Meeting the Moment

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T he shared experience of the past 19 months has been an ordeal like none in our lifetime. The cumulative effect of global pandemic, economic embattlement, and racial inequities has taken its toll. Since March 2020, it seems impossible to count the times we have heard the words "unprecedented," "disruptive," and "life-altering," and the world as we once knew it has forever changed.

That said, even the worst of times brings silver linings, often in the form of providing opportunities to reprioritize, reset, and renew. In the spirit of not letting a good crisis go to waste, *portal*'s Editorial Board embarked on an intentional agenda and made solid strides toward accomplishing its goals during what many have called "the year that wasn't."[1] Priorities included maintaining our publication schedule; advancing equity, diversity, inclusivity, and justice; and conceiving a special issue to evince the agility of academic librarians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

portal, Uninterrupted

As the pandemic began to unfold, no one knew the impact it might have on scholarly publishing. A journal is only as good as the content it receives from authors, and we wondered how disrupted schedules, remote work arrangements, and other extraordinary demands might affect submissions. Some scholarly journals found it necessary to reduce the size of individual issues, take a brief hiatus, or suspend publication altogether. In 2020, *portal* was fortunate to see a 17 percent increase in submissions over the previous year, and the upward trend has continued throughout 2021. This influx of manuscripts has enabled us not only to maintain our schedule but also to publish a larger number of articles in each issue, keeping manuscripts moving steadily through the pipeline.

On the downside, the pandemic upended plans for an in-person celebration of *portal*'s 20-year milestone during the American Library Association's Annual Conference in Chicago in 2020.[2] But our 25-year anniversary will be here before we know it, and we intend to pull out all the stops then!

As a journal with a geographically dispersed board, we always have worked remotely from one another. The primary impact on *portal* of the lockdown and social distancing was that it became impossible to meet for in-person board meetings, preventing

us from engaging face-to-face or capitalizing on the energy in the room that we feel is so important for brainstorming. We were pleased—though not surprised—to discover that our board's collective personality, collaborative spirit, and give-and-take culture transferred easily to the "Zoom Room." In fact, we met more frequently, with fuller attendance, allowing us to advance the work described in this editorial, thanks especially to the volunteerism of board members who offered to take on additional assignments.[3]

"We Can Do Better"

One year ago, we published the first editorial ever coauthored by *portal*'s full Editorial Board. Titled "This Is Not Enough. We Can Do Better," it acknowledged our shared responsibility and resolved to address the issues of equity and structural racism that have plagued academic publishing. In it, we pledged to be accountable and transparent in these efforts and to provide updates on progress in the three areas that follow.[4]

Our first priority was to continue to increase the diversity of the Editorial Board. The six board recruits seated in 2021 have brought to *portal* an especially rich mix of diverse backgrounds, personal perspectives, and professional experiences, along with geographic representation from locales that we had previously not reached. We hope that these additions also will facilitate manuscript submissions from underrepresented areas, to further diversify our content.[5]

We also committed to the use of language that shows sensitivity, consideration, and openness toward all individuals and groups through positive, careful, and unbiased representation. As stated in the Author Guidelines, *portal*'s editorial practices support the development and evolution of inclusive language, aspiring to ensure that authors and readers feel respected regardless of gender, race, religion, age, education, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability status, socioeconomic background, or geographic location.[6] Additionally, discussions at *portal*'s January 2021 meeting reiterated our commitment to abide by the thoughtful, deliberate choices our authors make in their writing. *portal* will endeavor to make every article the best it can be without sacrificing the author's voice and to be increasingly mindful of how any changes that go beyond copyediting can alter original intent.[7]

Finally, we vowed to expand opportunities for new and emerging authors. *portal*'s referees have continued to provide deep, rich feedback on all submissions, but especially to fledgling scholars and to those testing the waters of academic publishing by sending a manuscript for consideration as a feature article. The forthcoming special issue on the responsiveness of academic libraries affords another option to publish without going through the requirement of peer review, and the revamped Best Article Award guidelines expand opportunity for recognition. Both are described in fuller detail in subsequent sections of this editorial.

In addition to these actions, *portal* has remained responsive to authors and their needs in our changing scholarly environment by retaining its hallmarks of offering a more inviting, constructive, and productive experience for novice writers; ensuring efficient article review and turnaround time; and including a wide range of global perspectives in each issue. Submissions from other countries have grown steadily and make up about a third of all manuscripts received during the past year and a half.

The Editorial Board was pleased to learn recently that *portal* is one of only three library and information science journals, among a field of more than 80, with an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) statement.[8] During the past year, the editor was invited to speak to a number of library groups to further raise awareness of *portal*'s inclusive philosophy and values.[9] As we continue our focused work in this area, we welcome input on additional measures the board could take to keep *portal* at the forefront of reform in academic publishing. In the meantime, the initiatives discussed here further demonstrate our shared commitment to equity, diversity, inclusivity, and justice. While they are still not enough, we will work purposefully to do better.

