

## Coming of Age: *portal* at 20

Marianne Ryan

Nearly 20 years ago, Gloriana St. Clair, then dean of Carnegie Mellon University Libraries in Pittsburgh, noted the challenge of writing a journal's inaugural editorial. As *portal*'s first managing editor, she acknowledged the need to "expound the reasons for the creation of a new journal" and proceeded to do just that. St. Clair outlined the circumstances that led to *portal*'s creation, which have become legend among academic librarians. Just before the turn of this century, a band of librarian-scholars decided to buck the existing journal publishing system to create something different and better. It was a bold move, predicated primarily on three goals: to offer an affordable alternative to serials that had risen exponentially in cost; to provide a more inviting and supportive environment for authors; and to model a new scholarly communication framework. To make something like this happen, a publisher was needed—one that was reputable, forward-thinking, and not risk averse. Enter the Johns Hopkins University Press (JHUP). And the rest, as they say, is history.

Now, two decades later, it is time to review and celebrate that history. I confess to feeling a challenge not unlike that described by St. Clair. How does one capture the elements of a journal's coming-of-age? This editorial will attempt to do so by providing a progress report on the three goals outlined above; describing some of *portal*'s other significant accomplishments; and offering a preview of potential future directions.

### Fulfilling the Mandate

As *portal* embarks on its 20th year, it has achieved its three initial objectives. Regarding affordability, it has continued to offer quality, reasonably priced content as the subscription costs of many academic journals have skyrocketed out of reach. At the time of its inception, *portal* was available at the individual and institutional print subscription rates of \$48 and \$145 annually, respectively. Today, an individual may purchase a print subscription for just \$55 or obtain online access for \$60. An institutional print subscription runs \$235. *portal* also is offered through JHUP's diverse, interdisciplinary Project MUSE ([http://www.jhu.edu/journals/portal\\_libraries\\_and\\_the\\_academy/](http://www.jhu.edu/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/)), which ensures that content is archived and will remain available.

*portal*: *Libraries and the Academy*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2020), pp. 1–5.

Copyright © 2020 by Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD 21218.



From the outset, *portal* has been committed to providing viable publishing options for both seasoned and novice authors. Regarding the latter group, the approach was—and still is—radical. St. Clair explained it well:

The major journals in most disciplines have prided themselves on their high rejection rates. The rationale has been that a high rejection rate signifies a strong commitment to and compelling evidence of quality. Nothing could be more wasteful of the scarce resources for library research than to replicate a system that encourages authors to create a finished product to be judged and rejected . . . The *portal* board and editors want to help authors from the moment they decide to engage in research to the moment when they elect to submit the finished product either to *portal* or to some other journal. Precious librarian research resources should be encouraged and fostered.

To actualize the commitment to this second goal, *portal* created a mentoring system for authors. At a minimum, this took the form of offering deep, rich feedback to prospective contributors, allowing them to benefit from expert insight and guidance on the suitability of their topics, the nature of their research, and the soundness of their approach. One need look no further than *portal*'s tables of contents over the years to see the wide array of authors whose work has appeared on its pages, many of them early in their careers, whose original work might have gone unpublished without *portal*'s mentoring, encouragement, and support. Both prospective and published authors regularly send notes of appreciation for the help they receive.

In concert with recommendations made by the Association of American Universities and the Association of Research Libraries in 2000, *portal* sought to “guide the transformation of the scholarly publishing system” as its third goal. As noted earlier, the directives to contain costs, provide electronic access, and ensure archival preservation have largely been achieved. Additional considerations involve processes attendant to journal production: clarity about submission and evaluation guidelines; preservation of author privacy; and timely manuscript review and turnaround by referees. *portal* has always made available its guidelines for authors; a recently updated version of “Information for Contributors” appears in this issue. Double-blind peer review continues to be employed, with a third, tie-breaking assessment sought when necessary, rather than having the editor (who typically knows the identity of the author or authors) make the decision to publish or reject. Currently, initial referee review averages 24 days. Other recommendations speak to copyright and author rights. *portal* offers reasonable copyright assignment, with authors retaining the right to use their work in teaching and research and to deposit their publications in their institutional repositories.

