



# Passing the Baton

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Charles B. Lowry

Whenever there is a change of editors at a scholarly journal, one expects to see the ritual “thank you,” and it may seem pro forma. However, for *portal: Libraries and the Academy* this is a significant milestone, and I want to attach special meaning to my first editorial statement—not because it is mine, but because our young journal has become such a success so quickly and many are due a sincere thanks. Four years ago, the creation of this journal was the idea of a majority of the members of the board of the *Journal of Academic Librarianship (JAL)* who felt that it was time for librarians to take a stand similar to our colleagues in science, who were at last rebelling against the deleterious effects of commercialism on the exchange of scholarly information. Debate within the board was serious-minded, and some stayed out of principled commitment to the title. Those of us who resigned our positions on the board did so with considerable angst and not a little regret. My own reasons for resigning were typical, as I stated in e-mail to colleagues at the time.

[A]s a member of the SPARC Advisory Committee it would be profoundly inconsistent of me to continue on the JAL board. I think the right thing to do is to quit and devote my energy to working with you like-minded colleagues to create a competing title. That is consistent with principle. I do not think we are engaged in a great moral crusade against some “Evil Empire,” but I do think we are engaged in a transformational struggle that will define the future. If we want a future we can live with, we had best understand that Elsevier wants something else. Their company stock is highly touted because of its P/E ratio. They are answerable to their stockholders not to the academy and certainly not to academic libraries. This is a matter of the future of scholarly communication, higher education, and our libraries.<sup>1</sup>

We did the right thing, but there was no certainty that we would succeed. The first challenge was to find a publishing partner with the willingness to support our little rebellion and with the track record that would give us confidence that our vision could be fulfilled. Our first stroke of luck was the willingness of Jim Neal to approach The Johns Hopkins University Press and our good fortune in getting the ear of Marie Hansen at the press. Her support, experience, and perspicacious advice in shaping a new publication were indispensable.

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We also received support from other quarters. The Association of Research Libraries Board and Executive Director Duane Webster encouraged and endorsed our effort. In particular Rick Johnson, enterprise director of SPARC, has been vigorous in supporting our work. Perhaps he described best what our journal means: “*portal* is a community built around diverse needs of its members. It offers a superior alternative to commercial journals in the field, and it is the kind of initiative academic librarians everywhere should support.”<sup>2</sup>

The critical requisite was the active participation of the board members who were willing not merely to talk, but to walk and, most importantly, to work very hard in the creation of a new journal, and recruits were added to them in the effort. That original board included: Don Bosseau, Nicholas Burckel, Karyle Butcher, Meredith Butler, Deborah Dancik, John DiBraggio, Ray English, Larry Hardesty, Pat Harris, Eddy Hogan, Neal Kaske, John Lombardi, Jim Matarazzo, James Neal, Ann Prentice, Sarah Pritchard, Helen Spalding, Steve Stoen, Jack Sulzer, and Jerome Yavarkovsky. I vociferously thank each one—most are still with us today.

Sue Martin and I signed on as executive editors, but Gloriana St. Clair did the heavy lifting of managing editor. More than any other individual contribution, her experience, brought daily to the first three years of *portal*, has made the journal what it is today. She deserves special credit for forwarding and implementing the idea of mentors in the context of a double-blind review scholarly journal. It has advanced a new idea that a manuscript may be raw, but if it contains the core of good research the author deserves more than a rejection. Thus we extend mentoring to help develop good ideas and good research into viable publishable articles. Many of the articles that have appeared in *portal* are the result of this nurturing effort.

On behalf of the board I want to also extend our appreciation to Copy Editor Martha Bright Anandakrishnan and Editorial Assistant Cindy Stell Carroll. We all know that their contributions have been critical. Our publisher deserves a word. The Johns Hopkins University Press is well known for the quality of its titles and for the groundbreaking venture into the world of e-journals with Project Muse. We are proud to be associated with it for its quality and for the principles it stands for in advancing the exchange of scholarly information as its primary purpose for existing.

Finally, in my inaugural issue as editor, I am introducing the new occasional feature of a “Guest Editorial.” Jay Jordan, CEO of OCLC, was generous in responding to my request for a submission in which he revisits The Keystone Principles, and the role of OCLC in the world of libraries and scholarly information.

## Notes

1. Charles B. Lowry, e-mail to JAL Board, February 10, 1999.
2. Statement provided by Rick Johnson to *portal*, summer 2003.