
This paper examined how public university archival collections are meeting the challenge of greater electronic mail reference inquiries through management techniques. This study focused on staff management, online information availability, user studies, and email reference policies and services. A twenty-four question interview was conducted with seven public university archives. Responses to interview questions were compared to determine patterns of management techniques. A case study of each archive’s management structure was developed.

This study finds that the seven archival institutions manage email reference services in distinct ways. Three distinct staffing methods were used to answer email inquiries. Information about email reference policies and services at these archives was provided in an inconsistent manner. Some archives publish more finding aids online, but have conducted few user studies to understand use patterns. This is a preliminary investigation and further study needs to be performed to create a “best practices” guideline in the management of email reference services.

Headings:

Electronic mail

Archives -- Reference services

Reference services -- Automation.
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGEMENT OF EMAIL REFERENCE SERVICES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

by
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Introduction:

We are in the midst of an online information and access revolution. The possibilities for the creation and dissemination of information seem limitless. The dream is that everyone will easily find just the information they need and at just the time they need it. This dream, however, is far from a reality because of the enormous amount of information available. In order for this dream to become a reality we must study the results of compiling information online and providing access to it. This is especially true for archive and manuscript collections, the contents of which are unique. Collections vary from a single sheet of paper to thousands of items containing information that ranges from well-known historic documents to obscure scraps of paper. Finding aids provide access to the contents of these collections, finding aids range from comprehensive descriptions of all items accessible in a collection to brief inventories describing their arrangement and significance. Historically, there has been little conformity in archival descriptive practice. This lack of standardization has made access confusing for novices and experts alike.

Reference staff in archival collections have provided the front-line instruction and access necessary to view this closed-stack information. Traditionally, walk-in reference was the primary means of accessing archival collections, although postal mail and telephone reference have allowed for some remote communication and access to
materials. With the addition of online information and remote electronic correspondence in the form of email, reference desks are faced with a surge of new, remote users in addition to those who visit the archives in person. There are many issues involved in offering email reference service. Management issues are especially critical for providing good service to patrons, regardless of its format. Good management makes any service easier to run, more efficient, and flexible to changes in use. This paper will address how archival institutions are managing four key areas essential for offering email reference service.

The first management issue concerns how well an archive understands the use of its holdings and who uses the information. User studies identify who your patrons are, what services they are requesting, and how satisfied they are with their experience. In the case of email reference service, examining records of use patterns, completed forms, or questions answered in addition to recording reference interactions, are good methods to evaluate the quality and nature of the service provided. User studies should be scheduled on a regular basis with clear objectives for the information gathered and the expected results. Acquiring this information through user studies is the first step of the process. This information must then be interpreted and used to propose new services or policies or adapt existing services or policies. The information compiled in user studies helps management understand user needs and how best to provide services to address these needs.

A second management issue related to email reference concerns the number of staff, their background and experience, and the departmental organization. Who will maintain the email address? How will the email questions be distributed? Which staff
members will respond to user inquiries? These questions are not easily resolved. When implementing a new service such as email reference or even slightly altering the way it is managed, staffing considerations depend heavily on evaluating the current departmental organization. The options of creating new positions or assigning additional responsibilities to current staff members are difficult decisions. There are many different philosophies about workplace culture that influence the establishment of services such as email reference. Further, when considering who will answer patron inquiries, the experience and expertise of the staff must also be considered. Essentially, staffing decisions must take into account the departmental organization of the archival institution, how reference changes affect the whole institution, and balance what is best for staff and users.

A third management issue is the creation and implementation of policies that govern use and define the nature of services. Such policies help staff members understand their responsibilities and educate patrons about reference services. Some services that are currently offered by archives include providing copyright and publishing information, duplication services, and instruction in researching the collection. As email reference questions increase so will the demand for these services. Therefore, it is necessary to consider to what extent these services will tax available resources. Management of services and the defined policies insures that email reference questions will be answered and services provided in a consistent manner.

Finally, a fourth management issue is which specific information about collections, services, and policies to provide to patrons and how to provide it. The internet has expanded the amount of information accessible to remote users. In a sense,
publishing information on the internet is advertising the service. Use increases as patrons locate the archive on the internet, search the information, and learn about the collection. Archival institutions must consider the consequences of internet publishing and the resulting greater demands placed on staff and resources.

This paper seeks to understand how different archival institutions have approached these management issues. Interviews were conducted with the head of the archives, head of reference, or the director of email reference services at selected academic archives, and focused on obtaining information about their institution's management of email reference. The interviews addressed twenty-four questions concerning the aforementioned management issues. The results are compiled in two ways. First, the answers to the questions are used to form a profile of each institution in order to understand their approach to management of email reference service. Second, all the answers to a particular question are compared to identify patterns in the approach to these management questions across institutions.

These two methods of compiling data provide insight about managing email reference services. Overall, it is expected that there will be a variety of management approaches. Because email reference is relatively new, it is believed that there will be little consensus on how to receive, distribute, and answer email reference questions. Further, based on the paucity of literature on email reference in archives, it is expected that archives have conducted limited research on the use patterns of remote patrons. Only archives that have a presence on the internet and provide finding aids or other online information about collections, holdings, and policies and services were selected for this
study. I expect to find that archives are providing extensive online information which indicates that archives are attempting to expand their base of users.

Hopefully, archival institutions, by understanding how similar archives manage their email reference service, will be able to use this study to assess their management practices, place them within a broader professional context, and implement management changes. Although, formulation of a "best practices" report for all archives is much needed for email reference, the small sample size of this study and the variety of different characteristics of archives allows for only limited descriptions of practice and tentative conclusions for the management of email reference services. This study may be seen as an initial exploration and a pilot study for future research.
Literature Review:

The world of archives is changing rapidly. This statement should be a surprise to few. Archives are a repository of information about people, events, and places kept to support, preserve, and document the history of human civilization. Along with the goal of collecting information, archives also have a mission to provide access to these collections. Access to archival collections traditionally has been difficult. These difficulties result from both physical and intellectual restrictions.

Physically, there are two main obstacles to access of archival collections. First, the information in these collections, by nature, is unique and unpublished. Inspection of the actual documents requires the researcher to travel to the archive's location. Most, if not all, archives do not offer their collections for inter-library loan. In some archives researchers must provide a letter of introduction, resume, or research plan to gain access to collections. Duplication methods, particularly microfilm and photocopying, and remote reference services allow for greater remote access for researchers reducing the need for initial visits. However, this does not always eliminate the need for physical inspection and research of the collections. Second, many collections have been donated with certain restrictions, limiting access and therefore research value. These donation restrictions can either eliminate all researching or restrict publishing or citation rights.
In addition to physical restrictions, researchers face difficulty when using archival materials because of limited intellectual access. Chiefly, archives describe their collections with finding aids. In many cases, these finding aids are only available on the premises of the repository. Tools such as the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC), Chadwyck-Healey’s ArchivesUSA, and published inventories allow a greater public awareness of collections. Other barriers to intellectual access include poor descriptive practices by individual archives and a lack of standard description methods by archives overall. These two barriers make the discovery of information difficult for researchers.

