

P E A R S O N E D U C A T I O N

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Jonathan M. Ahlbrand
Midwest Regional Manager
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Sayuri Rajapakse
Attorney-Advisor
Office of Policy and International Affairs
U.S. Copyright Office
Copyright GC/I&R
P.O. Box 70400, Southwest Station
Washington, DC 20024

Re: "Promotion of Distance Education Through Digital Technologies."

Dear Ms. Rajapakse:

As a distance learning professional for the world's leading educational publishers for the Higher Education market, I applaud the Copyright Office study regarding possible changes to U.S. Copyright Law in order to promote distance education through digital technologies. I strongly support the promotion of distance education opportunities that can make our materials available to an even wider audience. I believe, however, that the broad statutory exemptions sought by the educational and library communities will only undermine rather than support that end. In addition, I believe that given the infancy of this technology, all participants in the distance learning process -- educators, schools, publishers, students, authors, on-line providers -- need to experiment further with different models for licensing, fair use, and application of the existing copyright law, in order to make appropriate decisions about any changes to the law.

Our company itself provides eloquent testimony to the variety of possibilities created by distance learning and our experiments with them. **Currently our organization has been leading the industry with no cost content to support Distance Learning. By May 1999, we will have web based course material to support over 400 college level courses and texts. This content was design specifically to be delivered on the web and promotes the proliferation of distance learning.** Furthermore, distance learning has generated many new job opportunities and continues to increase employment in our organization and many others. Granting a new "distance education" exemption that would allow performance, display and distribution of all kinds of copyrighted works in digital formats without permission from the copyright owners would undermine this vital experimentation in its infancy.

In addition, it is important to understand the significant investment that educational publishers make in the materials that they prepare for the traditional classroom as well as the distance learning market. A typical textbook sold by our company also includes ancillaries such as teacher guides, testing materials -- including on-line assessment -- CD ROMs, study guides, related video materials, transparencies, and other materials for educational. If all of these materials, created at great expense by the publishers, can be further transmitted by a purchaser in their entirety to unlimited numbers of students engaged in "distance learning" or "lifelong learning," publishers will no longer be able to afford to make those materials available. Please remember: as educational publishers the education market is our market. Even if educators and the librarians will not themselves be profiting directly by the distribution of our materials, their distribution without our consent will greatly harm the primary market protected by the copyright laws.

In recognition of these factors, and the vital role that copyright plays in encouraging creativity, Congress has always crafted very narrow exemptions to the rights of copyright owners. To abandon that cautious approach at this time, in the infancy of this new technology, would be premature and totally counterproductive.

Should you have questions or need clarification, I would be happy to speak with you. I am working deeply within the Distance Education market and would be glad to share with you my experiences.

Best regards,

Jonathan M. Ahlbrand
Regional Manager, Distributed Learning