

Great American Public Libraries: HAPLR Ratings, Round Two

By Thomas J. Hennen Jr.

A TABULATION OF NEW FEDERAL DATA
SUPPLIES MORE EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE

Was the weather better before climatologists invented the wind-chill index or does it just seem that way? Does a library-rating index change the value or quality of the service provided, or, like the wind-chill index, does it just seem that way?

Librarianship has always lacked any commonly accepted indicators of what excellence is. Unlike a listing of top-500 corporations that reveal the success of public companies to all, the library and information services industry produces no intelligible reports that likewise inform stakeholders interested in libraries. Hennen's American Public Library Rating (HAPLR) seeks to help change that situation.

Comparisons to the first HAPLR Index

The first edition of the HAPLR Index (*AL*, Jan., 72-76) was based on data submitted by each state to the Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) for 1996. This second edition of the index is based on 1997 early-release data from FSCS as published on the World Wide Web in March. The data does not become final until publication by the U.S. Department of Education sometime later this year.

The HAPLR Index uses six input and nine output measures. The measures are calculated from the FSCS. Each factor was weighted and scored. The scores for each library, within a population category, were then added to develop a weighted score. The HAPLR Index is similar to an ACT or SAT score with a theoretical minimum of 1 and a maximum of 1,000. About 90% of libraries in each population group scored between 260 and 730.

Reaction to the First Edition

American Libraries published the first HAPLR Index (*AL*, Jan. 72-76). "Go Ahead Name Them: America's Best Public Libraries" was a first-ever attempt to rate all of America's

public libraries using an index similar to those used for rating cities, colleges, and hospitals. The article received so much publicity in newspapers across the country that *AL* posted the entire article on its Web site for download by journalists and individuals. The HAPLR Index site at www.haplr-index.com received more than 5,000 unique visitors that retrieved tens of thousands of pages in its first three months.

The article and the index engendered more publicity than most *American Libraries* articles. Why the interest? It is probably because newspapers and their readers love rankings and winning. It is also because an index number such as the HAPLR Index encapsulates a good deal of quantitative information in a single number that can be measured against all others.

The HAPLR Index received attention from newspapers, magazines, and TV stations throughout the country.

An Ohio wire service noted that "Ohio libraries sizzle!" In the *Akron Beacon Journal*, the director of the **Twinsburg Public Library** in Ohio, Karen Tschudy, noted: "You always believe your library is among the best. It's nice to see somebody prove it. We're very proud." Larry Black, director of **Columbus Metropolitan Library** was quoted in the *Columbus Dispatch* with:

"It's sort of nice to be at the top of one of those. We were very pleased, of course, to have an outside organization validate our efforts."

Bexley Public Library was rated number one in libraries serving between 10,000 and 99,999 people. "Primarily, I think we have some good management, and I'm proud of what we're doing," said Robert Stafford, Bexley's library director.

Stafford credited the General Assembly for providing revenue for public libraries. Ohio sets aside 5.7% of personal income tax receipts for public libraries. Generous state funding helped give Ohio 17 of the top 60 small libraries. Five of the top seven libraries serving populations between 10,000 and 99,999 are in Ohio.

In Virginia the **Loudoun County Library's** director was happy to be able to lead into a TV interview with their top ranking rather than yet another statement on its Internet filtering lawsuit (*AL*, Jan. p. 14).

Connecticut Lt. Gov. M. Jodi Rell personally presented a proclamation to the **Darien Library** congratulating the board and staff for its rating. She called the Darien

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THOMAS J. HENNING JR. is administrator of the Waukesha County Federated Library System in Wisconsin.

Library “a real gem,” and the many newspaper articles about the library’s rating echoed that theme. Library Director Louise Barry, called the rating, the publicity, and the lieutenant governor’s proclamation a real source of civic pride.

Don Napoli, director at **St. Joseph County Library** in South Bend, Indiana, said to his staff when he got the news, “This is a big deal! What makes it even more exciting is that the 15 factors which the study uses to make the comparison are the very things that we—you and I and the library board—have been working on very hard for the past 21 years.”

The December 28, 1998, *St. Louis Post Dispatch* quotes **St. Charles County Library** Director Carl Sandstedt as saying: “It’s not the bricks and mortar, it’s the staff and materials that matter.” He adds, “The underlying data have been there for years. It’s about time they rated libraries.”

A smiling Ida Nemeč of the **Plum Lake Library** in Sayner, Wisconsin, is featured on the front page of the *Lakeland Times*. The article notes that although a friendly smile is considered an important part of a quality library, it could not be measured in the HAPLR Index. The ranking also inspired extensive radio coverage for the library.