For many archives, internet use is reducing the barriers of intellectual access to archival collections. As archives provide more and more online information, more people can access this cache of information. Archives are using the internet to provide access to their materials in two primary ways. First, by cataloging archival collections in accordance with MARC standards, archives are providing access to these materials through online public access catalogs (OPACs). Many of these OPACs are available for searching through library web pages. MARC records allow patrons to search basic information about the archive's collections, although MARC records are limited in scope compared to finding aids. Archives are also publishing finding aids on the web that contain specifics about a collection that the MARC record cannot provide. Now, and increasingly in the future, the contents of these finding aids are searchable and even more sophisticated methods of searching using SGML and XML encoding are becoming available. MARC catalog records and encoded online finding aids are making archival information more widely available to a much larger audience.
Reducing the barriers of intellectual access to archival collections has led to an increase in remote use of these collections. This greater use has been dramatically felt in the public services and reference departments of some archives. Historically, patrons used postal mail and telephone inquiries, but as archives include electronic mail addresses on internet sites, remote reference requests are increasingly dominated by email. An email reference question can lead to anywhere from two to several exchanges between the patron and the reference archivists in order to answer a specific question, thus consuming a good deal of staff time in addition to the continuing demands from in-house patrons. Email reference is similar to traditional desk reference services in many ways, but has unique aspects and requirements. Although there have been many studies analyzing desk reference service, there are relatively few concerning email reference as a result of its recent emergence.

The earliest documentation of an email reference service comes from an article by Julie Stills and Frank Campbell in 1993. It describes the University of Maryland Health Sciences Library in Baltimore EARS (Electronic Access to Reference Services) service that was established in 1984. Many other universities began to establish email reference systems over the next decade. Having diverse clienteles, a large collection size, and resources, allowed public universities libraries to set-up distributed networks of terminals before many other libraries, although within five years though this advantage diminished. Nancy O'Neil mentions in a 1999 article that the Santa Monica Public Library began offering email reference services in 1989 and indeed now believes it to be a "logical

extension of library services. As the number of institutions offering email service increased, necessary reports and studies on the advantages, disadvantages, and experiences with reference email are being published.

The number of published studies and reports concerning email reference is growing, but there is a relatively small amount of information available concerning the services which are now widely offered. If email reference is indeed a "logical extension" of service and that every library will eventually offer it in some form, there needs to be far more research on exactly how email reference service will effect the library, patrons, and other reference services. This is certainly true for archives. The published literature that does exist, however, allows for some insight into the effects of email reference.

Email communication dramatically changes the nature of the reference interview and the interaction between patrons and librarians. Eileen Abels discusses many negatives and positives of email reference. She found that email questions are less formal, spontaneous and ephemeral. Email is an efficient, cheap, and fast way to correspond. Additionally, she finds that there is no time restriction on replies and that questions and the following answers can be more carefully considered but that this necessitates asynchronous communication. I find that these qualities are sometimes in direct opposition to one another. It is hard to have a well thought out spontaneous question. Likewise, email may be a cheap and fast way to communicate but the time involved in both the formulation of the question and in writing the answer takes longer than with in-person reference. This is especially true in an archival setting where

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questions are more complex and less ready reference or quick questions are received than in libraries. Her conclusions were that most email reference questions can be answered sufficiently, but for more complex email questions it is difficult to discover what the patron is asking and what information will answer the question.

Abel's study primarily investigates email correspondence for traditional library settings. As mentioned earlier, archives collections present different conditions for email reference. Helen Tibbo's paper focuses on archives and describes many similarities as well as several differences with non-archival email reference services. One key difference is that many patrons are not familiar with the concept, policies, or contents of archival collections. Many questions contain unrealistic expectations for information to be provided and the amount of time needed to satisfy requests. She suggests that substantive acknowledgements be returned so patrons know the message was received even if a reply will take much longer. Also, information about policies and services should be posted for patrons to read online and registration forms be available to provide complete information to the reference librarian. Tibbo remarks that a key to good reference email is good management of the service. This includes technological and reference training for staff members, storage of email questions, and establishing policies for ethical behavior. Management issues are certainly a concern for any email reference service and identifying these issues in a proactive manner makes any reference librarian's job much easier. Management issues become more important as the use of email reference increases.

Lara Bushallow-Wilbur notes that "email reference questions are not likely to overwhelm staffing resources--at least when the service is first offered," but as patrons begin to know of the service and use it more frequently, good management will become a necessity. In Bushallow-Wilbur's study many patrons emphasized their pleasure with the service, noting that ease of use and ready accessibility made it preferable to desk reference.

Many of the perceived negative aspects of reference email can be mitigated or compensated for with good management techniques. Diane Fishman discusses some of the key questions to ask and answer when setting up a reference email service. What clientele will you serve? How in-depth will you answer questions? How quickly will you answer questions? Although she mentions these in the context of setting up the service, it is imperative to periodically ask them, especially when demand or clientele changes. As we continue to understand the dynamics of email reference in general, and specifically in regard to archives, new ideas must be implemented. Experience in answering reference email reduces the reference burden. By keeping good records of correspondence, frequently asked question (FAQ) lists may be compiled, which can answer many questions before they are emailed. Additionally, by monitoring staff replies and keeping statistics, archives can create standard response letters for some inquiries and refine policies for using certain services.

Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of email reference is a dynamic process. Re-evaluation should be based on how archives provide email reference and who

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is using the service. For example, Helen Capizzi notes a particular instance where by geographic association her library became a target for a specific type of email question. Many email questions about antique furniture were received because they are located in a former hub of furniture makers although they did not have any relevant information. By reacting to this information need and anticipating future questions about this same topic they provided links to more relevant sites in order to satisfy some of these questions without much time or effort. This example is especially relevant to archives. Often archives collect specific ranges of information whether region, occupation, or era defines them. By referring some patrons to other areas and by stating up-front the nature of the collections, patrons are more likely to submit appropriate questions.

Capizzi’s example is a widespread phenomenon. People searching the internet are frequently unable to locate the best source to satisfy their information need. In these cases, any email address found on a website may be used to ask a question whether it is the most appropriate website or not. Email has an anonymous and informal quality. John Lubans noted this phenomena in work-place settings as a "demise of hierarchical communication." Somehow, email allows people to feel less timid about contacting people formerly out of reach. It is not necessarily just the perception of access but the distance, hierarchically, the communication travels. A staff member is far more likely to communicate directly over the head of his or her direct supervisor with email than to go knock on the higher up’s door breaking down traditional communication routes.

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3 John Lubans Jr., “‘While I was Busy Holding On, You Were Busy Letting Go.’ Reflections on E-mail Networks and the Demise of Hierarchical Communication.” *Library Administration & Management*, 14 no. 1 (winter 2000): 19.
Although Lubans was speaking mostly to the internal workings and staff of the library, these observations translate to remote reference. The presence of an email address, especially when combined with a "mailto:" application, empowers the user to query or comment. Because it is so quick and easy, gone are any hesitations that might occur if the patron might have to write a more formal letter or incur the expense of a telephone call. Also gone are the beliefs that these repositories are inaccessible or that they do not have time for questions from the general public.

Written composition of email should allow time and careful consideration between correspondences. Often, however, our reaction is to hastily construct a message or respond to one as the thoughts enter our heads. If this in the context of a casual conversation, there is little problem, but difficulties arise in more professional endeavors. David Stroker points out that many of the problems with email including security, unintended mass mailings, and "ill-considered or ambiguous messages," among others. He concludes that email use has rapidly expanded, but that we have not yet matured in use of well-considered email. I almost expect to see a "Miss Manner's" title out on the dos and don'ts of email.