Data Ethics

At its January 2021 meeting, *portal*'s Editorial Board discussed some of the data ethics issues at stake in research articles with student subjects, including the need to protect students' privacy in studies involving learning analytics. According to the Society for Learning Analytics Research (SoLAR), learning analytics is defined as "the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs."[10]

Board consensus was that *portal* should demonstrate ethical leadership on this issue, including crafting a policy articulating good data practices. A working group of board members, chaired by Kyle M. L. Jones and including Consuella Askew, Donna Ferullo, and Mark Stover, drafted a set of recommendations. Because of their work, *portal* has taken the position that while library learning analytics research holds potential, it also is replete with ethical concerns, not least of which is the possibility of reidentifying previously de-identified data. Therefore, authors are expected to address relevant ethical issues if their research is a learning analytics study or involves any other work gathering or reporting data on human subjects. The research design should strive to minimize risks; to respect human dignity, privacy, and self-determination; and to take extra precautions with vulnerable populations.

Additional working group recommendations endorsed by the board include modifying the assessment rubric used by *portal* referees to support strict scrutiny as to whether learning analytics is a component of a study's research methodology. If so, referees must evaluate whether the paper includes a conversation about data protection and management practices; addresses consent; discusses risks to privacy; explicitly describes institutional review board (IRB) assessment and status; and justifies its ethical choices. Similarly, if learning analytics research is integral to a manuscript's literature review, referees should be mindful of whether the study incorporates relevant ethics conversations from the literature within academic librarianship and even outside it, as some of this literature concerns privacy, beneficence, bias, justice, fairness, and other issues.

An editorial authored by Jones and published in the July 2021 issue of *portal* provides additional detail about the board's views on data ethics.[11] The salient points of the policy have been incorporated into our Author Guidelines.

Original Content

Most journals set standards regarding expectations for the originality of the content that is submitted for consideration. All material, of course, should be the work of the authors, but it is not uncommon to receive manuscripts that substantially duplicate parts of an author's prior publication or replicate a slide deck from a conference presentation. Given the regularity with which such submissions are received, we felt the time was right to reassess our guidance to authors about originality and to revise our guidelines accordingly.

Board members Mary Casserly, Brian Schottlaender, and Sarah Barbara Watstein conducted an environmental scan, reviewing the authorship and contributorship policies of library and information science journals, other scholarly publications, and an array of commercial publishers and university presses. They also examined the guidelines of the Committee on Professional Ethics (COPE), from which many publications draw their author guidelines.[12] The *portal* working group took a broad interpretation of originality, including redundant publication, plagiarism, and text recycling, to ensure the highest standards in publication ethics.

As a result of this investigation, the Editorial Board endorsed revisions to *portal*'s content policy to specify that

> *portal* publishes only original, previously unpublished content. Authors should consult the journal editor if part, or all, of their submitted manuscript has been published previously. *portal* acknowledges that, during the course of their research and manuscript preparation, authors may benefit from discussing or presenting some of their findings at conferences or meetings, or from posting such content on listservs or academic social networks. Authors must notify the editor and provide details of such dissemination when submitting their article. Authors must also notify the editor if their manuscript uses data from another published study, making the case for their study's added value and/or originality.[13]

Additionally, the policy notes:

> Authors should not submit the same manuscript for review to more than one journal at a time. Posting of manuscripts on personal sites, in institutional repositories, or, if required by law or policy, to an open access archive is permitted *after* the article has been accepted and the copyright agreement with The Johns Hopkins University Press has been finalized.[14]

This guidance augments, rather than replaces, information in *portal*'s existing author guidelines, including the Johns Hopkins University Press Journals Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement. That document declares, "Authors will submit only entirely original works and will appropriately cite or quote the work and/or words of others. Publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work should also be cited."[15]

Best Article Award

Since 2005, *portal* has given a Best Article Award to the author of the paper appearing in the previous year's volume that most clearly meets the stated criteria in the award

guidelines.[16] These include the quality of research methodology; the degree to which the article places library issues in a broader academic context; and the extent to which the article makes a significant contribution to the literature or to the advancement of knowledge. Timeliness, originality, and accessibility are also considered. Because of the emphasis on research, features are not considered for this recognition, only peer-reviewed articles. However, to broaden the scope of research content eligible for the award, *portal*'s Editorial Board decided to explicitly extend consideration to articles that may not be research-intensive but have a sound theoretical framework.

To further ensure broad eligibility among recipients, new parameters also have been established for the frequency with which a writer can receive the award. Going forward, sole authors who have received this award within three years from the date of the volume under review are not eligible, in the spirit of this journal's mission to create opportunity for the widest possible authorial base. The award brings an engraved plaque, a cash prize, and promotion of the article via *portal*'s social media outlets. Board members Becky Albitz and Harriet Lightman steered the effort that resulted in these improvements to our award process.

