EDITORIAL

Feature Articles: A Lens on Our Profession

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When we think of feature articles, we often envision content that is engaging, accessible, and practical. Feature articles provide an alternative to traditional, research-focused, refereed journal content. Rather than reporting on original research, a feature article may help stimulate discussion and debate among scholars, leading to new research questions and lines of inquiry. Moreover, feature articles help bridge the gap between academic research and practitioners by presenting complex ideas and findings in an accessible and appealing manner. These articles are a rich part of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*'s history. In this editorial, we explore the history of *portal*'s feature articles and illuminate our current features and their specific areas of focus. *portal* currently publishes three regular feature articles in each issue: Global Perspectives (edited by Michelle Guittar), Reports from the Field (edited by Mark Lenker), and Worth Noting (edited by Maribeth Slebodnik).

Feature articles align perfectly with *portal*'s mission of supporting and providing opportunities to authors. They often focus on practice and provide insight into a project or initiative and its impact on librarianship. As noted in *portal*'s Author Guidelines, feature articles are "edited but typically not peer-reviewed." They are generally shorter than *portal* research articles, with features being around 3,000 words and research articles around 10,000 words.

portal identifies and solicits feature articles for publication in various ways. Manuscripts considered in *portal*'s traditional peer review process are sometimes recommended as feature articles. In 2021, 28 percent of submitted articles were suggested by reviewers to appear as features. Feature articles proposed for publication often have a practice-focused approach, center on case studies, or share efforts or initiatives that align with one of our feature areas. Additionally, feature articles are solicited through targeted requests from prospective authors or by *portal* feature editors proactively recruiting content for the journal. Suggestions can come from different sources, such as conference presentations, social media posts, news articles, and more. *portal* feature editors are always interested in receiving new ideas for forthcoming feature articles.

The first issue of *portal*, in January 2001, contained two feature articles. "Isn't Life Great? A Dot Com Delivers Access to the Wealth of Human Knowledge" provided an overview of Questia, an early Web-based online digital library, while "The Search for New Measures: The ARL LibQUAL+ Project—A Preliminary Report" shared information on a new assessment response to academic libraries' data-driven needs. With these initial feature articles, *portal* achieved its goal of covering a range of content of interest to its audience of academic librarians. By the second issue of *portal* (April 2001), the organization of feature articles began to take shape. The April issue included eight book reviews, which became a regular component of earlier *portal* issues. In addition to the book reviews, two new feature article areas of focus were launched: Research: Theory and Applications, and Strategic Visioning.

Research: Theory and Applications focused on current research projects in librarianship and shared strategies for utilizing their results in practice for improved services. The feature also included interviews with researchers about their current and past research initiatives and put forth needed research agendas for discussion. Strategic Visioning provided individual perspectives on critical issues in libraries and higher education. In 2002, two additional features appeared: Information Technology Perspectives, centered on emerging technologies and their impact on higher education, and Information Standards, highlighting new metrics in the field. In the following years, Strategic Visioning appeared most regularly in *portal*, and all of these features remained in place until the mid-2010s.

In 2011, then-*portal* Editor Sarah Pritchard introduced a new feature called Reports from the Field, which aimed to bring attention to important issues and projects requiring a rapid response. She explained that this feature could take a variety of formats, including research project summaries, conference presentation recaps, or sharing new guidelines and standards. The first Reports from the Field article, "Three Years and Counting—The Economic Crisis Is Still with Us" by Charles Lowry, provided a time-sensitive analysis of current Association of Research Libraries members' expenditures.

With the beginning of Editor Marianne Ryan's tenure in 2015, new features appeared in *portal*, capitalizing on current directions in librarianship and academia, as well as an understanding of changing reader needs. In her July 2015 editorial, "Promoting Global Understanding," Ryan introduced the Global Perspectives feature, recognizing the rising inclusion of international relationship building in higher education strategic planning and the need to build global literacy and an appreciation and understanding of a diverse range of cultures and worldwide perspectives. Ryan explained that in addition to continuing Reports from the Field, two features would be retired: Information Standards and Technology, and Research: Theory and Application. She noted that these features were now "so integrated into the enterprise and so prominent on the landscape of libraries and the academy that having separate features to highlight them is no longer viable or necessary."