The practice of internet real-time chat and other interactive applications such as audio and video conferencing and application sharing is quickly becoming common on the web. Real-time communication will allow remote reference to accurately simulate traditional desk reference situations. Email "chats" themselves have no more benefit than telephone reference except perhaps in cost, but when combined with other technologies such as whiteboard (an interactive drawing board) or other digital information sharing

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applications, the patron's ability to transmit a complete and coherent message is increased.\textsuperscript{12} I have no doubt that these technologies will become more common and advanced but will be in addition to email and not replace it. The available studies on email users indicate that they like the ability to email at any time and to carefully craft their question.\textsuperscript{13} Email users do not expect instant answers and this would not necessarily be feasible with real-time applications anyway unless reference personnel were constantly monitoring these services. Real-time remote reference may become an additional stratum of reference service management in repositories with extensive resources and needs further study.

In a recent study with email reference management implications, public libraries were surveyed for their provision of email reference service, analysis of patron satisfaction with the service, and content analysis of the types of questions posed.\textsuperscript{14} Generally the results conclude that there were many methods of implementing this service and the level and types of service provided, that patrons were generally satisfied with their experience, and ready reference, research questions, and genealogy questions accounted for three-quarters of all questions. The management issues displayed an apparently wide range of approaches. The four main areas investigated were promotional techniques, number of questions per week, response time, and number of staff for the service. The latter three areas really seek to know how many resources email reference services demand out of the total reference department. In this study, an average of 5-6


\textsuperscript{14} Garnsey and Powell, “Electronic Mail Reference Services in the Public Library,” 250-251.
email questions per week were answered within three days. Most libraries had 1-2 staff members who were responsible, at least part-time, for email reference and those with more email reference staff were probably sharing the responsibilities on a part-time basis. This study is interesting as a snap shot of current conditions and hopefully will be followed-up with another study in a few years.

Archives have seen very few email reference studies performed. There is very little literature relating statistical information or profiles of email users. Kristen Martin will publish a paper in the spring of 2001 in the American Archivist that combines a user study with a statistical analysis to create a profile of remote reference services at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH).\textsuperscript{15} She compares the reference correspondence of the years 1995 and 1999 with regards to who was submitting it, what they were asking for, and how the request was submitted. Although every institution is different, her methodology and conclusions should be widely applicable to archival institutions and she demonstrates a staggering shift in the manner of submitting reference questions from letter and telephone to email. She analyzed and arranged email correspondence into inquiry "packets" compensating for the many back-and-forth emails that can occur to clarify email reference questions. There was a 60% increase in the total volume of reference correspondence received and much of the increase is attributable to the rise in email correspondence at the expense of letter and telephone inquiries. The increase in use can be attributed in part to a younger, more technology literate, generation of students who feel comfortable performing research on

the internet and take advantage of published holdings information. Further, the number of inquiries from personal researchers is rising rapidly.

Martin concludes her paper with a discussion of the implications for archival repositories and suggestions for how to cope with this increase and type of use. The suggestions incorporate both institutional and outreach methods. How repositories receive, store, track, and answer inquiries is paramount. These inquiries form a resource that helps those answering subsequent inquiries if stored in a cohesive manner. This will be especially necessary if few professional resources and more graduate or para-professional resources are used to answer the questions. Second, Martin notes that many inquiries can be deferred or refined by providing specific information about collections, policies, and services on the archive's website, which is or will become the dominant access point to archival holdings. An intelligible and diverse internet presence is critical. Knowing your user and how you manage reference services are still the primary issues, but with the increase in email reference the dynamics of the service must change.

Aside from Martin's study, there are very few papers that relate archives’ experience with reference email services. One recent library paper by Teresa Tickle focuses on the Slavic Reference Service at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign whose experiences can be closely equated with those of archival institutions. Their user community is spread across the United States and needs information on Slavic subjects that is unlikely to be extensive in other libraries. Collectively, the Slavic Reference staff’s knowledge and resources are unequalled. She

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16 Ibid., 43-44.
17 Ibid., 68.
argues that with the limited focus of her library, and special libraries in general, remote inquiries are primarily limited to Slavic subjects thus providing excellent reference to these patrons. However, the introduction of email reference service and the availability to discover this service over the internet has expanded the number of patrons who email questions to the Slavic Reference Service.

Tickle devotes much of her paper to discussing how the Slavic Reference Service is managed. The provision of email reference service was expanded slowly from initially asking phone patrons with lengthy questions for a written submission to creating a website that offered the email reference service. When the decision to expand the reference service with a website was made several factors were considered including staffing needs, extent of information provided on the website, and in what form to except questions. All three of these factors balance user needs with the amount of expected staff time dedicated to the service. One of the greatest difficulties is gauging how much information and of what specificity the user requires. When patrons take advantage of the information provided on the website before asking a question and provide contact information in addition to their question, the staff are able to overcome the difficulty of assessing how much information to provide and how specific it needs to be.

Special collections have in common many users who are only familiar with traditional library settings if any. In this way, the problems encountered by the Slavic Reference Service are very similar to the problems of archival reference. To provide good archival reference service it is important to discover the extent of the patron’s knowledge and how much information they require. Patrons often do not understand the nature, scope, and arrangement of unpublished holdings. For patrons who walk-in, write-in, or
phone-in, it is easier to assume or quickly gauge the level of sophistication with archival resources. For email, this cannot be assumed and it takes experience to read signs that point otherwise.

All signs indicate that more research needs to be done on the changing nature of reference services in archival collections especially considering the growing dominance of email as a means of inquiry. Within the literature the consensus appears to be that email reference in all institutions, once offered as a service, is used sparingly at first but increasingly so over time. Research reports indicate that the number of emails received is still increasing. This increase appears to be attributable to knowledge of the service, the growing use of the internet, and the amount of information accessible through that medium, although increased information may also be answering some preliminary questions. In light of these increases, new and concentrated efforts will be needed to manage email reference.

Ibid., 77-78.
Methodology:

With the goals of discovering and describing how electronic reference services are managed in archival institutions, the first step in this project was to select institutions that would display specific characteristics such as size and geographic location. Because of the limited nature of this study, nine institutions were selected based on the following criteria.

The first selection criteria for inclusion was that a repository located within a public university. I applied this criterion because public universities by definition are chartered to serve the general public. With the expansion of information available on the internet and individual access to this information, I was interested to see whether this open door policy can be maintained as clientele, especially non-university clientele, increase. While public universities are mandated to serve the public, especially their own states, what their role in labor-intensive reference service to individuals from other states or nations is unclear. Because email submissions can be anonymous to certain degrees, it is difficult for the archivist to know the geographic location or any other information about the patron unless that information is provided or requested.

The second criteria for inclusion in this study, was that a manuscript collection focus on obtaining information and collections from a specific region of the country. Further, my intent was to have a variety of geographic areas represented. I made this
decisions because often a large public university will effectively corner the market on the
historical collections of a particular region. Thus, the surrounding universities have
different collection development focuses and potentially fewer remote users. By dividing
the United States into three major sections, East Coast, West Coast, and Middle America,
and selecting three universities from each region, I chose a diverse sample of public
institutions. Additionally, because of the broad array of regional interests, I hoped that a
corresponding broad selection of users and interests would also be represented.

For this selection process, I used the information about archival institution stored
on the ArchivesUSA electronic database. Although this database is not necessarily
comprehensive or up-to-date, I chose it because it is the best available resource for
comparing possible participant universities and gathering contact information. The
searches for public university archives were first conducted based on my familiarity with
institutional reputation and size. The reputation of an archive is important since well-
known archives will have a larger user base. Accordingly, a well-known archive is also
more likely to have a large collection. The size of an archive is crucial because more
collections and resources can often equate to a larger user population. Thus a large
collection size and a well-known archive are often equated. Since my knowledge of
archival repositories is limited, it was necessary to extend the search to achieve the
sample size of archives desired. Thus, I searched state university library systems and
evaluated them based on the regional focus of their collection acquisition policy and size.

