

Scherlen, Allan (Column editor and author) "The Balance Point: Celebrating Twenty Years of a Serials Column," *Serials Review*. 33:4 (Dec. 2007) 244-252. Copy of record is available from Elsevier ScienceDirect: doi:10.1016/j.serrev.2007.08.011

The Balance Point Celebrating Twenty Years of a Serials Column

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Abstract

A co-editor of "The Balance Point" column looks back at its twenty-year history, its current function and its future in serving the serials professional and scholarly community. The author examines how the column emerged as an idea by then Serials Review editor Cindy Hepfer in 1988 to be a forum on important serials issues for practitioners who might not otherwise write formally on these topics. The column has continued through the 1990s and 2000s to provide that function, as well as serve as an important place where authors are invited to explore serial issues much in need of a balanced approach. The author shares comments from past "Balance Point" column editors, John Riddick, Mary Beth Clack, Ellen Finnie Duranceau, Karen Cargille, Markel Tumlin, and Kay Johnson on how they regarded the column, the rewards and challenges they faced, and how they see the future of this format in an evolving electronic communication milieu.

Introduction

I was handed the baton of co-editing "The Balance Point" column in 2003 from Markel Tumlin, who needed time to immerse himself in a major writing project. Upon accepting the job, I read many of the past columns and soon became interested in the column's history and place in our professional literature. Later, Kay Johnson, my co-editor, wrote a column article entitled, "The Balance Point: Where is the Column? In Search of the "Balance Point."¹ Her article inspired me to think about eventually doing an issue dedicated to "The Balance Point's" history, themes, and purpose as a kind of follow up to her article.

Soon after finishing my last issue in December, 2006, I noticed that the publication date for this issue of the column was scheduled for the end of 2007, roughly twenty years since the debut of the first "The Balance Point" column in 1988. This seemed an appropriate time to step back and reflect upon the column's origins, its purpose and if it will remain a viable medium in the future. This was also a good time to talk with past editors of the column to discover how they regarded the column and dealt with its challenges. It was also a fitting time to finally recognize the dedicated editors of "The Balance Point" who spent untold hours and energy assuring that the column served the interests of serials professionals and was finished on deadline.

The column editors' creativity and hard work may pass unrecognized by many readers who are unaware of the full extent of work involved in bringing a column article from concept to print. Editing a column such as this requires a number of steps, analogous to producing a mini journal within the journal. The editor must first determine an appropriate topic that will hopefully be of interest to the serials profession; find, contact, and persuade people to participate; edit their manuscripts (this can sometimes border on essentially co-writing); and write author introductions and sometimes write sections or the entire piece (as I have done for this issue). This must all be accomplished on a quarterly or, in the case of co-editors, semiannual schedule. The past and present editors of "The Balance Point" who managed these feats (not including guest or one-time editors) include Mary Beth Clack, John Riddick, Ellen Finnie Duranceau, Christa Easton, Karen Cargille, Markel Tumlin, Kay Johnson, and Allan Scherlen.

An examination of the past issues of "The Balance Point" column since its inception in 1988 reveals an interesting historical panorama of serials issues. Many of those issues are still of interest today, such as the future of serials librarianship, serials pricing, international serials, outsourcing, e-journal issues, the role of vendors, redefining serials, digital archiving, and open access, to name a few. In terms of the column's format, most of them over the years have followed the original formula introduced in 1988—that of inviting a number of people in the serials trade to each write a short section of the column, with the ensemble of short pieces juxtaposed together in hopes of rendering a multifaceted picture of the topic. But in later years, the column has assumed other formats. The purpose of "The Balance Point" column and its direction has evolved with subsequent generations of editors; for example, many issues appeared as single or co-authored pieces. The title of the column, "The Balance Point," certainly lent itself well to interpretation in terms of what approach and direction an editor might choose to take with it. The editors of this enduring column have shown that this medium continues to be an interesting and engaging channel for "balancing" the many sides of serial issues.

The Beginnings—The Mary Beth Clack and John Riddick Years (1988–1994)

"The Balance Point" originated with Cindy Hepfer, then the co-editor of *Serials Review*. Early in her tenure as editor, she conceived of the idea of a column that would present "different viewpoints about hot issues and controversial topics."² She pitched the idea to Ed Wall, the owner of Pierian Press, then the publisher of *Serials Review*. Ed was intrigued by the proposal and encouraged Cindy to pursue it. Looking back, Cindy recalls that "it may have been Ed Wall who suggested calling the column 'The Balance Point.'"

