

portal

A new model for the digital future

by Charles B. Lowry, Susan K. Martin, and Gloriana St. Clair

The Create Change initiative among the Association of Research Libraries, ACRL, and SPARC encourages librarians to be active on campus in helping faculty in all disciplines to rethink their scholarly communications practices.¹

To illustrate these principles, a group of librarians and an interested university press reacted to Elsevier's recent acquisition of several journals in librarianship and general social sciences by launching an alternative new journal titled *portal: Libraries and the Academy*. Susan K. Martin, Charles B. Lowry, Gloriana St. Clair, former *Journal of Academic Librarianship* editors and editorial board members, a group of willing mentors, and the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) Press are acting deliberately to achieve focused objectives, including:

- offering an affordable alternative to serials that have increased an average of 9 percent a year while the consumer price index increased only 3.3 percent;
- providing an inviting, constructive, and productive environment for authors;
- taking the lead on campus in illustrating new initiatives;
- building a closer relationship with academia;
- joining with a reputable university press; and

- dreaming of an enhanced communications future.

Affordable alternative

University presses offer a high-quality alternative to their commercial counterparts. Whereas some commercial presses report gross profit margins of 40 percent with annual profits between 20 and 30 percent, university presses only cover their costs and in the past have often received subsidies from their universities. Ray English and Larry Hardesty, two *portal* editorial board members, have called the commercial pricing practices "fundamentally unjust," and a governor of an engineering society called them "extortion."² The difference between commercial and university presses allows the latter to price their journals in more reasonable ways. Thus, *portal* sells for \$48 to individuals and \$145 to institutions; it is a journal we can afford.

Environment for authors

Major journals in most disciplines pride themselves on their high rejection rates. The rationale is 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

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research than to replicate a system that encourages authors to create a finished product only to be judged and rejected. The *portal* board and mentors want to help authors from the moment they decide to engage in research to the moment they elect to submit the finished product to either *portal* or some other journal. To accomplish that, *portal* has created a mentoring program for authors. Experts are available to consult with authors about topic selection and identification and about issues around statistical sampling and survey design and around the crafting of the article itself.

Librarians lead

Academic faculty understand that increases in serials prices are "killing libraries." Many are active library users and serve on library committees around the world. It is up to discipline faculty to create the not-so-subtle realignment toward alternative publishing that will support the flow of scholarly information, although librarians can supply ideas and information to foster that change. And we alone can change communications in our own discipline. In committing ourselves to this new journal venture, *portal* editors and board members model a reasonable next step that illustrates the Association of American Universities's best practices.

Academic ties

It has become obvious in recent years that the expansive nature of the library and information studies professions is creating ever stronger links between librarians and their colleagues in the academic community. Rather than establish a journal focused solely on libraries, the *portal* board decided that the new publication should attempt to attract manuscripts more widely within the academic community. These colleagues include computing science professionals, information science educators, and, particularly, that group of scholars who are now very aware of the flow of information within their own disci-

plines, who have also begun to create their own journals in lieu of the traditional marketplace. To that end, the *portal* editorial board includes one current and one former university president, and we expect to draw on other scholars as well as those concerned with the funding of information in higher education in the future.

The JHU/MUSE connection

It was clear to all of us that starting a new title would be a challenge and that the key first step was to identify the requirements we would have of any publisher with whom we would partner. As we developed strategies for creating a new journal, the first and most obvious requirement was to identify a publishing partner with a strong reputation for quality. There were several opportunities for doing this in both the commercial and university press scholarly publishing sectors. Equally important, we wanted a new publication to have both print and electronic presence. Because we also were committed to the central idea of creating a price competitive journal, our discussions with publishers always emphasized current price and control of inflation. Finally, we wanted a publisher who had a history of commitment to the principles of educational and library fair use. The Johns Hopkins University Press met all of these criteria.

In any negotiation, confidence in the other side is vital. We quickly established that confidence and a good rapport with Marie Hansen, who represented JHU Press. The press already had a strong presence in electronic publishing, with *Project MUSE*. Several other high-quality university presses had agreements with the JHU Press to support it technically in offering titles through *MUSE*. The press has steadfastly adhered to fair use, and together we crafted a statement published in the journal to support these principles. Among the Press's near-term goals was to expand its journal list to include a greater number of social science and professional

About the editors

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journals—and so the marriage was arranged. We easily achieved agreement on all of our requirements. In particular, the potential board for the new journal played a major role in pricing discussions, a factor of primary concern and a practice conspicuously absent from commercial journal publishing. We explored a range of prices that would accomplish two things. First, it would remain competitive in pricing for libraries. This, after all, was our principle reason for creating a new journal. Second, we wanted to stimulate individual subscriptions as part of our plan to build community around the new title. The Press has shown real imagination and flexibility in response. Recently, for example, we agreed that Beta Phi Mu inductees would receive a year's subscription at no cost.