I used size as a selection criterion for repositories included in this study's sample
with the idea that larger collections would be better known and attract more remote users.
Although collection size is reported in a number of ways (linear feet (l. f.), cubic feet (c.
f.), and number of items are the three most widely used, which makes it hard to make accurate comparisons), according to Tim Pyatt of the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-CH, one standard Paige Box contains roughly 1,000 to 1,500 items. This estimate is rough because an item can be a single page letter, a thousand-page manuscript or anywhere in between. A Paige Box has a base size of 18x12". The standard shelf at UNC-CH can hold two Paige Boxes and thus 3 l.f. of material. Other institutions may store these materials in different ways on shelves with different dimensions. Thus, it is not always easy to directly equate the two. The third measure of cubic feet could be considered a more accurate method of determining the size of collections. This method determines the actual volume of the materials in the collection based on box size and not on the amount of shelf feet occupied. Despite these measurements problems, I used size as a criteria based on the theory that larger collections would be better known, attract more remote users, and would provide more remote reference services than very small collections.

In this manner nine universities were chosen. For each university I gathered contact information from the ArchivesUSA record or by visiting the archives website. I first made contact with each archive by telephone in order to gauge willingness to participate and to establish who would be the best staff member to interview. The staff member requested was either the head of the archive or the person most familiar with the reference services or specifically email reference services. This call was followed by an email message to the selected staff member of the institution which restated the object of this study, asked about his/her willingness to participate, included a consent agreement,
and provided a list of questions to be asked. In one instance a selected archive did not provide a telephone contact number and thus only the email was sent.

I decided that the best format for gathering information would be to interview the participants based on a fixed set of questions. I chose the interview format over a written survey for two reasons. First, the time commitment needed to be kept low to facilitate participation. The length of the interview was kept to thirty to forty-five minutes. A written survey may have taken longer. Second, I desired quantitative and qualitative data to create case studies in order to compare the individual universities. I believe this was better facilitated by the interview format.

I structured the interview with a base set of 24 questions in four categories (Appendix 1). I intended some of the questions to require simple yes-no answers while others were open-ended. For all questions, I encouraged the participants to add context to their answers. The four categories of questions were general questions, forms and web services, staffing, and user studies. I created these categories of questions to obtain information that established the history of the archive's email reference service, its scope, who manages it, how it is managed, and how these decisions are made. I wrote the questions in each section partly based on my experience with the reference email service at the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-CH and partly based on literature of other studies. Many of the service questions were based on the public library survey used by Garnsey and Powell and also in the article by Schilling-Eccles and Harzbecker.


questions about forms were based on the ideas of Eileen Abels\textsuperscript{22} and also Kristen Martin’s\textsuperscript{23} discussion of the use of forms.

As stated earlier, each of the participant universities was emailed an advance copy of the interview questions. Archival repositories can be organized quite differently and be composed of very different parts. I wished to give the participant adequate time to consider the questions and how they related to their repository. Further, since the participant could review the questions prior to the interview, the interview would be smoother and shorter and allow for more anecdotal and contextual statements. Finally, I hoped that these questions would be interesting and encourage participation.

Before each interview, I reviewed the latest material that each archive had presented on their website. Since the website is the main portal through which remote users access information about the archive, I wanted to be familiar with the information provided about services and policies. This review also served to establish preliminary answers to the questions during the forms and Web services section of the interview. Further, I was seeking to understand the internal working structure of the archive and whether it was an independently run department or part of a larger special collections library unit.

The interview format was as follows: I asked each question, recorded their answer, and then recorded any additional notes. At the end of the interview, I gave each participant the opportunity to add any further contextual comments or clarifications. I also asked if there were any questions they thought should have been included.

\textsuperscript{22} Abels, “The E-Mail Reference Interview,” 352-253.
\textsuperscript{23} Martin, “Analysis of Remote Reference Correspondence at a Large Academic Manuscripts Collection,” 68-70.
All universities in this study will remain anonymous and be referred to as university 1, university 2, etc. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is being used as a specific example and control because of my familiarity with its policies and use. No interview with UNC-CH took place.
Findings:

Of the nine universities contacted, seven responded and agreed to participate in this research project. Of the two remaining, one responded positively over the phone but failed to respond to any email or letter mail correspondence, and the other had no listed phone number and did not respond to correspondence efforts. A thirty-five to fifty minute interview was conducted with each of the seven who participated as well as critical examination of the presentation and content of information on their website. No participant refused to answer a question and most provided additional contextual information.

The first section of this findings report compares the answers to each question across archives in order to see consistencies of response. Following that, I discuss each archive as a case study to compare the various approaches to the email reference service of each archive.

General Questions:

All of the seven archives do offer patrons the opportunity to submit email inquiries. For this sample of repositories, email is still a relatively new service being offered for only 5-7 years. Three archives reported 1996 as the inception year of reference email service, two 1995 and one in 1994. The inception year was difficult for
some repositories to calculate. All reported the date that it was publicly advertised or presented on the website or non-internet publications. In reality, a few had personal email addresses prior to this year, as early as 1992, and received some inquiries in that manner. Although six of the seven institutions offer a departmental email address, they all reported receiving additional inquiries to personal email accounts. These are still considered to be reference email questions and were included in any total count.

Of the seven archives, six reported that they maintain statistics tabulating the number of reference emails received, although only one of the seven indicated that they keep regular tabulations on the type of inquiry. The one that did not keep numeric data indicated that the email service occupied a small amount of time and that data about it had never been needed. Surprisingly, only one archive reported types of use statistics. A few of the others indicated that while they sometimes include informal measurements or anecdotes about reference email, no formal type of use numbers are kept. One archive did report some percentages, but those figures were based on a small sample and the calculations were done the morning of the interview. I found these results surprising because general categorization of email does not require a great effort, with few exceptions.

The third question in the interview followed-up the second asking for the number and top four types of email inquiries. As indicated by the previous question most were able to provide information about the number of reference inquiries although only three were able to provide more than one year's worth of statistics. In all of these three cases the percentage increase from year to year rose between 30-50%. Generally, the percentage increase was most rapid in the earliest years and has been more gradual since.
One archive, however, reported a decrease between 1998-99 and 1999-2000. For all archives the current average number of emails per day is 1-2.

Since only one archive kept actual content statistics, the reports of the top four types of inquiries are mostly based on the participant's experience and the answers had some consistencies. Most archives reported high requests for remote use copies for scholarly or academic questions, although one archive was displeased with the declining level of scholarship. Personal or genealogical research questions were also mentioned as reference requests but not by as many archivists. Ready reference type inquiries were reported by only two archives while three reported that questions about hours and locations seemed to be answered by the website. As the archives of a public university often house the university records, two archives reported heavy use by the institution in accessing and interpreting these records. As a final, and perhaps irritating, note one archive reported a dramatic increase in solicitations and other non-reference, mass emailing submissions.

The dramatic rise in reference email questions matches the increasing use of the internet since 1996. Although the rate of increase is not yet approaching a plateau, the slowing of the increase can be attributed in part to the growing saturation of internet service. Additionally, one archive speculated that as they presented more information on their website the amount of ready reference questions seemed to drop. Another stated that the questions were becoming more specific. So it is possible that more users are finding the information they seek without having to submit a question or can refine that question before submission. It also seems that more patrons expect that the archive will be able to
provide them with a digital, paper, microfilm, or photograph copy of any material they seek.