Cindy immediately set out to find an editor for the column. She wanted the column to be edited by outstanding serialists who knew the issues, had plenty of contacts in the serials community, and could handle the quarterly demands of editing a column. She chose John Riddick and Mary Beth Clack to share those duties (Fig. 1). John Riddick was a co-founder and the first president of the North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG) and Mary Beth Clack was an early NASIG president and editor of early NASIG proceedings.³

Volume, issue, year	Title	Editor(s)	Contributors
14:3 (1988)	<i>The Balance Point: Focus on Serials Issues.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick,	John Tagler, Rebecca T. Lenzini, Sally F. Williams, Robert L. Houbeck, Jr.
14:4 (1988)	<i>The Balance Point: Focus on Serials Issues.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Herbert S. White and J. Kendrick Noble, Jr.
15:1 (1989)	<i>The Balance Point, Death in the Afternoon.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Elaine K. Rast, Sharon K. Scott, Sylvia Martin
15:2 (1989)	<i>Counterpoint: Academe and Serials Publishing.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John F. Riddick
15:3 (1989)	<i>The Balance Point: Focus on Serials Issues.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Richard M. Dougherty, Robert T. Dillon, Jr., Chris J. Rawlins, David Cohen
15:4 (1989)	<i>The Balance Point: Focus on Women in Serials.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Minna Saxe, George Lupone, Marcella Nelson, Richard Rowe
16:1 (1990)	<i>The Balance Point: Focus on Serials Issues.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Barbara Meyers, John Tagler, Deborah Leggett, Robin B. Devin
16:2 (1990)	<i>The Future of Serials Librarianship.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	F. Dixon Brooke, Jr., Czeslaw Jan Grycz, Karen Hunter, Herbert White
16:3 (1990)	<i>The Future of Serials Librarianship: Part 2.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	Richard R. Rowe, Duane Arenales, Sheila S. Intner
16:4 (1990)	<i>Focus on Serials Issues.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John Riddick	John Ben DeVette, Hazel Woodward, Zhou
17:1 (1991)	<i>When the Boss is Away.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack and John F. Riddick	Gary L. Sibley, Pat Barbour, Kit Kennedy
17:2 (1991)	<i>CONSER: Cons ... and Pros, or, What's In It for Me?</i>	Rosanna M. O'Neil (Guest Editor), Mary Elizabeth Clack	Ron Watson, Melissa Beck, Frieda Rosenberg, Carol C. Davis, Marjorie E. Bloss
17:3 (1991)	<i>The National Shared Pattern Database.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack	Barry Baker, Bonnie Postlethwaite, Greg Anderson, Mary Beth Vanderpoorten, Mary Ann Van Cura
17:4 (1991)	<i>Electronic Journals: Considerations for the Present and the Future.</i>	Gail McMillan (Guest Editor), Mary Elizabeth Clack	Laura M. Craighead, William C. Dougherty, Bill Kownacki, Paul Metz, Charles Litchfield
18:1 (1992)			
18:2 (1992)			
18:3 (1992)	<i>Balance Point: Indexing Policies.</i>	Mary Elizabeth Clack	Melissa Kummerer, Bonnie James, Rebecca T. Lenzini, Delores Meglio, George Lewicky
18:4 (1992)	<i>Serials Acquisitions and the Third World: The Latin American Perspective: Part 1.</i>	Dan C. Hazen (Guest Editor), Mary Elizabeth Clack	Mark L. Grover, Laurence Hallowell, Fred G. Morgner, Scott Van Jacob
19:1 (1993)	<i>Serials Acquisitions and the Third World: The Latin American Perspective: Part 2.</i>	Dan C. Hazen (Guest Editor), Mary Elizabeth Clack	Peter T. Johnson, Terry C. Peet, Deborah Jakubs
19:2 (1993)			
19:3 (1993)	<i>Perspectives on the Future of Union Listing.</i>	Ann C. Schaffner (Guest Editor), Mary Elizabeth Clack	Betty Landesman, Noelene P. Martin, Jay Schafer, Patricia Erwin, Bessie K. Hahn
19:4 (1993)	<i>Perspectives on Firm Serials Prices.</i>	Janet H. Fisher and John Tagler (Editors), Mary Elizabeth Clack	Beth J. Shapiro, Mary Beth Vanderpoorten, Janet H. Fisher, John Tagler
20:1 (1994)	<i>Chaos By Subscription: Serials in Eastern Europe.</i>	Allan Urbanic (Guest Editor), Mary Elizabeth Clack	June Pachuta Farris, Eric A. Johnson, Gordon Anderson, Michael Biggins, Murlin Croucher, Allan Urbanic
20:2 (1994)			

Figure 1. The Mary Beth Clack and John Riddick Years (1988–1994).

