

# Great American Public Libraries: HAPLR Ratings, 2000

By Thomas J. Hennen Jr.

ONCE AGAIN, IT'S TIME TO CRUNCH THE NUMBERS AND FIND OUT HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES MEASURE UP

**N**ot all libraries will greet this new edition of Hennen's American Public Library Rating (HAPLR) index with joy. Some will say that the rating system is flawed, or that public libraries vary too much to assign meaningful rankings.

But others will be happy to see the comparisons again. Those in libraries that rank well are proud of their achievements, of course; but many in moderately or poorly ranked libraries are happy to point to their low ratings as further proof of the need for additional funding.

This edition of the index is based on 1998 preliminary final data from the Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) as published on the Web in June 2000. Has much changed in this edition? For better or worse, the answer is not much.

> Usable national data is still not available on Internet use, electronic access, or building size; however, progress is being made on data collection in these areas. The ratings have been criticized for not considering these factors, but the raw data is not collected nationally using consistent methods.

> The first HAPLR index (*AL*, Jan. 1999, p. 72-76) divided libraries into just four population categories. The current index and the previous one (*AL*, Sept. 1999, p. 64-68) divided libraries into the 10 population categories used by FSCS.

> Of the approximately 9,000 public libraries in the United States, about 1,000 do not report annual visits and another 1,000 fail to report reference queries answered. Consequently, FSCS imputes the data. "Imputing" means to guess, using statistical principles. The current HAPLR in-

dex cannot use this data because it is not yet available; thus 2,000 libraries are left out of the ratings. (The second index relied on imputed data and thus included 9,000 libraries, whereas the first strictly used unimputed data and covered only 7,000 libraries.)

In the 21st century, libraries that still do not track visits and reference activities are strongly urged to do so. Many libraries that ranked well when these factors were imputed have fallen off the radar screen because they cannot or will not report these elementary data elements. When FSCS releases its final report with the imputed data, the HAPLR database will be adjusted accordingly.

## The structure of the HAPLR index

The HAPLR index uses six input and nine output measures (see the table on page 51), calculated from FSCS data. Each factor was weighted and scored. Then the scores were totaled for each library *within* a population category to develop a weighted score.

## Responding to critics

The previous index met with many objections and criticisms, and I have tried to address some of them here.

*Insufficient number of criteria.* Adding more data categories to the index is possible. Program attendance, video circulation, and children's circulation are a few of the measures that have been suggested. However, I have resisted adding more in order to retain consistency from one version to the next. Weightings and categories remain the same as in the previous index.

*Flawed methodology.* Jim Schepcke in "The Trouble with Hennen" (*Library Journal*, Nov. 15, 1999, p. 36-37) misstates the HAPLR methodology. The scoring and ranking is *within* each population category, not across all categories as Schepcke indicates. The comparisons and rankings in each category, from expenditure per capita to visits per hour, are only to libraries of comparable size, not to all 7,000 libraries. Schepcke also notes that professional judgments would severely downgrade several of the top-rated libraries in Oregon because they lack adequate building space. He fails to add that neither Oregon nor FSCS collects the data on building space necessary to add this dimension to a rating system. (That situation will be remedied in the near

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future. Partly because of the HAPLR ratings, FSCS will soon begin to collect building data.)

*Inordinately high standards.* Schepcke also faults the ratings because it is difficult to have both a high level of FTE staff per 1,000 population and a low cost-per-circulation. He believes the same to be true of staff per 1,000 and circulation per FTE staff hour, or materials expenditures per capita and collection turnover. But that is the point! If you can do both, I judge that to be a good thing. It may be difficult, but so is pitching a perfect game in the World Series or winning the U.S. Open by 15 strokes. Why not find out what the libraries that manage to do the seemingly impossible are doing right?

*Disregarded demographics.* Daniel O'Connor and Robert Fortenbaugh argued in "Socioeconomic Indicators and Library Use" (*Public Libraries*, May/June 1999, p. 156–162) that allowances should be made for local community conditions. Poor and less-educated communities use libraries less, and therefore the data should be adjusted to reflect the ability of a given library to garner good scores. They argue that libraries in poor communities should be given adjusted performance scores to compensate for their demographic circumstances. However, that seems to beg the question, confusing results with causes. Societal neglect and the abuse of poor or less-educated people are more likely reasons for their using the library less, not inadequate library services.

