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The Association of Research Libraries: History and Accomplishments Celebrating the Career of Duane Webster

James G. Neal, Guest Editor

What is a *festschrift*? From the German, it is a volume of writings by colleagues to celebrate and honor the career of a distinguished scholar or fellow of a profession. When over 100 associates of Duane Webster assembled at Columbia University in New York in April 2008 to consider the history and accomplishments of the Association of Research Libraries under his leadership, it was clear to all in attendance that a permanent testimonial to his remarkable life-work was essential. This issue of *portal* captures 14 of the papers presented at the Columbia symposium. They illustrate the evolution of the interests and agendas of North American research libraries and the role of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in the expansion of their collective visibility and influence in higher education, scholarly communication, and public policy circles.

Duane Webster, a 1963 graduate of Heidelberg College and the Master of Library Science Program at the University of Michigan in 1964, spent the first five years of his professional life exploring public and corporate libraries and work in library systems. But, in 1970, he responded to the call of the Association of Research Libraries in Washington, D.C., and launched the Office of Management Studies (OMS). OMS would quickly evolve as the nation's most creative and influential center for organizational development and administrative

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improvement for the library community. In 1984, his responsibilities at ARL expanded to embrace the deputy executive director assignment. With the retirement of the executive director in 1988, Webster was selected by the ARL Board to take on the leadership



position, and he served as executive director for 20 years. Upon his retirement in 2008, ARL was an organization of 123 leading research libraries in the United States and Canada with a mission to strengthen and extend the capacities of its member libraries to provide access to recorded information and to foster an environment in which learning flourishes, to enhance scholarly communication, and to influence policies affecting the flow of information.

The papers in this issue are wide-ranging, cutting across the activities at ARL that have advanced this mission. They are also celebratory, highlighting distinction and accomplishment and, in particular, the personal role and impact of Duane Webster. The coverage is not exhaustive, for there are many noteworthy activities that are not included. One recalls such initiatives as the Collection Analysis Project, the various investigations of special collections, and the Preservation Program, among numerous studies, reports, and services. One notes the more recent work in areas like e-science, teaching and learning, and government information.

The work of ARL under Webster's leadership has been defined by several critical themes. ARL has been able to attract very effective staff—individuals with the experience, expertise, and credibility—so essential to success. ARL has always aggressively involved its member-leaders, the ARL directors, in positions of governance, in program development and advancement, and as spokespersons for strategic issues. ARL has sustained a strong financial situation, managing effectively operational funds, building essential budgetary reserves, and securing grants to enable new initiatives. ARL has promoted a rigorous and transparent membership program, sustaining a high bar of qualitative assessment for joining the association. ARL also has aggressively forged partnerships with library and higher education associations to advance collaboratively high priority interests.

Maureen Sullivan (consultant) provides a paper that captures an aspect of ARL across all 38 years of Webster's work—the focus on organizational development and the effective use of the self-study process in research libraries. Similarly, Joe Branin (Ohio State) picks up another persistent theme, the development of research library leaders through the various training and mentoring programs that have distinguished ARL over many years. Barbara Dewey (Tennessee) writes about ARL's long-standing commitment to diversity, to expanding the interest of underrepresented groups in research library careers, and to developing and advancing minority librarians into positions of leadership in ARL libraries.

Fred Heath (Texas) and Brinley Franklin (Connecticut) cover the range of programs and projects that have highlighted the value and importance of measurement and assessment in research libraries. Whether it is the constantly evolving annual statistics report, the widely embraced quality survey tools, or the expanding focus on qualitative instruments and the sharing of best practices, ARL continues to view accountability as essential to research library relevance.

ARL advances strategic priorities in partnership with other organizations. Three papers describe examples of highly successful enterprises. Deborah Jakubs (Duke) relates the collaboration with the Association of American Universities to create the Global Resources Program, with the focus on the distinctive role and capacity of ARL libraries to acquire, organize, and service foreign publications. Richard West (California



State), with the assistance of Joan Lippincott (CNI), recount the history of the Coalition for Networked Information and the coming together of the research library and the higher education computing communities to address the opportunities and challenges of the digital and network revolutions. Mary Case (Illinois-Chicago) records the founding of the Office of Scholarly Communication and the bold launch of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), now a global advocacy group for open access and barrier-free use of research.

Information policy issues have long dominated the ARL agenda, with legal and legislative concerns across a wide range of topics. These have focused at the federal level in areas like telecommunications, privacy, intellectual freedom, appropriations, government information, and higher education. Perhaps no policy matter has captured ARL attention more consistently than copyright, the need to fight off erosions of fair use and to protect the access rights of our users under the impact of technological controls. Jonathan Band (Library Copyright Alliance) and Mark Haslett (Waterloo) illustrate the copyright challenge from the U.S. and the Canadian perspectives and the ARL response.

The ability to be effective in the policy wars has required that ARL understand the political culture of higher education. David Shulenburg (APLU) characterizes the federal political environment and compliments ARL's leadership and effectiveness. In addition, the political process mandates strategic partnerships and collective advocacy. John Vaughn (AAU) describes how political collaboration is created in the education sector in Washington and focuses on the critical and positive relationship between ARL and AAU.

But ARL is also an association, an organization with budgets, staff, members, facilities, plans, board, and committees—the superstructure and infrastructure that must be administered well. Carla Funk (Medical Library Association) addresses the management of a professional association and the priorities for ARL's sustainability and success. But excellence in stewardship must be coupled with a commitment to leadership and entrepreneurship. Kevin Guthrie (Ithaka) characterizes ARL's history under the direction of Duane Webster as consistently defined by these qualities and its future that will demand continuing innovation.

There are many additional aspects of ARL's accomplishments during the tenure of Duane Webster that are not captured in these papers. ARL became an influential player in the international library community, serving as a model for other regional research library associations, participating in the work of the International Federation of Library Associations and distributing its publications widely on the Web. ARL has been a valuable tool for all types of libraries, particularly smaller academic libraries, that took advantage of ARL training programs and joined

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initiatives like CNI and SPARC. ARL provided a training ground for future research library leaders—individuals who worked at ARL and later became ARL directors, as well as senior administrators and staff at ARL libraries who served as visiting program officers at ARL and, through these assignments, achieved visibility, expertise, and advancement.

Duane Webster has been celebrated throughout his career: Distinguished Alumnus Award at Michigan, Academic Librarian of the Year by ACRL, Lippincott Award from ALA, and the Distinguished Service Award from ARL. Clearly, this is an accomplishing and accomplished individual. This issue of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* seeks to demonstrate the how and why and to document some of the key themes that define ARL authority, influence, and visibility.

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