Archivists’ Views of Copyright

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Research Problem

How do American archivists view copyright?

Why should we care?
Data Sources

Study population:
- Purposive sample of 96 institutional members of Society of American Archivists (SAA)

Data Collection:
- 66 questionnaires (69% response rate)
- 18 telephone interviews with archivists
Copyright is not a problem for archival repositories making archival material available on the Internet (Q21a) (N=66)
The risk of legal consequences for copyright infringement involving archival material is low (Q21b) (N=66)
I am reasonably confident that I can provide colleagues and researchers with accurate information and advice about copyright issues. (Q21c) (N=66)
It is our professional duty to educate our patrons about copyright. (Q21h) (N=66)
What do you think about copyright as it affects your job?  (N= 18)
Part of the Job

- “fascinating” (A15)
- “enjoy the intellectual challenge” (A7)
- “I’ve become probably more expert than I would like to be” (A2)
- “It feels a little bit unfair that archivists have to go out and gain this knowledge on their own” (A7)
Complicates the Job

- “I find it very difficult” (A3)
- “It makes our jobs harder” (A6)
Resentment

- “A part of me… resents the copyright law” (A4)
- “It really holds back your ability to [make holdings available] without spending enormous time and effort which in the end equals money.” (A7)
- “It is a royal pain” (A11)
Fear

“I kind of live in fear because I’m the person that is responsible for the website and the digitization” (A12)

“People are very scared when they hear the word copyright.” (A16)

“one of the questions that I dread getting” (A17)
It is important to restrict the ability of visitors to our website to copy or download documents from our website without our permission (Q21j) (N=66)
As long as the repository is credited as the source, it's OK for members of the public to download documents from our website and use them in a publication or on another website. (Q21e) (N=66)
Preliminary Conclusion

How do American archivists view copyright?

Apprehensive ambivalence
Ambivalent apprehension

“It is a royal pain”
Further Investigation

- Ways to reduce resentment/fear factor
  - Copyright education for archivists: best content and delivery modes
  - Risk assessment tools
  - Study the risk-takers’ methods and outcomes