

# VRA EAC Community Hour

Thursday, May 25, 2:00-3:00pm EDT / 11:00am-12:00pm PDT

## Topic: “Working Towards an Equitable Workplace when Hiring, Supervising and Mentoring Student Employees and Interns”

We will hear from two different student supervisors on their approach to hiring, supervising and mentoring student employees. Our speakers will discuss their own approaches to the hiring process, as well as the challenges of supervision such as addressing mental health, equitable pay, being a mentor, supervising students of various positionalities and their own formal or on-the-job training on being a student supervisor.

### Guests:

**Joanna Wiley** is the Lead Student Supervisor for Library Services at McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland.

**Jeffrey Hines** is the Student Supervisor for the Art and Architecture Libraries at the University of Maryland. Prior to that he was a Library Supervisor for the Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine Library at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

**Moderator:** Cindy Frank

**Notes:** Lesley Chapman

- Please keep your microphones muted--please use a reaction, raise your hand, or use the chat to indicate that you would like to speak.
- **Video not required**, virtual backgrounds welcome (be mindful of your virtual background selections). Feel free to add your pronouns to your Zoom name.
  - [How to change your name during a Zoom meeting](#)
  - How to provide captions via [PowerPoint](#) or [Google Slides live captions](#)
    - <https://webcaptioner.com/> - Free Captioning Right In Your Browser
- If you'd like to ask a question anonymously, please send your question through a private chat to any moderators listed above.
- **Community Hours are not recorded** for the sake of attendees' privacy and so that all attendees feel safe to express any concerns or questions they may have on various topics.

**Attendees are encouraged to take notes under the [‘Community Notes’](#) section of this document.**

EAC webpage: <http://vraweb.org/about/committees/equitableaction/>

EAC email: [ea@vraweb.org](mailto:ea@vraweb.org)

Submit a topic for a future Community Hour: <https://forms.gle/fENKfkEJjAC6Fqew5>

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Thank you! [Visual Resources Association's Equitable Action Committee](#)

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## **Discussion Prompts:**

Did you have an impactful employer/mentor?

Why is a diverse group of employees important to you?

What kind of accommodations have you had to make for employees?

What are the top characteristics of a successful student employee candidate?

Do you ever wish you had special training for the hiring process, or for managing students?

Do you ever find yourself in conflict with the hiring policies of your institution?

How or what form does mentoring students take?

What characteristics do you have that help you supervise and mentor student workers?

Have you ever had to intervene when a patron is harassing or being abusive towards a student employee?

[Joanna's Answers to these questions.](#)

## Community Notes:

- Student workers shared across three units, so they can learn multiple skills
- Mentoring students can be very rewarding, helping students develop and grow
- Some of us started out our careers as student employees due to good mentors
- Student workers are not always young undergrads—many ages
- Supervisor mindset and work environment
  - We are hiring people who happen to be students who have a lot of other things going on in their lives, and need or want a job
  - Physically accommodating
  - Psycho-socially accommodating (so students can bring their whole selves)
  - Takes time to develop a culture and a process
  - Job descriptions
    - Work well with a diverse group of people
    - Willingness to learn new skills (don't limit applicants with specific required skills)
  - Posting
    - Libraries' Employment website
    - School of Information Sciences listserv
    - Multicultural Student Life listserv
    - Bulletin boards
    - Word of mouth
  - Interviewing
    - Pre-interview online background questionnaire (provides equal footing for folks less comfortable/adept with extemporaneous speaking)
    - Followed by an informal in-person or virtual "chat"
  - Choosing
    - Ignore "fit"; we want diverse experiences to help us understand all patrons
    - Ignore current skills, look for eagerness to learn
    - Ignore GPA, grades do not make the person
    - Pay attention to attentiveness and how communicative the applicant is
  - Training
    - Individualized
    - Instruction cards at workstations
    - SharePoint site with documentation
    - Always available for questions
    - Training never ends—we are always learning something new on the job (it's okay not to know—ASK!)
  - Mentoring
    - What do they want from the job? ("just a paycheck" is an okay answer!)
    - Allow them to use their outside skills on the job and teach skills they are interested in learning
    - Understand who they are
    - Pay attention to behavioral changes
    - Remember that we are responsible for their growth and safety
    - What is your applicant pool? Federal work study only? Or open to any interested students? Only undergrads?

