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, which was especially important during the pandemic, when women of color were disproportionately impacted by illness and childcare-related work challenges (Grandy et al. 2023). The survey tool distributed by Grandy et al. asked many similar questions to our own survey, but targeted hiring managers rather than candidates.

Another common theme that was prevalent in the literature regarding interview practices in academic libraries is the need for the interview process to better match the nature of the job being performed. Martin, Erikson, and Stefani (2020) discussed how their Library Acquisitions team at the University of Chicago overhauled the interview process before the pandemic to recruit more diverse candidates who may not have experience in academic libraries but possessed desirable skills for positions and workflows that are increasingly electronic and customer-service oriented. While the interview process at the University of Chicago Library did not take place virtually, many elements of the interview were changed to "attract a wider range of candidates to fit this new climate of flexibility and diversity" (Martin, Erikson, and Stefani 2020).

The need to attract flexible and diverse candidates is even greater in the wake of pandemic-induced workforce changes like the "Great Resignation" and more flexible or hybrid positions. In fact, some academic libraries justify their decision to stick with virtual interviewing after the pandemic is over because workflows are changing. In "Conducting Effective Online Interviews in an Academic Library," Michalak and Rysavy explain that their library has "high expectations for technology use by the candidate because the culture of our library . . . requires us to use Zoom and other tools like Slack to communicate with teammates who work in-person and remotely" (Michalak and Rysavy 2022). An anonymous interview on the popular website *Hiring Librarians* echoed this idea when asked if the candidate's institution hires virtually: "Because we serve an

online university, the ability to connect virtually is critically important" (Hiring Librarians 2022). In this context, "connect" does not simply mean having the technology skills to access remote platforms but also the ability to conduct an engaging conversation, interview, or reference interaction without inhabiting a shared physical space.

Enhancing Candidate Experience of the Academic Library Interview

Most of the literature we consulted focused on implementing virtual hiring practices from the perspective of the hiring institution. The literature has yet to thoroughly explore what changes could be made to academic library interview practices to humanize the process and be more accessible for all candidates. Some changes mentioned in the literature include the interviewers asking better questions of the candidates and having a more conversational-style interview (Martin, Erikson, and Stefani 2020); building in break time, communicating clearly and frequently, as well as providing a copy of the questions to the candidate in advance (Steidinger et. al 2021); and sending a digital information packet to the candidate pre-interview (Michalak and Rysavy 2022). These changes to interview practices may be helpful in increasing the candidates' physical and mental comfort, though the literature is severely lacking in examining the candidates' experience of these changes and what impact they have on their interview experience, including if they improve their understanding of the institution or position. There are also gaps in the literature as it relates to these changes and whether pandemic-inspired changes, like virtual modality and shorter duration of the interview and hiring timeline, should continue to be utilized and improved. Ongoing evaluation of virtual hiring practices has the potential to improve the candidate experience versus going back to the traditional way of academic interviewing.

Methods

This online survey was approved by Wake Forest University Institutional Review Board and designed to sample the academic library job candidate's interview experience for the unique period of change from March 2020 to April 2022. An anonymous cross-sectional questionnaire survey was created in, and powered by, Qualtrics, a secure web-based platform. Inclusion criteria for respondents was participation in an academic library interview from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 to the start of the survey in March 2022, regardless of whether they actually received a job offer. Responses to the survey that fit the inclusion criteria

totaled 137. The investigators discarded 22 responses due to potential respondents opening the survey but not entering responses.

In an effort to solicit a non-probability purposive sample, the investigators utilized a mass media method of eliciting respondents. The online survey was distributed electronically through purposefully chosen email listservs related to librarianship, which included approximately 22 North Carolina and national library-related listservs. Data collection occurred from March through April 2022.

The 21-question survey was generated as an iterative process and was pilot tested four times to allow for evaluation of survey content, clarity, length, and difficulty. The survey consisted of four demographic questions (stage of career, type and rank of position interviewed for, and date of interview), ten multiple choice questions (five including an option for open-text response), one question using a three-point Likert scale, and one question using a 10-point Likert scale.

The instrument collected career and interview information as it relates to the following:
- respondents' stage of career
- type of position they interviewed for (level and rank)
- when they interviewed (year and date)
- what modalities were utilized during their interview and their preferences of interview modality
- what costs, if any, were paid for and reimbursed
- the time frame/length of their interview experience
- whether accommodations (see appendix) were incorporated into the interview process
- elements (see appendix) scheduled/included in the interview process
- elements (see appendix) of the interview process respondents found prohibitive
- factors (see appendix) of the interview process that were, or were not, impactful to respondents' interview experience
- if the interview process, as it was experienced, provided respondents with a strong understanding of the position and the institution
- if the respondent made it to the final round in their candidacy

The investigators undertook a quasi-experimental approach to address three core research questions about the candidates' experience of academic interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. How are academic library interviews experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and how is this affecting/impacting candidates' understanding of the position and institution?

2. Do candidates like interviewing virtually? If so, what interview elements did candidates find beneficial?

3. What potential limitations or challenges do candidates face when interviewing virtually?

For quantitative data analysis, the investigators used descriptive statistics to explore and describe the survey data. They also utilized cross-tabulation via Qualtrics to discover potential relationships between data variables.

For qualitative data analysis of the respondents' open text responses, the investigators implemented a hybrid coding approach in their thematic analysis. The initial round of coding utilized both structural and simultaneous coding methods. In the second round of coding, content analysis was employed to draw further connections between identified themes. Twelve themes emerged, including modality, COVID-19, mental health, accommodations, and more.

To ensure inter-coder reliability, one researcher initially reviewed the qualitative data and created a preliminary codebook. To ensure coding consistency, the investigators then separately coded an overlapping subset of responses and jointly reviewed and resolved any differences in their interpretations, refining the codebook as necessary. The changes were not tracked, thus preventing us from calculating the internal rate of return (IRR).

Research Questions

- How are academic library interviews experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and how is this affecting/impacting candidates' understanding of the position and institution?
- Do candidates like interviewing virtually? If so, what interview elements did candidates find beneficial?
- What potential limitations or challenges do candidates face when interviewing virtually?

