

Great American Public Libraries: The 2002 HAPLR Rankings

THE EAGERLY AWAITED—IF OVERDUE—
MEASURE OF THE NATION'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

By *Thomas J. Hennen Jr.*

The last three editions of Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR) generated widespread media coverage. Similar results are expected for this delayed fourth edition. This edition of the scores is about a year overdue because of delays by the Federal-State Cooperative Service (FSCS) in posting the data.

Some things have changed about library statistics since the first edition of HAPLR (*AL*, Jan. 1999, p. 72–76), which was based on data filed in 1997 for 1996 (this one is based on data from 2000, filed in 2001). Total operating spending by libraries rose by 6.6% per year over that period, while capital spending increased 8.6% annually, according to FSCS data. The average salary rose 3.2% each year while materials spending grew by 6.8% annually.

Half of the increase in materials spending went to electronic materials and access, yet we still have no way to measure either outputs or outcomes in this area. Nonprint materials are in the forefront of spending increases: The amount of money spent on books (2%) and periodicals (1%) grew at a far slower pace than that on audios (7%), videos (17%), electronic materials access (16%), or electronic materials (22%).

Circulation and reference transactions grew, but not enough to match population growth. On the other hand, the number of visits to libraries and the rate of attendance at children's programs outstripped population growth rates.

In 1999, it was difficult to locate Web sites for the top 10 libraries in each category; I found an online presence for fewer than half of them. By this edition, however, there was difficulty only in the smallest population categories. Moreover, the search was much quicker because many

libraries have learned the importance of metadata description and consistent naming in their Web pages.

State budget impacts

Many libraries that have earned high HAPLR scores in the past are again represented in this year's ratings. Will the

STRUCTURE OF THE HAPLR SCORES

The HAPLR scores are based on six input and nine output measures (see below). Each factor is weighted and scored. The author then totals the scores for each library within a population category to develop a weighted score in each category. This means that only libraries serving comparably sized populations are compared with one another. A 90th-percentile score for all 15 measures would give the library a score at the top of its population category, while a fifth-percentile score for all measures would put the library at the bottom. Further details on the rating methods are available on the author's Web site.

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
Collection per FTE staff hour	2
Circulation per capita	2
Reference per capita	2
Circulation per capita	2
Visits per hour	1
Circulation per visit	1

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current economic slowdown and state budget cuts change the landscape?

If a rising tide raises all ships and a falling tide lowers them all, then Ohio libraries may be the ones to prove the case very soon. The state's libraries have dominated HAPLR—and most other assessments of library service—for years. This appears to be because of very substantial state funding levels, but as this article goes to press it appears that state funding for Ohio libraries may be drastically curtailed by the recent budget crises affecting so many states (*AL*, Sept., p. 16–17).

How long can Denver stay at the top of the ratings with falling revenues? Recently the governor of Colorado moved to drastically reduce state funding for libraries, and Denver was one of the major casualties (*AL*, Aug., p. 23). With the reported levels of budget cutting, it is hard to imagine that Denver will retain its number-one spot in future listings.

Regional library system data

The FSCS dataset still contains data on library organizations that may be causing trouble for the results presented here. Specifically this involves regional library system data. Most regional systems are excluded from the data for the FSCS dataset, but there are notable exceptions. None of the regional library systems in Wisconsin (the author is director of Waukesha County Federated Library System) are included in the direct service measures for the FSCS dataset on library services. Most regional library systems in Wisconsin do not provide direct public library service, and they are therefore not included in the FSCS data. In other states, the distinction between a library “system” and a library is a good deal more blurred, leading to confusion in the data reporting. Minnesota and Tennessee appear to be prime examples of states with regional systems that deliver some direct services and are therefore included in the FSCS dataset.

Impact of imputation

Of 9,000 libraries, about 1,000 do not report annual visits and another 1,000 or so fail to report reference queries. The FSCS therefore “imputes” their data. “Imputing” means to guess using statistical principles. Libraries that still do not track visits and reference activities are strongly urged to do so. The failure to report includes libraries in all population categories. Even in the over-500,000-population category, 10 libraries do not report annual visits, annual reference queries, or both! The imputation needed to adjust for their nonreporting takes time and effort, resulting in delays. Furthermore, the imputation of the library's data may be inaccurate.

Population issues

Population numbers are always problematic. Depending on the demographic makeup of the state, population assignment may result in inconsistencies. 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.