Looking back on the formative years of the column, John Riddick remembered the concern among members both within the United Kingdom Serials Group (UKSG) and NASIG about growing divisions within the serials information chain. In a recent e-mail to this author, he noted the need at the time for a column that brought together disparate voices to a discussion on serials. “We held that greater dialogue between serials librarians, journal publishers, automation specialists, serials binders, and library educators might bring greater understanding to our mutual problems. As a consequence, we sought reasoned viewpoints addressing library budgets, publisher profits, automation applications, and where the future of journals was progressing. In essence these goals paralleled what we were trying to do in NASIG, but in *Serials Review* we hoped to reach a larger audience.”⁴ His co-editor, Mary Beth Clack, was also interested in “keeping the conversations of NASIG among librarians, vendors, and publishers alive in a new forum.”⁵

John Riddick and Mary Beth Clack encouraged first-time authors and busy professionals in the industry, those who might not feel inclined to write a formal peer-reviewed article but who would be willing to write a shorter piece, to contribute to the column. They sought contributors who were willing to speak candidly about issues and to “talk turkey” about what really was of concern to serialists. A high point of fun for John during his co-editorship with Mary Beth was his last column, “When the Boss is Away” (17:1)⁶ where one of his library staff wrote a humorous but respectful lampoon of him for the column.

These first co-editors of “The Balance Point” were confronted by challenges expressed by subsequent editors: life's impediments to the impending quarterly deadlines. As John Riddick remembered, deadlines had to be met even when “aunts died, grandfathers became terribly ill, and felines were misplaced.” But Mary Beth Clack remembers the process of editing the column as being relatively easy for two reasons: “we planned ahead enough so that deadlines were usually met and we had enough connections in the community to keep a steady stream of topics and contributors. It certainly helped to be actively networking and to be able to draw upon like-minded folks who were interested in the current state of affairs ... and good-hearted enough to be excellent collaborators. I recall now how truly fortunate I was to be the editor at that time.” Mary Beth continued to edit “The Balance Point” column after John Riddick moved on in 1991. Working with various guest editors, she continued to serve the column until 1994.

During John and Mary Beth's tenure as editors, “The Balance Point” covered numerous topics including: the effect of the 1987 stock market crash on serials (14:1/2), the publish or perish academic reward system (15:2), women in serials (15:4), the future of serials (16:2/3), serials in the Pacific rim (16:4), pros and cons of CONSER (17:2), and indexing policies of an I and A company (18:3), to name a few of the twenty columns written during their years of service.

The Ellen Finnie Duranceau Years (1994–1997)

Ellen Finnie Duranceau was associate head of serials and acquisitions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Libraries in 1994 and had worked with Serials Review editor Cindy Hepfer editing the NASIG Newsletter.⁷ When Cindy asked her to take over editorship of “The Balance Point” in 1994 she welcomed the challenge and opportunity (Fig. 2). Ellen had great respect for Cindy's management of Serials Review and felt Cindy brought stamina, intellect, and compassion to the journal and knew Cindy provided excellent guidance to authors and editors. Ellen brought incredible energy and dedication to the journal as well. Without a co-editor, she edited every quarterly issue, with only one guest editor, Julie Herrada, who produced an issue entitled “Zines in Libraries: A Culture Preserved” (21:2).⁸

Vol., issue, year	Title	Editor(s)	Contributors
20:3 (1994)	<i>Vendors and Librarians Speak on Outsourcing, Cataloging, and Acquisitions.</i>	Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Karen Wilhoit, Rick J. Block, Cynthia M. Whitacre, John Baker, Nancy Gershenfeld
20:4 (1994)	<i>Naming and Describing Networked Electronic Resources: The Role of Uniform Resource Identifiers.</i>	Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Alan Emtage, Karen Sollins, Rebecca Lasher, Clifford A. Lynch
21:1 (1995)	<i>The Economics of Electronic Publishing.</i>	Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Stevan Harnad, Frank Quinn, Gail McMillan, Fytton Rowland, Robert H. Marks, Janet H. Fisher
21:2 (1995)	<i>Zines in Libraries: A Culture Preserved.</i>	Julie Herrada (Guest Editor), Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Billie Aul, Andy “Sunfrog” Smith, Michael Basinski, Tom Trusky
21:3 (1995)	<i>Exchange Rates and the Serials Marketplace.</i>	Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Knut Dorn, John Cox, Allen Powell, Harry Hoffer, James Mouw
21:4 (1995)	<i>Cataloging Remote-Access Electronic Serials: Rethinking the Role of the OPAC.</i>	Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Martha Hruska, Wayne Jones, Eric Lease Morgan, Regina Reynolds, Allison Mook Sleeman
22:1 (1996)	<i>Old Wine in New Bottles?: Defining Electronic Serials.</i>	Ellen Finnie Duranceau	Marilyn Geller, Crystal Graham, Ed Jones, Erik Jul, and Rebecca Ringler,
22:2 (1996)	<i>Selecting the Serials Module of an Integrated System.</i>	Carol MacAdam	Sylvia Martin, James R. Mouw, Linda Richter, Sandra Hurd
22:3 (1996)			
22:4 (1996)			
23:1 (1997)	<i>Trading Places: Back Issues Find a Home on the Net.</i>	Marilyn Geller (Guest Editor)	Robert Cleary, Don Jaeger, Simone Jerome, John Lucas, Paul Thirion, John T. Zubal

Figure 2. The Ellen Finnie Duranceau Years (1994–1997).