Research Results

Survey Participant Information

A total of 137 respondents completed the survey. Of the 137 respondents who answered our question about the year they participated in an academic library interview (within the determined

timeframe of March 2020 to April 2022), 19 (14%) respondents interviewed in 2020, 78 (57%) interviewed in 2021, and 40 (29%) interviewed in 2022.
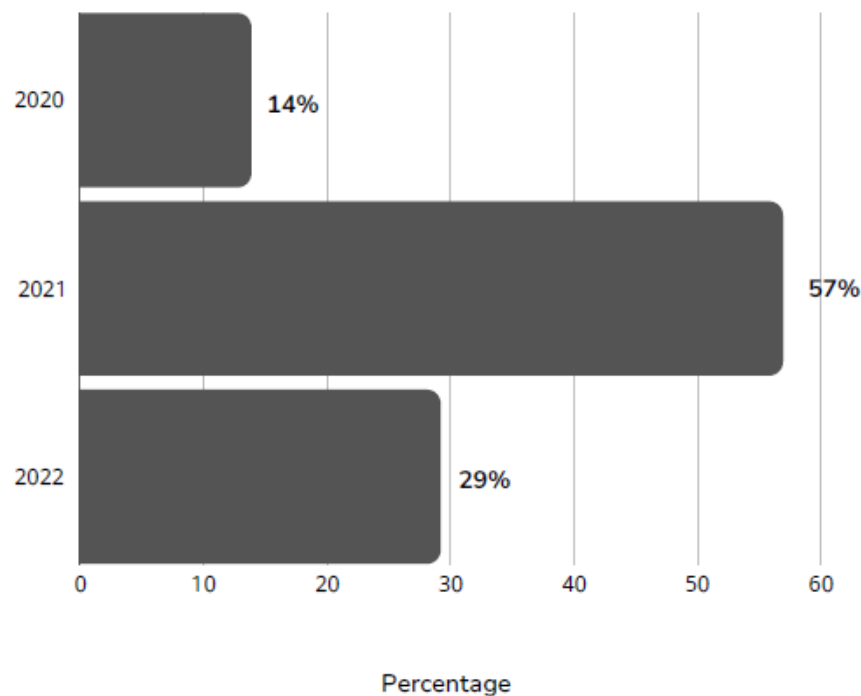

Figure 1. When (what year) did you last interview during the pandemic? (*N* = 137)

Of the 137 respondents who answered our question about what their current career stage was, 15 (11%) were advanced career librarians (with more than 15 years of experience), 43 (31%) were mid-career librarians (5–15 years of experience), 70 (51%) were early career librarians (fewer than 5 years of experience), and 9 (7%) were students.
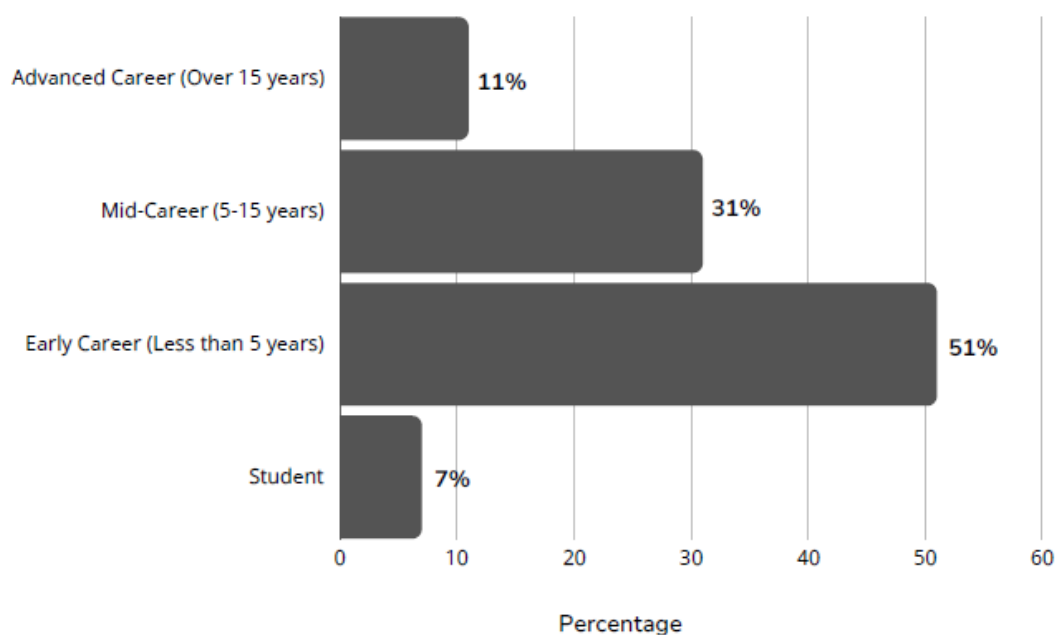
Figure 2. Career stage of respondents (N = 137)

Of the 136 respondents who answered our question asking what level the position they interviewed for was, 7 (5%) said they interviewed for an administrative position, 22 (16%) said they interviewed for a management/supervisory position, 63 (46%) interviewed for an experienced academic librarian position, and 44 (32%) interviewed for an entry-level position.
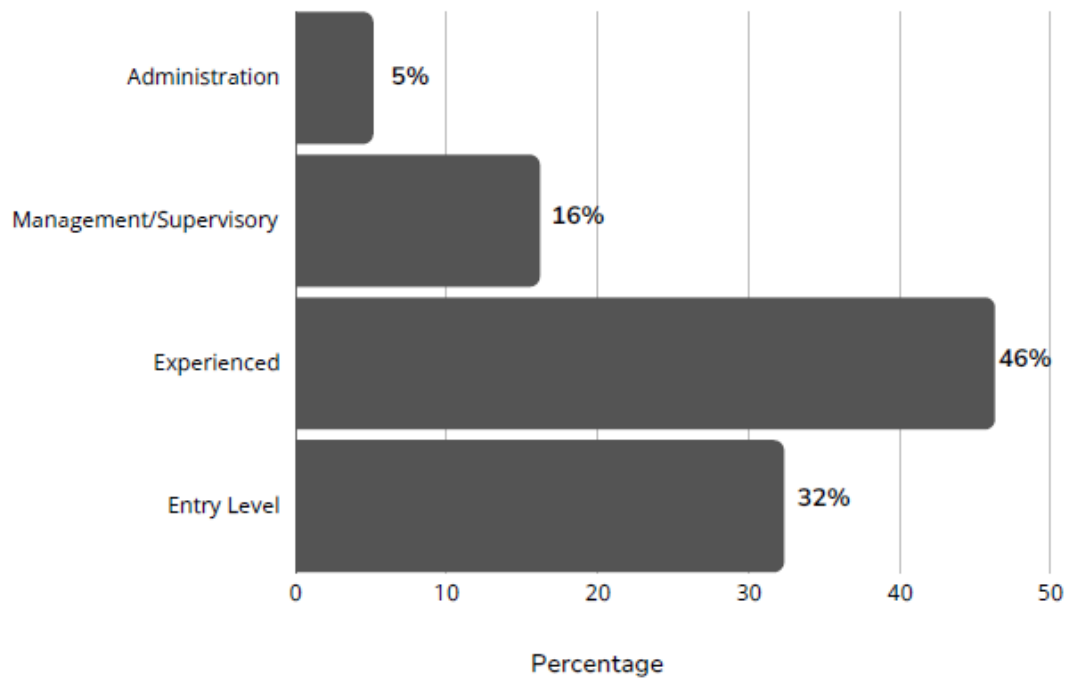
Figure 3. What level was the position you interviewed for? (*N* = 136)