Special Issue

Soon after the onset of the pandemic, we made an editorial decision to publish a special-themed issue focused on the resilience of academic librarians during the higher education crisis fostered by COVID-19, racial inequities, and economic hardship. At that time, no one knew what the timeline of evolving disruptions would be, so we aimed for January 2022 publication. Editorial Board members Ellysa Stern Cahoy and Maribeth Slebodnik agreed to lead the project.

In the summer of 2020, a call for proposals went out.[17] It emphasized the aims and scope of this special issue, underscoring the objective "to explore and accentuate positive possibilities—the unique opportunities, creative strategies, and innovative responses—that have emerged in academic libraries because of these challenges." It also encouraged seeing this as a moment to question conventional academic library practices and perspectives and to craft submissions exploring what might be possible. The call further reminded those submitting papers that manuscripts would be subject to editorial assessment but not to blind peer review, encouraging novice authors as well as those sharing traditionally marginalized perspectives. This policy conforms to *portal*'s long-standing commitment to mentor aspiring scholars and to expand the range of voices and viewpoints on its pages.

The call for proposals brought an overwhelming response, paving the way for a double issue that will showcase the efforts made by academic libraries to be creative, innovative, responsive, and nimble. Topics it will explore include inventive provision of remote and on-site services; building campus connections and student engagement; and responsive organizational strategies for diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. A first look at the articles will be available in mid-December of this year on our preprint server at https://preprint.press.jhu.edu/portal/.

Approaching the Other Side

The pandemic is not yet fully visible in the rearview mirror, but as we approach the close of the calendar year, there is reason to hope that the end might be near. Libraries, their parent institutions, businesses, and other organizations will adjust their routines to address the changing demands and shifting priorities of the new normal, whatever that may be. *portal*, too, will strive to meet evolving expectations even as it retains a sustained commitment to providing high-quality content to its readers and helpful, respectful mentoring to its authors.

The end of the year also brings predictable transitions on our Editorial Board. If this journal's mission and priorities resonate, please consider expressing your interest in becoming part of our enterprise.

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Notes

1. "The year that wasn't" has been widely used to describe 2020 and various efforts to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some interesting examples include Betsy Atkins, "2020: The Year That Wasn't," *Forbes*, December 28, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/betsyatkins/2021/12/28/2020-the-year-that-wasnt/?sh=508615dd1245; Leo Mirani, "2020: The Year That Wasn't," *Economist*, November 16, 2020, https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2020/11/16/2020-the-year-that-wasntand; and Lawrence Lindell, "The Year That Wasn't," *New Yorker*, December 7, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/the-year-that-wasnt.
2. Thanks to the efforts of board members Brian Schottlaender, Maribeth Slebodnik, and Mary Augusta Thomas, we designed a commemorative cover for our 20th year and got it into production prior to the pandemic. An image is available at https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/41793.
3. The author wishes additionally to acknowledge the written outputs of the work groups that are mentioned in this editorial. Many sections of the editorial draw from these internal documents.
4. "This Is Not Enough. We Can Do Better. The Editorial Board of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, 4 (2020): 559–63, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2020.0037.
5. *portal*'s Editorial Board roster is at https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/portal-libraries-and-academy/editorial-board.
6. *portal*'s "Author Guidelines" are at https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/portal-libraries-and-academy/author-guidelines.
7. This discussion began with a conversation about Christian Minter's blogpost "A Case Study on Anti-Black Publishing Practices," *Christian I. J. Minter, MSLS*, December 11, 2020, https://christianminter.com/2020/12/11/a-case-study-on-anti-black-publishing-practices/.
8. Internal report of the Library Faculty Organization, Pennsylvania State University, November 2020.
9. These opportunities included the Research and Publications Committee of the University Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, March 17, 2001 (virtual) and the Scholarly Research Committee, Community and Junior College Libraries Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), "Scholarly Research for Community College Librarians: Demystifying Submission, Review, and Publication Processes," June 10, 2021 (virtual).

10. For additional information about the Society for Learning Analytics Research (SoLAR), see SoLAR, "About SoLAR," 2021, https://www.solaresearch.org/about/, and "What Is Learning Analytics?" https://www.solaresearch.org/about/what-is-learning-analytics/.

11. Kyle M. L. Jones, "Library Learning Analytics: Addressing the Relationship between Professional, Research, and Publication Ethics," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 21, 3 (2021): 417–23, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2021.0022.

12. For additional information about the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), see https://publicationethics.org/about/our-organisation.

13. *portal*, "Author Guidelines."

14. Ibid.

15. The full Johns Hopkins University Press (JHUP) "Journals Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement" is available at https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/author-resources/ethics-and-malpractice-statement.

16. For a full list of winners of the Best Article Award, see https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/portal-libraries-and-academy/awards.

17. The call for proposals was widely distributed; it also appeared as front matter in the October 2020 issue of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, 4 (2020).