



## An Editor's Life

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Gloriana St. Clair

The rhythms of a scholarly journal—submission, review, revision, editing, and finally publication—have dominated my life since 1990 when I became the editor of *College & Research Libraries*. Next year, I will assume new, limited responsibilities as Editor Emeritus while Charles Lowry takes on the role of Managing Editor. Sue Martin will remain as the Executive Editor. The thirteen years I spent at *C&RL* (1990–1996), *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (1996–2000), and *portal: Libraries and the Academy* (2001–2003) have been years of change in librarianship.

For me, the editor's job was about encouraging librarians to share their research and vision on shaping a better future for the scholarly community, and about choosing. In my 1990 inaugural editorial, I encouraged librarians to do more research. The *portal* board's commitment to helping librarians do quality research by setting up a mentoring program made that desire a practical reality. In choosing, I encouraged change based on solid analysis, logical thinking, a vision of the future, and a concern for students. Directions included the ongoing transition from paper to digital, the impending move from inputs to outcomes, and the focus on students.

*Paper to digital:* The scholarly communication system, which academic libraries serve, is moving itself, at a varying pace, to a digital approach. Graduate students, the faculty of the future, expect the convenience and added functionality of 24/7 electronic journals. Undergraduates also prefer electronic resources and believe that they are more credible. In the last two years, survey after survey underlined the preference that students and faculty have for using electronic information. *portal* article download statistics suggest that articles published in *Muse* are read much more actively than those in the early issues of *C&RL*, and *BioMed Central* now boasts that every article in its database is accessed 2,500 times—an astonishing number.<sup>1</sup> An intriguing recent study by Cornell librarians also indicates that computer reference, while still abysmal, is getting much better.<sup>2</sup> Many librarians are actively engaged in realizing the digital future, but more are critical, suspicious, reluctant, and hostile. My energies are focused on a digital future for scholarly communications and its academic libraries.

*Inputs to outcomes:* Many libraries continue to judge themselves and their peers by measuring the critical inputs—number of volumes added, number of serials, number



of staff, budget, etc. The focus of the larger academic community is shifting towards outcomes. At a recent training for Middle States Commission on Higher Education team chairs and evaluators, speakers focused on the need to be worthy of public confidence and to be able to continue a peer evaluation system, rather than having a government evaluation system imposed on higher education. Middle States' new "Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation" focuses on a library that is adequately supported and staffed to support student learning. Libraries will be judged by what information seeking skills students attain. The transition from the older way of thinking to the newer will be fascinating, and Middle States evaluation teams will expect to see this new thinking in self studies being reviewed this year. I think this new expectation will strengthen relationships on campus.

*Faculty to students:* Dennis Dillon's amusing recent "Observer" column, "The Librarian's World and Welcome to It," in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, provides an incisive critique on the politics of journal acquisition on university campuses.<sup>3</sup> Faculty continue to want the library to subscribe to specialized and expensive journals in their narrow research fields. The late Anne Buck at CalTech was one of the most successful of my friends in employing analysis of journal use to convince her faculty to drop little used subscriptions. Most libraries cannot afford the journal acquisition game Dillon satirizes. When I became an editor, changing the library paradigm from acquisition to access was a trend. Some libraries still haven't accepted that shift, much less moved on to consider how their local collection relates not just to other library collections but also to the web information network. More and more, libraries should be focusing on the student learning needs that will be required for accreditation. In the complex campus political scheme, students are often ignored, but, for me, they remain not only the university's prime *raison d'être*, but also the library's first responsibility.

Articles on information explosion, the web, scholarly communications dysfunction, diversity, information literacy, archiving, and access have filled the editor's inbox, made journeys to a dedicated set of referees, and been rewritten to improve quality before publication. My editorial board members, fellow editors, authors, and publishers have made for an illustrious, dynamic, and intellectually challenging group of fellows. The ideas of such scholars have been a constant source of knowledge for improving my participation in the business of supporting scholarly communications and, through my editorial work, have been shared as broadly as possible. I have chosen the best articles possible over the last dozen years, and I have chosen with a commitment to change and to making the academic library an active partner in communications among scholars.

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## Notes

1. Peter Suber post (September 5, 2003), available on <[http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fof/2003\\_08\\_31\\_fosblogarchive.html](http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fof/2003_08_31_fosblogarchive.html)> [September 26, 2003]: "Elsevier has put some PowerPoint slides on the web summarizing its interim results for 2003. Slide #16 shows

that there were 4.5 million full-text articles in ScienceDirect on June 30, 2003, and slide #15 shows that there were 124 million article downloads in the 12 months preceding that date. This means that its articles were downloaded an average of 28 times each during the past year. <<http://www.investis.com/reedelsevierplc/data/interims2003b.ppt>> [September 26, 2003]. For comparison I asked Jan Velterop of BioMed Central what the download figure was for BMC articles during the same time period. He reports that the average is about 2500 per year, which doesn't count downloads of the same articles from PubMed Central. This is 89 times the Elsevier number."

2. Anne R. Kenney, Nancy Y. McGovern, Ida T. Martinez, and Lance J. Heidig, "Google Meets eBay: What Academic Librarians Can Learn From Alternative Information Providers," *D-Lib Magazine* 9, 6 (June 2003). Available: <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/june03/kenney/06kenney.html>> [September 26, 2003].
3. Dennis Dillon, "The Librarian's World and Welcome to It," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 19, 2003): B5.