The *Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette* reports that **Urbana (Ill.) Free Library** officials were caught off guard by the article and the library’s ranking and, understandably, were giddy about it. “We’ve always known that the Urbana Free Library’s statistics were impressive,” library board President Michael Stevenson said. “But it’s great to have this confirmed by a national study.”

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* noted that the HAPLR Index ranked 17 Ohio libraries, including five in Northeast Ohio, in the top 20 of their respective population categories. Westlake’s **Porter Public Library** was third and Painesville’s **Morley Public Library** fifth in the 10,000–99,999 category. “This is a real coup for the whole state,” said Twinsburg Library Director Karen Tschudy. **Medina County Library** officials were happy not only to make the list, but also to have been named the 1998 Library of the Year by the *Library Journal*.

The *Cupertino Scene* notes a particularly good year for **Santa Clara County (Calif.) Public Library**. Susan Fuller was named Librarian of the Year by *Library Journal* and the library made the top 10 in the HAPLR Index.

Writing for *The State* in Columbia, South Carolina, Amanda Mays cites the **Richland County Public Library** for its 21st rank in the over-100,000 population category. Library Director David Warren compares their traffic count to being in the Atlanta airport on a Sunday afternoon. Since their new building opened in 1993, circulation and visitors have doubled.

The structure of the HAPLR Index

The previous index received many objections and criticisms. Some of the issues are addressed in this article. The new data from FSCS uses a process known as imputation to assign assumed numbers for many performance measures. It would therefore be possible to add more categories to the index. Program attendance, video circulation, and children’s circulation are just a few of the measures urged by readers. Measures of electronic use

Average HAPLR Index Ratings by States and District of Columbia

| State | HAPLR | Rank |
|----------------------|-------|------|
| Alabama | 386 | 46 |
| Alaska | 512 | 18 |
| Arizona | 501 | 22 |
| Arkansas | 392 | 45 |
| California | 491 | 24 |
| Colorado | 510 | 19 |
| Connecticut | 520 | 15 |
| Delaware | 475 | 27 |
| District of Columbia | 412 | 42 |
| Florida | 469 | 29 |
| Georgia | 344 | 49 |
| Hawaii | 402 | 43 |
| Idaho | 504 | 21 |
| Illinois | 537 | 14 |
| Indiana | 607 | 3 |
| Iowa | 548 | 11 |
| Kansas | 563 | 6 |
| Kentucky | 419 | 40 |
| Louisiana | 386 | 47 |
| Maine | 449 | 34 |
| Maryland | 549 | 10 |
| Massachusetts | 559 | 9 |
| Michigan | 463 | 30 |
| Minnesota | 622 | 2 |
| Mississippi | 292 | 51 |
| Missouri | 505 | 20 |
| Montana | 449 | 32 |
| Nebraska | 519 | 16 |
| Nevada | 477 | 26 |
| New Hampshire | 470 | 28 |
| New Jersey | 497 | 23 |
| New Mexico | 452 | 31 |
| New York | 562 | 7 |
| North Carolina | 446 | 36 |
| North Dakota | 436 | 38 |
| Ohio | 669 | 1 |
| Oklahoma | 449 | 33 |
| Oregon | 538 | 13 |
| Pennsylvania | 414 | 41 |
| Rhode Island | 448 | 35 |
| South Carolina | 351 | 48 |
| South Dakota | 516 | 17 |
| Tennessee | 328 | 50 |
| Texas | 393 | 44 |
| Utah | 562 | 8 |
| Vermont | 446 | 37 |
| Virginia | 482 | 25 |
| Washington | 579 | 5 |
| West Virginia | 421 | 39 |
| Wisconsin | 580 | 4 |
| Wyoming | 539 | 12 |

HENNEN'S AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY RATINGS INDEX II