Of the 137 respondents who answered our question asking what rank the position they applied for was, 33 (24%) respondents said the position they interviewed for was a tenure track faculty position, 55 (40%) respondents said the position they interviewed for was a non-tenure track faculty position, and 49 (36%) respondents said the position they interviewed for was a staff position.
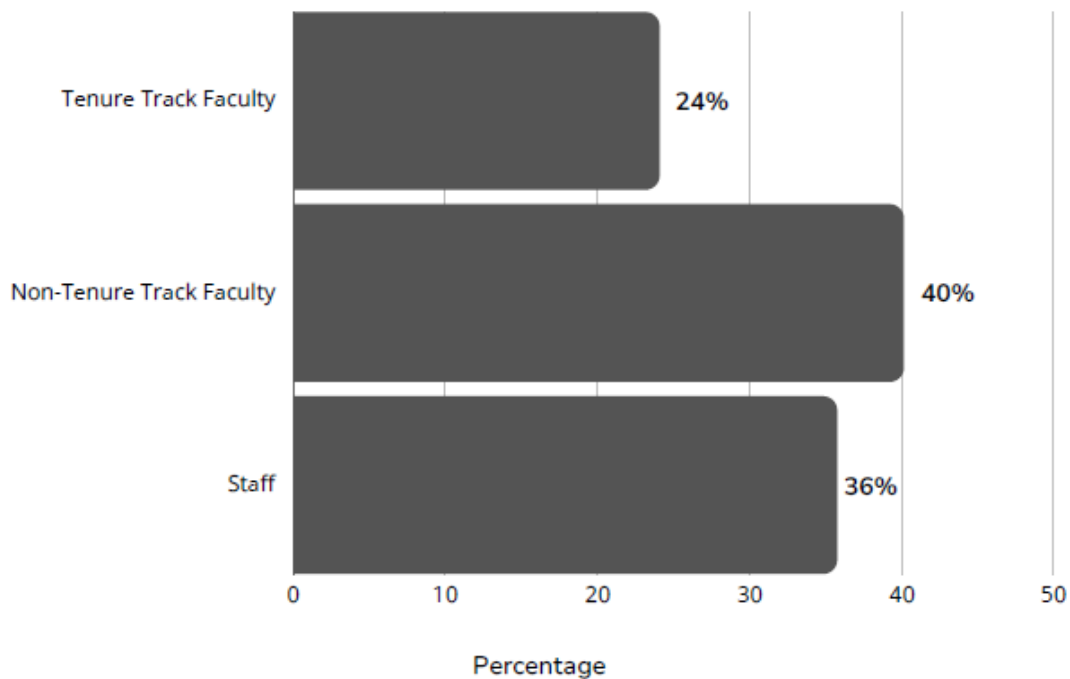
Figure 4. What rank was the position you interviewed for? (*N* = 137)

The vast majority of the respondents were from those who were successful in securing the position after the interview, with 85 of the 93 (91%) respondents indicating they received a final offer after their interview experience and only 8 (9%) of the respondents saying they did not.

Modalities of Academic Library Interviews (March 2020–April 2022)

The survey respondents experienced the following modalities for interviews in academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and April 2022: 36% (46/127 responses) of interviews included a telephone component, 92% (122/133 responses) of interviews included a virtual live video conference, 15% (19/123 responses) of interviews had candidates record video or audio responses to interview questions, and 27% (34/128 responses) of interviews involved on-campus visits.
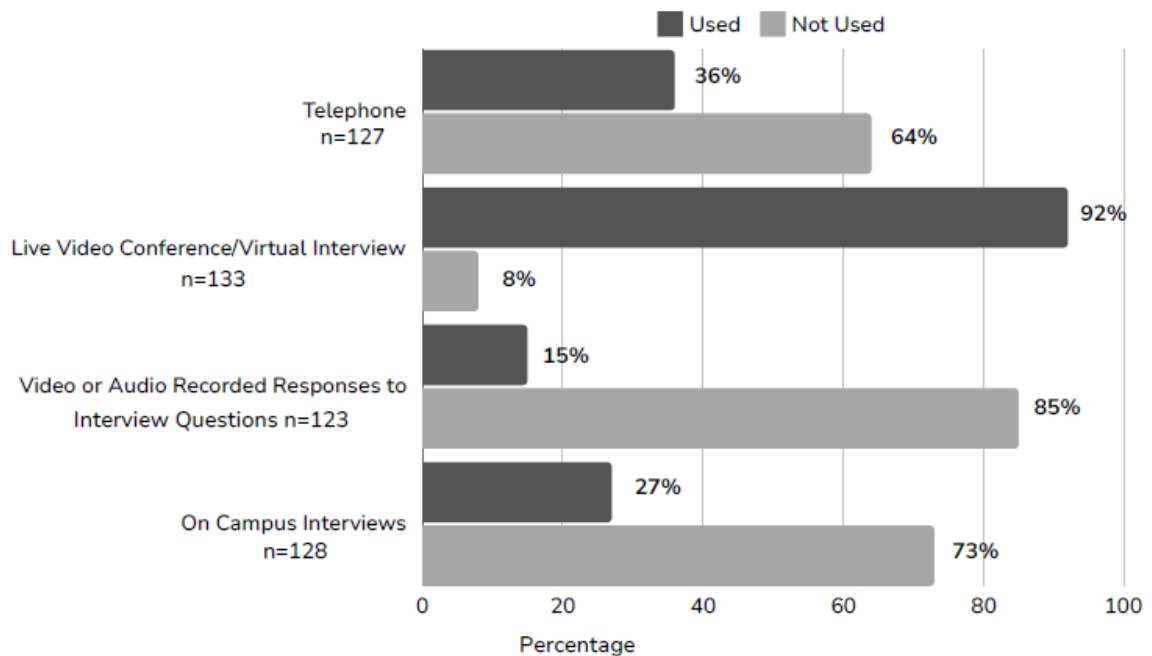
Figure 5. Modalities used and not used in interviews

Preferred Modality

A 58% majority (75/129 responses) that responded to the survey question asking their preferred modality for interviewing, even in non-pandemic times, selected a virtual interview, followed by an on-campus interview. While the COVID-19 pandemic was the impetus behind changes to the academic librarian interview process, survey respondents made relatively few comments specific to COVID concerns. Mentions of COVID by the survey respondents were mainly connected to decisions to interview virtually, which candidates said alleviated safety concerns and anxiety due to the pandemic. Candidates were much more likely to discuss their experiences with the virtual interview process, including its ability to provide candidates with an understanding of the position and institution.

