ONE BOOK ONE PROFESSION

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS

2021–2022 selection
Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts by Cheryl Oestreicher
(Society of American Archivists, 2020)

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. The author defines *outreach* as anything that archivists do to make collections available, whether through specific events or day-to-day work. Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not?

2. What does *equitable access* mean to you as an individual and to your institution? Is there a difference between your personal philosophy and how it is applied at your institution? How do you reconcile any differences?

3. The author states that the theories and practices in *Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts* are not prescriptive, but are open to interpretation and adaptable. What presented ideas or practices would you like to modify and apply within your institution?

4. The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed access, affecting both users and archives staff. How have reference services been adjusted at your institution, and what were patrons' responses? In what ways have you reevaluated your practices to implement temporary or permanent changes?

5. In August 2021, the American Historical Association wrote a letter "seeking clarity on the National Archives and Records Administration's planned reopening following pandemic closures." Shortly thereafter, the AHA wrote an apology to archivists, and SAA responded to the situation. After reading all three documents, in what ways would you envision creating

more open dialogue about access between the archives profession and researchers? What are obstacles to open dialogue? What would be the benefits?

6. *Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts* offers several recommendations for addressing physical and virtual accessibility. What strategies might you implement based on those ideas? What strategies do you already use? What strategies do you use that are not addressed in the book?

7. The book discusses ways to reduce or eliminate barriers to access, such as not requiring researchers to register or by reducing or eliminating fees. What are practices and procedures at your institution that you consider barriers to access? What would you change to reduce barriers? What steps have you already taken to reduce or eliminate barriers?

8. Access and use policies vary widely and are contingent upon staffing, institutional and legal policies, and, often, adhering to longstanding "traditional" rules. This means that when patrons visit different repositories, they have inconsistent experiences. The [ACRL/RBMS-SAA Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries](#) provides guidance and though it is impractical to expect all institutions to adhere to the exact same policies, what are specific ways that the profession could work toward aligning policies across the profession to present a more unified approach to researchers? Are there any longstanding practices in your institution that no longer serve contemporary scenarios around access and use?

9. Chapter 2 outlines knowledge and skills for reference archivists. Which skills would you like to develop, and what knowledge/skills do you think should be added to the list for the future?

10. *Reference and Access for Archives and Manuscripts* describes the types of users commonly found in various repositories. What types of users are unique to your institution? What are user groups that are uncommon but would benefit from using archives?

11. Chapter 7 presents options for virtual access to collections, whether content or information about collections. One of the emerging practices is a virtual reading room, where patrons follow similar procedures to a physical reading room by registering and agreeing to terms for access. How do you see this shaping the future of digital access? Would you consider implementing such a procedure at your institution? How does this align or conflict with the concept of "equitable access"?

12. Chapter 12 discusses assessment and statistics of reference services. Among the book, [SAA's Standardized Statistical Measures and Metrics for Public Services in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries](#), and the [SAA Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment](#), what ideas do you have to facilitate more openness in sharing reference and

research data, while maintaining patron privacy, among archivists and to the public? How would sharing this data benefit archivists? The public?

13. The author offers suggestions for how reference and access can evolve in the future, including expanding virtual access, incorporating advancements in technology, continuing to document historically excluded voices, and presenting content in multiple languages. If you had all the resources you needed, what advancements would you implement to increase access?

14. What (diversity/equity/inclusion/accessibility) DEIA-related considerations affect access and use in your institution? What steps has your institution taken to mitigate or end these concerns to provide access and use to the broadest group of users?