*An impossible task.* Keith Curry Lance and Marti A. Cox objected in "Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics" (*AL*, June/July, p. 82–86) that the rating system is not a proper index because there are statistical flaws in the methodology. They seem to be saying that the job of comparing libraries cannot be done, so I am at fault for having tried. Somehow, uniquely among American public or private institutions, libraries are just too varied and too local to be compared. On the other hand, they urge individuals to use the NCES Public Library Peer Comparison Tool ([nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/publicpeer/](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/publicpeer/)) to do this impossible task.

I agree that "index" may be the wrong word to describe the HAPLR system; perhaps I should have used "scorecard." The ratings are designed to be like a Scholastic Aptitude Test with a theoretical score between 1 and 1,000, and most libraries scoring between 260 and 730. An index, like the Dow Jones Index or the Consumer Price Index, can theoretically range from zero to infinity.

### **Weighting the factors**

Many measures could be extracted from the available data. But how should the factors 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?

The weightings were my decision, as advised by members of the Publib online discussion list. The weighting

amounts, from 3 to 1, are listed in the table below. 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. Cost per circulation was rated from lowest to highest, while all other measures were scored from highest to lowest.

A 95th-percentile score might be considered an A "grade," while a 5th-percentile rating might be equivalent to an F. Because of the weightings, a good score on spending per capita counts three times as much as periodicals per capita. The

HAPLR score is a composite average that can be compared to the score of all other public libraries.

### **Population numbers**

Consolidated county and regional library systems are more prevalent in some states and regions than in others, skewing some of the 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.

There are two possible population categories available to use in the FSCS data: population of the legal service area and the unduplicated population. HAPLR relies on the population of the legal service area. For some states, the legal service area exceeds the total state population because of overlapping jurisdictions.

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

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## **HAPLR WEIGHTS BY CATEGORY**

### **Input Measures**

Expenditures per capita	3
Percent budget to materials	2
Materials expenditure per capita	2
FTE staff per 1,000 population	2
Periodicals per 1,000 residents	1
Volumes per capita	1

### **Output Measures**

Cost per circulation (low to high)	3
Visits per capita	3
Collection turnover	2
Circulation per FTE staff hour	2
Circulation per capita	2
Reference per capita	2
Circulation per hour	2
Visits per hour	1
Circulation per visit	1

# HENNEN'S AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY RATINGS INDEX, 2000

	Library Name	City	State/ZIP	Population	HAPLR
Over 500,000	1. Denver Public Library	Denver	CO 80204	508,597	890
	2. Columbus Metropolitan Library	Columbus	OH 43215	600,083	831
	3. Indianapolis–Marion County Public Library	Indianapolis	IN 46206	770,684	788
	4. Hennepin County Library	Minnetonka	MN 55305	720,895	787
	5. St. Louis County Library	Saint Louis	MO 63131	849,652	738
	6. Fairfax County Public Library	Fairfax	VA 22035	939,400	714
	7. Gwinnett County Public Library System	Lawrenceville	GA 30045	503,280	685
	8. Mid-Continent Consolidated Library District	Independence	MO 64050	570,421	684
	9. Multnomah County Library	Portland	OR 97212	639,000	680
	10. Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg Co.	Charlotte	NC 28202	608,567	676
250,000–499,999	1. Santa Clara County Free Library	San Jose	CA 95112	397,645	859
	2. Johnson County Library	Shawnee Mission	KS 66212	329,663	857
	3. Prince William Public Library System	Prince William	VA 22192	262,000	824
	4. Richland County Public Library	Columbia	SC 29201	307,056	791
	5. Anne Arundel County Public Library	Annapolis	MD 21401	467,400	785
	6. Dayton & Montgomery County Public Library	Dayton	OH 45402	448,758	782
	7. Toledo–Lucas County Public Library	Toledo	OH 43624	443,694	760
	8. Allen County Public Library	Fort Wayne	IN 46801	300,836	753
	9. Sarasota County Library System	Sarasota	FL 34236	316,023	749
	10. Dakota County Library	Eagan	MN 55123	312,378	745
100,000–249,999	1. Naperville Public Libraries	Naperville	IL 60540	118,835	887
	2. St. Charles City-County Library District	Saint Peters	MO 63376	212,907	880
	3. Porter County Public Library System	Valparaiso	IN 46383	113,109	839
	4. Tippecanoe County Public Library	Lafayette	IN 47901	104,310	832
	5. St. Joseph County Public Library	South Bend	IN 46601	167,477	831
	6. Schaumburg Township District Library	Schaumburg	IL 60193	124,773	830
	7. Loudoun County Public Library	Leesburg	VA 20176	134,900	822
	8. Santa Clara City Library	Santa Clara	CA 95051	101,900	820
	9. Middletown Public Library	Middletown	OH 45044	142,084	818
	10. Beaverton City Library	Beaverton	OR 97005	106,012	815
50,000–99,999	1. Lower Merion Library System	Ardmore	PA 19003	58,003	884
	2. Newton Free Library	Newton	MA 02459	80,238	882
	3. Newport Beach Public Library	Newport Beach	CA 92660	72,600	873
	4. Palatine Public Library District	Palatine	IL 60067	89,493	865
	5. Westerville Public Library	Westerville	OH 43081	80,139	851
	6. Wheaton Public Library	Wheaton	IL 60187	55,755	846
	7. Cleveland Heights–University Heights PL	Cleveland Hts.	OH 44118	67,790	842
	8. Findlay–Hancock County Public Library	Findlay	OH 45840	57,881	842
	9. Ames Public Library	Ames	IA 50010	54,232	838
	10. Carlsbad City Library	Carlsbad	CA 92008	73,700	830
25,000–49,999	1. Washington–Centerville Public Library	Centerville	OH 45459	48,693	918
	2. Carmel Clay Public Library	Carmel	IN 46032	43,007	884
	3. James Prendergast Library Association	Jamestown	NY 14701	34,681	878
	4. Elmhurst Public Library	Elmhurst	IL 60126	42,680	851
	5. Urbana Free Library	Urbana	IL 61801	36,383	850
	6. Wright Memorial Public Library	Oakwood	OH 45419	38,223	850
	7. Cook Memorial Public Library District	Libertyville	IL 60048	47,487	848
	8. Cary Memorial Library	Lexington	MA 02420	29,484	847
	9. Concord Pike Library	Wilmington	DE 19803	27,119	846
	10. Downers Grove Public Library	Downers Grove	IL 60515	46,845	842