Most archives do have email reference questions referred to them and also refer some email questions to other departments and institutions. Of the seven archives all receive referrals of questions and six of the seven will resubmit the question to a more appropriate location. The reasons for these referrals seemed mostly based on the confusion of the patron or the patron’s tendency to use any available email address. Sometimes these referrals can be based on situations much like the furniture questions mentioned in the literature review.  

Predominantly, the participants indicated that the source of incoming referrals was from other departments within the university, principally the central reference desk and other special collections departments. While the participants said they would refer email to other departments or institutions some indicated that this was infrequently done and usually good faith attempts to answer would be made in addition to recommending another source for the information.

All of the seven archives indicated that they do not have policies that offer separate services or levels of service for walk-in and email patrons, but these answers were often qualified. Three archives mentioned that they believed that in-house patrons received more thorough service, not intentionally but simply because they were in-house. There were two primary reasons for this discrepancy. The first was the number of resources in the reference area that the patron could review and the ability of the reference archivist to give feedback over a longer period. With email you provide a single answer or service whereas in-house it is easier to maintain a longer dialog. The second reason was the difficulty and time commitment of relaying complex instructions through
email. What might only take five minutes to explain could consume two pages of written material and often the written material is abbreviated or condensed. One archive also reported that administrative or university uses of the collection received top priority for staff assistance over any other type of research or inquiry.

The final question of this section considered how the institution stored these inquiries. Four of the seven archives reported that they store email strictly as paper files with no electronic archiving. These print files took on many forms including comprehensive alphabetical storage, collection files, staff member files, and subject files or some combination thereof. Of the remaining three only one used electronic storage exclusively. The other two primarily stored correspondence electronically but also created some subject files. The discrepancies found between the archives stem from different management styles, the perceived usefulness of past inquiries, and the archivists’ perception of storing electronic files. Another consideration may be statistical. How the emails are stored can facilitate statistical reporting. As Martin discovered, the process of deciding what constitutes an email reference "question" is complicated. 25 Some may consider the raw number of incoming and outgoing messages to be the count. Others may see the completed negotiation of a question as one "question." There are a multitude of other considerations also. This issue will be revisited below.

**Forms and Web Services:**

The question of access to holdings and the online description of those holdings is fundamental to an archive's internet presence. Of the seven archives, only one did not

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24 Capizzi, “E-mail Reference Service,” 25.
have HTML findings aids, EAD encoding, or searchable MARC records available. Of the rest, five had extensive HTML finding aids and two had at least one finding aid mounted. Three had EAD finding aids and three others were planning on using EAD in the near future. Six had MARC records for their collections although one reported that unprocessed collections made available to the public did not have MARC records. This demonstrates a continuing accumulation of archival information available over the internet. This trend will most likely increase the number of users who expect more information and likewise will have questions about the materials and its availability. As mentioned earlier, the increase in web-accessible information can also preempt some questions and lead to fewer, or more specialized email requests.

Another way to possibly preempt questions is with online guides to the site and collections. Of the seven archives, five had web-based resources that explained their collections, subsets of their collections, and how to maneuver through them. These included bibliographic and searching instructions, information on certain documents about race or ethnicity within the collection, indexes, and links to independent sites of interest. Two archives did not have any such tools available online but indicated that published works were available and one also mentioned that online guides were a great idea. Guides are used in archives to assist in collection access, and published volumes can quickly become out-of-date. The online world seems to be a perfect environment for this type of evolving information and five of the archives interviewed are taking advantage of the flexibility of the internet.

The next question concerned the existence and availability of written policies outlining reference services. The answers to this question varied greatly. Two had no written policies concerning the nature of reference services. Five had some written policies but only four had them online. Two of these archives had online policies that applied to only certain services, such as copying but generally felt that policies were restrictive to the course of reference work and trusted the staff member to handle each request as necessary. Two were quite clear about use of their reference services.

Question 11 focused on examining the impact of offering email reference service. Specifically the question asked if the archive's policies address how much time will be devoted to each question and how much time will elapse between receiving the question and sending a response. Also, if these policies exist, are they followed? Only two of the archives’ policies specifically mention allotted time for reference work and the amount of time before a response to the reference email inquiry. Beyond written policies, institutions often have unwritten or internal guidelines for amount of time and elapsed time for responses. Three of the seven archives mentioned an informal time restriction for research about a question of one hour while the others did not place restrictions on time. Six of the seven archives had an elapsed timeline for responses that of between 24 hours to two weeks while one believed that a timeline is restrictive. Two archives felt that the practice of reference work did vary significantly from their policies about rate of response and amount of research per response, written or unwritten. Again although some archives choose to be more specific and rigid most believed that reference work does not easily conform to rigid guidelines. In other words, the reference service provided should, within reason, be based on the patron’s needs not institutional requirements.
Question 12 asked whether the archive has a reference web page. Only two archives reported having a separate reference web page although it was apparent that at least two of the archives did not have enough staff to have a separate reference department. The idea of a web page would be to centralize certain functions and policies in the archival reference department. The lack of this sort of web page does not indicate a lack of reference services but simply that information about reference services is distributed throughout the archive’s website. Some archives have considered centralizing the remote reference services on a reference web page but were wary of advertising these remote reference services because it may result in an increase in reference service use. Information on a reference web page could include access to guides and policies mentioned before or simply information on how to contact the archive, access to forms, or other means of standardizing correspondence.

Questions 13 and 14 outlined the use of forms standardizing remote reference questions. Three archives said that they use an online form for email questions although one said it was not yet functioning indicating that it was a recent addition. Three archives had forms for other reference services such as research agreements and copy requests. Almost half of the archives are achieving a certain level of technical sophistication through the use of online forms. Through these techniques it becomes easier for the patron to understand what information needs to be provided by them to successfully answer their question and it allows archives to provide better service.

**Staffing:**

The six questions about staffing are intrinsic to understanding the issues of management. The first question asked about how many people are working on reference
email and how much time is dedicated to it. Unlike in-house reference service, it is unnecessary to have complete daily coverage schedules but depending on the response rate the email needs to be checked regularly. The next three questions asked for more in-depth information about qualifications and background of the staff members, how long they have been with the archive, and what training they have received. Finally, it was necessary to see how the staffing resources have changed and will change in the future.

The results for this section of questions are somewhat difficult to compare from one institution to another because there were many different management styles that will be discussed later.

Five of the archives had a professional staff member who presided over the email reference service and was responsible for insuring responses to inquiries. For two of these five archives, this staff member was the only one responding to the email. The other three archives were assisted by up to four graduate students. The remaining two archives used a distributed system to answer the email. One staff member would receive the email, read the contents, decide which other staff member was best suited to answer the question, and forward the email to them. At that point, it is their responsibility to answer the email. As can be expected, the hours for these different systems also vary considerably. I was not able to get a firm hour total or percentage from the two archives that use the distributed system. The distribution takes very little time and since many staff members are answering the questions it was difficult for the interviewee to know the percentage of their time it occupies. Among the other five archives it is a bit clearer. In the two archives that have professionals solely in charge of email reference, one spends about 10% of his/her time and the other about 35-40% on reference email questions. Apparently, there
is a distinct difference in the volume of email between these two archives. Of the remaining three archives, two use graduate students about twenty hours a week to answer email reference primarily in addition to the professional staff member. For the one other archive, the email reference occupies about 15% of their time and some of the inquiries fall to a single graduate student for approximately 5-10%.