| | Library Name | City | State/ZIP | Population | HAPLR |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| Over 500,000 | 1. Columbus Metropolitan Library | Columbus | OH 43213 | 758,012 | 834 |
| | 2. Hennepin County Library | Minnetonka | MN 55305 | 689,744 | 820 |
| | 3. Montgomery County Dept. of Public Libraries | Rockville | MD 20850 | 813,100 | 796 |
| | 4. Baltimore County Public Library | Towson | MD 21204 | 708,500 | 784 |
| | 5. Indianapolis–Marion County Public Library | Indianapolis | IN 46206 | 770,684 | 772 |
| | 6. Cuyahoga County Public Library | Parma | OH 44134 | 585,673 | 735 |
| | 7. Salt Lake County Library System | Salt Lake City | UT 84121 | 590,130 | 721 |
| | 8. Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library | Dayton | OH 45402 | 508,500 | 717 |
| | 9. St. Louis County Library | Ladue | MO 63131 | 886,684 | 692 |
| | 10. Fairfax County Public Library | Fairfax | VA 22033 | 906,300 | 687 |
| 250,000–499,999 | 1. Johnson County Library | Shawnee Mission | KS 66201 | 307,634 | 867 |
| | 2. Santa Clara County Free Library | San Jose | CA 95112 | 380,030 | 826 |
| | 3. Saint Charles City–County Library District | Saint Peters | MO 63376 | 255,066 | 809 |
| | 4. Dakota County Library | Eagan | MN 55123 | 287,321 | 795 |
| | 4. Prince William Public Library System | Prince William | VA 22192 | 276,900 | 795 |
| | 6. Denver Public Library | Denver | CO 80204 | 497,007 | 791 |
| | 7. Toledo–Lucas County Public Library | Toledo | OH 43624 | 452,691 | 781 |
| | 8. Richland County Public Library | Columbia | SC 29201 | 289,839 | 774 |
| | 9. Allen County Public Library | Fort Wayne | IN 46801 | 300,836 | 753 |
| | 10. Stark County District Library | Canton | OH 44702 | 253,213 | 744 |
| 100,000–249,999 | 1. Naperville Public Libraries | Naperville | IL 60540 | 100,422 | 889 |
| | 2. St. Joseph County Public Library | South Bend | IN 46601 | 167,477 | 856 |
| | 3. Schaumburg Township District Library | Schaumburg | IL 60194 | 124,773 | 844 |
| | 4. Loudoun County Public Library | Leesburg | VA 20176 | 108,300 | 831 |
| | 5. Central Rappahannock Regional Library | Fredericksburg | VA 22401 | 181,100 | 821 |
| | 6. Boulder Public Library | Boulder | CO 80306 | 114,712 | 801 |
| | 7. Chesapeake Public Library | Chesapeake | VA 23320 | 177,900 | 799 |
| | 8. Beaverton City Library | Beaverton | OR 97005 | 108,351 | 797 |
| | 9. Porter County Public Library System | Valparaiso | IN 46383 | 113,109 | 783 |
| | 10. Ramsey County Public Library | Shoreview | MN 55126 | 221,249 | 778 |
| 50,000–99,999 | 1. Westerville Public Library | Westerville | OH 43081 | 55,660 | 896 |
| | 2. Newport Beach Public Library | Newport Beach | CA 92660 | 69,100 | 886 |
| | 3. Lower Merion Library System | Ardmore | PA 19003 | 58,003 | 875 |
| | 4. Lakewood Public Library | Lakewood | OH 44107 | 63,433 | 871 |
| | 5. Waukesha Public Library | Waukesha | WI 53186 | 78,751 | 857 |
| | 6. Iowa City Public Library | Iowa City | IA 52240 | 78,435 | 852 |
| | 7. Corvallis–Benton County Public Library | Corvallis | OR 97330 | 75,500 | 848 |
| | 8. Cleveland Heights–University Heights PL | Cleveland Heights | OH 44118 | 66,956 | 839 |
| | 9. Wheaton Public Library | Wheaton | IL 60187 | 51,441 | 839 |
| | 10. Carlsbad City Library | Carlsbad | CA 92008 | 68,200 | 838 |
| 25,000–49,999 | 1. Washington–Centerville Public Library | Centerville | OH 45459 | 38,530 | 929 |
| | 2. Morley Library | Painesville | OH 44077 | 36,175 | 896 |
| | 3. Carmel Clay Public Library | Carmel | IN 46032 | 43,007 | 875 |
| | 4. James Prendergast Library Association | Jamestown | NY 14701 | 34,681 | 869 |
| | 5. Cary Memorial Library | Lexington | MA 02173 | 29,108 | 864 |
| | 6. Urbana Free Library | Urbana | IL 61801 | 36,383 | 857 |
| | 7. Way Public Library | Perrysburg | OH 43551 | 25,611 | 857 |
| | 8. Downers Grove Public Library | Downers Grove | IL 60515 | 46,845 | 853 |
| | 9. Upper Arlington Public Library | Upper Arlington | OH 43221 | 38,881 | 848 |
| | 10. Crystal Lake Public Library | Crystal Lake | IL 60014 | 28,016 | 847 |