Modalities and Understanding of the Position and Institution

When asked to rate on a 10-point Likert scale if the interviews they experienced allowed them to develop a strong understanding of the position and institution, 95 of the 133 respondents (71%) answered with a 7 or higher, with 35 of those respondents (26%) answering with a 9 or 10. These results seem to imply that more work can be done to develop an interview process within academic librarianship that more strongly promotes understanding of the position and institution

as 28% (38 respondents) answered with below a 7 on the Likert scale when asked about their level of understanding.
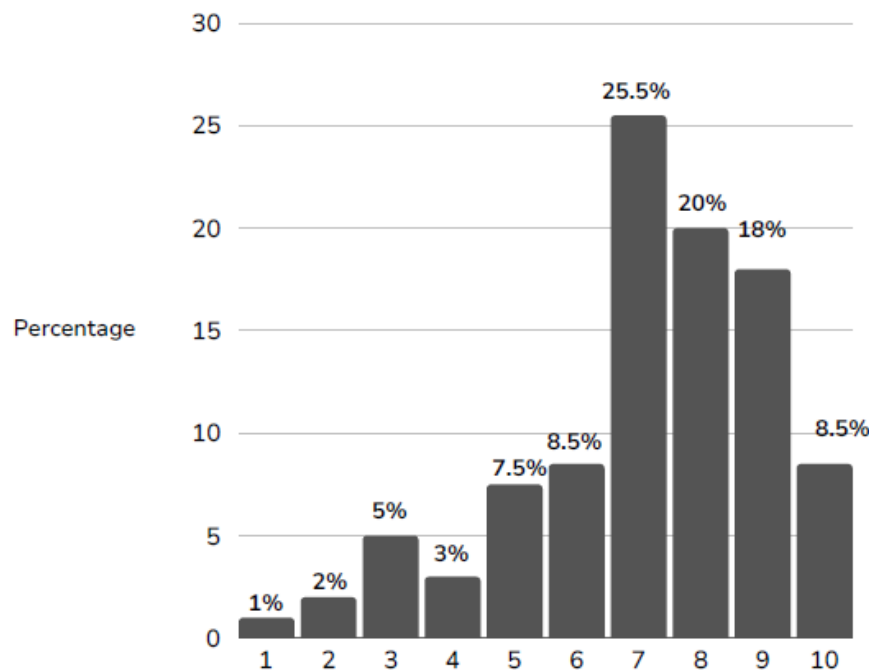

Figure 6. How well candidates understood position and institution after interview (*N* = 133)
1 = least understanding, 10 = greatest understanding

When we cross-tabulated responses to the question "Did you gain a strong understanding of the position and institution?" with the question "What modality was utilized during your interview?," the results were as follows:

- Among the 44 respondents who conducted telephone interviews, 32 (75%) also indicated a strong understanding of the institution and position with a Likert score of more than 7.
- Out of the 119 respondents who participated in live video interviews, 87 (73%) also reported a strong understanding of the position with a Likert score exceeding 7.
- Among the 19 respondents who experienced recorded or audio responses, 13 (68%) also reported a strong understanding of the position and institution with a Likert score of more than 7.
- Of the 33 respondents who engaged in in-person interviews, 25 (76%) also responded with a Likert score above 7, indicating a strong understanding of the position and institution.

For all interview modalities, except on-campus interviews, the majority of respondents selected responses in the mid-range of the Likert scale regarding the interview's ability to convey a strong understanding of the position and institution. This suggests that interview elements, rather than the modality itself, played a more significant role in candidates' understanding of the position and institution.

Table 1. Modalities utilized in interview (Q7) cross-tabulated with understanding of position and institution (Q17)

| | | | Q17: Did the interview process as you experienced it allow you to develop a strong understanding of the position and the institution? (Likert Scale 1-10) | | | | | | | | | | |
		Total	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Telephone	44	0	0	2	0	3	3	4	12	7	8	5
	Live video conference/ virtual interview	119	0	1	1	6	4	9	11	32	24	18	13
	Video or audio recorded responses to interview questions	19	0	0	0	2	1	2	1	2	8	1	2
Q7	On campus interview	33	0	0	1	1	1	3	2	8	4	9	4

Like in most cross tabulations, each cell-pair represents a modality (row) that has a response (column). However, because an interview process typically includes multiple modalities if the candidate moves from phone/zoom interview to onsite interview, each respondent had multiple modalities (Q7, rows) for one rating of understanding gained (Q17, columns). To represent this, the columns state the total number of participants who responded at that level of understanding, but each cell-pair has the count who had that modality and the percentage of the number at that understanding-rating who had that modality, because multimodal interviews will total more than 100%. Thus, the right column of the table reports that 13 respondents answered that they had a level 10 understanding of the institution, and of these

13 respondents, five (38.5%) had a phone interview, 13 (100%) had a zoom interview, two (15.4%) had recorded response interviews, and four (30.8%) had on-site interviews.

Elements of the Interview Process

The respondents were asked whether the following elements were offered in their interview process:

- provided interview questions or a detailed itinerary in advance
- allowed input on interview modality, day/time, travel and ADA accommodations/arrangements, and restaurant choices
- given options on whether their camera was on or off during the interview
- allowed to provide input on what staff or departments were included in the interview

Of the above-listed elements, the four that respondents reported experiencing the most often with their interviewing process were allowing their input on the day/time of the interview, providing the detailed itinerary in advance, providing interview questions in advance, and allowing input on ADA accommodation. These four elements, when compared to the others, have mostly minimal impact on the format or design of the interview schedule or process. Some of the elements that were included in the survey had few responses, including input on travel arrangements and restaurant choices (likely because a majority of interviews during the study's time frame were held virtually).

