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Introduction to the Special Issue on DEIA in Copyright Librarianship

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When JCEL put out the call asking for editors for a special issue on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) issues in copyright and librarianship, I felt that I could not refuse. Ever since I joined the profession of librarianship, I have lamented the fact that it is still, largely, a white woman's profession. And, in the field of copyright librarianship, where a J.D. is quite often one of the qualifications for the position, diversity in the profession is not doing much better. The very first course I took at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois was taught by Dr. Nicole Cook. It was a course about diversity (or the lack thereof) in librarianship and the message stuck with me: diversity and inclusivity is necessary to make the profession better—it is not optional.

While doing some background reading to think about how to develop this special issue, I noted that copyright information science literature rarely focuses on DEIA issues. To be sure, there are some luminaries like April Hathcock, but the lack of a robust scholarly discussion of DEIA and copyright librarianship struck me as unacceptable. That is one of the reasons I am so very excited to add to the discussion of DEIA, copyright, librarianship and education with this special issue. Not only that, but I have spent my summer in residence at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) working to better understand international legal issues surrounding traditional cultural expressions and how the lack of protection impacts native communities. This work is difficult—there seems to be no easy solution. But, at the same time, it is important. Protecting Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from cultural misappropriation is worth the time and concern of the delegates who travel from all over the world to WIPO and struggle with drafting an international for the Intergovernmental Committee on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore.

DEIA, of course, includes a broad set of topics and this special issue can by no means cover every topic in copyright librarianship and education. Hopefully, however, this issue will open the door to further scholarly conversations on the topic, spark debates, and encourage more research in this area. To that end, a conversation with Dr. Kimber Thomas illustrates, through easy to use power point slides, how educators can address DEIA issues in the classroom when discussing copyright issues.

As the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) just celebrated the tenth anniversary of the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty (which allows cross border transfer of library books for the visually impaired) it is appropriate that this issue includes an article about providing closed captioning for videos for hearing impaired students.

In addition to focusing on the rights for the disabled, this volume of the journal addresses issues related to protecting the rights of indigenous communities through intellectual property and sui generis laws. For instance, in a book review of “The Copyright Thing Doesn’t Work Here,” Matt Voigts describes how Boatema Boateng explains the ways in which the copyright system fails to protect Adinkra and Kente cloth producers in Ghana. Traditional Cultural Expressions comprise an area adjacent to copyright law where the legal regime fails to protect the works of Indigenous Peoples due to a focus on individual authorship and a time-limited legal protection scheme among other issues. In her piece about TCE education, Siyao Cheng explains how few Information Science programs teach their students about this important area of protection for Indigenous Communities. Similarly, interviews with Drs. Tomas Lipinski and Anthony Kakooza add to the discussion of TCE issues internationally by rounding out discussions of international policy at the WIPO as well as international struggles relating to copyright law implementation.

Indigenous archives are also explored in this special issue. In a book review of Wemigwans’ “A Digital Bundle: Protecting and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Online,” Treasa Bane examines how the FourDirectionsTeachings.com website works to share Indigenous knowledge and stories from five diverse First Nations in Canada with the hope of encouraging educators to incorporate stories from elders into their curriculum. Rina Pantalony’s article, “Stewarding Collections in Times of Changing Perspectives,” examines how collaborative stewardship by cultural heritage institutions can responsibly work together with Indigenous Peoples to curate the preservation and access to these important collections.

I want to thank all of the members of the journal production team including the managing editors and the guest editors working on this special issue. It takes a village to produce a journal and I am incredibly proud of this special issue and the fruits of our collective labor.

