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# Making Waves: Toward a New Model for Copyright Education

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# Making Waves: Toward a New Model for Copyright Education

## **Abstract**

This article discusses the current and future state of copyright education for visual resources professionals from the perspective of the Open Copyright Education Advisory Network (OCEAN). OCEAN launched in 2022 as a collaborative venture among copyright educators to maximize their efforts by working strategically to create complementary programming. OCEAN addresses library, archive, and museum professionals' urgent need for copyright education that empowers them to continue and expand mission-driven activities.

The article briefly outlines the research and activities that led to the creation of OCEAN and gives an overview of OCEAN's current education model in the context of the current copyright education landscape, leading to recommendations for the future of copyright education. The article draws on key findings from the white paper "The Library Copyright Institute, 2019-2025: Lessons Learned and Future Directions for Library Copyright Education."

## **Keywords**

Continuing Education, Copyright, Intellectual Property, Professional Development

## Introduction

Copyright literacy has become an essential skill for visual resources professionals and a prerequisite for unlocking the full power of visual collections. Few library and information science or museum studies programs offer comprehensive copyright education, leaving their graduates to train themselves on the job as they encounter intellectual property issues. Best practices also evolve as new legal precedents are set, making continuing education a necessity regardless of the thoroughness of your degree program. Our daily work depends on making informed decisions about the responsible creation, use, and sharing of images. With limited professional development budgets, visual resources professionals need access to trustworthy and affordable continuing education opportunities. How can the cultural heritage sector rise to the occasion to meet this need?

After a years-long pilot that started in response to the pandemic in 2020, the Open Copyright Education Advisory Network (OCEAN) launched in 2022 as a collaborative venture among copyright educators to maximize their efforts by working strategically to create complementary programming. The vision of OCEAN is to create an online community-driven education network about copyright and related issues for professionals and creators working in cultural heritage institutions to broaden access to collections. OCEAN serves to create this space for both professionals working with collections and the copyright experts that provide their education and training. It seeks to connect copyright educators to complement and leverage existing copyright education and training programs so that they are delivered comprehensively, with greater consistency and less duplication. The objective is to achieve scale in capacity building for the cultural heritage community and its members. Finally, OCEAN serves as an equity builder, providing professionals with access to rights education even if their respective cultural heritage institutions cannot afford to hire in-house expertise.

OCEAN addresses library, archive, and museum professionals' urgent need for copyright education that empowers them to continue and expand mission-driven activities. Through our collective wealth of experience and research, OCEAN's Advisory Board members have insight into the past and present of copyright education and hope to help shape its future.

## The Birth of OCEAN

In 2018, Columbia University Libraries conducted a feasibility study to determine the viability and sustainability of a copyright education center for libraries, archives, and museums. Prepared by Kristin Kelly (formerly of the Getty) and current OCEAN Chair Rina Elster Pantalony with support from the LYRASIS Catalyst Fund, this study provided concrete data supporting the need for copyright education for cultural heritage professionals. Three-quarters of the 203 survey respondents indicated that they would want their organization to consider having staff take advantage of educational opportunities from a copyright education center.<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2019, Copyright Advisory Services at Columbia University Libraries was given a grant by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to host roundtable discussions to build upon the

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<sup>1</sup> Kristin Kelly and Rina Elster Pantalony, "Feasibility Study on the Creation of a Virtual Center for Copyright Education for Professionals in Libraries, Archives, and Museums," *LYRASIS Research*, January (2018): <https://doi.org/10.48609/s6tg-vb13>.

feasibility study and consider how copyright education could be made scalable, financially sustainable, advanced in subject matter, and responsive to both evolving audience needs and to legal and technological change. With support from project partners ITHAKA S+R and LYRISIS, the discussions gathered participants representing significant copyright expertise, diverse and inclusive perspectives, and recognized leadership in the cultural heritage sector. A summary report of the discussions was prepared by Pantalony and Roger C. Schonfeld, then Director, Libraries, Scholarly Communication, and Museums at ITHAKA S+R.<sup>2</sup> The report serves as a basis upon which OCEAN was launched, first as a pilot in direct response to the critical need exhibited during the early days of the pandemic and then as a fully created independent initiative.

From 2020 to 2021, LYRISIS and Columbia University Libraries' Copyright Advisory Services piloted a new Virtual Copyright Education Center that included a series of classes on copyright issues and rights management. The first pilot delivered through the new Research and Innovation division of LYRISIS, it included business planning with the goal of developing a sustainable service model and made pilot details available via a wiki space.<sup>3</sup> Five 90-minute courses were held live online and recorded, with the exception of the question-and-answer time (Q&A). Each of the five courses was offered twice during the spring and fall of 2021. A baseline copyright 101 course was developed and distributed publicly, and the remaining four courses were on advanced topics and offered on the LYRISIS Learning platform for a nominal fee. Over 1600 participants registered for the courses in less than a year. All recordings were later made publicly available.