The editorial leadership of the journal was a key issue. Our group had individuals with strong credentials, and JHU Press readily agreed to an unusual arrangement that we thought was vital to the success of our start-up. *portal* has two executive editors—Charles Lowry and Sue Martin—whose roles include the managerial and public aspects of starting the new title, as well as soliciting and managing the work of feature editors. Managing editor Gloriana St. Clair is responsible for the refereeing and editing process and for the mentoring program. All three had served on the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* board. Lowry was the founding associate editor and then editor of *Library Administration and Management*, and Martin served as editor of *Journal of Library Automation*. St. Clair has been editor of *College and Research Libraries* and *Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

Dreams for the future

The title *portal: Libraries and the Academy* is intended to be evocative, reflecting the idea that libraries are the central mechanism through which knowledge and learning created in the academy is expressed, and through which students and faculty gain access to it. Above all, the board and the press want to use the journal as the platform for a dialogue about the academic library as a central and indispensable institution within higher education. Ultimately, we believe this will mean that *portal* will become more than a journal. Through it, we want to create a community that provides a platform for the ongoing dia-

logue about libraries at a pivotal time in their history.

To observe that there is a sea of change around libraries is prosaic by now. As part of that change, scholarly information essential to the research and teaching enterprise is proceeding through a dramatic transformation, driven by the use of networked information technology. How well libraries choose their path will define whether we take on a full (and appropriate) role in the campus scholarly information exchange or are marginalized. The *portal* board believes that the academy needs and expects us to do the former.

The dialogue about this change is rich, varied, and full of divergent opinion. At the same time, academic libraries are experimenting boldly with organization, technology, and partnerships in a way they have not since they took their modern form in the early twentieth century. The press and the board have undertaken a study of next steps—how can we expand the discussion beyond the pages of the journal? We certainly do not want for models, and some come readily to mind:

- MIT CogNet™ (http://cognet.mit.edu/Cover/tour_library.html) “provides a unique electronic community for researchers in cognitive and brain sciences, with in-depth current and classic text resources, and a dynamic interactive forum for today’s scholars, students, and professionals.” This dynamic site includes a searchable full-text collection of books, journals, and reference works; editorials by scientists on leading-edge or controversial topics; job listings; personalized work space; seminar and conference information and calls for papers; discussion groups; and institutional and member profiles.

- Romantic Circles at the University of Maryland (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>) shows similar diversity. It includes a searchable archive of electronic editions on the Romantic period; conference and seminar information; a database of publications in the field; Romantic Circles High School K–12 partnership; online reviews; collections of critical essays; online tools for the study of the period; and a “multi-user virtual space dedicated to real-time meeting and discussions.” Romantic Circles is also experimenting with Cambridge University Press

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for the K–12 students and their teachers. Also, it is important to note that this is frequently the first college campus that the K–12 students have visited, and their enthusiasm for “going to college” is a visible result of this experience.

Although student teachers from Carthage are not required to arrange field trips to the Saemann Center for their classes, we are finding that more and more of them do so. Remarkably, we have found that even graduates of our teacher preparation program are reserving the lab facilities and bringing in their students.

Professional development for teachers

A third element of our collaboration has been to provide professional development to teachers in the local schools. We have held numerous workshops and institutes for teachers in our Saemann Center. Even more important, the Carthage education students have been major participants in these workshops by sharing sample products they have

created with a variety of software applications, by sharing the instructional Web sites they have created, and by providing one-on-one support to the teachers participating in the workshops. In fact, the workshops have been so successful that we plan to integrate them regularly into our methods courses. It is just one more extension of the idea of providing the cooperating teachers with visions of different uses of technology to create powerful, motivating instructional experiences.

We have been pleased with our progress toward developing community partnerships and promoting technology-enriched instruction in the local schools where Carthage students conduct their field experiences. There can be little doubt that a program as ambitious as this one could not have been implemented and maintained without collaborative partnerships among a number of groups and individuals. The success of these programs illustrates very clearly that collaborative partnerships truly are an essential means of achieving our goals. ■

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(<http://www.rc.umd.edu/pubinfo/prospectus.html>). The Publications section “houses Cambridge University Press @ Romantic Circles, a joint experimental site devoted to finding productive ways to fuse the worlds of hypertext and print publication. This site allows users to read the full text of select chapters from texts currently available from Cambridge University Press, as well as conduct keyword searching of the entire texts. It is our hope that these resources will serve as valuable tools for scholars who are already working with the featured texts and for those who are considering purchasing them.”

The *portal* editorial board and JHU Press intend to draw on these and other best practices to build a larger e-environment that will help us push the discussion about academic libraries more rapidly, to test ideas and prototypes even as we experiment. Information technology has great potential for improving discipline communications. Change pressures in libraries mandate that librarians optimize discipline communications. Librarians worldwide can participate in this change by submitting to *portal*, subscribing to *portal*, read-

ing *portal*, and going through this *portal* into the future.

Notes

1. Denise K. Magner, “Seeking a Radical Change in the Role of Publishing,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 16, 2000). Available online at <http://chronicle.com/free/v46/i41/41a01601.htm>. Ray English and Larry Hardesty, “Create Change: Shaping the Future of Scholarly Journal Publishing,” *C&RL News* 61 (June 2000): 515–18. Available online at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/scholarlycomm.html>.

2. English and Hardesty, “Create Change,” 517. Acta Metallurgica Governor’s meeting. Kauai, Hawaii, June 2, 2000. ■

Correction

Tami Echavarria is coordinator of instructional services at Whitworth College. She was listed incorrectly on p. 316 of the March 2001 issue of *C&RL News*. The editors regret the error.