

[Working with Your Librarian: Copyright Assistance during COVID-19](#)

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A post from [Feeding the Elephant: A Forum for Scholarly Communications](#).

Guest post by Sara R. Benson, Interim Head of the Scholarly Commons and Copyright Librarian, University of Illinois Library

Faculty scholars interact with copyright in a variety of ways on a daily basis, from gathering resources to cite in their project, to advising graduate students writing a dissertation, to writing articles and books, to teaching both in person and online. These examples are diverse and involve both sides of copyright, as faculty are both creators and users of copyrighted material.

Lately, though, issues of copyright and teaching have become more urgent than ever before. With courses rapidly moving online in the spring of 2020 and courses continuing in some sort of hybrid fashion in the fall, faculty members are struggling to understand copyright in order to provide students with course materials, course content, and course instruction. In the spring semester, many students were forced to leave campus quickly and some were unable to bring their previously paid-for textbooks, coursepacks, and other course materials with them. Universities scrambled to make a variety of works available to students who were trying to continue with coursework from home and, to do so, were copying copyrighted works to send digital copies to students. Note: the students had already purchased the books; academic staff were simply helping students to access them.

Luckily, a group of copyright librarians, including myself, quickly crafted a document outlining the rationale for the exercise of fair use under such emergency circumstances. The document was crafted on March 13, 2020, but with many campuses still in some sort of modified format for the fall, it is still relevant. As aptly put by April Hathcock, "Fair use is made for just these types of contingencies." The [Public Statement of Library Copyright Specialists: Fair Use & Emergency Remote Teaching & Research](#) is freely available online, and many faculty members will continue to find it helpful while they try to navigate the troubling waters of teaching during the COVID pandemic.

Additionally, with the help of a partnership between the HathiTrust Digital Library and the University of Illinois Library, where I work, faculty, staff, and students have access to many of the books in the University of Illinois' physical collection through a digital link. The HathiTrust Emergency Temporary Access Service, or ETAS, permits patrons from member libraries to view (but not download) works that are available from their university libraries in the HathiTrust digital library. In other words, if a university library has digitized the work and has the physical book as part of its collection, a patron can "check out" the book through ETAS for digital viewing. This service comes at a crucial time given that the main stacks at the University Library--like at many other libraries--are closed to patrons and print books are available on a very limited appointment-only basis. Approximately 46.65% of our collection is available through the ETAS, so this is no small number of books, and patrons can still

access necessary research through the ETAS on an as-needed basis. You can find more information about the partnerships between university libraries and the ETAS [here](#).

As a copyright librarian, I am here to help University of Illinois faculty with additional (read, more complex) copyright questions, and your library may also offer this service. I have created quite a few Library Guides about copyright, and even a quick [website resource](#) guiding professors who need to quickly shift a course online. I also have a [Copyright Chat](#) podcast and a YouTube Channel (branded the [Copyright Chat Channel](#)) containing helpful videos like this one on [fair use](#). In an hour-long webinar for the Association of College and Research Libraries titled "[Copyright for Campus Closures](#)," I even addressed the issue of shifting to online teaching. The webinar has been viewed more than 4,400 times.

Copyright certainly is not the only issue universities face as they struggle to meet the needs of their diverse student bodies in the fall of 2020. Issues about food insecurity, housing insecurity, and even internet insecurity are prominent among the problems our students will face (in addition to illness from the pandemic) as they attempt to return to campus this fall. But, copyright is one of the challenges we face and it need not be an insurmountable one—your librarians are here to help.

There may be nothing that I have produced to date that answers your unique copyright question and that is why your university's librarians are happy to help with those not so easy or uncommon questions. So, feel free to reach out if you have copyright questions related to the shift in teaching and research caused by COVID-19.

Sara R. Benson is Interim Head of the Scholarly Commons and Copyright Librarian at the University of Illinois Library. She specializes in the sociopolitical implications of copyright in the U.S. and abroad. You can follow her on Twitter [@SaraCopyLib](#).

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