### Noteworthy Achievements

Building on its solid foundation, *portal* has thrived throughout the years of its existence. Not including the current issue, the journal has published 715 articles, 560 book reviews, and nearly 75 features. Five special issues have appeared: (1) January 2007, “Public Access,” with Heather Joseph as guest editor; (2) April 2007, “The Spelling Commission,” John M. Budd, guest editor; (3) July 2009, “Festschrift Honoring Duane E. Webster, Executive Director of the Association of Research Libraries,” guest editors Charles B. Lowry and James G. Neal; (4) July 2014, “Imagining the Future of Academic Libraries,” guest

editor Damon E. Jaggars; and (5) April 2017: "Public Services and User Engagement," guest editors Kathleen De Long and Julie Garrison.

More than 100 academic librarians have contributed time and talent as members of *portal*'s Editorial Board, with eight fulfilling a role as feature editor and the seven mentioned earlier serving as guest editors for individual issues. The journal has had four editorial teams, each of which has left its mark in some significant way. The first, Gloriana St. Clair and Susan K. Martin, along with *portal*'s first Editorial Board, laid the groundwork for this new enterprise and assumed responsibility for ensuring that the fledgling publication would succeed. Beginning in 2003, Charles Lowry and Marcia Lowry became editor and managing editor, respectively. Soon afterward, *portal*'s Best Article Award was established, which brings a plaque and a cash prize from JHUP. The first recipient was "A Survey of Business Trends at BioOne Publishing Partners and Its Implications for BioOne," coauthored by Todd A. Carpenter, Heather Joseph, and Mary Waltham, which appeared in the October 2004 issue. To date, 15 awards have been given; a complete list appears in an appendix to this editorial.

In 2009, Sarah Pritchard took the helm, first continuing to work with Marcia Lowry, then with Jan Voogd. One of the most significant achievements of Pritchard's tenure was shepherding the establishment of a preprint server for all accepted articles, an enormous step toward providing open access to *portal*'s content. This system has been in place since 2010. During 2014, I served as assistant editor, becoming editor in 2015. Working with current managing editor Sara Dreyfuss, one of our priorities has been to emphasize the worldwide focus of the journal by establishing a new "Global Perspectives" feature and cultivating stronger connections with international scholars. In the past year alone, we received manuscripts from 63 authors outside North America. The submissions that were published accounted for just over 20 percent of *portal*'s content last year.

In *portal*'s first year, the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ) named the publication its runner-up for best new journal. Since then, special issues have been nominated for other CELJ awards and articles appearing on its pages have won annual awards, including the Jesse H. Shera Award for Distinguished Published Research from the Library Research Round Table of the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Instruction Section Ilene F. Rockman Publication of the Year Award. As of 2019, *portal* ranks an impressive 25th of the 669 journals in Project MUSE in overall usage.

### Poised for the Future

When the experiment known as *portal: Libraries and the Academy* began, there was, of course, no guarantee that it would succeed. Now, just 20 years later, it clearly has come of age, which *Merriam-Webster* defines as "attaining prominence, respectability, recognition, or maturity." What, then, should come next? Three goals immediately come to mind.

First, expanding inclusivity. When *portal* was established, it chose to distinguish itself not only as a journal focused on academic libraries but also as one that contextualizes those libraries within the higher education environment. While some of its content has reflected this emphasis, the focus has remained predominantly library-centered. As the academic library continues to transition from primarily a service unit to a vibrant

partner, a priority should be soliciting content more representative of the campus and of the academy as a whole. Inclusivity should extend further, to ensure the fullest possible range of voices among both contributors and board members and wider geographical representation.

Second, connecting with a broader audience. As a new generation of readers and authors grows in number, it will be critical to expand *portal*'s reach to meet that audience where it is. Two years ago, the journal launched a social media presence. While activity on its social media channels has grown, *portal* must continue to explore additional platforms for outreach and visibility. In the meantime, please consider following *portal* on Twitter, @portaljournal. Further, the Editorial Board is exploring the feasibility of creating a graduate student intern position to help connect the journal to the community of aspiring librarians.

