
Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts. Archival Fundamentals Series III, Vol. 4. By Cheryl Oestreicher. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020. 195 pp. Softcover. \$69.00. \$49.00 for SAA members.

Reference and access are significant and enduring topics in archival practice and scholarship. It is fundamental to our common professional understanding of archives that “archival records exist to be used”¹ and that archivists must “construct a robust system of access” to records in their care.² Appropriately, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) has again included a monograph on reference and access in its Archival Fundamentals Series III, the latest iteration of its monograph series addressing several core aspects of archival practice.

Cheryl Oestreicher’s *Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts* is the fourth volume in the series, the latest descendant of Sue E. Holbert’s similarly titled *Archives and Manuscripts: Reference and Access* from SAA’s 1977 Basic Manual Series, and the newest volume since Mary Jo Pugh’s excellent 2005 *Providing Reference Services for Archives & Manuscripts* from Archival Fundamental Series II. While not formally a series in and of themselves, all these works are of a kind, which naturally invites comparison between them. Oestreicher acknowledges and addresses this context in the foreword, preface, and introduction to *Reference and Access* and promises to address “innovations in archival thought and practice in the last fifteen years” (p. xi) in the current volume.

Oestreicher brings nearly 20 years of professional library and archives experience to bear in authoring *Reference and Access*. She has been head of Special Collections and Archives at Boise State University’s Albertsons Library since 2012. Her long and varied record as an archival manager and educator at multiple universities, along with her service in professional organizations, no doubt contributes to a wide perspective of the field, which is of obvious benefit to a volume of this kind.

Oestreicher addresses definitions of the title terms right away, defining *access* as the ability to use records, and *reference* as the activities that lead to such use (pp. 1-2). The introduction includes wider context for modern and historical uses of these terms in archival practice in the United States, mirroring and complementing a similar section in Pugh’s *Providing Reference Services*. In chapter 1, Oestreicher further contextualizes reference and access within contemporary archives programs and correctly positions access as the desired outcome of all other archival functions, such as appraisal, selection, acquisition, preservation, arrangement, description, reference, outreach, and advocacy. She encourages all archivists to understand the intersection of access with other functional areas.

This volume is divided into chapters by topic, a familiar arrangement to readers of Pugh’s *Providing Reference Services*. Chapters average about 10 pages, touching on significant subtopics in each area, with plenty of recent literature cited for readers with strong follow-up research needs. With a total page count of about 140 pages plus appendices, readers seeking a comprehensive overview of reference and access can have it in just a few sittings.

As many readers might expect, Oestreicher places emphasis on current expectations researchers have about digital archives. In the 15 years since the publication of *Fundamental Series II*, researchers have (fairly or not) elevated their expectations around the immediacy and extent of access to digital records. Oestreicher states that meeting these expectations, which often removes archivists from reference interactions, requires a new kind of approach to reference services. This new approach is detailed throughout the volume, especially in chapter 7, which is devoted to virtual access. Although slight at just 10 pages, this chapter's discussions of born-digital and digitized records, metadata, and online access reflect growing user demand around immediate access to digital materials.

Technology is not the only aspect of public services deserving of updates in the literature. In discussing user registration, *Reference and Access* touches on current ideas about inclusion and user privacy. Oestreicher also devotes a chapter to skills and knowledge needed for reference and access services, another departure from previous volumes. This emphasis on competencies such as content knowledge, research and information literacy, and interpersonal skills provides new utility to those developing and training public services staff. A chapter on reference interactions expands on these competencies, providing guidelines on providing reference services in both in-person and remote interactions, reflecting an increase in email and chat users in the twenty-first century. An emphasis on emotional intelligence and upsetting encounters builds on the discussion of interpersonal skills from the previous chapter.

In general, Oestreicher presents topics and possible approaches to reference and access in a way that makes them useful for a range of repositories and archivists. She has wisely anticipated a wide-ranging audience of archival practitioners with different user needs working under varying amounts of institutional resources. However, in some cases, more discussion of the "why" alongside the "how" would have been useful. For example, a chapter on use policies starts with advice to promote "shar[ing] materials with broader audiences" (p. 115), but then devotes the next 10 pages to methods of restricting and profiting from use of archival holdings, without much guidance on when restrictions and fees might or might not be appropriate. One might expect a chapter that cites Michelle Light's progressive 2015 article "Controlling Goods or Promoting the Public Good" to contain a few guidelines or cautions about implementing permission processes and fee structures, but such guidance is absent.

Nitpicks aside, *Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts* really does keep its introductory promise to provide readers with up-to-date theory and practice around research services. It stands alone as a monograph, or as a supplement to Pugh's 2005 *Providing Reference Services for Archives & Manuscripts*. Those eager to make changes at their home repository will value the bibliographies and dozens of templates in the back matter as well as the main text. It is both a useful overview for new professionals and a critical update for the bookshelf of veterans, at least until the fruition of the changes

Oestricher predicts in her postscript: “I look forward to learning how archivists convert, rebuild, and revolutionize reference and access long into the future” (p. 143).

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NOTES

1. Gregory S. Hunter, “Access, Reference, and Outreach,” in *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives*, 2nd ed. (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2003), 207.
2. Society of American Archivists, “Overview of Archival Description,” *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, Version 2021.0.0.2, https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/dacs/05_overview_of_archival_description.html.