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10,000–24,999	1. Hays Public Library	Hays	KS 67601	17,991	902
	2. Brown Deer Public Library	Brown Deer	WI 53223	12,396	883
	3. Wickliffe Public Library	Wickliffe	OH 44092	22,825	879
	4. Peters Township Public Library	McMurray	PA 15317	14,467	869
	5. Staunton Public Library	Staunton	VA 24401	23,500	867
	6. Fergus Falls Public Library	Fergus Falls	MN 56537	13,217	863
	7. Delphos Public Library	Delphos	OH 45833	11,436	859
	8. Darien Library	Darien	CT 06820	18,125	854
	9. Twinsburg Public Library	Twinsburg	OH 44087	24,792	854
	10. George F. Johnson Memorial Library	Endicott	NY 13760	13,531	852
5,000–9,999	1. Morris Public Library	Morris	MN 56267	5,647	904
	2. Bridgeport Public Library	Bridgeport	WV 26330	6,739	898
	3. Westfield Public Library	Westfield	IN 46074	9,272	882
	4. Manlius Library	Manlius	NY 13104	8,783	879
	5. Fayetteville Free Library	Fayetteville	NY 13066	7,637	877
	6. Bernardsville Public Library	Bernardsville	NJ 07924	7,085	876
	7. Mukwonago Community Library	Mukwonago	WI 53149	7,399	871
	8. Redwood Falls Public Library	Redwood Falls	MN 56283	5,665	865
	9. Williamson Free Public Library	Williamson	NY 14589	6,540	865
	10. Cresco Public Library	Cresco	IA 52136	6,457	855
2,500–4,999	1. Hagerstown–Jefferson Township Public Library	Hagerstown	IN 47346	3,331	936
	2. Falconer Public Library	Falconer	NY 14733	2,653	899
	3. G A R Memorial Library	West Newbury	MA 01985	3,871	892
	4. North Liberty Community Library	North Liberty	IA 52317	3,248	887
	5. Tracy Memorial Library	New London	NH 03257	3,641	880
	6. Vineyard Haven Public Library	Vineyard Haven	MA 02568	3,341	877
	7. Lee Public Library	Lee	NH 03824	4,050	868
	8. East Syracuse Free Library	East Syracuse	NY 13057	3,343	867
	9. Hamilton Public Library	Hamilton	NY 13346	3,845	864
	10. Central City Public Library	Central City	NE 68826	2,868	861
1,000–2,499	1. Hazel L. Meyer Memorial Library	De Smet	SD 57231	1,170	888
	2. Moose Lake Public Library	Moose Lake	MN 55767	1,709	884
	3. Jones Memorial Library	Orleans	VT 05860	1,395	868
	4. Perham Area Public Library	Perham	MN 56573	2,343	865
	5. Mary Cotton Public Library	Sabetha	KS 66534	2,421	864
	6. Union Public Library	Union	IA 50258	1,748	864
	7. Fairfax Community Library	Fairfax	VT 05454	2,486	860
	8. Seneca Free Library	Seneca	KS 66538	1,995	857
	9. Odon Winkelpleck Memorial Library	Odon	IN 47562	1,475	854
	10. Runals Memorial Library	Edgerton	MN 56128	1,098	852
999 and Under	1. Lynnville Public Library	Lynnville	IA 50153	393	913
	2. Brownsville Public Library	Brownsville	WI 53006	875	883
	3. Clayville Library Association	Clayville	NY 13322	463	882
	4. Poland Public Library	Poland	NY 13431	456	880
	5. Raquette Lake Free Library	Raquette Lake	NY 13436	200	867
	6. Easton Library	Greenwich	NY 12834	230	852
	7. Falls City Public Library	Falls City	TX 78113	757	846
	8. Wide-Awake Club Library	Fillmore	NY 14735	455	845
	9. Mill Pond Public Library	Kingston	WI 53939	559	843
	10. Ellisburg Free Library	Ellisburg	NY 13636	246	842