All but one of the archives reported that staff time devoted to reference email has increased. One reported that this increase was 40% while the others were unable to give percentages. This increase in time spent answering reference email questions is not surprising considering the significant increase in the amount of email reference questions received that was reported earlier. Future plans for staff hours were not so uniform. Three archives reported that no further allocations of staff time were being planned. Two archives were considering more staff members but not necessarily because of email reference demands. Of the final, one was adding a non-professional position and the other was going to allocate more staff hours to email reference services.

Questions 16-18 addressed the training and experience of the staff. None of the seven archives have any type of special training for email reference service. Each of the professional staff members has many years of experience particularly in general reference service in archival institutions. For training purposes, email is not addressed in a special way. For the three archives that employ graduate students, half-day training sessions are conducted on using the collection and answering questions. Further training and assistance is available on a continuing basis. In fact, one archive reported that all graduate correspondence is reviewed before being sent out. But no part of the training is specific to email. The graduate students are usually studying either library science or history and the
duration of employment ranges from one to five years although the average is closer to two years. All of the professional staff members were reported as being with the archive for five years or much longer.

User Studies:

The inclusion of a user studies section to the interview was a necessary step to gauge what these archives knew about their patrons. This type of research helps archives to understand who their users are, why they are visiting the archive either in-house or online, and what they are using. User studies can also be conducted to determine the level of satisfaction with the service the patrons received and overall impression of the experience. Although archives are in the business of historical preservation, archives must always remember that without the patron they cannot justify the expenses. Formal user studies are not the only way to gather patron information but provide insights to institutions.

Four of the seven archives had conducted a user study on its patrons, but only one of these had done so in the past four years. Not surprisingly, these studies did not incorporate email reference users and were primarily studying walk-in patrons. One archive said that they were in the planning stage of a study but could not provide details. This lack of studies made the answers to the next two questions mostly the interpretations of use by the interviewees and their knowledge of the archive.

When archives were asked about the type of services or materials online patrons request the information archives provided was sparse, although six archives reported that duplication services were heavily requested. Additionally, three reported that specific
questions about the contents of collections (Does this collection hold this letter?) are often asked. This type of question may indicate that patrons are using the online finding aids before asking questions. All of the interviewed archives reported being asked for the "full range" of services although duplication services are more requested. This lack of specificity indicates that archives do not have empirical information about what types of services are requested. Further, because the archives were unable to differentiate between the demand for types of services requested by in-house patrons and remote patrons, I believe they have not yet begun to class in-house patrons and remote patrons as distinct user groups.

When archives were asked about the affiliation or background of online patrons, only two archives were able to give any specific information. One reported that about half of the archive's patrons were either scholars conducting professional research or students conducting research on specific paper topics while the other archive reported that approximately 40% of the archive's patrons were conducting scholarly research. The remaining five were able only to give a few examples. Three mentioned that the general public doing personal research was a significant population while the other two mentioned scholarly researchers and graduate students as significant populations. Three archives were able to report that these significant populations were among the remote users but none of the five were able to differentiate specifically between remote and walk-in patrons.

The final question of the interview attempted to understand how well the patrons review the information provided for them on the website. Two archives reported that their
patrons were unaware of the scope or nature of policies and services. The remaining five archives gave their patrons only partial credit for understanding policies and services.

Case Studies:

The answers to the questions reported above are in some ways fractured. To put some of the responses in context it is necessary to evaluate each archive as a single entity and to compare these entities against one another. Thus, archives not included in this study might be better able to evaluate how their remote reference services and their management of remote reference service compares with archives that were included in this study.

My personal experience with email reference service is with the Southern Historical Collection at UN-CH. I have included the following case study of this archive so the reader has more information by which to compare their archive and so the reader will understand my personal experience and background with email reference services. This archive has offered email reference since 1995 and does keep statistics on the number of emails received. A thorough analysis of the numbers and types is now available through Martin's paper. Essentially, email has become the dominant form of remote correspondence and that general research, genealogical research, graduate student research, and permission to publish are the top four uses. Many questions are referred to the archive, mainly from other departments such as the special collections or the graduate library reference desk, but some simply come from the website committee whose email is available as a comment link on the bottom of most library web pages. Very few inquiries are forwarded on. There are really no differences between email and in-house reference
services and all email is printed out and stored in alphabetical order by year, although electronic records are currently being stored by month for one year.

The Southern has its finding aids available in HTML, many available in SGML (although to work with SGML documents requires special software), and all finding aids have been encoded in EAD. The SHC has created and provides access to a few online guides and summaries of the collections. Additionally, the SHC provides access to some of the policies and conditions of use for the collection on their website. Answers to email submissions are expected within two weeks although a response is usually provided much quicker and there is no restriction on the amount of time spent answering each question although more than one hour is rarely given. The reference department does not have its own web page and a form for submitting email inquiries has been in use for over six months although no other forms are currently available.

The staffing resources allocated to email reference include both professionals and graduate students. The graduate students spend approximately twenty hours a week answering email. One professional employee coordinates the service, distributes the email, and responds to many of these email questions submitted. Additional professionals are often used when a large amount of email reference is received. There is really no training specific to email reference and training in general for reference is geared towards familiarizing the graduate student with the collection and the ways to access it. The amount of time spent on email has been increasing but no new staff or graduate hours are currently being planned for it.

Several user studies have occurred analyzing the patterns of use, the types of questions asked, and the patrons who use the collection, the latest of which resulted in the

Ibid.

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Martin paper. These studies have assisted the SHC in understanding its patrons and the use of the collection, which allows the SHC to discover the areas where its service may be lacking. Whether patrons are familiar with policies and services is difficult to know. Information about policies and services is provided but whether they are read and understood is unclear.

Archive #1 has a distributed system of email that appears to be very set in the method of submission of inquiries and other information. They have provided reference email service since before 1995, no exact year could be established, and have switched over to a form for email submissions. Each staff member who responds to email inquiries keeps a printed file of this correspondence with no electronic storage and reports to the head of the department the number of emails answered and sometimes information about content. The amount of staff time devoted to email inquiries has risen by an estimated 40% and general staff increases are expected although not specifically because of email. There is a great deal of information available about policies and services, collection finding aids are available online, and guides to holdings are provided. The archive conducted a user study focusing on the affiliation of walk-in patrons. This study concluded that there were more patrons visiting the archive from off-campus than from on-campus. Another study investigates how staff members spend their time by recording their daily responsibilities at periodic intervals. These studies aside, the archive is unaware of how well informed their patrons are about policies and services.

Archive #2 started email reference in 1996 and stores their email as print files with no electronic storage. Email questions are handled by a single professional and distributed to four graduate students who answer the inquiries. The number of staff or
hours has not increased since the service began and no increases are planned. They have published online finding aids in HTML and are starting to implement EAD encoding. All collections are searchable as MARC records. No other guides or policies are available at this time. The reference department does have its own website and an email submission form is planned but not yet in use. Other forms for copying and other services are being considered. No studies on users have been performed and specific knowledge about users is unknown. About half of the users are considered to be knowledgeable about services and policies.

Archive #3 started email reference in 1994 and stores their email as print files with no electronic storage. They also handle email questions with a single professional who distributes the questions to graduate students. Before sending any replies to correspondence the professional approves it. The amount of staff and graduate hours has increased since the beginning and currently plans to add non-professional staff are being considered. EAD, HTML, and MARC records are available for searching or viewing. They have thorough documentation about policies, guides, email and other forms, and a web page for the reference service. Although no user studies have been done, one is in the planning stage. The archive indicated that a large percentage of their use occurs from remote patrons who frequently request duplication services. The general public is the largest user group. With all the online information provided, only a small portion of their patrons appear to be well informed about policies and services.