In January 2017, *portal* introduced its final current feature, Worth Noting. Ryan explained that the new feature was specifically designed to expand upon the journal's prior published book reviews and to accommodate a wide range of topics of interest to its readership.

And with that, we arrive at the present day with regard to *portal* features! I am pleased to be joined in this editorial by our current feature editors: Michelle Guittar for

Global Perspectives, Mark Lenker for Reports from the Field, and Maribeth Slebodnik for Worth Noting. In the following sections, each will provide a personal perspective on their respective feature's focus and aims.

Global Perspectives

As mentioned, Global Perspectives has endeavored to document ways in which academic and government libraries both partnered and strived to enhance global literacy and support diversity. In recent years, the focus of Global Perspectives has shifted to highlight LIS research from international contexts that is relevant to academic libraries, particularly in the United States but applicable throughout the world. This research has challenged assumptions and the ownership that we, as U.S. academic librarians, may feel over specific issues related to libraries and higher education. For example, in January 2022, Global Perspectives published a report by Adeyinka Tella, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution in Nigerian Libraries." Tella's article, with its focus on the technological changes to be brought by artificial intelligence and machine learning, seemed futuristic at the time, but now could not be more relevant. In the past year, we have featured research on academic integrity, changing work environments, social justice in collections, and job outlook and security for PhDs in library and information science, all issues we grapple with here in the United States, but also issues of concern across the globe.

In the future, Global Perspectives aims to continue to document and highlight global partnerships and diversity initiatives, but we also hope to continue publishing research that is relevant in a global context, which could potentially influence professional associations, policy, recommendations, and best practices. The feature aspires to answer such questions as "What happens elsewhere that also happens here?" "How do we support our profession globally?" and "Together, how do we prepare for the future?"

Reports from the Field

Have you encountered a challenge at work that made you reevaluate your approach? Maybe you found yourself looking for a new method to provide a traditional academic library service, or perhaps you have found a new way for libraries to contribute to their institution's mission or to support their users. Reports from the Field provides a venue to share your responses to challenges like these. Ideally, these feature articles will make the reader step back and say, "I never thought of doing it that way." Or, "I've heard of that, but I've been wondering how someone would actually do it."

Reports from the Field authors typically engage with the literature as they share their experiences, questions, and proposals for ways to move our work forward, but coverage does not need to be as comprehensive as one might expect in a literature review for a peer-reviewed *portal* article. Reflecting on problems and working through provisional ideas are also valued sources for material for Reports from the Field.

Worth Noting

The newest column on the block, Worth Noting, has evolved from its book review roots to present a wide-ranging portfolio of noteworthy trends, often with a public services

focus but always with the common thread of relevance to academic librarians and library directors. Recent topics include group interviewing, systematic reviews, and the CO-VID-19 pandemic's impact on special collections and archives. Articles currently in the pipeline will address sustainability issues in libraries and archives and the social justice aspects of technology lending. As the profession of librarianship continues to change rapidly with no deceleration in sight, Worth Noting provides a bridge between news and research, expanding on topics that are becoming important but for which research may still be in process. The sheer breadth of potential subjects makes Worth Noting an exciting column to recruit for and edit!

Conclusion

These feature articles not only provide a valuable perspective on current trends and issues in academic librarianship and higher education but also showcase the diverse range of voices and initiatives within our profession. As *portal* continues to evolve and adapt to changing trends in the field of librarianship, we are committed to providing a space for feature articles that showcase innovative practices and diverse perspectives, and that contribute to the ongoing conversation and development of the field. If you, as a reader, have an idea for a feature article, please do not hesitate to contact any member of our editorial team directly!

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Notes

1. Sarah M. Pritchard, "Encouraging Rapid Response," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 11, 3 (2011): 755, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2011.0034.
2. Charles B. Lowry, "Three Years and Counting—The Economic Crisis Is Still with Us," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 11, 3 (2011): 757–64, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2011.0028.
3. Marianne Ryan, "Promoting Global Understanding," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 15, 3 (2015): 387–88, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2015.0028.
4. Ryan, "Promoting Global Understanding," 388.
5. Marianne Ryan, "A New Year Worth Noting," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, 1 (2017): 1–2, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0000.