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## Drifting with Professional Scope

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# Drifting with Professional Scope

## **Abstract**

“Drift,” as a noun, may ignite feelings of unease. Daunting nouns such as “scope drift,” “change management,” “conflict resolution,” and “project management” swirl around the professional landscape, and in facing these nouns, the work associated with them can be unfamiliar and frightening. However, productive outcomes can quickly emerge when these terms are reframed as inspiring verbs. Managing change, resolving conflict, managing projects, and drifting with scope are verbs that grant some control over what happens next, which is much more inspiring and motivating than watching from the side and hoping everything turns out fine. From the perspective of a drifter, this article is a case study of one professional’s journey riding with the changing tides of her career in a way that has resulted in growth and opportunity. It will explain how each educational experience, new/evolving job description, and redirected initiative were not means to an end, but tools acquired along the journey and to be used for the duration of the journey. Even though many professionals find themselves in situations where they no longer do what they started doing, this case will provide an example of how every piece of information, professional advice, certification, and educational moment can be leveraged, re-used, and repurposed while drifting with scope.

## **Keywords**

professional development, professional transitions

## **Author Bio & Acknowledgements**

Jen Green is the Digital Scholarship Librarian within the Scholarly Communication, Copyright and Publishing Program at Dartmouth College. Jen works with faculty, students, and staff to provide them with current information and resources that can help them share the results of their research, scholarship, teaching, and learning. She is involved in planning, design, and development of Dartmouth’s emerging online scholarly repository, the Dartmouth Digital Commons on bepress. This is where Dartmouth scholars can share their work openly with the world. In addition to this, she works across campus departments to build awareness about other tools, resources, and services that support publication generally and open access publishing more specifically. In an effort to help people understand the scholarly communication/publishing landscape, she coordinates education and outreach opportunities about author rights, copyright, managing scholarly identity and broader impact of research, and innovations in scholarly publishing.

## **Introduction**

This article describes my professional journey to date, and how I've responded to changing career tides, which enabled discovery of professional growth and opportunity. It's also a reminder that shift in job scope may be imposed by an institution or a professional trend, but it may also be initiated by the individual as new ideas and paths emerge along the way. This is an attempt to articulate how each educational experience, new job, evolving position description, and redirected initiative was a critical component and stage towards developing a toolset used to produce successful outcomes along the journey. Many professionals find themselves in situations where they no longer do what they started doing, and my experience is no different. This case study will provide an example of how every ending and beginning of every experience provided an educational moment, which I leveraged, re-used, and repurposed while drifting with professional scope.

## **Beginning a Career Path**

While pursuing a B.A. in Art History, I expected that I would later have a career as a museum curator. I have always valued practical experience, so before I decided on a master's degree focus (something Art History related), I applied for a museum curatorial internship. It turns out that curatorial internships fill quickly, so I ended up interviewing with the museum registrars. At the time, I did not know what museum registrars were or what they did, but decided that I should know more about their work and find out if I could be involved in some way. During that meeting, I learned that museum registrars are the stewards of all information about the museum's permanent collections, spaces, and traveling exhibitions, and therefore expert information managers. This was also the first time I'd heard of "rights and reproductions (R&R) requests," which was one thing the registrars were telling me they needed help managing. In case you are unfamiliar with the concept, R&R requests are requests that come from scholars, authors, commercial publishers, and merchandisers to use images of the museum's permanent collection in a publication or on a product. For many years, museum registrars responded to these requests by providing color transparencies or print photographs, but the need to provide digital images was pressing. When I took the registration internship, it was not what I had hoped for, but now I feel fortunate that I gave it a try. I had no idea that managing R&R requests would lead to my interest in and enthusiasm for creating a better organizational structure for the museum's analog and digital images, nor did I realize that these projects would lead me towards a passion for information management, publishing, and issues surrounding copyright and intellectual property. But, I was curious, and that curiosity allowed me to drift down an unplanned, yet exciting professional route.

## **Beginnings in Art and Information**

My love for art and now information management continued to grow, and I began to reconsider the direction I intended to take for my master's degree. I was drifting away from the idea of becoming a museum curator and leaning more towards museum registration. Museum registrars often achieve advanced degrees in Art History and Museum Studies, but my registrar mentors encouraged me to consider a Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS), as one that is applicable to a museum registrar track, but versatile for other information management tracks. Taking that advice, I enrolled in an MLIS program. At the same time, I wanted to develop my practical library experience, so I accepted a position at an art college library and spent the next year assisting patrons at the circulation and reference desk, as well as helping the librarians shift from a card catalog to an online catalog. As the MLIS unfolded, I realized that although I enjoyed working in art-dedicated environments, what was really driving my enthusiasm was information management and service at a broad and general scale. This time the shift in my career path was coming from me.

### **Beginnings in Design and Information**

I needed to diversify my practical experience within the information management profession, which led me to apply for an image collection curatorial assistant position within a design school. In this position, I was tasked with digitizing thousands of slides used for classroom presentation, assisting faculty with their image requests and helping them acquire the technical skills needed to build their own digital presentations for teaching. I was also involved in the design, development, and implementation phases of an in-house content management system, which would be the home of the digital images we were producing and sharing. I learned about digitization standards, image metadata standards, fair use, database development, and project management. As my skills and knowledge within these areas grew, I reconsidered the direction of my MLIS and shifted my academic focus from art librarianship to digital librarianship. In making that decision, I accepted that I had potentially closed the door on working with art-focused collections and services. What I later realized was that in making this shift, I was developing the skills needed to fulfill the drifting scope of work museum and art library professionals were starting to experience. These environments now needed people with skills to understand the creation, preservation, and presentation needs of digital materials.

