

Moving Forward—with Gratitude, Empathy, and Intention

Ellysa Stern Cahoy and Marianne Ryan

Change is a time for reflection—an opportunity to look back as well as a chance to look forward to what is to come. At *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, the beginning of 2023 is a time of great change as our editor, Marianne Ryan, moves to the role of past editor on the journal's Editorial Board after eight successful years of leadership.

Marianne served as editor from January 2015 through December 2022. As *portal's* longest-serving editor, her achievements were numerous. In Marianne's first year as editor alone, the average time from submission of a manuscript to informing the author if it would be published was lowered to less than a month. This significant reduction in how long prospective authors waited to learn about the decision of *portal's* reviewers indicates one of Marianne's many strengths as a librarian and a leader: she thinks always of the user, the individual, and how to help them in positive and lasting ways.

In the spirit of reflection and continuity, incoming *portal: Libraries and the Academy* editor Ellysa Stern Cahoy met with Marianne to explore the professional journeys that she has taken as an academic author, an editor, and a leader in our profession. Speaking together via Zoom, Ellysa and Marianne employed a “collaborative construction” approach to this ethnographic interview, where interviewer and interviewee built a narrative together.¹ In the edited conversation that follows, Marianne shares themes and ideas that reflect her ethos as *portal's* leader over the past eight years. She is deeply empathetic, a good listener, and an advocate for authors. Marianne's tenure as editor was marked by her commitment to transparency and amplifying voices, including those of authors and the Editorial Board, and encouraging broad engagement in all aspects of developing *portal*.



Beginnings as an Author

ELLYSA. What were your first experiences as an academic author?

MARIANNE. My first serious academic writings were my thesis and my dissertation. They gave me a much fuller sense of how scholarly research should be done. In many respects, they set the tone for what I would later do in academic writing.

In terms of authorship, I began my career the same way that many others do, with book reviews and then book chapters. Those are less-threatening ways to ease into publishing. Often, authors of book chapters can draw from areas where they already have deep expertise, without necessarily needing to conduct hard research. Early on, I also did a lot of indexing, some for professional associations and some for state library publications. That proved to be a great experience, helping me better understand access points to information and how to think about my own writing.

In addition, while not exactly academic, I was involved with the library's publications most places I worked, collaborating on the newsletters or other missives that went out for or from the library. Typically, I was either the associate editor or the editor of those publications. They were a good way to keep a hand in writing on a regular basis, to hone my skills as an editor, to figure out how to recruit and work with authors, and to hold to a production schedule.

Early Research

ELLYSA. What were your initial areas of research as an author?

MARIANNE. My background is in public services and in government information. I have always been interested in ensuring access to and raising awareness of that unique, multidisciplinary content, promoting civic engagement, and fostering citizen literacy. Those are important issues and critical to participatory democracy. I also have explored how organizations work, including their culture, development, and support structures, and succession planning.

Editorial Approach

ELLYSA. How do you think your earlier, formal writing experiences informed your editorial approach and how you lead and work with authors?

MARIANNE. I try to put myself in the shoes of the authors I work with. My approach has always been one of trying to nurture and encourage, urging people to share their ideas whoever they are, wherever they are in their career, and whatever their discipline and area of interest or expertise. You do not need something fully formed when you embark on academic authorship—just take it one step at a time. There are many ways to begin the process. You can start with some of the things I mentioned, such as book reviews, or perhaps essays. The advice we have all been given at some point, to write about what you know and what you care about, is good to keep in mind.



Proudest Accomplishments

ELLYSA. Looking back, what would you say are your proudest accomplishments related to your eight years as *portal* editor?

MARIANNE. If I had to identify an overarching theme, I would describe it as growing the journal. I feel that, working as a team, we were able to expand what *portal* has to offer. In addition to research-intensive, peer-reviewed articles, we emphasized grounded theoretical pieces as well, so that authors whose ideas were not necessarily given to quantitative studies could still find a place to share their scholarship. Additionally, in concert with our journal's editorial philosophy of mentoring and supporting novice authors, we created two timely new features, Global Perspectives and Worth Noting. Along with Reports from the Field, which had appeared occasionally, all three features now have a regular, sustained presence in the journal and provide a non-peer-reviewed option for authors.

Our Global Perspectives feature is also a cornerstone of something I have focused on with *portal*: inclusivity and internationalization. I hoped to encourage a diversity of perspective and voices from authors around the world. I also wanted to ensure that our Editorial Board reflected a range of viewpoints and areas and levels of expertise. I am particularly proud of the multifaceted breadth of our board. The members have varying backgrounds, interests, and experience; they differ in the level of and length of their careers and in their domain expertise; and they embody racial, ethnic, geographic, and other diversity. Their range has added depth and richness to *portal*. In tandem with that, we have evolved our editorial policies and practices to further support diversity and inclusion, as reflected in our updated Author Guidelines.

We further grew the journal by expanding the size of most issues from five articles to eight, plus three features. A year's content is now substantially more than it had been previously, and manuscript flow has remained robust.