Interview Elements & Understanding

As can be seen in table 2, displaying the cross-tabulation of responses for both "did you develop a strong understanding of the position and institution" on a 10-point Likert scale and "what elements were included in your interview?," the results of the cross-tabulation highlighted the following insights that may be worth further exploring:

- Out of 132 respondents, 37% (49) claimed to receive interview questions in advance. Of those, 76% (37) rated their understanding of the position and institution as 7 or higher on the Likert scale. Comparatively, 67% (57 of 83) of those who did not receive questions in advance also rated their understanding similarly. This suggests a need for further exploration of how providing questions in advance impacts understanding.
- Out of 122 respondents, 83% (101) received a detailed interview itinerary. Among them, 65% (79) rated their understanding of the position and institution highly. This indicates

the potential effectiveness of detailed itineraries to a candidate's understanding of the position and institution.

- Out of 128 respondents, 87% (111) had no input into their interview modality, yet 72% (81) rated their understanding of the position and institution highly. Conversely, among the 13% (17) who had input, 54% (11) rated similarly. This suggests that providing modality choices may influence understanding but was not common, possibly due to lack of other modality options during COVID-19.

- Out of 132 respondents, 87% (115) had input on interview date and time, and 65% (86) rated their understanding of the position and institution highly, suggesting a potential connection to understanding.

- Out of 32 respondents, 56% (18 out of 32) had input regarding travel arrangements, and 41% (13) rated understanding of the position and institution highly. Among the 44% (14) without input, 79% (11) still rated understanding highly, indicating a need for further investigation, possibly due to virtual interviews lacking travel arrangements during COVID-19.

- Out of 30 respondents, 33% (10) had input into restaurant choices, with 70% (7) rating their understanding of the position and institution highly. Surprisingly, 80% (16 of 20) of those without input also rated highly. This finding suggests limited relevance due to the pandemic.

- Out of 120 respondents, 13% (16) had input on camera use, with 75% (12) rating their understanding of the position and institution highly. However, 93% (97) of the 104 without input still rated their understanding highly. This practice was seemingly uncommon to offer candidates, but candidates still came out of the interview feeling that they had a strong understanding of the position and institution.

- Out of 72 respondents, 50% (36) had input on ADA accommodations, with 69% (25) rating their understanding of the position and institution highly. Among the 36 without input, 75% (27) also rated their understanding highly, suggesting further investigation.

- Out of 119 respondents, only 2.5% (3) had input into staff/department inclusion in their interview day, and all rated their understanding of the position and institution highly. Of the 116 without input, 76% (88) still rated their understanding highly, indicating potential impact but limited practice of offering this type of input to candidates. This could be due to virtual interviews with limited itineraries during COVID-19.

Table 2. Interview elements (Q18) cross-tabulated with understanding of position and institution (Q17)

			Q17: Did the interview process as you experienced it allow you to develop a strong understanding of the position and the institution? (Likert Scale 1-10)										
			Total	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Q18	Total Count (All)		133.0	0.0	1.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	11.0	11.0	34.0	26.0	22.0	13.0
	Provided interview questions in advance	Yes	36.8%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	27.3%	54.5%	35.3%	42.3%	36.4%	46.2%
		No	62.4%	0.0%	100.0%	66.7%	83.3%	83.3%	72.7%	45.5%	61.8%	57.7%	63.6%	53.8%
	Provided detailed itinerary in advance	Yes	75.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	72.7%	72.7%	79.4%	84.6%	81.8%	92.3%
		No	15.8%	0.0%	100.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	18.2%	18.2%	14.7%	7.7%	13.6%	7.7%
	Allowed for your input on deciding interview modality	Yes	12.8%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	16.7%	9.1%	27.3%	8.8%	15.4%	4.5%	23.1%
		No	83.5%	0.0%	100.0%	33.3%	100.0%	83.3%	81.8%	72.7%	82.4%	84.6%	95.5%	76.9%
	Allowed for your input on deciding interview day/time	Yes	86.5%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	81.8%	90.9%	91.2%	80.8%	95.5%	100.0%
		No	12.8%	0.0%	100.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	18.2%	9.1%	5.9%	19.2%	4.5%	0.0%
	Allowed for your input on deciding travel/accommodation arrangements	Yes	13.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	18.2%	18.2%	11.8%	15.4%	13.6%	15.4%
		No	10.5%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	17.6%	3.8%	13.6%	7.7%
	Allowed for your input on deciding restaurant choices	Yes	7.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	5.9%	3.8%	9.1%	15.4%
		No	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	27.3%	9.1%	20.6%	7.7%	22.7%	15.4%

Allowed you to choose between camera off or on in virtual interview	Yes	12.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	18.2%	0.0%	2.9%	15.4%	9.1%	38.5%
	No	78.2%	0.0%	100.0%	33.3%	83.3%	66.7%	54.5%	100.0%	85.3%	80.8%	81.8%	61.5%
Allowed to provide input on ADA accommodation	Yes	27.1%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	27.3%	45.5%	20.6%	15.4%	36.4%	46.2%
	No	27.1%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%	18.2%	9.1%	35.3%	34.6%	18.2%	15.4%
Allowed for your input on which staff or departments included in the interview day	Yes	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	4.5%	7.7%
	No	87.2%	0.0%	100.0%	33.3%	83.3%	100.0%	90.9%	90.9%	85.3%	96.2%	86.4%	76.9%

Virtual Interview Elements that Candidates Like/Modalities and Interview Elements Accommodation

One prevalent theme from the qualitative survey responses was that candidates liked the comfort, convenience, safety, and extra breaks or "downtime" that virtual interviews afforded. Candidates also commented positively about the virtual interview process having the potential to minimize bias. This was exemplified in comments such as:

"The Zoom interview was great for being able to see the names and preferred pronouns of all the people involved."

"I really liked that they did a blind interview during this first round. It took place over Zoom and they only recorded my audio. That helped remove bias from the interview process."

Virtual interviews accommodated candidates for whom material culture and social cues in the form of clothing, masks, and facial expressions were a concern. Some candidates experienced physical changes during the pandemic that impacted their ability to interview in person:

"The all-virtual format made it easier to deal with my wardrobe. I gained weight during COVID and couldn't button the collar on any of my dress shirts. I ordered a new one but it didn't arrive in time. So I cut through the back of the collar on one of my old shirts with scissors. This gave me the extra inch of slack I needed to button it and wear a tie, and because I was just staring at a webcam the whole time, no one knew the difference."

We posit that virtual interviews, when done correctly, can be a viable modality in non-pandemic times to accommodate the physical and mental health needs of candidates. While the examples provided above specifically address the COVID-19 pandemic, physical changes due to other life events such as illness or injury, weight fluctuations, and pregnancy/childbirth are common and should be considered to make the interview process as accessible as possible for candidates. Additionally, virtual interviewing might aid in providing a better support system and freedom for a candidate who finds the process anxiety-producing.

