

2019-12-18

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Repository Citation

Thielen J, Neeser A. How You Can Write More Inclusive Data Practitioner Job Postings. *Journal of eScience Librarianship* 2019;8(2): e1167. <https://doi.org/10.7191/jeslib.2019.1167>. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/jeslib/vol8/iss2/2>

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Commentary

How You Can Write More Inclusive Data Practitioner Job Postings

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Abstract

The principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion have long been incorporated into many aspects of the data practitioner profession. The hiring process is an exception; it is opaque, stress-inducing, and ultimately reinforces a homogeneous workforce. Job postings are important both as a window into the profession and as the first way that candidates interact with your institution. This commentary article provides concrete and actionable recommendations on how you can start writing more equitable, diverse, and inclusive job postings at your institution.

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Keywords: job posting, hiring, diversity, equity, inclusion, data practitioners, library jobs, data librarians, academic libraries

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Disclosures: The substance of this article is based upon a panel presentation at RDAP Summit 2019. Additional information at end of article.



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Introduction

Everyone's read them. Some of us have even written them. That's right: job postings. It seems like almost daily, there is a new posting for a data practitioner position. As a job seeker, you have probably tried to decode the language in these job postings: *what do they actually mean by the word 'equivalent'?* The job search is stressful, opaque and, honestly, not equitable. It favors those 'on the inside,' those already working in library and information science (LIS), and worse, those who look like or grew up in dominant groups. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles have long been emphasized within the academic library community (Association of College and Research Libraries 2019), but there has been little application of those principles to the hiring process. We are writing this commentary article to provide recommendations on how you can start writing data practitioner job postings that more effectively incorporate EDI principles today.

The phrase 'equity, diversity, and inclusion' is often used within our profession, without defining what each of those terms mean. According to the American Library Association (ALA), equity "takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair outcome" (ALA 2017). Diversity is "the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different" (ALA 2017). Finally, inclusion means an environment where everyone is treated fairly, valued for their differences, has equal access, and can contribute to an organization's success (ALA 2017).

Job postings are readily accessible and widely available windows into the profession. They are often analyzed to look at the evolving nature of academic libraries (Kim and Angnakoon 2016). Also, for many job seekers, a job posting is their first encounter with your institution and a brief introduction to the way in which their future work will be evaluated. So a carefully crafted job posting is essential to highlight your strengths as an institution and to attract candidates.

Recommendations on Writing Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Job Postings

Creating job postings that are more equitable, diverse, and inclusive is an opportunity to reduce disparities within institutions and professions that favor dominant groups. While these recommendations are not a comprehensive list, they are applicable to all LIS positions, inside and outside of academia.

- Make EDI a qualification or responsibility for the position, rather than only listing a generic institutional or unit statement. For example, a required qualification could read "demonstrated commitment or ability to advocate for and cultivate an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment on campus." The candidate must now show their demonstrated or potential ability to advocate for and cultivate an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment in their cover letter. Additionally, some universities require candidates to submit a separate statement about their commitment to EDI.
- Critically evaluate which degree(s) is a required and/or preferred qualifications. For example, does this position *really* need an MLIS? Or is it a default required qualification for your library? If so, how is the knowledge and/or experience that come with an MLIS degree, as opposed to a different degree, crucial to fulfilling the job responsibilities? If unsure about answering this last question, consider

making the MLIS degree a preferred qualification or not listing it at all. Librarianship is already skewed toward dominant groups (Vinopal 2016) so looking to other fields invites more diverse demographics, experiences, and skill sets. This is especially important in the data practitioner profession as we seek to expand research data services to areas such as data curation and data visualization.

- Eliminate the words “equivalent” and “relevant.” Specify which disciplines and/or experiences are pertinent. For example, change the required qualification of “MLIS degree or equivalent degree and relevant experience” to “MLIS degree or a graduate degree in the social sciences and experience working with research data.” It is unfair to assume that candidates outside of LIS know what would be comparable. Even for those working in LIS, “equivalent” and “relevant” can have a variety of meanings across institutions.
- List a numerical salary range (e.g. \$59,000-\$62,000), rather than using descriptive words like “commensurate” or “competitive.” A salary range, rather than a minimum, indicates to the candidate that the salary is negotiable (Ryan 2017). Having clear numbers allows for transparency as candidates can compare salaries. Further, it lessens the need for candidates to negotiate, which underrepresented groups are much less likely to do (Kray, Thompson, and Galinsky 2001). Specify also that the salary is negotiable depending on the candidate’s education and experience. Even if your library is not currently hiring or you are not in the position to determine salaries, you can start conversations about this issue.
- Limit the number of required qualifications so they truly are must-haves and include all others in the preferred qualifications section. Underrepresented groups are less likely to apply if they do not feel they completely meet the qualifications. Listing too many can create unrealistic expectations and discourage these groups from applying (Mohr 2014).
- Ask a range of people to provide feedback on the job posting, especially if you are trying to recruit a candidate outside of LIS. Ask them to see if the posting is clear (e.g. free of ambiguous language and jargon) and attractive to your desired candidate pool.

Conclusion

The institutions in which we work as data practitioners are the very power structures that define which communities are included and excluded. From access to public services such as education and technology to which voices are represented in our digital archives, these structures favor and perpetuate dominant groups and ideologies. The pipelines into these institutions are often murky, and without diverse voices and perspectives these systems will continue to perpetuate themselves. But, as a community, data practitioners can advocate for more equitable hiring processes and a stronger commitment to EDI. We hope that this article inspires you to be an advocate for more equitable hiring practices at your institution.

Disclosures

The substance of this article is based upon a panel presentation on ‘Data Services’ at RDAP Summit 2019: “Advocating for Change: Understanding the Landscape of Academic Data Professionals” available at <https://osf.io/pgv5f>.

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