Finally, increasing *portal*'s commitment to open access. As the momentum of the open access movement increases, the demand to make more digital content freely available to researchers around the world will likely grow. Continuing to explore options to meet the evolving needs of the scholars will be imperative and is essential to supporting evolving models of scholarly communication.

Whatever its future directions, here's to *portal*'s next 20 years!

Marianne Ryan is the editor of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* and the dean of libraries at Loyola University Chicago; she may be reached by e-mail at: mryan21@luc.edu.

## Appendix

### Winners of the *portal: Libraries and the Academy* Johns Hopkins University Press Award for Best Article

- 2005:** Todd A. Carpenter, Heather Joseph, and Mary Waltham, "A Survey of Business Trends at BioOne Publishing Partners and its Implications for BioOne," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, 3 (2004): 465–84.
- 2006:** Brian D. Cameron, "Trends in the Use of ISI [Institute for Scientific Information] Bibliometric Data: Uses, Abuses, and Implications," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 5, 1 (2005): 105–25.
- 2007:** Corinna Baksik, "Fair Use or Exploitation? The Google Book Search Controversy," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 6, 4 (2006): 399–415.
- 2008:** Amos Lakos, "Evidence-Based Library Management: The Leadership Challenge," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 7, 4 (2007): 431–50.
- 2009:** Sharon K. Epps, "African-American Women Leaders in Academic Research Libraries," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 8, 3 (2008): 255–72.
- 2010:** Scott Bennett, "Libraries and Learning: A History of Paradigm Change," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9, 2 (2009): 181–97.
- 2011:** Kevin Smith, "Copyright Renewal for Libraries: Seven Steps toward a User-Friendly Law," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 10, 1 (2010): 5–27.

- 2012: Kathryn Lage, Barbara Losoff, and Jack Maness, "Receptivity to Library Involvement in Scientific Data Curation: A Case Study at the University of Colorado Boulder," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 11, 4 (2011): 915–37.
- 2013: Tyler Walters, "The Future Role of Publishing Services in University Libraries," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 12, 4 (2012): 425–54.
- 2014: Jennifer L. Bonnet, Sigrid Anderson Cordell, Jeffery Cordell, Gabriel J. Duque, Pamela J. MacKintosh, and Amanda Peters, "The Apprentice Researcher: Using Undergraduate Researchers' Personal Essays to Shape Instruction and Services," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13, 1 (2013): 37–59.
- 2015: Ellysa Stern Cahoy and Smiljana Antonijević, "Personal Library Curation: An Ethnographic Study of Scholars' Information Practices," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14, 2 (2014): 287–306.
- 2016: Richard Fyffe, "The Value of Information: Normativity, Epistemology, and LIS in Luciano Floridi," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 15, 2 (2015): 276–86.
- 2017: Eamon Tewell, "Toward the Resistant Reading of Information: Google, Resistant Spectatorship, and Critical Information Literacy," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 16, 2 (2016): 289–310.
- 2018: Mark Lenker, "Developmentalism: Learning as the Basis for Evaluating Information," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, 4 (2017): 721–37.
- 2019: Stefanie R. Bluemle, "Post-Facts: Information Literacy and Authority after the 2016 Election," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 18, 2 (2018): 265–82.

## Notes

1. Gloriana St. Clair, "Through *portal*," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 1, 1 (2001): v.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., vi.
4. See Shirley K. Baker, Douglas Bennett, Myles Brand, Felix E. Browder, Daryle Busch, Jerry D. Campbell, Mary Case, et al., "Principles for Emerging Systems of Scholarly Publishing," Association of Research Libraries, 2010, <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2000/05/tempe-principles-10may10.pdf>.
5. Ray English, "*portal* Adds a New Way In: Open Access in a Project MUSE Context," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 10, 3 (2010): 259–63.
6. See "Coming-of-Age," Merriam-Webster, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coming-of-age>.

This mss. is peer reviewed, copy edited, and accepted for publication, portal 20.1.