

ALPS LINK: Site of the Month February 2012

By Vera Spika.

February 2012 ALPS LINK Site of the Month features the [Douglas College Copyright Guide](#). Its entry in the ALPS Fall 2010 "Burning Needs" Contest received much recognition for best learning object because of its streamlined design, easy to find and succinct information, exemplary organization, and over all aesthetic.

Site of the Month profiles some of the excellent instructional materials being produced by academic librarians in British Columbia. [ALPS LINK](#) (Library Instructions Knapsack) is "a repository of learning objects to support academic librarians in their instructional role." These learning objects are all available for reuse and modifying by the library community. Most are licensed under the Creative Commons license Attribution/Share Alike. To learn more, visit the [ALPS LINK](#) Portal at www.eln.bc.ca/link.

ALPS LINK spoke with Douglas College Librarian Carolyn Soltau about the guide:

1. Why did you produce [Copyright: Douglas College Copyright Guide](#)? Who was the intended audience?

It's fairly standard practice for academic libraries to have copyright guides on their website. Copyright is a moving target because it is constantly evolving. So the impetus was to update and expand the information that was already on the Library website.

Regarding the intended audience, it is a resource accessible to everyone in the college community, but as I was writing it, I directed it towards people who were using copyrighted material for instruction – faculty who needed to know "what can I do, what can't I do." And if I "can't do something", what's the reason?

It sounds like it was a challenge.

It was. I got the project in part because I also work for a newspaper library. I process permission requests from the public so had some familiarity with copyright. But when I started working on the guide, I realized I had much to learn about how copyright applied in the academic world.

Initially I figured the guide would be a one page FAQ — the basic "do's and don'ts" of copyright. But then I started attending workshops and taking

courses. The more I learned, the bigger the guide grew. It was important to provide balance in the guide; I needed to include information about topics such as Users' Rights and Copyright Reform.

2. Do you know if the guide has increased awareness of students and faculty and do you know how often it is being used or accessed?

In terms of being accessed, on the Libguides main portal you can actually see the counts and see what are the most popular guides. I just checked today – and the guide is number 3. The number of page views for the year was approximately 1,600. It is open to everybody so it's not just internal traffic.

3. Other institutions have produced copyright guides, many of which provide a lot of links for users to gain access to information about this subject. Though your guide includes links to outside resources, most of it provides succinct information defining concepts and answering questions. Even the tabs are labeled with questions such as "How Long Does Copyright Last?" or "What Rights do Owners of Copyright Have?" Why did you choose to present the information this way?

In terms of labeling the tabs, that was actually a lesson I learned from the reporters. I had to revamp the newsroom Intranet site. I brought in a focus group of reporters for feedback. One reporter said, "You need to make things easy to find. You use the term 'Directory.' But what I want to know is 'How to find a person.' When I am on deadline, I don't want to guess where this link is going to take me."



Carolyn Soltau. Photo by Vera Spika

That really stuck with me. So instead of using the terminology "economic rights" or "owners' rights", I wrote "What rights do copyright owners have?"

In terms of the succinct answers and then linking out, the rationale was "less is more." Copyright is a very dense subject and seeing an overwhelming amount of text can put some users off. So I identified the pertinent points and then provided links for those who wanted to learn more. It was about making the guide as user friendly as possible.

4. Copyright can be very complex and confusing subject for many of us. Can you tell us more about your process of learning about copyright and your suggestions for librarians wanting to create a similar guide?

At the beginning you have to build up your foundation of knowledge. When I first started, I swear, I looked at copyright guides from Victoria to Prince Edward Island. It was helpful research because it showed me different approaches to presenting copyright information (which is reflected in the guide).

But there came a point where I had an overwhelming amount of sources. I had to narrow down all my sources to my top ten for the final phase.

Studying copyright can be challenging because there are differing opinions. I always describe copyright as the two P's: Polarizing and Passionate. You will encounter people who are convinced that their opinion is right and then you go to another workshop and a different expert argues the opposite. I've been in workshops where lawyers disagree. That can be intimidating because you think "if the experts don't agree — what I am supposed to think"? But eventually you develop your own opinions on copyright. And you also learn to accept "the nature of the beast" — there will always be differing opinions. Once you embrace that, it become fun (in my opinion). That's why it is important to attend copyright workshops. You build up your initial foundation through reading but to develop your copyright knowledge, you need to be at a dynamic forum where copyright can be discussed. Copyright taught me firsthand the importance of library conferences.

5. Other advice?

Well there is a difference between having an informal conversation about copyright and writing guidelines that will posted on your Library's website. A guide needs to reflect the policies and procedures of

the institution. For example, is your institution part of the Access Copyright Tariff or has it opted out? Writing about copyright can be intimidating because it is a branch of law. I recommend including a clearly marked legal disclaimer. It takes the pressure off because it notifies the reader that the information should not be considered legal advice.

It's critical to get input from the college community. I did this by connecting with the entire library — the librarians, the technicians, the assistants, all the people working on the front lines with the faculty and students. I asked them "What questions are you receiving about copyright? What do our users want to know? What are they confused about?" Even though the guide is under my name, it was really made possible with the support and input of everyone in the Library. And the dialogue continues to this day.

6. Do you belong to the CLA's Copyright Committee?

Not at this point, but the CLA conference is the one I always attend because I know I am going to get updated Canadian copyright information. The conference workshops are informative and the individual members of the CLA Copyright Committee have been very generous in sharing their time and expertise with me. CLA has also been an important advocate for copyright reform. Studying copyright issues is how I personally came to appreciate the importance of library associations and their dual roles of education and advocacy.

Note: Since being interviewed in December 2011, Carolyn has been appointed to the CLA Copyright Advisory Committee.

7. Your copyright guide has up-to-date information and commentary on the current bill C-11, making it a very useful starting point for anyone interested in this topic. Do you need to update it frequently?

I do have a lot of links to other sites that needed to be checked for functionality. One challenge is to know when to take material off the site. For example, I have debated whether to remove the 2009 Copyright Consultation Transcripts. For now, I feel that they are still relevant.

8. Do you think that there would be some use in having a second guide, smaller one to deal with copyright issues pertaining to students?

Yes, that's a really interesting point. Once the new Copyright Bill is passed into law, it will be time for a

massive rewrite of the guide. At that point the decision can be made about a student guide.

I look forward to updating the guide. This is an interesting time to be studying copyright issues with a new Copyright Bill working its way through Parliament. I cannot wait until my next conference copyright workshop – there will be lots to talk about.

Please see the Douglas College guide and other excellent learning objects in ALPS LINK:

www.eln.bc.ca/link.

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