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Paths to a Career in Copyright Leadership: When Metadata Met Copyright

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Abstract

This article explores the experience of a librarian with a background in metadata and digital collections and the introduction of copyright into their career. It offers insight on how to handle copyright if it is added to your job description.

Keywords: copyright, metadata, digital collections, copyright librarianship, careers



Paths to a Career in Copyright Leadership: When Metadata Met Copyright

Copyright wasn't in my job title, or my official job description. My job title when I began copyright in earnest was "Metadata Management Librarian." I worked on digital projects and initiatives. However, I served as the copyright contact for our libraries. Copyright was an area that needed additional coverage in the library, an academic library serving over 16,000 students and over 1,000 faculty or instructors. I found myself given both an opportunity and, eventually, a new realm to explore within librarianship. What began as an additional project on my plate turned into something that framed me as both a librarian and a person as I rose to meet the challenge in front of me. How did I end up here? Where do I begin?

While I pursued librarianship through college by working in several different libraries, my first experience with copyright was during a practicum with the Biodiversity Heritage Library as I pursued my Master's in Library and Information Science. After successfully completing their Professional Development Internship program, I worked with the library to create a project for course credit the focus of the practicum ended up being copyright. The Biodiversity Heritage Library is an international library serving a diverse audience which its collection development mirrors. Researching not only U.S. copyright law, but also delving into the difference with international publications and the copyright laws that protected them, left a lasting impression that I wouldn't realize until later. I conducted research in the U.S. Copyright Office to determine the copyright status of potential digital library content and contacted copyright holders for permission to distribute their content. There was something about taking a field trip to the Library of Congress and developing a better understanding of the dynamic nature of the library that was exhilarating. Using the computers to look up books and journals then digging through the drawers of registration records felt like the culmination of my love of libraries and my childhood love of Erle Stanley Gardner and Perry Mason.

My experience grew as I joined an Institute of Museums and Libraries Services grant project to "Expand Access to Biodiversity Literature." I found and contacted creators for permission to put their content in the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Working in a position between creators and authors who held copyright, and a library wishing to advance and promote biodiversity, it was an [interesting?] experience seeing copyright from the perspective of copyright holders. From individuals to publishers, learning their hopes and concerns about copyright infringement was a completely new perspective. My time with them highlighted the importance of balancing the rights of creators with the proliferation of creativity and knowledge that copyright law was meant to encourage. I moved on as the grant ended, not yet considering copyright as a path I was destined to pursue.

That was until I found myself in an academic library, creating copyright presentations and materials for faculty. It was intimidating; I was only familiar with researching copyright status! But this new task allowed me to grow and find footing in the copyright librarian landscape — even if my job title made me feel like an imposter sometimes. I researched (a lot) and learned (even more). I submerged myself in the copyright librarian community and found books, articles, and online resources that helped guide the process. The world of copyright librarians is a quilt of helpful and supportive characters. Every new addition to this quilt strengthens the futures of librarianship — it is built on the special copyright laws created to protect our field.

On to the topic of how I got here — well, faculty had questions — a lot of questions — about copyright. They were looking for someone to offer guidance and support, but often came to realize how important copyright law was to academia. We developed a better way to streamline inquiries and provided a more robust offering of webinars and presentations. One of my last projects at Fordham was creating a Copyright Series for the libraries' social media accounts. One of my favorite “copyright breakthroughs” was creating the acronym “[LEARN](#),” Legal, External, Access, Redistribute, and Notice, respectively, to guide people through the core requirements of the TEACH Act for online learning. Through all these new initiatives one thing was clear: copyright is not static. It must be reviewed and evaluated consistently to ensure the proper guidance is given. As librarians and faculty move towards a digital future for research and access, copyright is at the forefront, and utilizing copyright exceptions becomes an exercise in creativity.

At Fordham University, I was part of committees and working on projects and conference planning on copyright. It has given me a passion to continue down this road and pursue equitable access and systems for those who wish to create. During the pandemic I started looking for a challenge and a way to strengthen the copyright tools I had developed. It paid off as my first year of law school is almost complete. I hope to focus on intellectual property with the New York Law School's [Innovation Center for Law and Technology](#). Balancing full-time work with the part-time, evening division program is a challenge, but hopefully one day I will be able to be just as helpful as those copyright librarians who guided me in the beginning! While my exact path for finding my place in the copyright librarian world is not yet paved, I am on a wonderful adventure until then.

As one starts their own journey with copyright, they may find a “When Harry Met Sally” love story or they may find it to be yet another job on top of an already mountainous to-do list. However, the journey proceeds, there are resources and guidance from copyright librarians for any level.