

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Powers, M., Costello, R. **Reaching Diverse Audiences with Virtual Reference and Instruction. Practical Guides for Librarians**, No. 59. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield; 2019. Softcover: 96p. ISBN: 9781538116906. Price: USD\$65.00. Available from: <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538116890/Reaching-Diverse-Audiences-with-Virtual-Reference-and-Instruction-A-Practical-Guide-for-Librarians>

The discussion of how to expand reference services to new and diverse patron populations is an ongoing one in the LIS field; all librarians, regardless of specialization, have likely asked themselves questions of “How do I extend services to a greater user-base?” and “What can I do to engage the greatest possible subsection of my patrons?” The authors, Powers and Costello, both have experience in the provision of reference services to diverse audiences. *Reaching Diverse Audiences with Virtual Reference and Instruction* is a primer for librarians who are grappling with these questions and looking for the resources and definitional frameworks to get started.

In 8 chapters, the book lays out the all-important frameworks of, and definitions for, virtual reference, and deals with some of the core concepts that are absolutely necessary for providing effective virtual reference. The book works to define issues such as: what constitutes a library community, diversity, privacy for patrons, as well as what it means to be an accessible and inclusive reference service. Also addressed are the broad-strokes of what constitutes virtual reference, library instruction, and necessary teaching resources. The final 2 chapters discuss the importance of the iterative process of program evaluation for virtual reference services, and take a look at the evolution of the theory and practices relating to providing reference for varied user-groups.

The book is a useful primer and refresher for librarians looking to engage a wider group of patrons via virtual reference. The book is sensibly laid out,

dealing with the issue from conception to evaluation of in-progress programs, in a common-sense chronological format.

The writing itself is concise, to the point, and easily accessible to any reader. The book is also designed with brevity and the working professional in mind. The writing and layout of each chapter is easily digestible, and the work focuses on making its point in each chapter, without belaboring it. While the authors write primarily for the academic library context, the book is laid out with the relationship between librarian and patron in mind, in such a fashion that the text could be adapted without difficulty to other contexts, librarians, and needs. In addition, the authors make a clear case that diversity and inclusion, within the context of reference, has intrinsic value to the LIS field and cannot be overstated.

The primary difficulty in engaging with this book is that it is limited in its scope. As mentioned earlier in this review, the book should best be understood as a primer, rather than an in-depth guide. It is an excellent starting point for libraries and librarians who are looking to grapple with issues of diversity within reference, rather than a how-to guide. Readers looking for an all-inclusive how-to guide may find it less immediately useful to their work.

Having said that, the list of references that went into this book are extensive, and provide a highly useful bibliography for further reading and learning. In my case, the print edition was reviewed, but I can easily see how the e-book version would be even more useful, as cross-referencing the bibliography would be straightforward and intuitive.

The book is of good value for its cost, and one that is useful to more than just the academic librarian who constitutes its expected audience. Reference and diversity are aspects of library work that all library staff should assess, and this book provides an excellent first step for thoughtful, worthwhile conversation and institutional change and (or) refocusing.

Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

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