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Review: Engagement in the Digital Era

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Engagement in the Digital Era. Edited by Nicole J. Milano and Christopher J. Prom (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020. ix +175 pp.)

Engagement in the Digital Era is a concise guide to implementing thoughtful outreach strategies in archives in the context of our digital age. This volume contains modules 21, 22, and 23 from the Society of American Archivists' "Trends in Archives Practice" series. Each module addresses a different aspect of archival outreach, including dealing with media requests, creating meaningful programs that connect users to archives, and designing effective social media strategies. As with other volumes in this series, an appendix containing case studies, bibliographies, and examples of forms and documentation a repository might adapt for its own use accompanies each module as well.

While at first glance the title may lead readers to believe that the contents will mainly address social media and digital forms of outreach, editors Milano and Prom address this notion in the introduction, stating that engagement in the digital era "means thinking deeply about how and why we want to build connections, and then taking specific engagement actions in the real world of our users – wherever those spaces exist" (1). Writing in the context of the recent COVID-19 shutdown in 2020, Milano and Prom stress the importance of adapting "more 'traditional' archival methods to changing circumstances" and "prioritizing archival engagement" as core archival work that will positively impact the profession and the public, enhance our collections, and add value to the work that we, as archivists, already do (3). In each of the modules in this volume, Milano and Prom have carefully chosen authors whose experiences in archival outreach underscore this creative, inclusive approach to engagement.

In Module 21, "Lights, Camera, Archives," Daniel J. Linke and Travis H. Williams address the unique circumstances of accommodating media requests, whether the request involves a journalist searching for information or an entire film crew setting up in your facility. Linke and Williams initially emphasize the importance of creating a media policy that will provide a smooth path for media interactions, which includes understanding and accommodating the high-pressure, fast-paced environments in which members of the media operate. They emphasize that, with the right preparations, interactions with the media can and should become a way to showcase your collections and expertise and dispel myths about archives. Linke and Williams also cover the intricacies of preparing for interviews and film shoots and practical considerations for both circumstances. The appendices in Module 21 include case studies, a list of additional readings, and guidelines for creating a media policy.

In Module 22, "Engaging Users with Archives: Programs That Get Results," by Michele Casto, Jessica Lacher-Feldman, and Nicole J. Milano discuss inspiring approaches to archival outreach that "can be adapted to suit the mission, priorities, and resources of almost any repository" (51). Casto, Lacher-Feldman, and Milano structure the module so that readers can use it "sequentially as a programming manual or pick and choose" different strategies (52). They outline considerations for thorough preliminary planning, assessing the budget and goals of your institution, and the importance of creating an open and welcoming space, including addressing barriers to access and making connections with historically marginalized communities. The authors also distinguish between implementing strategies for collection-driven programming and user-driven programming that engages new and existing and external and internal users. The

strongest aspects of this module involve the examples of the creative and even unconventional outreach events and activities that Casto, Lacher-Feldman, and Milano have chosen, such as trivia nights, archives crawls, and most memorably, the University of Rochester Special Collections' "yarn-bombing" exhibit (99). The appendices include case studies, worksheets, policy examples, and forms for readers to use in their own programming efforts.

In Module 23, "Establishing Archival Connections Through Online Engagement," Dina Kellams and Jennie Thomas emphasize the importance of using online engagement tools to virtually "[throw] open your repository doors" to "strengthen the connection [archivists] already have with their users *and* entice new audiences" (118). This module contains a wealth of foundational information about how to do just that. Kellams and Thomas outline the process of finding a social media voice, how to choose the right platforms and the right approach for your repository, and considerations of copyright and privacy concerns when using social media. They also include an illuminating ten-page posting guide, including extensive discussion of consistency and posting frequency, which will be helpful to social media users who may not fathom just how much time and engagement is required of each platform to maintain an audience. Of course, social media-specific information may become obsolete as algorithms change and platforms come and go. For example, the authors discuss creating short-form video content via Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook, but advice for using TikTok is missing here. Otherwise, the information serves as an excellent introduction to online engagement for archives. In the appendices, Kellams and Thomas include a list for further reading as well as case studies.

Engagement in the Digital Era is a thought-provoking, practical primer for implementing effective outreach strategies in archives. Though some of the specifics of digital outreach discussed in this volume will require updating in the future, the core information is solid and will likely remain useful to readers hoping to implement more creative, effective archival engagement strategies for years to come.

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