In some states the combined “legal service areas” for all libraries exceeds the total population of the state because of overlapping jurisdictions. Twenty-seven states have such service population overlaps. Because of the overlapping of service patterns in these states, the total population served by libraries is larger than the actual population of the state by an average of 6%. Rhode Island and Connecticut report the largest, with 22% overlaps. A number of libraries would fare somewhat better in these ratings without this overlap.

The source of most of the problems in service population allocation is the methodology. Consider, for instance, the results of a revised allocation methodology in the author's home state of Wisconsin. About two-thirds of Wisconsin residents own and operate libraries directly, while the remaining one-third are served on the basis of a county library tax on nonlibrary jurisdictions. The state of Wisconsin formerly allocated that remaining one-third of the population to each library by the relative proportion of a city's size to all other cities in each county; but starting in 1999, the allocation has been made on the basis of circulation instead.

In the old population method, a large city that experienced relatively little “extension” use was assigned much more “extension” population than in the new use-based allocations. A number of Wisconsin libraries saw their relative HAPLR ranking shift because of this revised allocation of population. As noted in previous editions,

AVERAGE HAPLR INDEX RATINGS BY STATE					
The calculations below are not weighted by population					
State	HAPLR	Rank	State	HAPLR	Rank
Ala.	338	49	Mont.	464	31
Alaska	488	26	Nebr.	577	12
Ariz.	544	17	Nev.	436	39
Ark.	397	45	N.H.	473	30
Calif.	408	42	N.J.	439	38
Colo.	633	6	N.Mex.	459	32
Conn.	519	22	N.Y.	542	18
Del.	489	25	N.C.	475	29
D.C.	291	51	N.Dak.	519	23
Fla.	448	34	Ohio	701	1
Ga.	374	47	Okla.	476	28
Hawaii	442	35	Oreg.	658	4
Idaho	563	14	Pa.	402	43
Ill.	532	20	R.I.	432	40
Ind.	672	2	S.C.	441	36
Iowa	590	11	S.Dak.	556	15
Kans.	627	8	Tenn.	354	48
Ky.	439	37	Tex.	400	44
La.	374	46	Utah	666	3
Maine	502	24	Va.	575	13
Md.	622	9	Vt.	483	27
Mass.	548	16	Wash.	651	5
Mich.	455	33	W.Va.	408	41
Minn.	531	21	Wis.	628	7
Miss.	306	50	Wyo.	536	19
Mo.	600	10			