"I have always found the academic interview process challenging, especially the fact that it is an entire day long and the pressure of the presentation portion. I liked that completing the interview virtually allowed me time to actually take a break in privacy between meetings, which is difficult during in-person, on campus interview. It also allowed me to chat with my support system (family, significant other, friend) during breaks, which helped put my mind at ease and reduce my anxiety."

When speaking on interview elements they were allowed input on, the respondents had all good things to say about the ability to control that part of their interview.

"I liked that they built in 5–10 minute breaks between each set of interviews. The prompt for my presentation was given in advance and I liked having time to prepare. And for the phone interview the questions were provided 48 hours in advance which was also helpful and I think allowed me to think of some great examples that really demonstrated the skills I had that fit the position."

"Questions in advance is a big improvement—better, more complete answers, especially via Zoom"

"Liked: Very well thought out and planned, questions provided beforehand, fully virtual, incorporated breaks."

Prohibitive Challenges to the Interview Process

When asked if they found any elements of the interview process between March 2020 and April 2022 to be prohibitive of their consideration, application, or pursuit of the position, 19 of the 133 respondents (13.9%) to the question answered "yes."

The respondents were asked about the impact of various potential challenges to their ability to interview, including childcare and eldercare arrangements, health or disability challenges, pandemic concerns, current job obligations, internet availability/reliability, out-of-pocket costs, duration of interview, and distance to travel.

The top challenge impacting the respondents' interview experience was current job obligations. Fifty-three (53) respondents noted current job obligations having some or significant impact on their interview experience.

Duration of interview was the second most challenging element impacting respondents' interview experience, with 46 respondents claiming some or significant impact on their interview experience.

Cost was rarely mentioned as a challenge of the interview experience. Only 7 respondents claimed cost had "some impact" or "significant impact" on their interview experience. This could be due to most interviews being virtual during this study's timeframe.

Reviewing the data indicated that the respondents who found a part of their interview challenging or prohibitive were less likely to have received the interview questions in advance, been allowed input on deciding interview modality, and been allowed input on travel/accommodation arrangements or restaurant choices. They were also less likely to have had input on choosing between having their cameras off or on, or on which staff or departments were included in the interview.

Respondents who were not given input about these interview elements mentioned such in a negative light.

"I did not have a chance to tour campus at all and they did not offer any additional contact with folks outside the library (like HR, LGBTQ groups, etc.)."

"I was not offered a choice in times to meet; they gave me a time and I either had to meet it or request another. I rearranged my schedule to meet, but it would have been nice to be asked."

"The library did not present itself in a very good or professional light during my interview by not having any campus IT leaders be a part of the interview process, by not having any prepared questions for any of the group sessions, and by many groups not having facilitators, therefore allowing conversations to turn negative and letting dominating personalities run rampant."

"I have a lot of anxiety around food and particular food preferences and would have MUCH preferred to have the option of eating all meals alone, or at least being given a choice of restaurants."

As mentioned earlier, of the potential interview process challenges we included in the survey, candidates were most impacted by current job obligations and duration of interview, even if they did not let this deter their consideration, application, or pursuit of the position. Respondents commented that virtual interviews could help to alleviate the scheduling demands of interviewing in relation to their current job obligations.

"Virtual interviewing is wonderful and I hope it stays. It is so much easier to just take one day off rather than 2-3 for traveling."

However, there are spatial challenges to interviewing virtually, especially when already employed and during the pandemic; people were sharing spaces with family members more regularly and there were fewer safe spaces for people to work from outside of home.

"I would have liked to have been offered a hotel room or some other non-home, non-current work third space for extended virtual interviews in the finalist round."

"I do not have a professional space in my own home to participate in a virtual interview, but did not feel it was ethical to interview from my office!"

"Interviewing at my home (a smallish condo) was difficult, because I had to work around my partner's schedule."

Discussion

Communicating Interview Context

From the respondents' qualitative comments, it seems it is not modality alone that makes an interview more inclusive, accessible, or effective. Many of the respondents' responses showed a misunderstanding and/or lack of context around the library's choices as it relates to the interview schedule and process. As many of the respondents did report being in the early career stage, they likely have not had a professional library job yet or have not experienced many interviews, which is a consideration that search committees should keep in mind. In the qualitative comments, respondents shared elements of the interview process that were off-putting, such as fewer people in the interview, requesting the candidates submit a video, and recording the candidates' presentations. These interview elements were likely accommodations the library made for their staff, but with little to no context or explanation, these accommodations made a bad impression on the candidate. Ultimately, we think that libraries sharing what they are doing to plan for the interview, whether it directly affects the candidate or not, would help build context for the candidate and would paint a picture of the culture of the institution better than leaving it unspoken.

Like the misunderstood COVID-19 accommodations, many of the respondents' observations showed a lack of, and a desire for, more context. These responses advocated for, and/or showed an appreciation of, communication in advance. The responses also included mentions of receiving the interview questions in advance; wanting to receive details about responsibilities, pay, benefits, etc., in advance; and wanting to understand the nature of the questions being asked. This makes sense when considering going into an interview is often an overwhelming and intimidating experience. Some of the responses of this nature show how more context may improve candidates' experience and understanding of the library's place within the institution. For example, one of the responses stated, "Some of the people who I had meetings with indicated they weren't involved in the hiring process, so it seems those meetings might have been eliminated to cut down on the time investment." For those of us who have been in academia or experienced various academic interviews, we know that often candidates need to meet with colleagues from outside their potential department and administrators, sometimes these colleagues are in units outside of the library (e.g., the provost, campus centers related to

liaison work, etc.). They may not be active in the hiring process, but their input matters to the decision-makers.

On the note of context and communication, some respondents mentioned an appreciation for being asked their pronouns and for hearing the pronouns of others involved in the interviews. Though we know this is not necessarily representative of how all librarians feel regarding pronouns, asking for pronouns is another element of candidate-centered design that should be considered in the interview. This not only seems to be inclusive but also provides context on who the candidate would potentially be working with.

Showing Institutional Culture More Tangibly

To analyze candidates' understanding of institutional culture, we cross-tabulated elements included in the interview and whether the respondents felt they had a strong understanding of the institution and position. The results imply that many of the elements that institutions add to the interview process to show context, culture, or consideration (such as providing the interview questions in advance or allowing input into restaurant choices) could be better implemented so that candidates do not need to do the work of reading between the lines and making ill-advised assumptions. Examples of this include providing more context as to why certain questions are asked or making culture more tangible (e.g., "here at this institution it is important to us to accommodate all employees' food allergies when planning a meal").