In 2022, OCEAN launched its autonomous efforts as a collaborative venture between copyright educators and their programs intended to address an urgent need to educate library, archive, and museum professionals to enable them to maximize mission-driven activities. It confirmed our commitment to a free or “pay what you can” model and the need to share recordings of courses as an open resource. We found that the real educational value lies in the direct and live interaction with a copyright expert and not in the asynchronous learning experience offered by a recording alone. An important additional factor was the achievement of scale. It was more important to achieve scale and develop a community following than try to generate a small amount of income from charging fees for educational trainings. Maximizing educators' efforts by enabling them to work strategically developing complementary programs, OCEAN aims to scale up copyright education efforts to maximize impact and effect change.

OCEAN's operating model is collaborative and unaligned with one organization or group. All learning is online through volunteer efforts, allowing for low overhead costs. Board members represent diverse interests in the cultural heritage community and are themselves copyright education experts in the field. By supporting each other in this shared vision and using an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to education, OCEAN believes it will achieve positive results in showing how intellectual property can be used by cultural heritage professionals as a tool to achieve their intended objectives as opposed to being a barrier to access and use. This

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<sup>2</sup> Rina Elster Pantalony and Roger C. Schonfeld, “Copyright Education in Libraries, Archives, and Museums: A 21st Century Approach,” Ithaka S+R, January 22, 2020, <http://sr.ithaka.org/?p=312596>.

<sup>3</sup> Erin Tripp, “Virtual Copyright Education Center - Virtual Copyright Education Center - LYRISIS Wiki,” Lyrisis.org, May 21, 2021, <https://wiki.lyrisis.org/display/VCEC/Virtual+Copyright+Education+Center>.

collaboration seeks to convene greater exploration, research, and development of how intellectual output, the subject of cultural heritage collections, is harnessed, used, and communicated.

In 2023, OCEAN formally incorporated and obtained 501(c)(3) non-profit status. OCEAN accepts donations, but with the approach of asking people who have benefited from its work to donate when and what they can. OCEAN is not based on a membership or other paywall model in order to achieve its highest priority: scale.

### **Lessons Learned from the Library Copyright Institute**

The Library Copyright Institute (LCI) was developed in 2019 as an IMLS-funded project aimed at closing gaps in copyright education for library staff by developing intensive training opportunities led by copyright experts. LCI especially focused on meeting the needs of librarians at institutions with few resources, scarce professional development opportunities, and little or no in-house copyright expertise.

OCEAN Advisory Board member Dave Hansen served as LCI's original project director while he and the project were based at Duke University. Following his departure, former OCEAN Advisory Board member Anne Gilliland served as project director and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill became the project's institutional home. Upon the conclusion of the program in 2025, a white paper was released outlining lessons learned from the program and recommendations for future directions for library copyright education.<sup>4</sup>

First among the practical lessons learned was the need for an organization to provide administration and communication structure in order to build a community of practice. While some groups LCI worked with had existing structures that could be leveraged to share information about programming and resources, others were more informal. In order to reach and sustain connection to the audiences that need support most, it is important that an organization of some sort take on the administrative burden of facilitating communication.

LCI's principal investigators also found that many librarians are not easily able to schedule time for training, and a flexible format that accommodates learners' schedules lowers the barrier to participation. Providing instruction online instead of in person also increases the accessibility of classes. Out of the formats tried by LCI, the most successful was a systematic plan of instruction that spanned several weeks, with online meetings typically held once per week over four to six weeks. The format also allowed participants time to absorb and process the information.

Opportunities for practical application of copyright concepts were determined to be very valuable. Dedicating substantial time to discussing hypotheticals and encouraging students to analyze real-life situations helped reinforce the concepts they had just learned and prepared them for applying the skills in their work.

Assessing students' learning accurately proved to be challenging. Rigorous assessment would help instructors understand the efficacy of various teaching methods but is not something most

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<sup>4</sup> Library Copyright Institute, Anne Gilliland, Dave Hansen, Will Cross, Kate Dickson, Caroline Mort, Siyao Cheng et al., "The Library Copyright Institute, 2019-2025: Lessons Learned and Future Directions for Library Copyright Education," September 18, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.17615/4cgg-r530>

attendees would be likely to engage with. Reaching consensus about which copyright skills are fundamental for library staff and how to assess them is an area for future work.

The final lesson identified was the need for follow-up training and engagement. Participants repeatedly indicated that they would appreciate having access to forums where they could continue the conversations and learning. They were also curious how they could best support colleagues who have not attended copyright training, and valued having access to handouts and files of presentation slides after the conclusion of their course. Many were interested in further information about a variety of intellectual property topics.

LCI's principal investigators noted that there is a growing need for copyright training for under-resourced librarians who do not have full-time copyright support in the library. Open educational resources that supplement the teaching, share guidance, and raise awareness of communities of practice are also needed. Lastly, the white paper recommends the development of a coordinated plan for copyright education across the library sector, aligning existing programs so that they complement each other and avoid duplication of efforts.

### **OCEAN's Current Education Model**

OCEAN's program is led and managed on a volunteer basis by an active Advisory Board and Program Committee who all work as rights experts in libraries, archives, and museums. OCEAN faculty also volunteer their time to the program.