HENNEN'S AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY RATINGS, 2002

	Library Name	City	State/ZIP	Population	HAPLR
Over 500,000	1. Denver Public Library	Denver	CO 80204	554,636	893
	2. Columbus Metropolitan Library	Columbus	OH 43213	584,201	855
	3. Multnomah County Library	Portland	OR 97212	646,850	819
	4. Baltimore County Public Library	Towson	MD 21204	730,969	816
	5. Indianapolis–Marion County Public Library	Indianapolis	IN 46206	770,684	796
	6. Hennepin County Library	Minnetonka	MN 55305	735,050	777
	7. Salt Lake County Library System	Salt Lake City	UT 84121	682,620	776
	8. Cuyahoga County Public Library	Parma	OH 44134	523,022	776
	9. Montgomery County Public Libraries	Rockville	MD 20850	855,000	765
	10. Fairfax County Public Library	Fairfax	VA 22035	962,800	730
250,000–499,999	1. Santa Clara County Library	San Jose	CA 95112	409,200	862
	2. Johnson County Library	Overland Park	KS 66212	346,046	845
	3. Prince William Public Library System	Prince William	VA 22192	309,700	821
	4. Fort Worth Public Library	Fort Worth	TX 76102	491,801	794
	5. Allen County Public Library	Fort Wayne	IN 46801	300,836	769
	6. Richland County Public Library	Columbia	SC 29201	307,279	752
	7. Chesterfield County Public Library	Chesterfield	VA 23832	252,200	749
	8. Toledo–Lucas County Public Library	Toledo	OH 43624	455,054	741
	9. Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library	Dayton	OH 45402	451,557	738
	10. Dakota County Library	Eagan	MN 55123	326,397	737
100,000–249,999	1. Naperville Public Library	Naperville	IL 60540	118,835	895
	2. St. Charles City–County Library District	St. Peters	MO 63376	212,907	891
	3. Medina County District Library	Medina	OH 44256	118,090	871
	4. St. Joseph County Public Library	South Bend	IN 46601	167,477	851
	5. Porter County Public Library System	Valparaiso	IN 46383	113,381	847
	6. Greene County Public Library	Xenia	OH 45385	147,886	844
	7. Santa Clara City Library	Santa Clara	CA 95051	102,900	841
	8. Ramsey County Library	Shoreview	MN 55126	223,884	839
	9. Salt Lake City Public Library	Salt Lake City	UT 84111	181,743	826
	10. Howard County Library	Columbia	MD 21045	234,500	825
50,000–99,999	1. Lakewood Public Library	Lakewood	OH 44107	59,091	924
	2. Newton Free Library	Newton	MA 02459	80,143	893
	3. Palatine Public Library District	Palatine	IL 60067	89,493	877
	4. Westerville Public Library	Westerville	OH 43081	86,245	870
	5. Lower Merion Library System	Ardmore	PA 19003	58,003	856
	6. Wheaton Public Library	Wheaton	IL 60187	55,755	855
	7. Corvallis–Benton County Public Library	Corvallis	OR 97330	77,100	854
	8. Ames Public Library	Ames	IA 50010	54,232	853
	9. Euclid Public Library	Euclid	OH 44123	54,299	851
	10. Cleveland Heights–Univ. Heights Public Library	Cleveland Heights	OH 44118	65,868	845
25,000–49,999	1. Washington–Centerville Public Library	Centerville	OH 45459	45,932	925
	2. Carmel Clay Public Library	Carmel	IN 46032	43,007	897
	3. Westlake Porter Public Library	Westlake	OH 44145	36,734	895
	4. James Prendergast Library Association	Jamestown	NY 14701	34,681	880
	5. Stow–Munroe Falls Public Library	Stow	OH 44224	34,630	869
	6. Cary Memorial Library	Lexington	MA 02420	29,583	866
	7. Bettendorf Public Library Information Center	Bettendorf	IA 52722	28,132	865
	8. Urbana Free Library	Urbana	IL 61801	36,383	863
	9. Concord Pike Public Library	Wilmington	DE 19803	27,185	861
	10. Middleton Public Library	Middleton	WI 53562	25,644	859

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	Library Name	City	State/ZIP	Population	HAPLR
10,000–24,999	1. North Canton Public Library	North Canton	OH 44720	22,632	913
	2. Twinsburg Public Library	Twinsburg	OH 44087	24,891	901
	3. Wickliffe Public Library	Wickliffe	OH 44092	21,548	899
	4. Brown Deer Public Library	Brown Deer	WI 53223	12,179	897
	5. Orrville Public Library	Orrville	OH 44667	16,946	884
	6. Darien Library	Darien	CT 06820	18,085	883
	7. Rocky River Public Library	Rocky River	OH 44116	20,678	878
	8. Falmouth Public Library	Falmouth	MA 02540	10,664	869
	9. Simsbury Public Library	Simsbury	CT 06070	21,767	866
	10. Warsaw Community Public Library	Warsaw	IN 46580	22,465	859
5,000–9,999	1. Hartford City Public Library	Hartford City	IN 47348	6,960	903
	2. Fayetteville Free Library	Fayetteville	NY 13066	7,637	895
	3. Redwood Falls Public Library	Redwood Falls	MN 56283	5,665	895
	4. Bridgeport Public Library	Bridgeport	WV 26330	6,739	885
	5. Delphos Public Library	Delphos	OH 45833	9,886	881
	6. Freeport Community Library	Freeport	ME 04032	7,800	879
	7. Williamson Free Public Library	Williamson	NY 14589	6,540	874
	8. Cresco Public Library	Cresco	IA 52136	6,457	860
	9. Archbold Community Library	Archbold	OH 43502	7,463	858
	10. Manlius Library	Manlius	NY 13104	8,783	855
2,500–4,999	1. Falconer Public Library	Falconer	NY 14733	2,653	937
	2. Hagerstown–Jefferson Township Public Library	Hagerstown	IN 47346	3,331	919
	3. North Liberty Community Library	North Liberty	IA 52317	3,248	917
	4. Bell Memorial Public Library	Mentone	IN 46539	3,590	911
	5. Tracy Memorial Library	New London	NH 03257	4,116	891
	6. Yoakum County Library	Denver City	TX 79323	3,842	890
	7. Desert Foothills Library	Cave Creek	AZ 85327	3,785	887
	8. Morton County Library	Elkhart	KS 67950	3,440	880
	9. Edgartown Free Public Library	Edgartown	MA 02539	3,794	872
	10. G. A. R. Memorial Library	West Newbury	MA 01985	4,062	869
1,000–2,499	1. South Whitley–Cleveland Township Public Library	South Whitley	IN 46787	1,482	900
	2. Moose Lake Public Library	Moose Lake	MN 55767	2,173	888
	3. Marrowbone Public Library District	Bethany	IL 61914	2,209	883
	4. Hazel L. Meyer Memorial Library	De Smet	SD 57231	1,164	881
	5. McCall Public Library	McCall	ID 83638	2,084	877
	6. Jessie F. Hallett Memorial Library	Crosby	MN 56441	2,132	867
	7. Mary Cotton Public Library	Sabetha	KS 66534	2,355	866
	8. Sodus Free Library	Sodus	NY 14551	1,904	864
	9. Wabasso Public Library	Wabasso	MN 56293	1,090	862
	10. Fairfax Community Library	Fairfax	VT 05454	2,486	862
999 and under	1. Bedford Park Public Library District	Bedford Park	IL 60501	566	878
	2. Chilmark Public Library	Chilmark	MA 02535	794	862
	3. Raquette Lake Free Library	Raquette Lake	NY 13436	200	859
	4. Clayville Library Association	Clayville	NY 13322	463	845
	5. False Pass Public Library	False Pass	AK 99583	64	839
	6. Easton Library	Greenwich	NY 12834	230	838
	7. McCook Public Library District	McCook	IL 60525	278	836
	8. Takotna Community Library	Takotna	AK 99675	50	835
	9. Lynnville Public Library	Lynnville	IA 50153	393	828
	10. Silverton Public Library	Silverton	CO 81433	531	807