### **Other Beginnings**

While drifting along my own professional road, I've developed a sense that professional journeys (and most journeys, for that matter) are a series of beginnings that have no defined endings. Everything seems to merge together and experiences drift towards and away from one another. Once I achieved my Digital Library-focused MLIS, I took the first part-time reference librarian position I could find at a small art college. This felt comfortable, familiar, and achievable for me, which left me feeling confident I could do the job for a few years and pick up the experience needed to gradually move up the librarianship ladder. After my first day, that reference position turned into an Interim Library Director position, and thereby marked a moment where I realized that professional trajectory can shift and drift, but it also takes sharp right and left turns. Within 24 hours, I redirected my focus from assisting students and faculty with their research to supervising three staff members, overseeing the library's budget and acquisitions, leading library initiatives, attending faculty meetings, managing space, and thinking "big picture." That experience drastically changed my perspective on my own abilities and gave me confidence to stretch within my professional pursuits. After six months, the permanent Library Director position was offered to me. While this was exciting and appealing in many ways, I still wanted more time to explore my interests in digital librarianship. So, in that moment, I made a U-turn and accepted a position as a Visual Resources Librarian within the region. I was back in a slide collection, working on digitization efforts and library instruction around image use and visual literacy. The environment and the work were exactly what I'd imagined I'd be doing with an art history degree, an MLIS, and years of experience working with digital image collections in museum and design school environments. It was my dream job, and just when I thought it would last forever, life took the next exit and merged onto a new road, which sent us towards my partner's career opportunities.

### **Beginning Digital Directions**

This change in direction felt like a loss, but I had already experienced enough personal and professional transition to know that eventually the benefits of this shift would become apparent. Experience had also taught me that staying positive and continuing to move forward usually produces the best results, and it was not long before I applied for and accepted a position as a Digital Projects Librarian at a state university. With this new position, I re-established my footing in the

work of digital collections, and with my background in the arts, I was able to work with the Art Department and the Library Special Collections and Archives Unit to research, acquire, and implement a system for creating and housing digital images for teaching and research. My knowledge of imaging standards, digitization, and digital preservation best practices resurfaced as critical areas of expertise that I could provide to a wide range of campus audiences. I provided education on copyright and fair use and started to talk more with faculty about their rights to share their own work after publication. One might assume that these conversations ignited my interest in scholarly communication and digital scholarship; however, the interest truly developed after I experienced yet another drift in the scope of my work—this time initiated by institutional decisions related to the Library’s organizational structure.

The Library Dean position became vacant, and in response to financial strain, the university decided to freeze the search and move the Head of Technical Services and Acquisitions into the role of Interim Library Dean. Given my professional history and experience managing a variety of collections and budgets, I was asked to serve as Interim Head of Technical Services and Acquisition Services and maintain my role and responsibilities as the Digital Projects Librarian. I spent significant time in this new role evaluating the costs of our online resources and gaining, for the first time, a true understanding of the tremendous expense of subscription journals and “big deal” packages. I was in a position to help the library determine what resources could be cut in order to meet the university’s reduction in allocations for collection spending. Determined to provide as many resources as possible to students and faculty to support their research, I started to learn about open access resources, studying the Directory of Open Access Journals, and became intrigued by the idea of open scholarship and what open access could mean for researchers regardless of their institutions’ or their own financial means. Before this time, I’d not thought a great deal about pursuing a career as a Digital Scholarship Librarian, but evaluating these resources and learning about the importance of open access opened my eyes to a whole new professional avenue. And at the same time I discovered this new career possibility, I realized I was ideally situated to pursue it. I started to see positions as Digital Scholarship and Scholarly Communication Librarians emerging in academic institutions across the country and most of them required experience in digital resource management and issues of copyright--skills I had acquired, starting with the museum internship nearly ten years prior.

I am currently a Digital Scholarship Librarian within the Scholarly Communication, Copyright and Publishing Program at Dartmouth College. I enjoy the work that I do with faculty, students, and staff to provide them with current information and resources that can help them share the results of their research, scholarship, teaching, and learning. I am involved in planning, design, and development of Dartmouth’s emerging open scholarly repository where Dartmouth scholars can share their work openly with the world. I also work across campus departments to build awareness about a range of tools, resources, and services that support publication generally and open access publishing more specifically. To help people understand the scholarly communication/publishing landscape, I also coordinate and lead education and outreach opportunities about author rights, copyright, managing scholarly identity and broader impact of research, and innovations in scholarly publishing.

### **Endless Beginnings**

I began this journey as an art history student with the intent to become a museum curator, but I cannot yet confidently claim that I’ve ended my journey as a Digital Scholarship Librarian. What I can say with confidence is that I’d never have been able to predict the various paths, new

beginnings, and sharp turns that I have encountered up to this point. I would never have expected to love a job that I did not know existed, and that I would not be able to perform my job as well as I do without all of these unexpected shifts in the scope and direction of my work. I expect to encounter endless beginnings as I continue to move forward in my career, but now I understand that I will need every one of these shifts and drifts in order to achieve whatever the road ahead of me presents.