



# Journal of Copyright in Education and Librarianship

ISSN 2473-8336 | jcel-pub.org

Volume 6, Issue 1 (2022)

## **From Novice to Expert: Building Copyright Expertise Over Time**

Stephanie Savage

Savage, S. (2022). From novice to expert: Building copyright expertise over time. *Journal of Copyright in Education and Librarianship*, 6(1), 1-3.  
<https://doi.org/10.17161/jcel.v6i1.18490>



© 2022 Stephanie Savage. This open access article is distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution- 4.0 International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

# From Novice to Expert: Building Copyright Expertise Over Time

Stephanie Savage  
Scholarly Communications and Copyright Services Librarian  
University of British Columbia

**Author Note: Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Stephanie Savage, [Stephanie.savage@ubc.ca](mailto:Stephanie.savage@ubc.ca)**

## Abstract

Students and early career professionals should not be dissuaded from considering a career in copyright librarianship if they have an interest in the subject matter and a willingness to seek out professional development opportunities. Despite starting my MLIS degree with no legal or academic libraries experience, I was able to obtain a skill set in copyright literacy that enabled me to secure an entry level copyright librarian position upon graduation. Those who are willing to embrace being a novice and seek out available opportunities to build their expertise will find copyright librarianship a rewarding and valuable area of specialization to pursue.

*Keywords:* Careers, copyright librarianship, professional development



## **From Novice to Expert: Building Copyright Expertise Over Time**

Aside from a brief sojourn as an English teacher in Japan, I entered my MLIS program directly out of my disciplinary master's in literature. I brought no special interest or knowledge of copyright to the program. I was introduced to copyright librarianship in my first semester of library school when a copyright librarian provided a guest lecture in one of my classes. Aside from a general introduction to the work, I walked away from his presentation with a sense that this emerging area of specialization was both dynamic and perhaps not oversaturated with qualified librarians competing for a diminishing number of positions. I had already come to the realization that I would be competing with dozens (if not hundreds!) of other qualified candidates for the English liaison positions I had originally hoped to apply for. I strategically reconsidered my job prospects and started to look for opportunities to gain copyright knowledge and experience during the rest of my time as an MLIS student. Fortunately, my program encouraged experiential learning, so I was able to do a professional experience course at a law firm and obtain a co-op position as a student librarian in the copyright office at my university. In these positions I became familiar with the role and responsibilities of a copyright librarian within the academic library context. Through these work experiences, I was introduced to the legal and policy context that informed the copyright education we gave. I began to build a vocabulary for talking about these issues with members of my campus community. Along with this formal experience, I also stayed current in the ever-changing copyright landscape in Canada. I read relevant case law, followed the work of copyright scholars including Michael Geist, Howard Knopf, and Carys Craig, and became involved in the community of copyright librarian practitioners in my area through association memberships, listservs, and conferences.

By the time I graduated with my MLIS, I had a solid early-career resume that showcased tangible copyright knowledge and experience. With this skill set I was able to obtain a one-year contract position at the University of Winnipeg, as their Scholarly Communications and Copyright Librarian. In my first academic position, I dealt with issues familiar to most early-career professionals: self-doubt, imposter syndrome and general uncertainty about what my professional responsibilities were. However, by the end of my tenure I also gained invaluable experience that left me feeling much more confident in my abilities and potential value to an organization. When I was in the position to look for a job again, I found that my copyright experience was relevant not only for copyright librarian postings, but also for more traditional liaison roles, which increasingly call for candidates to have at least a basic understanding of copyright principles.

As is often the case in life, luck and timing played a large role in getting my next (and current) position. Just as my term appointment was coming to an end in

Winnipeg, an ongoing Scholarly Communications and Copyright Librarian position was opening at the University of British Columbia, the school where I received my MLIS and also worked as a student librarian for 16 months. Although I probably didn't have as much experience as the hiring committee was looking for, I did bring specific knowledge of UBC copyright policy and a familiarity with the organization that gave me an advantage. I was selected as the successful candidate for the position in late 2017 and have been in the role since.

I hope that my story demonstrates that it is possible to build copyright knowledge and experience with no formal background in the law. You can gain the needed skill set to perform the role of a copyright librarian through professional development and on the job training. I believe copyright education will continue to be an important area of specialization for academic libraries. Even when positions don't explicitly call for such expertise, a firm understanding of copyright within the academic library context will make job candidates stand out in a competitive job market. I encourage MLIS students, or anyone interested in making a career transition, to consider adding copyright experience to their list of qualifications.

Copyright librarianship is a niche and complex specialty within a profession that already necessitates significant training and educational commitment. In my experience, both library school students and professional librarians alike shy away from pursuing this career focus because it requires nuanced comprehension of the law, keen understanding of the difference between legal advice and education, as well as acknowledgement that the work we do may have real world legal consequences beyond the academy. For these reasons and more, copyright librarianship may seem like an intimidating career path. Even those with an interest in the field may feel they lack the knowledge or experience to pursue it. Despite the challenges that this role may offer, this area of librarianship satisfyingly melds the intellectual with the practical. Copyright librarianship also supports a strong advocacy movement, facilitated by a group of passionate librarians and legal experts who want to protect and encourage user rights. For those with an interest in the role, I encourage them not to be daunted by the legal aspects of the specialization. Hopefully my experience as someone who came to copyright librarianship as a complete novice with no prior legal training will serve as proof that this career is worth pursuing.