OCEAN has not charged any registration fees for its training programs, and it does not require participants to incur any expenses because all education and training modules are delivered on a Zoom platform using a live synchronous model. The only requirements on the part of any participant is an interest in rights management topics, that they work for a cultural heritage organization or academic institution, that they have access to a computer and the internet, register for the program, and adhere to OCEAN's Code of Conduct.<sup>5</sup>

The learning model that OCEAN is currently best known for is called the Discussion Series and is based on the development and delivery of targeted one-hour training sessions held on Zoom, usually on Fridays at a convenient time for most participants (noon Eastern) with live faculty (usually three to a program plus a moderator) who present a topic of discussion and then allow for a robust Q&A period online. To maximize the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers, the chat function is used to carry on side discussions with other panelists while one member of the expert panel is presenting.

As provided for in OCEAN's Code of Conduct, sessions are not recorded and are governed by the Chatham House Rule to enable frank discussion and comparative analysis on how to operationalize suggested solutions to rights problems and risk assessment. Essentially the model is predicated on "what's the problem, how do you assess it, and how can you fix it?" Slide presentations are shared with attendees and posted online when possible. The Discussion Series model enables OCEAN to deliver broad education and training to professionals in libraries, archives, and museums at a significant scale. On average, OCEAN's training and education

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<sup>5</sup> OCEAN, "OCEAN's Code of Conduct | OCEAN," Open Copyright Education Advisory Network, 2024. <https://www.oceancopyright.org/oceans-code-of-conduct>.

programs have attracted 300 registrants per session. This fall, OCEAN's program co-produced with the Authors Alliance on AI, copyright, and cultural heritage has topped 800 per Zoom session!

OCEAN has also developed several Workshops, which are unique opportunities for OCEAN to engage with partners to develop online live learning events on Zoom. A Workshop is typically a two-hour synchronous learning event with a group of experts who address subjects in depth and suggest practical solutions to current copyright and related issues that are relevant to libraries, archives, and museums. These learning opportunities are far more involved and, based on the feedback obtained from participants and the level of registration and attendance, they are critically needed. Notably, an online live workshop, held in 2022 in conjunction with the American Alliance of Museums attracted more than 517 participants. OCEAN does record these workshops so they can be viewed asynchronously and referenced in the future, but does not record the Q&A sessions to enable frank discussion for reasons provided above. Pre-reads, materials, and slide presentations are shared with attendees and posted online when possible.

### **Keeping OCEAN Sustainable**

As previously stated, OCEAN's Discussion Series events and Workshops are free, and OCEAN is not a member-based organization. As a 501(c)(3), OCEAN does have the right to solicit donations and does so on its website.<sup>6</sup> Its costs are kept low because of the benevolence of its faculty, and the hard work and dedication of Advisory Board members. However, because OCEAN relies only on volunteers to manage its program and only on volunteer faculty, there are limits to what it can deliver, which on average is eight Discussion Series events a year as well as the occasional online Workshop. Workshops require more preparation, coordination, faculty involvement, and outreach, and OCEAN, operating purely on a volunteer basis, does not have the bandwidth and internal support to provide such Workshops on a regular basis.

OCEAN has now started to customize learning events for specific supporting organizations who in turn donate to OCEAN. Additionally, some of OCEAN's institutional founders have committed to annual ongoing funding. OCEAN has received base operational funding and in-kind support from academic libraries, archives, and museums that recognized that the lack of training and education in rights issues was fundamentally shaping which of the collections were being preserved and made accessible. Because these institutions already invested in their own in-house rights expertise, it was recognized as imperative to bring equity to the field to ensure robust access, nationally and internationally, to collections from American institutions. This base funding has allowed OCEAN to file for 501(c)(3) status and create an independent website. Much of OCEAN's in-kind support is currently ongoing, including Zoom access provided by Miami University.

OCEAN will be seeking grant funding to support specific needs and projects in the future. Additional funding would provide OCEAN with a much-needed, dedicated staff member responsible for coordinating programmatic activities, managing registrations and related participant issues, including accessibility requirements, and managing and assessing evaluation data so that OCEAN can assess its success in building rights knowledge at scale. Additional funding would also enable OCEAN to offer a modest stipend as an honorarium to its otherwise volunteer faculty who

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<sup>6</sup> OCEAN, "Donate | OCEAN," Open Copyright Education Advisory Network, 2024, <https://www.oceancopyright.org/donate>.

have tirelessly contributed their expertise without expectation of remuneration because of their commitment to OCEAN's educational mission.

## **The Future of Copyright Education**

The feasibility study, roundtable discussions, and pilot project that led to the creation of OCEAN brought the copyright education needs of the cultural heritage community into clear focus. These needs were reiterated by the findings of the LCI white paper. Practitioners need copyright training that is accessible: low- or no-cost, with online options that work with their busy schedules. Interactivity is also key to successful learning outcomes. Live access to experts and the opportunity to work through hypothetical scenarios together and build a community of practice is invaluable. To further strengthen this community and reach audiences who need support most, outreach to cultural heritage community institutions who are not part of formal professional networks must be improved. OCEAN is committed to keeping our mission equity-driven and community-focused, seeking to level the playing field across institutions at scale when their budgets and size may preclude in-house copyright, licensing, and related areas of expertise.

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