

PROFESSIONALIZING FOR NEW PERFORMANCE DUTIES

Gemmicka Piper

Frankly, I didn't have any guidance on leveraging my skills while I was a student, and this lack continued through my first position. Right after graduation, I landed a position as a resident/visiting assistant librarian at an institution that was exclusively focused on instruction. In this environment it was made abundantly clear that the chief function of a subject specialist was to provide instruction to lower level students. This translated to almost no professional development support. In this position I more or less functioned as the ethnic studies librarian. My subject fields were all interdisciplinary and treated as programs rather than a department with its own unique user needs. Realistically, I saw almost no instruction related specifically to my subject disciplines. Instead, creative and instructional opportunities emerged out of nonsubject partnerships that I had actively pursued with individuals and units across my campus. Any coordinated outreach efforts were at my discretion.

After a year and a half, I transitioned into a new role at a new institution. I was still a subject specialist, but now I was the humanities librarian. My situation was improved by the facts that (1) research support was also considered part of what librarians did, and (2) funding support for professional development was available via several mechanisms. I was highly encouraged to go places and to experiment. Because of the shift in environment and greater flexibility in how I was allowed to engage with my subject areas as a liaison, I felt comfortable attempting something that I thought was way outside of my discipline range. As part of an experimental process to get the necessary work completed, while still under budgetary constraints, my library decided to test a new hybrid functional liaisonship model. There were a couple of 20-percent-time positions, each dedicated for two years, that were created under this hybrid model, one of which was for a copyright liaison. I saw a position description that was interesting because it was looking for someone who could assist the university in growing a new service and develop training and education around copyright issues.

After I accepted the position I was told to come up with a service model, draft a copyright policy, and do a campus survey to better understand our user needs around copyright. But I was given no time line or other information. I was able to leverage previously developed analytical skills. First, I drafted a rough time line for the full two years of the position. Then I drafted a full-scale service model. I drew upon my experience with creating learner-centered educational assessments. I started with the learning objectives for each group of perspective customers for the service. Working backward, I was able to define what success looked like at each year of a potential program and to come up with a

five-year service model. By reviewing the copyright policies of our peer and aspirational peer institutions, I was able to get a sense of the points they stressed. I created a synthesis grid noting key issues in their policy statements, as well as some sample language. Once I had this comprehensive understanding of user-focused issues in copyright policies, I was able to create a policy draft for my institution.

Let me stress, none of the above magically came together. I routinely keep up with broader trends in library instruction. I attended the 2019 ACRL preconference on Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This was how I learned about UDL, and in doing so saw its potential applications in creating a framework for this new service we were imagining. Because I was point person, it was left up to me to establish the vision and direction for my liaisonship. I had never created a new service before, and when I searched online for templates and models I wasn't finding anything ready-made. So I had to lean into the skills I already had with designing curriculum to create something new. The result is that we now have a new research support service model that is more outcome-focused and instruction-entwined. As this is a train-the-trainer model, the connection back to instruction is critical for getting other liaisons trained to a basic standard. I am in the process of developing new online training materials for everyone. This has included a recorded webinar in partnership with our Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and the creation of an open self-paced course in our Canvas LMS with a certificate at completion.

I more or less had the skills for designing and executing my task. What I did not have was content knowledge. I had never received any training in copyright prior to taking it on as a liaison. Almost from the moment of being assigned to be copyright lead, I was slammed with questions. I really had to get up to speed quickly. So before I attempted any of the design stuff above, I reached out to our general counsel and a few local copyright librarians and scheduled virtual meetings with them to get a sense of (1) what service models they deployed, (2) what support they had from their campuses, (3) the scope of their services, (4) how they drew the line between providing information and offering legal advice, and (5) when they referred the client to general counsel. I found it to be interesting and illustrative, and I think the associate dean for the project did as well. I made sure to schedule meetings when administration could come. I think that helped them think more about the role that they had tasked me with.

In addition to directly contacting individuals, I have done a lot of online training. Coursera's online course Copyright for Educators and Librarians, Library Juice Academy's Introduction to Scholarly Communication, and now the weekly CopyrightX program. Aside from these, I also attended the 2019 Miami University Library Copyright Conference. This past year has been a series of learning things in spurts but then having to apply this information during a real consultation context. I have had to be proactive in identifying training opportunities to acquire more copyright knowledge. This means checking out sections or topics posted at large conferences like ACRL. It also means looking locally for opportunities around specialty areas. For example, my state library hosted a workshop on copyright in context to digital preservation. I also receive forwarded messages from my colleagues who know about the work I am doing on copyright. It is impossible to attend every event, so do what is feasible in accordance with your time and your financial resources.

Things are always in flux, and change is a reality of this profession. My duties have changed twice in the two and a half years I have been at my current institution. Equally important as knowing how to go about new duties is also knowing (1) when you are overloaded, and (2) how to adapt to failure (because not everything you try will be an immediate success).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What strategies did Gemmicka use to skill up to new duties?
2. What skills have you learned so far that would help you to skill up when tasked with new responsibilities?
3. Think of a time that you failed to achieve a desired goal or outcome; what did you learn from that experience? How might you approach new duties differently with that experience in mind?