portal: Libraries and the Academy 2025 Johns Hopkins University Press Award for Best Article

Karen Kohn and Ellysa Stern Cahoy

The editorial board of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* is pleased to announce, "Academic Libraries, Counter-Storytelling, and Minoritized Students' Scholarly Identity Development," by Darren Ilett, as the recipient of the Johns Hopkins University Press Award for the best article published in the journal during 2024. Ilett's article is the 21st annual recipient of the award, an honor earned following the editorial board's thorough assessment of all articles published in Volume 24 and an online voting process. The winning article appears in volume 24, number 4, pages 765–787, and is available at https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/938742. The author will receive a commemorative item and a $500 cash prize from Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ilett conducted his research at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), where he is an associate professor and teaching and learning librarian. "Academic Libraries, Counter-Storytelling, and Minoritized Students' Scholarly Identity Development" explores the experiences of first-generation, low-income, and/or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) graduate students participating in the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program. The McNair program supports first generation and/or traditionally underrepresented PhD graduate students in building academic success through involvement in research and other scholarly endeavors.[1] Collaborating with the UNC McNair Program Director, Ilett examined how students in the UNC program perceive and develop their identities as scholars. Grounded in a critical race theory framework, the study emphasizes the value of perspectives shaped by experiences of systemic oppression. Ilett utilized counter-storytelling as a methodological approach to challenge dominant narratives in academia and highlight the lived realities of minoritized students. The article reveals that first-generation and BIPOC students may experience alienation within higher education, even while meeting conventional markers of success. Ilett concludes with actionable recommendations for teaching librarians, encouraging

approaches that build students' trust and effectively support the scholarly development of students from underrepresented backgrounds.

The editorial board praised the rigor and depth of Ilett's research, which drew on three data sources: classroom observations, student assignments, and interviews. Nearly all McNair students from a specific academic year participated in the study, providing a robust representative sample. From the data, Ilett identified three central themes—research experiences, sense of belonging in academia, and the influence of family and community on one's academic success—illustrated through students' counter-stories. Interviewees described how academic achievements, such as presenting at conferences, shifted their self-perceptions, and shared reflections about seeking representation on campus and navigating tensions between academic and home communities.

A board member shared, "Darren Ilett's article is a significant contribution to the field of library and information science, particularly in its focus on equity and inclusion. By employing counter-storytelling from critical race theory, the article provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by minoritized students in developing their scholarly identities. The practical recommendations for academic libraries to create more inclusive environments are both timely and essential, making this article a valuable resource for educators and librarians committed to supporting diverse student populations. Another board member noted, "The author covers considerable conceptual ground, and does so adeptly, bridging understanding of minoritized student-scholar voices and furthering awareness of academic libraries' role in empowering these voices."

Thank you to the members of the 2025 Best Article Award Committee: Karen Kohn (chair), Carmen Cole, and Wendy Pothier, who thoughtfully led the board's evaluation and selection process. Additional thanks to Karen Kohn for co-authoring this Best Article Award announcement and to our publisher, Bill Breichner and the Johns Hopkins University Press for continuing their longstanding support of portal's annual Best Article Award.

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Notes

1. U.S. Department of Education, "Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program," accessed March 26, 2025, http://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-higher-education/trio/trio--ronald-e-mcnair-postbaccalaureate-achievement-program--home-page.