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The Order of Success: A Slow Path to Copyright Librarianship

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Abstract

No faculty lines were open when I graduated with my MLS at the library where I was employed as a staff member, but I was able to take advantage of organizational restructuring to obtain a management position over interlibrary loan. My department head at the time was assigned with providing copyright assistance. I seized the opportunity to learn more while I searched for a position that required my degree. I was supported while pursuing continuing education in copyright. I was also given increasing responsibilities that I suspected were beyond my rank. My eagerness to develop a professional skill set had worked both for and against me.

Keywords: interlibrary loan, course reserves, copyright, career, librarianship



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The experiences and skills I obtained while working at an academic library as a circulation clerk, and later as an interlibrary loan specialist, informed my studies while I worked to obtain my Masters in Library and Information Science. My studies were improved by the first-hand experience I had as a library staff member, and my work was improved by the training and instruction I received while obtaining my degree. No faculty positions were open at my library when I graduated with my MLS, but organizational restructuring provided me with an opportunity to apply for a management position over interlibrary loan. At each step, I was supported by my supervisors and my library to develop a professional skill set by pursuing continuing education in resource sharing, library systems, management, and copyright. I was given the opportunity to take charge of systems upgrades and migration, new program launches, and process improvements for the interlibrary loan department. I used these experiences to inform my first publications.

Through publishing in professional journals dedicated to interlibrary loan practitioners, I was noticed by the editors of the *Journal of Interlibrary Loan*, *Document Delivery and Electronic Reserves*, and was offered the position of assistant editor. My department head supported me in this endeavor as well, writing the responsibility into my assignment even though it was an activity that would usually be part of a faculty assignment. Eventually I would move from assistant editor to editor in chief. Working with the journal gave me unique insight into scholarly publishing, peer review, and author-editor interaction.

I had also taken positions on state and national committees, contributing to the development of new resource sharing surveys, programs, and systems. In these positions, and as an editor of a professional journal, I was acutely aware that the inter-institutional colleagues I worked with and the connections I was making often held positions of greater rank and responsibility than I did at my library. I was beginning to see that my eagerness to develop a professional skill set worked both for and against me.

During my time managing an interlibrary loan department and establishing a record of publication and service, I had gone through periods of intensive job searching. Every other year I would throw myself into the task of finding a position that would put me on more equal footing with my colleagues. The experiences that I had during these interviews further confirmed that I should have spent less time developing myself as a library professional and more time looking for a position that by its nature would have established a foundation for my professional career. I learned that my impressive publication record and my study and success as a manager would likely not be considered when establishing rank and pay should I be hired into a faculty position, because I had not obtained these skills while holding a

position that required my degree. By this time, I had also served on some search committees and could see that a large gap between when I obtained my degree and when I obtained a position requiring my degree would raise questions and cause suspicions, no matter what type of professional activity I had on my curriculum vitae.

My department head at the time was assigned to providing copyright assistance and supported me when I undertook to complete various continuing education in copyright law. I was given time to complete the [Berkman Klein Center Copyright for Librarians](#) course, [CopyrightX](#), and several other shorter educational programs. Copyright knowledge applied to so much of interlibrary loan, and also prepared me when I served as temporary manager of the reserves department at a time of system migration and process change. Developing a skill set in copyright made me an obvious choice to take on part of the copyright services provided by the library when my department head retired. As much as I enjoyed working with copyright, I felt that assigning the responsibility of providing the service to a non-faculty member could only hurt the library in the future. Allocating copyright service delivery to a non-faculty position would put the library out of step with peer institutions who rested that responsibility only with faculty. It could also, because of the vast difference in prestige and pay compared to peer institutions, create a position that could never be filled again should I leave it. I also suspected that continuing to develop specialized expertise without a faculty position would not help my career either.

The official letter of concern that I wrote about copyright services pointed out the problems I saw with assigning the responsibility of copyright to a non-faculty position and suggested what an appropriate position might look like. It did not ask that I be given the opportunity to take a faculty position in the library. I didn't know it at the time, but the library had just completed the [Ithaka S+R Faculty survey](#). The results of the survey indicated that faculty on campus felt an acute need for guidance on copyright and intellectual property issues. The reorganization that the library planned to apply, using information learned from this survey, included the creation of a faculty position devoted to copyright services. Of course, I applied and interviewed.

Not long after I was hired as a faculty member, I was honored to receive the American Library Association (ALA) Reference and User Services (RUSA) Sharing and Transforming Access to Resources Section (STARS) Publication Recognition Award. The recognition of valuable research and publication in resource sharing helped me to understand that, though much of my early publications will not count toward any future promotion, the work I had done previous to obtaining a position that required my degree was not all wasted. My path may have seemed a slow one, but I committed to contributing to the profession, the library community, and my

library at each step via professional development, scholarly communication, and personal advocacy.