- Graduate students usually looking for more hours/work, so retention can be difficult
- Usually don't hire seniors due to the amount of time it takes to train them
- Interview—start with what the various library units do and what the job will require of them, then a list of questions to discern how well they work with a diverse group of people, how they handle stress or tense situations, times that they have shown initiative, overall familiarity with libraries
  - Giving the student practice at interviewing, learning how to answer the questions, understanding transferable skills (don't be literal and think you need library experience per se), learning what their "soft skills" are
  - You can see a personality and sense where they may be able to use their best characteristics (ex. Extroverts working the desk and outward facing, introverts working in stacks, more organizing tasks)
  - How well do they communicate? Do they respond to emails promptly, were they on time?
- When onboarding, reassure them that it's normal you would never have seen any of these tasks before—encourage them to always ask questions—it's a continuous learning process and libraries are always adapting to patrons' needs and changing systems as needed, lots of on the job learning, and you won't know everything within a week, or even a semester

#### **Q&A:**

**Q:** Talk a bit more about the [pre-interview, what kind of questions are asked](#), and what kind of feedback?

**A:** Microsoft Forms form with typical interview questions

- Favorite course and why
- Least favorite and why
- What does excellent customer service look like
- (During Covid, asked if they had particular concerns)
- Forms tracks how long it takes users to answer

No time limit on answering the questions – really helps neurodiverse students fully process and engage (ex. ADHD student may not have been able to answer the questions as fully; many students appreciate the format)

The "chat" afterwards is more informal and relaxed, more personal

**Q:** How do you screen applicants to get to the next stage?

**A:** Not everyone who starts completes the questionnaire—may decide the job doesn't appeal after all  
What do they bring that is unique and how can they help us be better?

**Q:** Thoughts or experiences creating a welcoming atmosphere for neurodiverse, differently abled, or students whose first language isn't English?

**A:** Multilingual students are great assets to patron service!

Ask students what their preferred name in the workplace would be (ex. some Asian students adopt Western-sounding names rather than using their given name)

Many students are up front about their neurodiversity

Be up front and let them know accommodations are always available and there is no judgment

Start the conversation—make yourself available, ask that they tell you if they need accommodations so they can do the best job they can (help them develop self-advocacy skills)

Service desk design can be crucial for folks who use wheelchairs or who cannot stand or sit for long periods. Everyone coming in should “see a set of eyes” (A seated service desk attendant allows folks who use chairs to see who is there to help right away)—library anxiety is a real thing, we need to help alleviate it. Let them work in the way they can still do the work and be their full self—accommodations are going to happen—as long as the job can be done.

**Q:** Have you come across a time when you disagreed with the institution’s policies on how students were treated/compensated, etc.

**A:** It would be nice to be able to pay them more!!

Some students deal with food insecurity—can create a shared free pantry to help them out and make available to all so there is no stigma attached.

What are their needs and how can we meet them?

### Other thoughts:

Provide a student worker questionnaire each semester—what do you want to learn this semester? Then provide the opportunity for them to learn and practice those skills.

Remember we are here in part to help them develop as people.

**Q:** How to diversify your applicant pool to draw a wider range of folks in?

**A:** Can take time to do outreach, but word of mouth can have a great effect.

Posting to multiple places helps as well.

Breaking through that wall can take time but it is worth the effort and is enriching for everyone involved.

The appeal of the job can play a huge part—for example, a desirable on-campus job makes working and going to school easier.

Even if the student employees don’t go on to work in libraries (most won’t), they still will come out of their experience with a lot of transferable skills.

## Resources:

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting in progress. The main window displays a PowerPoint slide titled "Contact Info" for Jeffrey Hines. The slide content is as follows:

- Jeffrey Hines
- email: jahines@umd.edu
- tel: 301.405.9964
- LinkedIn: unjeffrey

The Zoom interface includes a toolbar at the bottom with icons for Unmute, Stop Video, Security, Participants, Chat, Share Screen, Polls, Hide Captions, Breakout Rooms, Reactions, Whiteboards, and More. On the right side, a vertical list of participants is visible, including Cindy Frank (she/her...), Lesley Chapman (she/her...), Jeffrey Hines, Joanna Wiley (she/her...), Hannah Plan..., Hannah Plank (she/her...), Marie-Louise Orsini (...), George Luna..., George Luna-Peña (h...), Marie Van Heulestijn (...), Nicole Corrigan..., Nicole Corrigan (she/her...), and Iona Hubner.

[USRS Interview questions](#) User Services and Resource Sharing, University of Maryland Libraries