I appreciate how the Editorial Board members have coalesced into a thriving team. There is a range of perspectives around our table, and no one is shy about speaking up. I am happy that everyone feels they can express an opinion, even if it differs from mine, and that they can introduce new ideas. Many of our efforts—things we have done, directions we have gone, issues we have addressed—have been initiated by the Editorial Board. We have an extraordinarily engaged board, and that makes us better. As you know, members are always willing to pitch in to work in small groups and task forces to accomplish our goals.

We published two special issues during my tenure. The most recent, in January 2022, was "Academic Libraries: Resilient in Times of Crisis." We took a lead in our field with that issue, which is already proving to be a significant contribution to the literature and widely resonant. In 2017, we published the other special issue, on the future of public services in libraries. The content from that issue still holds as some of the most heavily accessed in *portal*, which tells me that it was and remains meaningful to many readers. It was also personally important to me because, in many ways, I saw something of an identity crisis surrounding "public services" in our profession at that time and wanted to underscore its enduring value.

The Future of Academic Journals

ELLYSA. Look into your crystal ball. What do you see happening in the academic journal publishing landscape? How do you think it relates to *portal*'s future?

MARIANNE. Lacking a crystal ball, it is hard to say! We will certainly have more open access publishing and more demand for it, and it will be interesting to see where the demand and the ability to meet it intersect. Academic publishing reflects what people are involved in; their work is grounded in a discipline but not necessarily tethered to it completely. We see more and more atom splitting, more niche curricula, new departments, collaborative models, interdisciplinary work, cross-disciplinary programs, and new areas of academic innovation. One of the things that I have wondered about is what happens to journals as fields of study continue to evolve? Will there be more new journals reflecting the collaborations and blendings? Or will there be a reduction or consolidation in publications as disciplines shift their boundaries?

I also wonder what will happen to peer review. Many journals are already challenged finding expert reviewers. As research becomes more specialized, the pool of reviewers shrinks even more. Who assesses new works? How will increasing specialization affect peer review? The double-blind review process used to be sacred; now, there is less and less of it, giving way to other types of manuscript review. As standards continue to change, what will be the impact of that on things like the promotion and tenure process?

In library publishing, the quality of research has improved and the volume of quantitative research has increased. Libraries do more assessment than they did 20 years ago, and data collection is widespread. In addition to qualitative studies, there are more opportunities to conduct quantitative studies as libraries have become so data rich.

Looking Forward

ELLYSA. What are you looking forward to most as you move into your new role as past editor of *portal*?

MARIANNE. I want to continue to contribute to the enterprise of the journal in whatever ways would be most helpful. The mentoring support that we give to authors, which is one of our hallmarks, has been a priority for me. I wonder if there is a way to emphasize that even more, maybe by *portal* engaging LIS programs, talking with students, and encouraging them to publish on the front end of their aspiring careers. I have done a number of conference and meeting presentations about *portal* and academic publishing. To date, those have primarily resulted from people reaching out to me and inviting me to participate. Maybe we can proactively build out that space and initiate such outreach efforts. *portal* has never exhibited at conferences, and there are creative ways of approaching that as well. In just a few years, it will be the journal's twenty-fifth anniversary. Despite our best-laid plans, we could not celebrate the twentieth anniversary, as the COVID-19 pandemic interfered. I would love to work on commemorating and celebrating the twenty-fifth, which is a significant milestone.

I am available to serve as a resource person and to leverage networks in which I already have a presence and established expertise. Additionally, I would like to help ensure continuity in our organizational memory regarding past practices and decisions.



Being a part of *portal* has been the most meaningful and rewarding editorial experience of my career. I believe strongly in the mission of our journal, which speaks to opportunities for authors, access to content, and underscoring the role of the library within the broader context of higher education. I look forward to remaining involved!

A Road Map for *portal*

In her January 2020 editorial, “Coming of Age: *portal* at 20,” Marianne noted three goals for *portal* as the journal moved into its third decade.² First, increasing inclusivity, including publishing content that recognizes the more distributed role that libraries now play within individual campuses and higher education as a whole. Second, building *portal*'s online engagement and broadening our audience. Our social media editor, Steven Bell, has accomplished yeoman's work in this area, and we will continue to explore additional avenues for online outreach and visibility. Third, continuing to build *portal*'s commitment to open access.

These strategic areas—inclusivity, engagement, and open access—are a road map for *portal*'s continued development. Yet, as we move out of the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are entering an extended pandemic era.³ The impacts of social inequity, declining mental health, and increased workloads in academic librarianship and academia as a whole persist.⁴ As a result, while we continue to develop *portal*'s accessibility, audience, engagement, and equity-centered practices, we must balance these efforts with empathy and mindful intention for our authors and editorial community. As Marianne noted in her interview, journals have begun to see the impacts of the pandemic. It is harder to find peer reviewers. Submission rates for articles written by women have slowed, a significant finding for academic librarianship.⁵ Addressing these deficits will take persistence, ingenuity, and patience, centering and building on *portal*'s core mission to mentor and support others. With that in mind, we move forward with the continued goal of listening deeply to our constituencies, engaging with authors, both novice and expert, and continuing to build and connect with a global community through our publications.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, we collectively thank Marianne for her highly collaborative and communicative leadership, as well as the advances and enhancements that she brought to the journal during her editorial tenure.

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Notes

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