

Copyright Anxiety and Digital Learning

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Abstract

Digital learning provides a number of benefits to students and educators, but brings with it a number of ethical and legal considerations. Copyright is a particular challenge, because activities which were unproblematic in the classroom or lecture theatre raise a range of questions when transferred online; as we saw during the Covid-19 pandemic (Secker and Morrison, 2020). Is it 'fair' to incorporate copyright protected content such as text, music and video into learning materials and who is responsible for making risk-based decisions which could be challenged by a copyright owner? More recently there have been significant concerns about copyright issues associated with the rise of Generative AI tools (La Diega and Koolen, 2024), in particular, what types of content should be uploaded into these tools.

This workshop will share findings from a recent research study into 'copyright anxiety' in higher education, undertaken at City St George's University of London, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford and the University of Alberta in Canada. The research reports on a survey of over 500 members of staff and focus groups with 32 staff in higher education in the UK and Canada to explore whether copyright law and its interpretation 'chills' innovative teaching and research practices. Our research tested a survey instrument known as the Copyright Anxiety Scale (Wakaruk et al, 2021).

Almost 20 years ago Hobbs et al (2007) reported on the pedagogical costs of "copyright confusion" meaning teaching materials were less effective and there could be the perpetuation of misinformation. Our findings reveal concerns about copyright continue to impact on teaching and learning, research activities and the services that libraries can offer. Almost 60% of UK respondents and 52% of Canadians, reported they worry they do not know enough about copyright and 25% say they have abandoned projects or avoided activities because of copyright issues. We will discuss the impact that copyright has on digital learning activities in higher education.

The workshop presenters have been running regular webinars since the pandemic to support the higher education community and try to ensure copyright is not a barrier to online learning. They also co-Chair the Association for Learning Technology's Copyright and Online Learning special interest

group and have developed several educational games (Secker and Morrison, 2022) to teach about copyright in a playful way.

Workshop aims:

- Share findings from the copyright anxiety research
- Discuss some of the reasons for copyright anxiety and provide participants with playful opportunities to share their own experiences
- Consider what institutions and the higher education community can do to build greater levels of understanding about copyright so that it does not unduly restrict digital learning activities in higher education.
- Collaborate in small groups to devise strategies that might help to address copyright anxiety as part of their own practice.

Keywords: Copyright, Digital learning

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