## Average HAPLR Index Ratings by States

The calculations below are not weighted for population. Carl Sandstedt at St. Charles City-County Library District in Saint Peters, Missouri, has urged: "In weighing state averages, take size into account. Two libraries serving 500 people with excellence shouldn't outweigh one serving 500,000 with a lower score."

Previous editions of the index have used the un-weighted averages. This one does so as well. Weighted averages will be posted on the HAPLR Web site.

State	HAPLR	Rank
Alabama	397	44
Alaska	522	17
Arizona	504	23
Arkansas	392	45
California	517	19
Colorado	530	15
Connecticut	553	10
Delaware	476	27
District of Columbia	403	43
Florida	467	29
Georgia	382	47
Hawaii	508	22
Idaho	510	21
Illinois	534	14
Indiana	607	2
Iowa	540	12
Kansas	566	8
Kentucky	423	40
Louisiana	379	48
Maine	438	38
Maryland	512	20
Massachusetts	599	3
Michigan	465	30
Minnesota	591	5
Mississippi	299	51
Missouri	484	26
Montana	439	37
Nebraska	520	18
Nevada	456	33
New Hampshire	475	28
New Jersey	491	25
New Mexico	458	31
New York	560	9
North Carolina	449	35
North Dakota	458	32
Ohio	657	1
Oklahoma	433	39
Oregon	528	16
Pennsylvania	418	41
Rhode Island	452	34
South Carolina	350	49
South Dakota	545	11
Tennessee	342	50
Texas	389	46
Utah	576	6
Vermont	448	36
Virginia	498	24
Washington	592	4
West Virginia	416	42
Wisconsin	576	7
Wyoming	539	13

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, so the HAPLR index was revised to parallel these categories. However, the top two categories, over 500,000 and over 1 million 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 critiques has been HAPLR's emphasis on circulation. Some argue that a library with a research role should not be compared directly to a popular materials center. However, 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, not an inordinate amount.

### Conclusion

Further research on library performance measures is needed. Some day, I will query seasoned professionals in all 50 states and ask them to rank libraries in randomly selected counties with no reference to the HAPLR rankings. Then I would compare their lists with the results of the HAPLR index 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 who have a good knowledge of libraries in their areas, but substantive research would enhance the index's credibility.

At the Australian National Public Library Conference in November 1999, Alan Bundy, president of the Australian Library Association, called for "the establishment of a nationally promulgated index of public library performance similar to the recently developed HAPLR index which uses six input and nine output measures to evaluate US public libraries" ([www.library.unisa.edu.au/papers/howfar.htm](http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/papers/howfar.htm)).

Some argue that because we have not measured such factors as electronic use, or because we cannot measure excellence in research or true population served, we should compare nothing at all. I reject that argument. Certainly, there is more to quality library service than the HAPLR Index ranking—just ask any librarian or library user. But the HAPLR rankings remain useful comparative tools.

### For more information

> Hennen's American Public Library Rating index home page ([haplr-index.com](http://haplr-index.com)). The author has a Web page 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/](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/)). Nationwide public library statistics are collected and disseminated annually through the Federal-State Cooperative System for public library data. ♦