Copyright Practices of Archival Repositories and Their Impact on Users

JEAN DRYDEN

Abstract: Digitizing archival holdings and making them available online provides exciting opportunities to increase access to archival materials. However, copyright issues present a challenge as archives enter the digital domain, both in what is selected for digitization and online dissemination, and in how digitized content is presented online. Research has found that archival institutions use technical measures (e.g., watermarks, low resolution images), and non-technical measures (e.g., rights management information such as copyright status and terms of use statements) to control further uses of their online holdings. This is often done under the rubric of copyright, even if repositories' reasons for control are for reasons other than copyright.

This presentation will report on the preliminary findings of IMLS-funded research currently underway to investigate how users of online archival holdings (specifically genealogists and historians) deal with the copyright-like restrictions that archivists place on further uses of their holdings. Telephone interviews were conducted with sixteen historians and genealogists to explore their awareness of copyright generally when reproducing archival holdings in the products of their research, and how they deal with the copyright information (e.g., terms and conditions of use, and technical limitations on copying) that they encounter both online and onsite. Preliminary findings suggest that study participants do not appear to think about copyright in any detailed or sophisticated way; many of them think only in terms of citing sources rather than obtaining permissions. While some think it would be a good idea if archives made more efforts to educate their users about copyright, others see no need to get involved with copyright, or they are not interested in any sort of educational efforts that will slow down their research.

About the author:

Dr. Jean Dryden is on the faculty of the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland (http://www.ischool.umd.edu/ people/dryden/). Her doctoral dissertation, completed at the University of Toronto in 2008, investigated the copyright practices of Canadian archival repositories in making their holdings available on the Internet. Her expertise in copyright has been developed over many years of experience as an archivist and archival administrator. Her research interests include copyright in the digital environment, information law and policy, archival arrangement and description, and digital preservation. She is currently the Principal Investigator for a three-year research project funded by IMLS that investigates the copyright practices of archival repositories and their impact on users.