HENNEN'S AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY RATINGS INDEX II

| | Library Name | City | State/ZIP | Population | HAPLR |
|---------------|--|----------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| 10,000–24,999 | 1. Bexley Public Library | Bexley | OH 43209 | 15,636 | 926 |
| | 2. Hays Public Library | Hays | KS 67601 | 17,363 | 896 |
| | 3. Porter Public Library | Westlake | OH 44145 | 18,224 | 888 |
| | 4. Ella M. Everhard Public Library | Wadsworth | OH 44281 | 23,013 | 876 |
| | 5. Dover Public Library | Dover | OH 44622 | 13,845 | 875 |
| | 6. Orrville Public Library | Orrville | OH 44667 | 10,768 | 874 |
| | 7. Greenfield Public Library | Greenfield | IN 46140 | 11,657 | 872 |
| | 8. Staunton Public Library | Staunton | VA 24401 | 24,500 | 866 |
| | 9. Brown Deer Public Library | Brown Deer | WI 53223 | 12,526 | 864 |
| | 10. Acton Memorial Library | Acton | MA 01720 | 15,983 | 856 |
| 5,000–9,999 | 1. Twinsburg Public Library | Twinsburg | OH 44087 | 9,021 | 942 |
| | 2. Wright Memorial Public Library | Oakwood | OH 45419 | 9,150 | 911 |
| | 3. Delphos Public Library | Delphos | OH 45833 | 9,695 | 909 |
| | 4. Williamson Free Public Library | Williamson | NY 14589 | 6,540 | 892 |
| | 5. Decatur Public Library | Decatur | IN 46733 | 8,642 | 887 |
| | 6. Mary Lou Johnson–Hardin County District Library | Kenton | OH 44326 | 8,216 | 881 |
| | 7. Bridgeport Public Library | Bridgeport | WV 26330 | 6,739 | 874 |
| | 8. Worch Memorial Public Library | Versailles | OH 45380 | 5,784 | 873 |
| | 9. Kirtland Public Library | Kirtland | OH 44094 | 7,815 | 873 |
| | 10. Dorcas Carey Public Library | Carey | OH 43316 | 5,542 | 871 |
| 2,500–4,999 | 1. Hagerstown–Jefferson Township Public Library | Hagerstown | IN 47346 | 3,331 | 939 |
| | 2. East Syracuse Free Library | East Syracuse | NY 13057 | 3,343 | 908 |
| | 3. New Glarus Public Library | New Glarus | WI 53574 | 2,731 | 883 |
| | 4. Falconer Public Library | Falconer | NY 14733 | 2,653 | 879 |
| | 5. Berne Public Library | Berne | IN 46711 | 3,559 | 876 |
| | 6. Centerburg Public Library | Centerburg | OH 43011 | 4,468 | 867 |
| | 7. G A R Memorial Library | West Newbury | MA 01985 | 3,930 | 866 |
| | 8. Desert Foothills Library | Cave Creek | AZ 85331 | 3,076 | 863 |
| | 9. Haxton Memorial Library | Oakfield | NY 14125 | 3,312 | 861 |
| | 10. Vineyard Haven Public Library | Vineyard Haven | MA 02568 | 3,171 | 859 |
| 1,000–2,499 | 1. Westbank Community Library | Austin | TX 78746 | 1,726 | 885 |
| | 2. Union Public Library | Union | IA 50258 | 1,748 | 876 |
| | 3. Jones Memorial Library | Orleans | VT 05860 | 1,395 | 876 |
| | 4. Boyden Public Library | Boyden | IA 51234 | 1,790 | 875 |
| | 5. Hazel L. Meyer Memorial Library | De Smet | SD 57231 | 1,172 | 867 |
| | 6. Whiting Public Library | Whiting | IA 51063 | 1,207 | 860 |
| | 7. Moose Lake Public Library | Moose Lake | MN 55767 | 1,605 | 858 |
| | 8. Pelican Rapids Public Library | Pelican Rapids | MN 56572 | 1,897 | 857 |
| | 9. Odon Winkelpleck Memorial Library | Odon | IN 47562 | 1,475 | 854 |
| | 10. Perham Area Public Library | Perham | MN 56573 | 2,204 | 853 |
| 999 and Under | 1. Brownsville Public Library | Brownsville | WI 53006 | 777 | 891 |
| | 2. Lynnville Public Library | Lynnville | IA 50153 | 393 | 883 |
| | 3. Coin Public Library | Coin | IA 51636 | 278 | 874 |
| | 4. Poland Public Library | Poland | NY 13431 | 456 | 867 |
| | 5. Takotna Community Library | Takotna | AK 99675 | 46 | 865 |
| | 6. Edith B. Ford Memorial Library | Ovid | NY 14521 | 660 | 865 |
| | 7. Easton Library | Greenwich | NY 12834 | 230 | 863 |
| | 8. Mill Pond Public Library | Kingston | WI 53939 | 570 | 856 |
| | 9. Falls City Public Library | Falls City | TX 78113 | 716 | 854 |
| | 10. Plum Lake Public Library | Sayner | WI 54560 | 576 | 845 |

were also urged but are still not possible with the current FSCS data. In order to retain consistency from one version to the next, these suggestions have been resisted. The weighting of factors and categories chosen remains the same as in the last index.