Ethical Considerations for Virtual Interviews

The relative novelty of virtual interviews for academic library hiring and the emergency conditions under which this modality was employed resulted in some practices that were ethically questionable, including privacy and boundary violations, for the respondents we surveyed. Based on the experiences of the respondents it would be helpful for hiring institutions to be aware of the power imbalance between the hiring institution and candidates and to define the limit of what can be expected of candidates in virtual interviews, for example, space-related constraints, privacy concerns, preparation time, and work/life balance considerations.

Institutions wishing to conduct virtual interviews should be mindful of the space constraints and barriers candidates face when virtual interviews are being designed. During the pandemic especially, respondents to the survey mentioned feeling uncomfortable about the ethics of where they interviewed for a variety of reasons: letting future employers and coworkers glimpse into their private home space where children were, conducting an interview in the same space

as a partner or roommate who was also using the space for their own work, and interviewing from a space that was dedicated to their current job, like an office in a library. These ethical considerations could be remedied by making arrangements for candidates invited to a virtual interview to secure a private space, like renting a coworking office or a hotel room that is local to them as a place to conduct the interview.

Another practice that presented ethical challenges for candidates was being asked to record their presentations or entire interviews for review by other people at the institution or, in one case, an entire consortia. The survey respondents expressed hesitancy to have their interviews recorded because it could potentially jeopardize their privacy on the job market and complicate their current position.

We also encourage hiring institutions who use virtual modalities to be cautious not to overstep boundaries candidates may have regarding their time and work/life balance. Respondents to the survey revealed situations that clearly disregarded what the candidate had going on other than their virtual interview, including a candidate who was invited on a Friday to a virtual interview, which included a presentation, the following Monday. This likely would not have happened for an on-campus interview because the committee would have recognized the challenge(s) for a candidate to make the necessary travel arrangements on such short notice. Another survey respondent was scheduled for an on-campus interview but tested positive for COVID-19 shortly before their scheduled flight, and the committee changed the interview to a virtual modality. It was not stated whether the candidate was allowed time to recover from COVID before undertaking the virtual interview day, but it is very alarming to think that candidates may be asked to interview virtually despite illness when this would (hopefully) never be expected of a candidate who is interviewing on-campus.

Recommendations Overview
Candidate-Centered Design Applied to Academic Library Interviews
Reviewing the survey respondents' feedback for the actions that a search committee can implement to best meet candidates' needs, there are some relatively easy, accommodating practices that could be implemented. These specific actions include the following:

- Design itineraries from the perspective of the candidate.
- Allow for candidate input on itinerary and interview schedule.
- Minimize the length of the interview as much as possible.

- Utilize virtual interviews to minimize costs and eliminate barriers for candidates and reduce the carbon footprint and time commitment of the interview process.

- Build in quiet time and break time into the itinerary.

- Allow candidate input on the day/time of the interview.

- Provide a detailed itinerary in advance.

- Provide interview questions in advance.

- Ask for input on ADA accommodation.

- Offer to arrange a third interview space, away from both home and work, in the candidate's area.

- Do not request that interviews be recorded to meet the needs of the search committee.

- Allow adequate time between the request to interview and the interview day to allow candidates to prepare.

Limitations

The investigators acknowledge that this study has multiple limitations that have caused a gap in the assumptions that we have been able to determine from the results. First and foremost, because we did not make every question of the survey required, not all respondents answered every question. Of course, the pandemic environment had a massive impact on the results of this survey, and the conditions of the pandemic cannot be replicated exactly for future studies. In this same sense, some of the potential accommodating practices and challenges (e.g., travel, health, cost) of on-campus interviews were not especially revelatory due to a lack of on-campus interviews in this timeframe. Other responses, though meaningful, were affected by the usual virtual interview environment. For instance, the findings around duration of the interview might be suspect, since virtual interviews change pre-pandemic expectations for travel time and Zoom fatigue can impact both interviewer and candidate ability to withstand prolonged time in front of a computer camera.

The survey takers were mostly early career and mid-career librarians, therefore we acknowledge that student and advanced career librarians' perspectives on their academic librarian interview experiences is based on a small sample size and should be understood as such. Further, as mentioned previously, almost the entirety of the respondents' candidacy made it to the final round of consideration, therefore the results are potentially biased by respondents whose experience may have ultimately been colored by obtaining the best possible outcome. We also recognize that the number of respondents we had does not represent the entirety of academic librarian job candidates. As with other non-probability sampling strategies such as a

sample of convenience, a non-probability purposive sample cannot be assumed to be statistically generalizable. While this sample was chosen purposely to reflect professionals rather than a truly arbitrary convenience, it still does not have statistical generalizability. Each of these limitations provide opportunities for further investigation.

We recognize that further research could be done on the academic library interview experience looking at differences depending on whether the candidates are already primarily and/or currently employed in library careers and looking for their next job or if they were applying for their first jobs out of library school. Another opportunity for further investigation would be examining the academic library interview experiences by regional and/or by size and scale of the libraries applying for.

An important question for this survey was when we asked respondents whether they felt the interview experience gave them a strong understanding of the position and institution. We recognize that further research could delve deeper into this idea of "understanding" and what is meant by that. We hope that further research in this area could explore ADA accommodations for both mental and physical comfort as it relates to the academic librarian candidate experience. Lastly, as mentioned above briefly, although the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be replicated for future studies, we do think there is value in doing further examination of the respondents by asking those whose candidacy made it to the final round of consideration whether an on-campus interview would have impacted their decision to accept or decline a job offer. We recommend that further statistical analysis be done to determine the impact of modality and accommodations on job candidates.

Conclusion

The survey we conducted identified how academic library interviews were experienced by job candidates and how interviews conveyed an understanding of the position and institution during the COVID-19 pandemic, if candidates liked interviewing for academic library positions virtually, and what potential limitations or challenges candidates faced when interviewing during the pandemic. The findings from the survey indicate that candidates like interviewing virtually and that candidate-centered interview practices could make the interviewing process better for candidates and allow them to have a more thorough understanding of the position and hiring institution. The insights discussed above are by no means exhaustive, but thinking about practices through the lens of how it will be experienced by candidates and creatively addressing

any challenges that might be found will likely enable a wider candidate pool to participate in the interview and expand access for all candidates.