Ellen Duranceau found the experience of editing “The Balance Point” an educationally rich process. “I could delve into a topic I might not otherwise explore and I was able to

meet some interesting people in the field.” The primary challenge for Ellen, common among all the column editors interviewed for this issue, was staying ahead of quarterly deadlines. She also noted another challenge which every “The Balance Point” column editor must face: continuing to find new topics that, as Ellen put it in our interview, “range farther and farther beyond one's comfort zone, beyond one's expertise.”

During her three years as editor of “The Balance Point” (1994–1997), the column explored topics ranging from outsourcing (20:3), Uniform Resource Identifiers (20:4), economics of journal publishing (21:1), exchange rates and serials (21:3), and selecting serials modules for an integrated system (22:2). Reflecting on those issues, Ellen noted how folks in the serials profession were already grappling with many topics that are still discussed today. A good example was the column entitled “The Economics of Electronic Publishing” (21:1). “It is interesting to see a snapshot in the evolution of Stevan Harnad's thinking about electronic journals in that article,” Ellen noted.

Ellen considered “The Balance Point” a vital part of Serials Review and an important service to the serials profession. As other editors also noted, Ellen saw the format of the column as allowing her to invite voices that might not utilize a listserv discussion (or, in current context, a blog), people who might not otherwise share their valuable insights in a public forum.

The Christa Easton and Karen Cargille Years (1997–2002)

Like “The Balance Point” editors before her, Karen Cargille was approached by Serials Review editor, Cindy Hepfer to take over editing the column.⁹ Karen asked Cindy if she could invite a co-editor, Christa Easton, with whom to alternate issues as was done in the days of Clack and Riddick. Dividing the job between two editors made the job much easier. Instead of having a couple of months to prepare one's column, alternating editors were only responsible for an issue every six months—some very welcomed breathing room. Cindy agreed, and thus the Christa Easton and Karen Cargille team was born in 1997 (Fig. 3). Their editorship would last until 2002.

Vol., issue, year	Title	Editor(s)	Contributors
23:2 (1997)	<i>New Column Editors Seek Input.</i>	Christa Easton and Karen Cargille	Christa Easton and Karen Cargille
23:3 (1997)	<i>Too Many Journals, In Too Many Forms?</i>	Christa Easton	Christa Easton
23:4 (1997)	<i>Where Have All the Serials Librarians Gone?</i>	Karen Cargille	Robert Alan, Eleanor Cook, Anne McKee
24:1 (1998)	<i>E-Journals and the Middleperson.</i>	Christa Easton	Christa Easton
24:2 (1998)	<i>Lost in Cyberspace? Issues in Subject Access to Electronic Journals.</i>	Karen Cargille	Ann Schaffner, Steve Shadle, Carroll Davis
24:3/4 (1998)	<i>The Ongoing" Umbrella: Rethinking the Definition of "Serial."</i>	Jean Hiron (Guest Editor), Christa Easton	Robert Bremer, Julia A. Gammon, Charlene Lehman, Kevin M. Randall, Ann Sitkin, Robin Wendler
25:1 (1999)	<i>Ongoing Entities: The Impact of Modified Model C on Cataloging Description.</i>	Kristin Lindlan (Guest Editor), Karen Cargille	Carroll N. Davis, Judy Kuhagen, John M. Sluk, Charles A. Litchfield
25:2 (1999)	<i>The Sure Burgs in Life: Serials Crisis and Cancellation Information on the World Wide Web.</i>	Daniel Burgard (Guest Editor), Christa Easton	Daniel Burgard
25:3 (1999)	<i>Electronic Journals and Users: Three Perspectives.</i>	Karen Cargille	Christie Degener, Joseph W. Barker, Tammy Huang
25:4 (1999)	<i>Looking Forward, Looking Back: Views of Serials Librarianship in the New Millennium.</i>	Karen Cargille	Regina Romano Reynolds, Trisha Davis, Ann Okerson, Laura Gasaway, Ed Jones, October Ivins
26:1 (2000)			
26:2 (2000)	<i>The California State University Journal Access Core Collection.</i>	Christa Easton	Interviews with Evan Reader, Leigh Watson Healy, David Kerin
26:3 (2000)	<i>Digital Archiving: Whose Responsibility Is It?</i>	Karen Cargille	Rick Anderson, Peter B. Boyce, Kimberly Douglas, Rebecca A. Graham, Karen Hunter, Sally Morris
26:4 (2000)	<i>Staff Performance Goals for Serials Functions.</i>	Christa Easton	Glenda Smith, Debbie Harrell
27:1 (2001)			
27:2 (2001)			
27:3/4 (2001)	<i>Doubly Bold – Replacing Print Journals with Electronic Versions.</i>	Christa Easton	Christa Easton
28:1 (2002)			
28:2 (2002)	<i>Distributing Journals to the World.</i>	Christa Easton	Emily Gillingham, Bonnie Zavon

Figure 3. The Christa Easton and Karen Cargille Years (1997–2002).

