

Enhancing access to high quality information resources

The scholars' portal project

In November 2002, Mary E Jackson from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) gave a public presentation on the Scholars Portal project at the National Library of Australia. The Scholars Portal had its genesis in the ARL-OCLC Strategic Issues Forum in late 1999. At that Forum it was noted that there was a need for a stronger library presence on the web if libraries wanted to avoid losing users to commercial services.

Jerry Campbell of the University of Southern California subsequently wrote a white paper (<http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/pla/1.1campbell.html>) on the issue, arguing for a scholars' portal that:

- included high quality content, including licensed content;
- was standards-based;
- offered searching across resources such as catalogues and other resources;
- offered a variety of supporting tools;
- offered links to enhanced services such as digital reference and document delivery; and
- integrated electronic thesauri to facilitate targeted searching.

She argued that a collaborative approach was necessary, and advocated that ARL undertake a leadership role in the design and development of such a portal.

The concept was extended in a paper by Sarah Thomas (<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/212/portal.html>) which emphasises the importance of identification of many new resources, including unpublished resources, rather than the cataloguing approach which traditionally identifies relatively few items.

A Scholars Portal Working Group was established in 2000,

chaired by Jerry Campbell. The initial focus was to develop specifications for a 'super discovery tool'. An environmental scan examined the various portal products already on the market, looking in particular at the features of such products and the readiness of the vendor to engage in a pilot project. It became clear that many vendors did not understand the complexity of library requirements, and were unable to support Z39.50 catalogue searching.

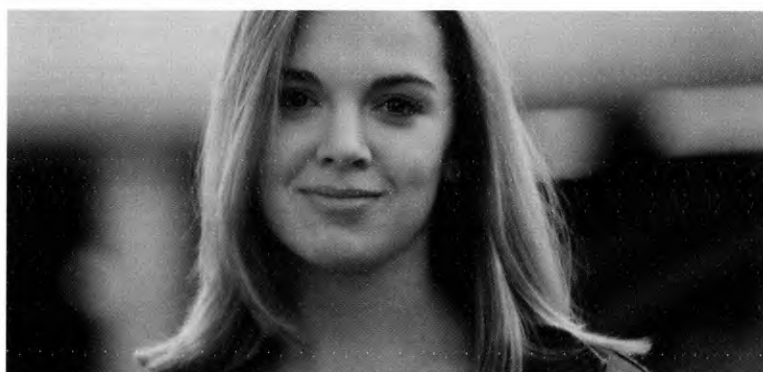
In May 2002, ARL announced the commencement of a three-year collaborative project between seven institutions and Fretwell-Downing. The academic participants are the University of Southern California, the University of California at San Diego, Dartmouth College, the University of Arizona, Arizona State University, Iowa State University and the University of Utah. Fretwell-Downing's ZPORTAL and related products will be used to deliver integrated search results from cross-domain searching of licensed and freely available content. Later stages of the project will incorporate links to local course environments and digital reference services.

ARL's role is to manage the project, monitor available portal tools (not just those being used in the project) and provide feedback to the library community. The Scholars Portal working group was disbanded, and a Scholars Portal Project Directors Group set up.

ARL has surveyed member universities on the extent of portal development. The results (<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/222/portalsurvey.html>) indicate some confusion over the definition of a portal, and relatively few organisations which have a portal offering integrated searching and some supporting services.

For more information about the project see: <http://www.arl.org/access/scholarsportal/>.

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