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Appendix: The Candidate Speaks Qualtrics Survey

Informed Consent

Study Title: The Interviewee Speaks: Candidates' Experience with Academic Librarian Interviews During COVID-19

If you have interviewed for an academic librarian position since March, 2020, you are being asked to participate in a research study.

We are investigating how interviewees have been experiencing academic librarianship interviews since March 2020. This data will allow us to determine what methods have contributed positively or negatively to the interviewees' experiences and best practices for academic librarianship interviews moving forward.

Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time without any penalty. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect you in any way. We do not anticipate that there is any risk to you in participating in this study.

To participate in this study, please respond to this survey to collect basic information about your experiences interviewing for an academic librarian position. Most of the questions on this survey will be multiple choice or will allow multiple selections from a list. Respondents who would like to describe in further detail will have the opportunity to do so by providing their contact information at the end of the survey. This survey takes most people between 5-10 minutes to complete.

The information that is recorded in this research study will be kept confidential. Survey response data (names, IP address, browser, other personal identifiers) are not being collected. Access to your data will be limited to the study investigators. The research data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Research data will be stored until they are no longer scientifically valid and then destroyed. In reports of the results, there will be no way of identifying your responses or you personally.

The researchers will take the following precautions to protect your information. All records of this study will be kept on a secure and password protected server and only authorized study team members will have access to them. Your data will be used only for scientific purposes, and once the data is no longer scientifically valid, it will be destroyed.

We encourage you to print or save a copy of this page for your records (or future reference). If you choose to decline or discontinue participation, you may exit the online survey now.

This research study was approved by the Wake Forest University IRB, Protocol #X21-0229. In addition, for any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Wake Forest University IRB Office at irb@wfu.edu or at (336) 758-4171.

For more information about this study, please contact the Principal Investigator: Summer Krstevska, krstevs@wfu.edu, or Co-investigators: Elizabeth Ellis, ellisea@wfu.edu & Mary Beth Lock, lockmb@wfu.edu

By clicking "Agree" below, you will be able to continue the survey. Clicking "Do Not Agree" will take you out of the survey entirely. Thank you!

○ Agree

○ Do Not Agree

We are interested in hearing from people who interviewed for Academic Librarian positions since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, 2020. If you have interviewed for more than one position in this time period, please answer with your most recent interview experience.

○ CONTINUE

Interviewee Information

What option below best describes the stage of your career?

○ Student

○ Early career librarian (less than 5 years)

○ Mid-career librarian (5-15 years)

○ Advanced career librarian (over 15 years)

What level was the position you interviewed for? (If you have interviewed for more than one position during the pandemic, please answer about your most recent interview.)

○ Entry level

○ Experienced

○ Management/supervisory

○ Administration

○ Other

[_____]

What rank was the position you interviewed for? (If you have interviewed for more than one position during the pandemic, please answer about your most recent interview.)

○ Tenure track faculty

○ Non-tenure track faculty

○ Staff

When did you last interview during the pandemic? (If you have interviewed for more than one position in this time period, please answer with your most recent interview.)

	Month	Year
Date	[▼]	[▼]

Interviewee Experience

Were the following modalities utilized during your interview?

	Yes	No
Telephone	○	○
Live video conference/virtual interview	○	○
Video or audio recorded responses to interview questions	○	○
On campus interview	○	○

If there was a modality utilized in your interview not identified above, please enter it here.

[   ]

Did you incur any costs related to technology for facilitating a virtual interview? (Example: microphone/video camera, additional internet/connection technology, software, etc.)

○ Yes

○ No

○ N/A

Were you expected to pay for any travel or interview expenses up-front for an in person interview?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

What expenses were you reimbursed for?

[   ]

What expenses were you not reimbursed for?

[   ]

How much did it cost you out of pocket, whether or not you were reimbursed?

○ 0-$24

○ $25-49

○ $50-$99

○ $100-499

○ $500+

○ N/A

Did you find any elements of the interview process to be prohibitive of your consideration/application/pursuit of the position?

○ Yes

○ No

To what extent did the following impact your interview experience?

	No impact	Some impact	Significant impact
Childcare arrangements	○	○	○
Eldercare arrangements	○	○	○
Health or disability challenges	○	○	○
Pandemic concerns	○	○	○
Current job obligations	○	○	○
Internet availability/reliability	○	○	○
Out of pocket costs	○	○	○
Duration of interview	○	○	○
Distance to travel	○	○	○

If there were other factors that impacted your interview experience, please enter it here.

Did the interview process as you experienced it allow you to develop a strong understanding of the position and the institution?

Weak understanding					Neutral					Strong understanding
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

In your most recent interview experience did the institution incorporate any of the following as you applied and prepared for your job interview?

	Yes	No	N/A
Provided interview questions in advance	○	○	○

	Yes	No	N/A
Provided detailed itinerary in advance	○	○	○
Allowed for your input on deciding interview modality	○	○	○
Allowed for your input on deciding interview day/time	○	○	○
Allowed for your input on deciding travel/accommodation arrangements	○	○	○
Allowed for your input on deciding restaurant choices	○	○	○
Allowed you to choose between camera off or on in virtual interview	○	○	○
Allowed to provide input on ADA accommodation	○	○	○
Allowed for your input on which staff or departments included in the interview day	○	○	○

Did your candidacy make it to the final round of consideration?

○ Yes

○ No

Which elements were included in your interview experience?

	Yes	No	N/A
A presentation to the whole library, search committee, other stakeholders on a pre-assigned topic	○	○	○
An interview with University administration	○	○	○
An interview with constituents from outside of the library	○	○	○
Meals with stakeholders	○	○	○

Which statement most accurately describes the timeframe/length of your cumulative final stage interview period? Include travel time if appropriate.

○ Less than one day (6 hours or less)

○ One full day (6 hours or more)

○ More than one, less than two days (may include dinner the night before, breakfast the day after)

○ Two days (more than one full day of interview time)

○ Other

[ ]

What did you like or dislike about the interview process as you experienced it?

What is your preferred modality for interviewing, even in non-pandemic times.

○ In person

○ Virtual

○ Virtual followed by in person

○ Other

If you are willing to speak with us more about your interviewing experience(s), especially if you've interviewed for more than one position since March, 2020, please provide your name and email address here.

Name

Email Address

Summer Krstevska (krstevs@wfu.edu) is Business, Economics, and Data Access Librarian at Wake Forest University. **Elizabeth Ellis** (ellisea@wfu.edu) is Instruction Librarian at Wake Forest University. **Mary Beth Lock** (lockmb@wfu.edu) is Associate Dean at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University.