In an interview with this author, Karen Cargille remembered how she felt that “The Balance Point” was an important part of *Serials Review*. Like other column editors before and after, she appreciated the opportunity the journal afforded to people in the serials profession to share their insights and state their opinions without having to write a full-length research paper. “Seldom was it difficult to find people who were willing to write,” she said. “The challenge for the editors was in settling upon an interesting topic and then finding the right people to round out the pros and cons or the different points of view.”

Karen found the Serials Review board meetings at American Library Association midwinter meetings very helpful as a forum for seeking writers and content. “The board was a source for discovering writers outside one’s sphere of professional life. They could also suggest topics as well,” Karen remembered.

During the editorship of Christa Easton and Karen Cargille, the column covered fifteen issues with topics that included journals emerging from the Internet (23:2), the importance of the serials specialist (23:4), the evolving role of vendors in the acquisition process (24:1), subject access to e-journals (24:2), redefining serials as “ongoing” (24:3/4), the effect of e-journals on research behavior (25:3), and digital archiving responsibility (26:3). The most memorable article in retrospect for Karen Cargille appeared in 1999 and was titled “Looking Forward, Looking Back: Views of Serials Librarianship in the New Millennium.” The column invited a number of serials librarians to ponder the future of serials librarianship especially in areas of licensing, copyright, and cataloging and included contributors Regina Romano Reynolds, Trisha Davis, Ann Okerson, Laura Gasaway, Ed Jones, and October Ivins (25:4).

The Markel Tumlin and Kay Johnson (Part 1) Years (2002–2003)

Markel Tumlin picked up a card from a table at the annual NASIG conference in San Diego in 2000. The card was recruiting book reviewers for Serials Review. Two years later, after reviewing a few books for the journal, he was asked by Beverley Geer, the associate editor of Serials Review, to take over as co-editor of “The Balance Point” column.¹⁰

Upon taking the editorial helm, Markel immediately wrote and edited a piece for his quickly approaching first issue entitled “Serials For Distance Education Research Projects: What Are We Missing?”(28:3) Then a few months later, before the next issue was due, he discovered his co-editor had resigned and an article submitted to Serials Review for the column was awaiting his editorial attention (28:4). Though he was not credited in the journal as editor of that column entitled “The Serials Chain Business: I Had NO Idea!” by Zuzana Helinsky, he devoted substantial editorial effort working with the article. A few months later, he was back into the full process of selecting another topic, finding writers and getting everything into perfection and on time for his next issue entitled “Everything I Need to Know About Serials I Didn’t Learn in Library School.”(29:1). Somewhere amidst all this work Markel realized the need for a co-editor to share the four-times-a-year schedule and suggested Kay Johnson, serials coordinator, University of Tennessee at Knoxville, for the job.

Kay Johnson remembered how there was an interest among the editors of Serials Review to bring different editorial voices to the column. Part of the interest in asking Markel to edit the column, she recalled, was because of his reference librarian background. “Markel called me up and asked if I’d be a co-editor. Since he’s a reference librarian, there was an interest in balancing the editorial team with a technical services librarian.”¹¹ Kay had some concerns about the column and the journal. “I was initially confused by the point of the column,” Kay confided. “The column title, ‘The Balance Point’ suggested soliciting different points of view, yet the topics and formats of many past column articles diverged

from this scheme and sometimes even the editors wrote the columns.” Though the charge of the column was unclear, Kay saw some advantages to that. “The column offered a lot of flexibility,” she said. So Kay agreed to co-edit the column in 2002 and the two editors alternated the four issues of 2003 (Fig. 4). The topics covered that year, included library school preparation for serialists (29:1), ongoing serials catalog training (29:2), the future of serials check-in (29:3), and electronic journal holdings data usage (29:4).