Archive #4 has been offering email reference since 1995 and does not keep records of its email correspondence either on paper or electronically. The email is handled by a single professional who also responds to most of it. Some email is
distributed to a graduate student. The amount of staff time has increased but no plans to increase it further have been made. Very little information about collections or anything else is provided online. Information about policies and services is not presented online. No EAD or MARC records are available and one HTML finding aid is available. No user studies have been done and very little can be generalized about users or what they ask for.

Archive #5 has been offering email reference since 1995 and primarily keeps electronic records of email with some print out files. Email is handled by one reference staff who also responds to it. The amount of time spent on reference email has increased and more of this person’s time will be allocated to reference email. This archive does have HTML, EAD, and MARC records available for searching and reviewing. There are guides and policies published on the website although the policies do not specifically outline reference services. There is no reference web page, or forms or methods of standardizing submitted information. A walk-in user study was performed a while back and there seems to be a fairly good understanding of who uses the collection and what services they ask for. A fair number of patrons do ask very specific questions, but again there is a high level of uniformed users.

Archives #6 has had email reference since 1996 and uses staff member organized print out files for storage. The email reference is received and distributed by the website coordinator to the staff member whose experience and specialty the question is best suited. The amount of email has been increasing as have staff hours and no further increases have been planned but are being considered. The archive does have some HTML finding aids available and EAD encoding is being started. All collections are
available in MARC format for searching and review. There are some guides available online but no information about policies and services. The archive does not have a reference page or any forms or standardized methods for submitting information online. User studies have been conducted but not by the archive. The studies were conducted by the central library on all patrons some of whom where visiting the archive. Even so, this archive seems to have a decent knowledge of their patrons including who they are and what they ask for. The archive does not believe its patrons are informed about their services and policies.

Archive #7 has offered email reference since 1996 and keeps records of electronic mail in electronic form only. The email reference is handled by one professional who responds to all inquiries. The amount of email has increased and the amount of time spent on email reference has also increased slightly although there are no plans for increases in the future. The archive offers some HTML finding aids and is beginning EAD encoding of finding aids, while all processed collections have MARC records for searching and review. There are guides and some information about policies and services available online although not specifically for reference services. There is no reference web page or standardizing forms for information submission. Recently a user study was performed on walk-in patrons that helps the repository understand their patrons and the services they seek. The archivists generally find that the patrons are well informed about their policies and services.
Conclusions:

These interviews provided a great deal of information and context as to how given archives across the United States choose to manage their email reference service. What the interviews did not provide are clear methods or best practices that permit other archives to successfully manage their email reference. Archives as a whole have very different collection sizes, number of staff, scope, number and type of patrons, and institutional resources that limit or expand its options. Since this study used a small sample size of large, prestigious, public university archives with a broad range of defining characteristics, it is difficult to apply the results to all archives. With these thoughts in mind we can, however, see some similarity in the handling of email reference requests among the archives included in the study.

Archives now consider email reference to be a necessary service and have been offering it for a number of years. Whether the initial decision was an intentional advertisement or simply an innocent "for more information" link on their website, it is apparent that all seven archives interviewed receive and respond to several reference questions a week through email. Further, six of seven maintain statistics on the number of emails received. This indicates that this service is firmly in place and must be measured for its influence on staff resources. Decisions about equipment and staff numbers and schedules depend on the amount of time email reference consumes from day-to-day.
While it seems most archives keep statistics on the volume of emails received, only one of the seven interviewed indicated that they maintain statistics on the type of request received. Although this number is low, it is not surprising and corresponds well with the low number of interviewed archives that have recently performed user studies and the minimal amount of literature available about user studies in the archives field.

From the interview questions on staffing for reference email, it is apparent that these archives have one principal person who first checks the email. With this system in place, each archive can record on a simple form the types of use and the affiliation of the patron who makes the email request. In this way a running tally can be maintained to track use patterns. This information allows the archive to respond accordingly to changes of use.

All but one archive reported that staff hours have increased consistently since email reference was first offered, and a few reported that there are plans to further expand these hours. Information based on the volume of emails received helps to plan these increases in staffing but additional information on the type of request allows further refinement of exactly what type of staff (professional, non-professional, etc.) will best meet the need.

These statistics on numbers and types of email requests are also helpful in identifying how much email is referred from outside to the archive and away to other sources. Most archives reported that they both are referred email questions and will refer email to appropriate sources. Most frequently the referrals occur because of patron's incorrect use of displayed email addresses or forms and because patrons will use by default, any email address they can find to pose a question. Some archives did mention that they were likely to attempt to partially answer all inquiries in addition to referring but as the number of emails received continues to increase, time constraints may make
even partial answering difficult. Developing a system to identify potential referrals and route them to the correct department or another institution should decrease the time and energy spent answering questions better left to others and increase the quality of the response these patrons will receive.

All seven archives reported that their policy is to provide the same services to in-house and remote patrons. This indicates that email reference overall is not considered to be much different than in-house reference. Indeed one of the selection criteria for universities in this study was that they be public universities. This criteria was intended to make sure that the repositories' community of users extended beyond the lines of the campus. Therefore, I do not find it surprising that they offer the same services and levels of services to all patrons, local and remote. With this in mind, it is still difficult to believe that an email question will receive the same service that an in-house user would receive. Four of the archives interviewed did qualify their "no" answers to question 6 about different services being provided to in-house and remote patrons by stating that they believed that somewhat better in-house service was provided because of the limitations of email. The literature seems to indicate that there are inherent difficulties in conducting an online reference interview. Tibbo speaks in detail about the lack of emotive signs, both verbal and visual, that facilitate desk reference.\textsuperscript{27} Further, as personal and non-professional use of email reference increases in archives, the average patron will be less familiar with the nature of archival resources and of what a reference archivist needs to know to provide good archival reference service. The fractured nature of email reference makes the reference interview longer if done as extensively as in-house interviews.

From question 17 about the nature and length of training, we also see that none of these archives have any specific training sessions for corresponding with patrons via email. All of the archives indicated that the professional staff members who perform email reference have years of reference experience. While general reference knowledge combined with mentoring and the accumulation of experience are certainly helpful, staff members should be introduced to the problems and benefits of email references by reading articles about email reference studies and reports. Knowledge of the computer systems and programs used for email may introduce timesaving mechanisms such as form responses. Introduction to basic services provided and what is necessary to provide them to online patrons will help to speed up the process. Further, clear guidelines and policies, either publicly stated or internally understood, would help the reference staff to set limits on what will be provided, thus avoiding lengthy negotiations with patrons about services.

Many archives do not have written policies or limits set on what service they will provide to patrons. Only two of the seven indicated that they have established guidelines presented to patrons online. Two archives had no written policies and one did not have them online. Interestingly, two mentioned that they have intentionally not devised restrictions on what services they will provide to email reference patrons. The intention is not to restrict services because these restrictions can negatively effect the ability of the reference archivist to answer a question. Experienced reference archivists would decide for themselves how much time and resources are necessary to satisfy any given inquiry. Further, this decision will be dependent on who the patron is and for what reason they seek the information. These two archives were the only ones to use a single professional
in charge of email reference. A single professional can respond to email reference
questions far more consistently than if the email questions were spread amongst many
staff members especially graduate students. I am not sure the "no policy" policy would
work as well for email reference services staffed by graduate students because their
relative inexperience may need restrictions in order to cut off patrons with lengthy
questions. Further, the distributive systems may also benefit from guidelines since email
reference is answered by a number of staff members. There is a crucial need to be fair
and consistent in the services that are provided but have the flexibility to respond to
individual situations and needs.