The data on electronic and Internet access is simply not available at present. Should the index include Internet access, electronic measures, and more up-to-date data? Definitely it should. When the numbers are available, future versions of the HAPLR Index will incorporate them.

Square-footage numbers would be extremely useful for comparison, but the data are not currently included in the FSCS data. When they are, the HAPLR Index will include them.

Weighting the factors

Many measures could be extracted from the available data. The question is how the factors should be weighted. For instance, is the number of volumes per capita more important than periodicals per capita? Collection turnover is important, but is it more or less important than reference? Members of the PubLib listserv on the Internet were queried on this issue. The responses—though limited in number, considering the thousands of subscribers—were useful in deciding on the weights to assign to each factor. The weighting amounts, from three to one, are listed on the HAPLR Web site (see sidebar). When calculating a composite score for each library, the factors were weighted as indicated. Cost per circulation, visits per capita, and revenue per capita were each given three times as much weight as the lowest rated factors. Note that cost per circulation was rated from lowest to highest. All other measures are scored high to low.

It might be said, that for the HAPLR Index, a 95th-percentile score was a “grade” of A, while a fifth-percentile rating was an F. The HAPLR Index score is a composite average that can be compared to the score of all other public libraries.

Population numbers

Population numbers are always problematic. The U.S. Federal-State Cooperative System had no choice but to ask states to make some rather arbitrary assignments of population. The population served by a library often extends beyond the population of the community that established it and provides its initial support. Left to their own devices, libraries would undoubtedly claim wider service territories, that, when added together, would far exceed the total population. Hence, the FSCS had to insist on states making assignments of population that are arbitrary.

Consolidated county and regional library systems are more prevalent in some states and regions than in others, skewing some population data. In some areas libraries may be serving residents that are nominally in the territory of another library. Depending on the demographic makeup of the state, there will be inconsistencies in population assignment. So, a word of caution is in order. Mileage stickers on new cars carry the disclaimer that “your mileage may vary,” depending on the driver and driving conditions. Depending on the actual population of your library service area, “your HAPLR Index rating may vary.”

Population categories

Four population categories were chosen for the first edition of the HAPLR Index. The categories changed at 2,000, 10,000, and 100,000. This did not correspond to the 10 categories used by the FSCS data collectors for most other reports. The HAPLR Index has been revised to parallel these categories. However, the top two categories, over 500,000 and over 1,000,000, were consolidated into one because the top category did not have enough libraries for meaningful rankings by itself.

Circulation emphasis

One of the more vehement criticisms of the first rankings was their emphasis on circulation. Some argue that a library with a research role should not be compared directly to a popular materials center. But circulation has been used as a rough measure of library use for a century. Eliminating it from a public library rating index would not be a credible step. Only 40% of the HAPLR Index is sensitive to circulation. That does not seem an inordinate amount to this author.

Conclusion

Eventually further research is needed in this area. I hope to query seasoned professionals in all 50 states and ask them to rank libraries in randomly selected counties with no reference to the HAPLR Index rankings. These rankings would then be compared to the results of the HAPLR rankings. This would help to determine whether or not the Index does, in fact, identify excellent public libraries on the basis of statistical data alone. At present there is anecdotal verification from a number of system library personnel and library users that have a good knowledge of libraries in their area, but substantive research would enhance the credibility of the Index.

Some argue that because we have not measured some things, such as electronic use, or because we cannot measure other things, such as excellence in research or true population served, we should compare nothing at all. While the author rejects that position, he adds that numbers alone can no more tell you everything about a truly great library than the wind chill index can tell you about a truly cold day. There is definitely more to the quality of life than just the average wind-chill factor—just ask anyone from northern Wisconsin. There is also more to quality library service than the HAPLR Index rankings; just ask any librarian or library user. ❖

FOR MORE INFORMATION

➤ **Hennen’s American Public Library Rating Index Home Page (haplr-index.com)**. The author has a home page on the World Wide Web with further information on the rankings and scoring for libraries. It also includes ordering information for individualized ratings for public libraries.

➤ **Federal-State Cooperative System (nces.ed.gov/surveys/public.html#contents)**. Nationwide public library statistics are collected and disseminated annually through the Federal-State Cooperative System for public library data.