Vol., issue, year	Title	Editor(s)	Contributors
28:3 (2002)	<i>Serials For Distance Education Research Projects: What Are We Missing?</i>	Markel Tumlin	Markel Tumlin
28:4 (2002)	<i>The Serials Chain Business: I Had NO Idea!</i>	Markel Tumlin	Zuzana Helinsky
29:1 (2003)	<i>Everything I Need to Know About Serials I Didn't Learn in Library School.</i>	Markel Tumlin	Mary Bailey, Maria Collins, Tonia Graves, Mykie Howard, Pauline La Rooy, Konstantina Matsoukas, Sandhya Srivastava, Merle Steeves
29:2 (2003)	<i>Ongoing Serials Cataloging Training: Perspectives from the Trenches.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Faye R. Leibowitz, Cecilia Genereaux, Janice Torbet
29:3 (2003)	<i>Is Check-In Checking Out?</i>	Markel Tumlin	Evelyn P. Council, Kittie Henderson, Daviess Menefee, Mircea Stefancu
29:4 (2003)	<i>Electronic Journal Holdings Data Usage: Results of a Survey.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Yumin Jiang, Richard P. Hulser, Frieda Rosenberg

Figure 4. The Markel Tumlin and Kay Johnson Years (2002–2003).

Markel, reflecting back on the challenges of editing the column, mentioned some of the job's frustrations: “Writers often promised things that they did not or could not deliver and convincing people to meet deadlines was difficult,” he said. Like other past editors, Markel acknowledged the challenge of producing on a regular schedule topics of interest across the serials landscape. All this work, he noted, is done without monetary compensation or much recognition. Other column editors, in private, voiced similar concerns about doing intense volunteer work for a major commercial journal publisher. Though Markel only served “The Balance Point” for a couple of years (2002–2003), his choice of topics, attention to detail, and command of the language rendered his columns among the very best.

The Kay Johnson (Part 2) and Allan Scherlen Years (2004–2008?)

Markel Tumlin left “The Balance Point” in 2003 to concentrate his efforts on a research project that demanded his attention for the next year. Since Markel and I had presented a workshop together at the 2001 NASIG conference in San Antonio, he was familiar with my writing and interest in *Serials Review*. He suggested my name to the journal's editor Connie Foster and associate editor Beverley Geer. In the autumn of 2003 I joined Kay Johnson as her co-editor and began to think about my first column scheduled for submission the following January (Fig. 5). I decided to both tap resources close to home while trying something that had not been done before to my knowledge in the column: I selected librarians from my institution, Appalachian State University Library, who, because of their positions in the library, each had a different perspective on serials. One of the group suggested we write the article as a dialog in which the group would discuss serials-related issues confronting our library (30:2). My writers included the associate university librarian Larry Boyer, the collection development coordinator John Abbott, and the serials coordinator Eleanor Cook. The experiment in using dialog seemed simple in planning and may appear smooth in final print, but the process demanded a significant amount of editing on my part to give the illusion of a flowing conversation. The result, in retrospect, was true to the column's tradition of bringing in different voices while trying a new approach to the column.

Vol., issue, year	Title	Editor(s)	Contributors
30:1 (2004)	<i>University of Tennessee Libraries Career Employee Program: A Case Study from the Serials Perspective.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Jill Keally, Nancy Bright, Valeria Bond
30:2 (2004)	<i>Courage of Our Convictions: Making Difficult Decisions About Serial Collections.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Larry Boyer, Eleanor Cook, John P. Abbott
30:3 (2004)	<i>The Dog Ate My Issue and Other Reasons for Gaps in the Periodical Volume.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Kay G. Johnson
30:4 (2004)	<i>Keeping Serial Bibliographic Records Viable in a Digital Age.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Michael Norman
31:1 (2005)	<i>Jumping through the Hoops: Serials Librarians' Reflections on Tenure, Reappointment and Promotion Experiences in Academia.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Bridget H. Miller, Elizabeth McDonald, Jia Mi, Sandy Roe, Robert Alan, Philenese Slaughter, Gayle Baker, Frances C. Wilkinson, Linda K. Lewis
31:2 (2005)	<i>Finding the Delicate Balance: Serials Assessment at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Reeta Sinha, Cory Tucker
31:3 (2005)	<i>The Balance Point: Where is the Column? In Search of the "Balance Point."</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Kay G. Johnson
31:4 (2005)	<i>Looking at Journals from Both Sides.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Norman Clark
32:1 (2006)	<i>Serials – The Constant Mid-Life Crisis.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Kay G. Johnson
32:2 (2006)	<i>The Weight of E-Collections and Value-Added Services: Revisiting Assumptions and Practices to Meet the Challenge.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Albert Joy, Pongracz Sennyey
32:3 (2006)	<i>Experiencing the Electronic Resources and Libraries Conference.</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Shantel Agnew, LaVerne Gray, LouAnn Blocker, Christine E. Ryan, Kelly A. Smith
32:4 (2006)	<i>The One-Box Challenge: Providing a Federated Search That Benefits the Research Process.</i>	Allan Scherlen	John Boyd, Marian Hampton, Patricia Morrison, Penny Pugh, Frank Cervone
33:1 (2007)	<i>Collectivism vs. Individualism in a Wiki World: Librarians Respond to Jaron Lanier's Essay "Digital Maoism: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism."</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Markel Tumlin, Steven R. Harris, Heidi Buchanan, Krista Schmidt, Kay G. Johnson
33:2 (2007)	<i>Perceptions of Open Access Publishing among Academic Journal Editors in China.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Xiaorong Shao
33:3 (2007)	<i>What's the Ballyhoo About Blogs?</i>	Kay G. Johnson	Jennifer Arnold, Lloyd Chittenden, K.D. Ellis, Jacob Eubanks, Iris Godwin, Elizabeth McDonald, Sarah Morris, Steven Ovdia, Flora Shrode, Samantha Teplitzky
33:4 (2007)	<i>The Balance Point: Celebrating Twenty Years of a Serials Column.</i>	Allan Scherlen	Allan Scherlen