If nothing else, the responses to questions about staffing showed the diversity of
approaches and techniques for managing email reference. In the findings I noted that
there appeared to be three systems of utilizing staff members for email reference namely
a distributed system, a single professional, and a single professional aided by graduate
students. Each of these systems has its merits and in the end the decision must be based
on staff workload and budgetary concerns. The distributed system, whereby email
reference is read and distributed to a staff specialist, utilizes the talents and strengths of
the staff. This system would work well for larger, diverse staffs but it would seem to
make centralized accounting and statistics of the email reference service harder.

The single professional system acting alone centralizes the email reference load
and keeps statistics, but this person will increasingly have email reference dominate their
time. Some may find email reference very satisfying while others will not. In a larger
archive, finding a staff member who is satisfied with providing email reference may be
easier than in a smaller archive.
The third system utilizes graduate students to answer the email reference questions. A professional staff member supervises the graduate students. This method allows generally for lower cost labor but also raises the specter of less experience when answering reference questions. These students focus only on email reference questions. A necessary part of using graduate students is having a professional staff member to oversee the process and be available to answer questions, refine approaches, read outgoing responses, and mentor the students. This method is highly dependent on finding good, motivated students and may benefit greatly from a library science graduate school or other related field at the university. Further, even with such students, thorough training is necessary. As mentioned earlier, none of the archives contacted had training specific to email reference. Training for reference in general familiarizes the students with the archive and the tools they will need to use. Training specific to email reference might simply include reading literature about email reference and its positives and negatives. The Abels and Tibbo articles would be excellent starts. Further, general oversight by a professional staff member including the development of search strategies and monitoring correspondence encourages a learning environment for the graduate student. It is important to realize that training and learning are continuous processes.

What separates these three methods of staffing? Each clearly demonstrates a different way that email reference is provided and none of which are inherently superior to the others. In the end, the choice will be determined by which fits best with the resources available in the archive for staffing and how this fits with the philosophy of the archive. Additionally, which solution may work best for the current situation may change
over time. With most archives reporting that the use of email reference continues to rise, how this service is provided will need to be re-evaluated.

The fact that email reference use continues to increase returns us to the question of online access to the collections. Six of the archives reported that access to finding aids in EAD or HTML is partially or completely available and that they will continue to add new finding aids. Further, the availability of guides and how-to-use/search information combined with advertising reference services increases the patrons' knowledge of archival collections. Does access to this information increase the likelihood of questions? On the one hand, more patrons might be able to answer their questions before having to pose them in an email. On the other hand, more information and access can lead to further and hopefully more refined questions. These options are hard to validate either way. Six of the seven archives have not noticed that patron's questions reflect a general increase in familiarity with their services or refined questions. But many changes are possible. Requests for paper finding aids may decline, but copies, either analog or digital, may increase. Online information and copying services may lead many researchers to believe they can complete their research remotely but it may also increase the number who discover new, relevant collections and lead to a personal visit. This again emphasizes the need for recording statistics not solely about the number of inquiries but also on what type of questions are being asked and what services are being requested.

Reference departments may find that access to online forms for inquiries and services may further facilitate efficient, thorough, and prompt service. Currently three archives reported that they had a form for the submission of reference questions although one was not yet working. The other archives did not specify whether these devices were
being considered. The advantage of such forms is that they provide the patron with essentially fill in the blanks that let them know exactly what information will assist the reference archivist in answering their question. More specific forms for services such as photocopying or requests for extensive research and for questions from patrons such as genealogical researchers or scholars may assist reference personnel to know how to respond better. The provision of these more specific forms or of any form should be considered to ascertain what information is needed. Further, knowing what types of requests are most commonly received will help the archive identify which forms to provide.

This returns us to the need for user studies. In searching through the literature I could find very few reported studies evaluating remote use patterns in archives, mostly attributable to the recent increases of remote email use. The increase in email services and patron use confirms that user studies are only becoming more necessary. Four of the archives reported that use studies have occurred but only one mentioned that it had occurred recently. One also had a use study that was being planned for the near future. None of these studies focussed on remote use or online service. Further, the infrequency of user studies and the lack of literature enforces the idea that user studies need to be performed but the results of such studies need to be evaluated, implemented, and published for others to read. Effective management of reference services, and specifically email reference services, will benefit from evaluation of patrons and their use patterns. However, applying one archives' user studies to another or generalizing the study to apply to all archives is difficult. As mentioned in the previous section, archives are a wonderfully diverse group of institutions. They vary greatly in size, scope, and place
within the larger university library system. All of these factors will dramatically effect individual management decisions and thus the applicability of other archives' user studies.

Through the course of this study I have emphasize that archives are a very diverse group of institutions but that some areas of commonality in the way they manage email reference can be found between them. This has been achieved with only limited success. Primarily, reference email service has been offered for about five years but few statistics other than raw email volume are recorded.

Although lacking much commonality, the variety of techniques for managing email reference discovered and analyzed in this paper will result in a better understanding for other archives of how to manage their own email reference service. In particular, I have shown three distinct systems for staffing email reference service. Further, there is a clear trend towards publishing more information about archival collections, policies, and services online but that this may only increase the demand for email reference.

In the rapidly changing and advancing areas of online information and email reference, it is necessary to understand that any changes in policies and services must be subject to further alterations as use changes. Online information is an exciting method of expanding the use of archival collections but as more users find these collections and other information published on the archive's website it seems likely that the number of email reference questions will continue to rise. Only by understanding the dynamics of this increase in remote use will archival management be able to meet the current and future needs.
Bibliography:


Appendix A:

Interview Questions

General:

1. Do you offer all patrons (local and remote) the use of email to submit reference questions? For how long have you offered this service?

2. Do you keep statistics on the number and types of email reference inquiries?

3. Please describe in your experience the approximate number and top four types of email service inquiries and the change (if any) in these number and nature in recent years. (Email types include: requests for duplication (photocopies, scanning, microfilm) professional/scholarly research, personal research, ready reference, referrals to other departments, hours and locations, policies, how to use systems, copyright info, etc)

4. Do you receive email reference inquiry referrals from other departments or institutions?

5. Do you refer email questions to other departments or institutions?

6. Are different services provided to in-house and remote?

7. How do you archive or store email correspondence?

Forms and Web Services:

8. Do you have HTML or EAD finding aids or MARC records available for searching on the Internet?

9. Do you have online guides on how to use your web site or searching functions?

10. Do you have written policies that outline what reference services you provide?
11. Do these policies specifically outline email reference services?  
   How much time per inquiry?  
   How long before response?  
   Does practice differ from policies?

12. Does the reference department have its own website?

13. Do you offer forms or other means of standardizing email inquiries made to the reference department?

14. Are there separate procedures for submitting certain types of inquiries or services such as genealogical questions, or requests for copies?

**Staffing:**

15. Please describe the staffing resources for email reference services in the reference department in number of employees, percentage of time spent answering email, and percentage of reference staff overall resources devoted to email reference?

16. What is the background training/education of the email reference staff?

17. Please describe the nature and length of training for reference department employees in general and specifically for email reference services.

18. On average, how long have they been with the department?

19. Has the number of email reference staff or hours increased or decreased since this service was first offered? Approximately what percentage?

20. Are there any plans to increase or decrease the amount of email reference staff or hours?

**User Studies:**  
(All questions here seek to understand if this differs for walk-in patrons.)

21. Have studies of your online patrons been performed?

22. What type of services or materials do online patrons ask for?

23. What is the background or affiliation of your online patrons? Who are your patrons?

24. Are your online patrons well informed about the nature of your services and policies?