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Paved by Good Intentions

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Abstract

I was thrilled to be accepted into the University of Michigan for my Masters of Science in Information, but it was an unexpected deviation as my health derailed my original plan to pursue a career in criminal law. As I enrolled in classes with my peers who intended to pursue careers as librarians and archivists, I was the odd person out asking myself how I could market my research in these courses to law schools in the future. I had always assumed I had incompatible passions, a love for history, literature, and research coupled with disinterest in pursuing a single field towards a Ph.D., and that my legal career would support my hobbies in the cultural heritage sector. With a heavy dose of irony I walked into “SI519 Intellectual Property and Information Law,” my first graduate school class, determined to use it to confirm to law schools my decision to pursue criminal law, but walked across the stage at graduation ecstatic to build a career at the intersection of copyright law and cultural heritage. Fantastic mentors, supportive networks, and timely court rulings and legislative changes, paved a path and provided me a stepping stone into a career at the intersection of my passions in a field I had not known existed. I entered the field at an increasingly critical time and had unique access to practitioners that helped create opportunities for engagement without which, I would not have had the opportunity to accept a tenure track librarian position at the age 24 as my first full time job out of library school.

Keywords: Careers, copyright librarianship



Paved by Good Intentions

Robert Frost (1916) wrote about roads not taken and Walt Whitman (1855) about open roads. The poets explored the decisions we make in life, destiny, and perceptions of self. The idea of an open road terrified me; by the time I entered college I had laid out what I thought was a map for the rest of my life. I did my best to stay the course, I took all the right classes, joined all of the right student organizations, and did everything possible to prepare for a career in criminal law where I could pursue a future focused in advocacy and informed by my liberal arts background. Life however had other plans and health obstacles eventually led me to completely uncharted territory.

Between my junior and senior years of undergrad the need for frequent check-ins with the CDC, for a particularly intense health crisis and resulting in suspected permanent organ damage, forced me to focus my energy on my current coursework and not the LSAT and law school applications as planned. In pursuit of what would eventually become the diagnosis of a genetic disorder, in the fall of 2017 I found myself enrolled at the University of Michigan School of Information. This decision was predicated by proximity to a renowned health system, a passion for research, a love of literature and history nurtured in my undergrad, and frustration with the availability of research collections and access to legal information (not to mention severely outdated courthouse software). It was not the next step in life I had planned, but was the best outlet for my passions, my need to continue to move forward, and my hope to not feel restricted by my health. I looked at my master's degree as a tool that could serve either as a steppingstone in my legal career path, one towards advocacy and reforming the legal information system, or if law school was not in the cards, as a tool that could open doors and provide me with access and skills to a productive and fulfilling career.

Determined to make the best of my health setbacks and the opportunity to pursue my Master of Science in information, I set out to take the long way around and try to connect back to my original path in life. I worked to formulate a convincing argument to future law schools about how this degree would shape my career in criminal law. As I registered for classes I told myself I would use these opportunities to research prison library systems and law libraries, write about court information systems, and talk about data ethics and privacy in the digital age—everything to show my continued commitment to a career in criminal law. Like my mentors, the criminal and family attorneys I interned for, who worked with local historic preservation committees, provided counsel to local museums, and served on community planning initiatives, I hoped to convey that my law degree would connect my academic career and interests, opening opportunities to serve the cultural heritage institutions I loved. I thought their way was the only way and

convinced myself it made sense to replicate their path. I would establish myself in practice and build a reputation so that eventually I could do pro bono work, be selected for board positions, and give back to my community. I had no exposure to the reality that not all heritage institutions contracted with big-name law firms or that they had every day legal needs, things outside of the realm of the City of Detroit declaring bankruptcy and considering deaccessioning large amounts of art as a solution to its financial troubles. I entered my master's program with a passionate but narrow view of the definition of advocacy, determined to pursue my JD, a career in criminal law, and a position in a large firm upon graduation. With a heavy dose of irony, I walked into my first graduate class, "SI519 Intellectual Property and Information Law," determined to use it to reinforce the path I assumed I could and should navigate back to but walked across the stage at graduation ecstatic to build a career at the intersection of copyright law and cultural heritage.

Following this new path forced me to be more open to the unknown and led me to see and create opportunities for growth, a skill that was underdeveloped by the meticulousness that dictated my journey until this point. I pursued additional opportunities to build confidence in my new field: a museum studies certificate, an internship at the U.S. Copyright Office, a class at the University of Michigan School of Law, development of an independent study in intellectual property and museum specimens, and participation in Harvard's CopyrightX. These opportunities unexpectedly became cornerstones in my interview and in my first year as Kansas State University's Scholarly Communication and Copyright Librarian; they led to collaborations with Kansas State University's Sunderland Foundation Innovation Lab and Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art. These collaborations extended my connections on campus and have helped shape and grow the range of reference services and collaborations Kansas State's scholarly communications team offers.

Fortunately, I have not been alone in navigating this new path; fantastic mentors, supportive networks, and timely court rulings and legislative changes paved steppingstones into the copyright librarian and cultural heritage law profession. Fueled by my interests and facilitated by an increase in hiring for scholarly communication librarians with copyright knowledge my current trajectory has been relatively seamless because of my openness to opportunity. Recent years have shown the value of this experience. *Cambridge University Press v. Patton* (2020), *Hachette v. Internet Archive* (2020), and the Copyright Alternative in Small-Claims Enforcement Act (2020) rolled out one after another, and significantly changed the attention given to this intersection in copyright and librarianship, and how I needed to work. In light of these events, I have extended my professional network, formed connections with new colleagues on collaborative projects, and worked to shape and grow my service so that my team and I could explore optimization in world with more copyright reference confusion.

Without this openness to new pathways and the benefit of early career access to established colleagues with networks willing to help create opportunities for my engagement, I would not have had the opportunity to accept my first full time job serving as a tenure track librarian at Kansas State University. Furthermore, I would not have just accepted a spot in the University of Miami Law School Class of 2025 as a J.D./Entertainment, Arts, and Sports Law LL.M. candidate. Just like Frost's poem, I, too, lack the ability to truly predict what my untraveled road would have looked like, but I am confident the path I am on now is where I am supposed to be. I still carry with me the same passion for advocacy and reform and could not be more excited to see what else unfolds as I continue to pursue and grow in the field of copyright education and advocacy.

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