Figure 5. The Kay Johnson and Allan Scherlen Years (2004–2007).

My co-editor Kay Johnson was on her own parallel quest for topics, writers, and direction. “At some point, I relaxed and took ownership of the column,” Kay explained in an e-mail correspondence. She stopped being concerned about the format of the column and shifted to thinking about experimenting with different approaches. “For instance, my last column, ‘What's the Ballyhoo about Blogs’ was an opinion piece about blogs (33:3).

I asked the contributors to write in the style of a blog.” On a number of occasions Kay penned her own articles for the column or contributed one of the parts among several authors (30:3, 31:3, 32:1, 33:1). To date she has edited ten columns—the record thus far for the most issues of “The Balance Point” edited by a single person.¹²

In her search for new approaches to the column, Kay has not forgotten the tradition of “The Balance Point” and frequently returns to that format by selecting a serials topic that interests her and then asking various people in the field to write their opinions about the topic. Sometimes her topics have been suggested by the Serials Review editors or others. For these “I see the column as a way to get a snapshot of current opinion. I attempt to recruit a diverse group of contributors and include a few silent ‘voices,’ i.e., people new to the field, or who are not widely published, including paraprofessionals.”

One of the high points among Kay Johnson's columns was one she wrote herself entitled, “The Balance Point: Where is the Column? In Search of the Balance Point” (31:3). “I'm proud of the effort it took to produce this one,” she said. Kay went back and looked up every “The Balance Point” column ever written to see how they were indexed and digitized in ScienceDirect and how they were indexed in Library Literature. She compiled extensive statistics and compared results using bar graphs to illustrate differences. The column that was most fun for Kay was “The Dog Ate My Issue and Other Reasons for Gaps in the Periodical Volume” (30:3). She obtained numerous quotes from current and past check-in staff about why journal issues did not arrive (or where they ended up). The column she has received the most inquiries about (which also happens to be on a very timely subject) was “Collectivism vs. Individualism in a Wiki World: Librarians Respond to Jaron Lanier's Essay ‘Digital Maoism: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism’” (33:1).

Like Kay, I have seen a need for “The Balance Point” column to explore beyond its traditional format of juxtaposing multiple authors. Though only one of my columns has strictly followed the traditional formula, an issue on federated search engines and student research (32:4), several have incorporated multiple voices in one way or another. In the case of this issue, past and present “The Balance Point” editors contributed their voices behind the scenes via phone and e-mail. Other columns I edited, though, were written by single authors or co-authors who discussed topics such as the balance of keeping serials bibliographic records viable in a digital age (30:4), serial de-selection projects and faculty buy-in (31:2), managing an open access journal while serving on a committee looking into outsourcing an association journal (31:4), weighing the value of new products against value-added services (32:2), and varied perceptions about open access among journal editors in China (33:2). Part of the fun of doing this column is in not knowing where it will go next or what form it will take.

The Future of “The Balance Point” Column

From its beginnings in 1988 (14:3) to this current issue (33:4), “The Balance Point” has appeared in sixty-six issues of Serials Review. During those nineteen plus years, only ten issues of Serials Review have not contained a “The Balance Point” column (18:1, 18:2, 19:2, 20:2, 22:3, 22:4, 26:1, 27:1, 27:2, 28:1). That track record of consistence and

durability is worth celebrating but also worth looking at afresh and critically. Are “The Balance Point” and other column forums in traditional journals still a viable medium for effectively communicating about issues in our profession? Certainly, before the age of blogs and wikis, columns such as “The Balance Point” were arguably essential. But are they as vital today?

