

The Envelope, Please!

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Like many professions, librarianship has an array of awards and honors that recognize the efforts of its members. The American Library Association (ALA), for example, bestows some 200 awards, prizes, citations, and scholarships each year. The ALA says that the winners, chosen by juries of their colleagues and peers, “embody the best of the profession’s leadership, vision, and service as well as a continued commitment to diversity, equality, education, and outreach.”¹ Some recognitions highlight a singular accomplishment of the recipient or recipients; others can be better described as lifetime achievement awards, designed to acknowledge one’s contributions across a storied career. The association hands out so many prizes that Blaise Cronin once wrote, “Pay your dues, stay sober, keep your hand out of the till, and you should get some kind of ALA award before the sun sets on your career.”² We cite this observation not to diminish the worthiness of these awards but rather to evince that the association is broadly committed to celebrating members of the library profession.

State library groups, other library organizations, and editorial boards also confer awards to acknowledge the achievements of exceptional librarians. Among them is the Berkeley Division of the Librarians Association of the University of California, which bestows an annual Distinguished Librarian Award.³ *Library Journal* grants a Librarian of the Year Award to “honor a professional librarian for outstanding achievement and accomplishments reflecting the loftiest service goals of the library profession.”⁴ *Library Journal* also publishes an annual list of Movers and Shakers, “a group of individuals who are moving the library field forward as a profession.”⁵

The Importance of Recognition

Professional awards and honors are especially significant for a field like librarianship, where it can be difficult to assess accomplishments and successes. Few librarians compile a win-loss record, a vote total, or other metrics by which to measure their achievements. Yet being liked and respected by others is a strong desire in many of us and essential for most people’s happiness. William James wrote to his students at Radcliffe College, “The deepest principle of Human Nature is the craving to be appreciated.”⁶ If people are recognized, they feel not only happier but also more motivated. Peer recognition,



the appreciation of colleagues for a job well done, is especially meaningful. It brings an increased level of pride and validation and shows that people in your field have noticed your efforts and contributions.

Beyond personal gratification, awards and honors can be important professionally. For example, candidates for promotion or tenure at most educational institutions are expected to show proof of recognition for their work. Such evidence might include journal publications, conference proceedings, and academic or professional honors and awards.

Awards and honors also help a profession to grow and advance. They can boost confidence, spark a career, and motivate others to improve their own performance. Awards enable those inside and outside the profession to see what has been achieved and what its members value. The lives and accomplishments of award winners serve as role models and provide a road map to success. Mentoring and networking may occur among winners, creating long-lasting professional relationships and providing new opportunities to give back to the profession.

The *portal* Best Article Award

An editorial reflecting upon the first 20 years of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* notes that the journal was launched when “a band of librarian-scholars decided to buck the existing journal publishing system to create something different and better.” One goal of the fledgling journal was “to provide a more inviting and supportive environment for authors.”⁷ In keeping with that goal, *portal* decided to honor the author of the best article appearing in its pages each year. The *portal* Editorial Board announced the first award for best article of the year in 2005.⁸

The Process of Choosing the Best Article

The process of choosing the best article begins each year in November, after release of the final issue of the volume under consideration. *portal*'s editor appoints a Best Article Award Committee comprised of members of the *portal* Editorial Board who have not published an article in that volume. The editor also selects one committee member to serve as chair. Members of the Editorial Board are urged to nominate articles from those appearing in the volume being reviewed. Nominations are submitted to the committee by February 15. The editor and the Best Article Award Committee also read all articles in the volume and make their own nominations.

The committee develops a shortlist of a few nominated articles to share with the full Editorial Board for review and anonymous voting. All members of the board are expected to reread the articles on the shortlist, vote on a finalist, and provide a justification for their choice by March 15. The award recipient is selected by April 15. In the case of a tie, the editor and the committee work together to reach consensus.

The Criteria

portal's Best Article Award Guidelines, most recently revised in 2021, provide a framework for evaluating peer-reviewed articles. When considering their votes, members of the Editorial Board may ask such questions as



- Does the article illuminate a significant and complex subject?
- Does it place library issues in a broader academic or higher education context?
- Does the article make a significant contribution to the literature or the advancement of knowledge?
- Is the work or research unique, standing apart from other similar work as a new contribution?
- If the topic is widely explored, does the article bring a new or provocative approach?
- Does the author build on existing scholarship on the chosen topic?
- Does the article expand the profession's understanding of an area of librarianship?
- Is the methodology or theoretical framework sound?
- Are the length of the study and the sample size appropriate?
- Do the author or authors demonstrate mastery of the subject?
- Does the writing *communicate* effectively with the intended audience?
- Does the article tell a good story?
- Do the author or authors present their findings in a clear way?
- Is the article timely?

Because they do not go through the peer-review process, pieces labeled “features” and “editorials” are excluded from consideration, though they serve an important purpose for the journal. Articles from special issues also are not considered, for the same reason.

A sole author or coauthors who have received the Best Article Award within the past three years of the date of the volume under review are not eligible, in the spirit of *portal's* mission to create opportunity for the widest possible authorial base. Both novice and experienced authors have received the recognition, from early-career librarians to well-established professionals to distinguished veterans.

The Range of Topics

Articles that have received the Best Article Award cover a wide range of topics. Recent winning articles have discussed

- the thought of Luciano Floridi, an Italian professor of philosophy and ethics of information at the University of Oxford.
- critical information literacy, an educational approach that encourages a questioning attitude toward information and recognizes the powerful commercial forces behind much of it.
- the post-truth phenomenon in American politics and the challenge it poses to teaching authority in information literacy.
- ethical issues surrounding learning analytics, the gathering and analysis of data about students to assess their academic progress and improve learning outcomes, which may compromise students' privacy.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an educational approach that addresses issues of accessibility and inclusion. The UDL approach aims to accommodate individual learning differences and so optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.