At the end of May, 2007, Bob Nardini and I gave a presentation at the North American Serials Interest Group annual conference, held in Louisville, Kentucky, which dealt with “the future of columns in a world of blogs.” During that session and in the subsequent papers we submitted to *Against the Grain*¹³ and the *NASIG Proceedings/Serials Librarian*,¹⁴ respectively, we grappled with issues surrounding columns and blogs, their interrelationship, and what will be the nature of professional discourse in the coming years. With those topics still in mind a month later, I asked past editors of “The Balance Point” how they saw the column's future. Would this medium – the column – continue to be important to the profession in the future as many librarians turn to blogs and other emerging Web forums for information? Looking over their responses, I felt it fitting to relate them as blogs do their entries, in reverse chronological order—in this case, from most recent editor to the first.

My co-editor, Kay Johnson replied to the question this way: “On thinking for a few seconds, I would say, ‘Yes,’ because of the instability of blogs and that none are currently comparable to the quality, reputation, impact factor, and longevity (i.e., archiving) of the major library journals. But a blog is a more timely form of publication and a good medium for the variety of styles and voices that typically make up one of my columns. Give it a few years, and ask me again.”

Markel Tumlin, my predecessor, responded “yes, because of the civility of journal writing and because it becomes part of the permanent record. Blogs seem a lot more transient, which is good for some things I suppose, but it's important to have a record of where we've been.”

Karen Cargille, from the previous generation of editors, said she sees a continuing future for columns such as “The Balance Point.” “It has always had a strong readership in *Serials Review* and been an integral part of the journal. This devoted readership speaks for itself.”

Ellen Finnie Duranceau, Cargille's predecessor, sees the publication process inviting voices that might not join a blog discussion. The staged forum of selected authors who must ponder their words well before publication brings quality to the writing. She sees the traditional “The Balance Point” array of authors as more akin to a conference panel than a blog, while blogs have the advantage of more voices and more immediate access to those voices. Ellen summarized her views succinctly: “The journal column and the blog are nice complements to one another, serving different functions.”

Mary Beth Clack, one of the first co-editors of “The Balance Point,” was open-minded to the whole question: “Maybe it's time to make the column a blog, as well as a print publication—with a way of archiving a digested version in print.”

There are many directions this column can go in the future and perhaps it or some aspect of it may evolve into directions some are already advocating, such as open access, and other directions no one has of yet dreamed. But the success and popularity of traditional academic publishing formats, such as our twenty-year-old “The Balance Point” column, seem a good sign they will continue to play a role in scholarly communication into the foreseeable future.

Now, on to the next issue...

References

1. Kay Johnson (editor), “The Balance Point: Where is the Column? In Search of the “Balance Point,” *Serials Review* 31, no. 3 (2005): 210–217.
2. Interview and e-mail correspondence by author with Cindy Hepfer, July 2, 2007. Cindy Hepfer, the longest serving editor of *Serials Review*, was co-editor of *Serials Review* with her husband, Will, from 1985 to 1989 and then as sole editor from 1989 to 2001. Cindy launched a number of columns during her years with *Serials Review* including: “Serials Spoken Here,” “Electronic Journal Forum,” “Serial Conversations,” “SR Visits,” “Standards Update,” “They Might Be Giants: Stories about Small Presses and Little Magazines,” and “The Case in Point” (a fairly short-lived serials cataloging advice column).
3. The co-edit model, introduced with the first editors of “The Balance Point,” continued to serve subsequent administrations well. Only during the Ellen Finnie Duranceau tenure (1994–1997), was one person charged with the responsibility of editing all issues for a given year.
4. E-mail correspondence by author with John F. Riddick, July 16, 2007.
5. E-mail correspondence by author with Mary Beth Clack, July 21, 2007.
6. For the convenience of readers, specific “Balance Point” columns are referenced with a shorthand of (volume number: issue number), i.e., (17:1) which can then be located on the accompanying charts.
7. For information of Ellen Finnie Duranceau's career at MIT and her views on various topics related to libraries, see the article “An Interview with Ellen Finnie Duranceau” in the *Serials Review* column “Serials Conversations,” 32, no. 4 (2006): 270–276.
8. Telephone interview by author with Ellen Finnie Duranceau, July 6, 2007.
9. Telephone interview by author with Karen Cargille, July 5, 2007.

10. E-mail correspondence by author with Markel Tumlin, July 12, 2007.
11. E-mail correspondence by author with Kay Johnson, July 16, 2007.
12. Though Kay Johnson holds the record for the most solo-edited issues to date, scoring the number of column articles completed by each editor is not a precise art. Some issues were completed with joint effort by both co-editors while some guest-edited columns required some effort by the official editor. For example, Mary Beth Clack and John Riddick are credited with co-editing eleven issues before Mary Beth continued on as solo editor of two issues and official editor behind several others that were guest edited.
13. Robert Nardini, "Issues in Vendor/Library Relations: Column People," *Against the Grain* 19 (3) (2007), p. 70.
14. Allan Scherlen, "Columns and Blogs: A Merging of Worlds," (working title) *Serials Librarian* 53, no. 4 (forthcoming 2008).