The Appendix provides a complete list of winners of the *portal: Libraries and the Academy* Johns Hopkins University Press Award for Best Article.

The Recognition

Once the winner of the *portal: Libraries and the Academy* Johns Hopkins University Press Award for Best Article is identified, the author or authors are invited to accept the award and discuss their research at the summer meeting of the *portal* Editorial Board. The gathering takes place at the ALA Annual Conference, unless canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic or other emergency. The winners also receive a plaque from the Johns Hopkins University Press and a cash prize. In some cases, this recognition has generated interest among recipients in joining *portal's* Editorial Board or becoming otherwise involved with the journal.

Conclusion

Awards and honors for librarianship bring few substantial material rewards, although there are some. One noteworthy example of a more lucrative award is the Lemony Snicket Prize for Noble Librarians Faced with Adversity. The "Series of Unfortunate Events" author Lemony Snicket created the prize in 2014 because, he said, "Librarians have suffered enough." Snicket, the pen name of Daniel Handler, describes the award as "a generous amount of cash from Mr. Snicket's disreputable gains," \$10,000 in 2021. He explained, "This seems like a better way to channel money to librarians than my previous strategy, which was incurring exorbitant late fees." The annual award also comes with "an odd, symbolic object" from Handler's private stash and "a certificate, which may or may not be suitable for framing." The ALA administers the coveted prize, which is granted only if a suitable candidate is found.⁹ Otherwise, winners of most honors and awards must content themselves with adding an accolade to their curriculum vitae, basking in the appreciation of their fellow librarians, and knowing they have made a significant contribution to the profession. Priceless . . .

We look forward to receiving your manuscripts and to identifying future Best Article Award winners from among them.

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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, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/173439>.
- 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, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/177787>.
- 2007:** Corinna Baksik, "Fair Use or Exploitation? The Google Book Search Controversy," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 6, 4 (2006): 399–415, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/203348>.
- 2008:** Amos Lakos, "Evidence-Based Library Management: The Leadership Challenge," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 7, 4 (2007): 431–50, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/223653>.
- 2009:** Sharon K. Epps, "African-American Women Leaders in Academic Research Libraries," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 8, 3 (2008): 255–72, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/240411>.
- 2010:** Scott Bennett, "Libraries and Learning: A History of Paradigm Change," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9, 2 (2009): 181–97, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/262845>.
- 2011:** Kevin Smith, "Copyright Renewal for Libraries: Seven Steps toward a User-Friendly Law," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 10, 1 (2010): 5–27, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/368767>.
- 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, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/452638>.
- 2013:** Tyler Walters, "The Future Role of Publishing Services in University Libraries," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 12, 4 (2012): 425–54, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/487363>.
- 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, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/498857>.
- 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, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/541847>.



- 2016:** Richard Fyffe, "The Value of Information: Normativity, Epistemology, and LIS in Luciano Floridi," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 15, 2 (2015): 276–86, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/578268>. (Awarded posthumously.)
- 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, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/613843>.
- 2018:** Mark Lenker, "Developmentalism: Learning as the Basis for Evaluating Information," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, 4 (2017): 721–37, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/672181>.
- 2019:** Stefanie R. Bluemle, "Post-Facts: Information Literacy and Authority after the 2016 Election," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 18, 2 (2018): 265–82, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690729>.
- 2020:** Kyle M. L. Jones, "'Just Because You Can Doesn't Mean You Should': Practitioner Perceptions of Learning Analytics Ethics," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 19, 5 (2019): 407–28, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/729196>.
- 2021:** Sara Maurice Whitver, "Accessible Library Instruction in Practice," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, 2 (2020): 381–98, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/753303>.

Notes

1. American Library Association (ALA), "ALA Book, Print & Media Awards," <https://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/>.
2. Blaise Cronin, "For Whom the Bell Curve Tolls," *Library Journal* 126, 1 (2001).
3. Berkeley Library, University of California, "Distinguished Librarian Award Guidelines," 2020, <https://live-staff-web.pantheon.berkeley.edu/Staff/lauc/dla/guidelines.html>.
4. *Library Journal*, "Librarians of the Year Nomination Guidelines," 2021, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/page/Librarian-of-the-Year-Guidelines>.
5. *Library Journal*, "Movers and Shakers 2021: The People Shaping the Future of Libraries," <https://www.libraryjournal.com/page/movers-and-shakers-2021>.
6. William James to his class at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, MA, April 6, 1896, in *The Letters of William James, Vol. II*, ed. Henry James (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920).
7. Marianne Ryan, "Coming of Age: *portal* at 20," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, 1 (2020):1.
8. Charles B. Lowry, "*portal: Libraries and the Academy* 2005 Johns Hopkins Press Award for Best Article," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 5, 4 (2005), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/188629>.
9. ALA, "The Lemony Snicket Prize for Noble Librarians Faced with Adversity," <https://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/lemony-snicket>; "Lemony Snicket Launches Prize for Librarians 'Who Have Faced Adversity,'" *Guardian*, January 13, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/31/lemony-snicket-prize-librarians-book-bans>; Sarah Bayliss, "Lemony Snicket Sponsors Prize for Librarians Facing Adversity," *School Library Journal*, January 30, 2014, <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=lemony-snicket-sponsors-prize-for-librarians-facing-adversity>.