RATINGS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Interesting developments in library ratings and assessments have recently occurred in Germany and Great Britain.

Bertelsman Publishing partnered with the Association of German Libraries (Deutsche Bibliotheksverband) to produce BIX, a library index quite similar to HAPLR. The main difference between BIX and HAPLR, aside from the publishing-house backing, is that BIX was designed to provide comparisons of one library to another as well as over time. HAPLR compares all libraries to one another only during a given year. An English-language description of the BIX index is available at www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/documents/Projekt_Info_Englisch_010112.pdf.

Great Britain recently adopted national standards, and in 2000 the Audit Commission, an independent body, began publishing both summary annual reports of library conditions and individualized ratings of libraries. Audit Commission personnel base the reports on statistical data, long-range plans, local government commitment to the library, and a site visit. Every library is assigned a score. The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. A horizontal axis shows how good the service is at present, on a scale ranging from no stars for poor to three stars for excellent. A vertical axis shows the improvement prospects over time of the service, also on a four-point scale. The narrative reports, which are about 40 pages long, are very specific and quite blunt in their assessments and recommendations for improvement. A description of the British program may be found at www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk.

“Depending on the actual population of your library service area, your HAPLR score may vary.”

Critical responses

Many critics of HAPLR contend that the ratings are far too circulation-driven, so let us consider the issue. Only one-third of the HAPLR factors are related to circulation; the other two-thirds involve inputs such as per-capita spending or volumes owned, or outputs such as annual visitors or reference questions. A library that ranked in the top 1% of the non-circulation factors and at the bottom 1% of all circulation factors would get a HAPLR score of 650; that would put the library in the top quarter of the rankings.

Stated another way, a public library could rank in the top quarter of HAPLR libraries without ever circulating a single item. Perhaps the ratings are less circulation-driven than they should be, not more!

Keith Curry Lance of the Colorado Research Service was quoted in a 2001 *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* article as saying, “The business of rating public libraries is very complicated, primarily because in the last few decades, libraries have been encouraged to be institutions that are [unique] to their

communities.” Lance claimed that the HAPLR index “gives every public library a test for a class it didn’t necessarily take.”

The author disagrees, of course, believing that if a library did not take the course, it should have! Every high school student is a unique individual, but that does not stop universities from using standardized assessment tools for college admission.

What makes a library unique to its community should be that which is over and above the basics, such as funding levels or number of annual visits, that HAPLR measures. The roles, or service responses, or whatever the Public Library Association planning process calls them these days, have no measurable effect on service outcomes in any case, a fact Lance understands from his own research.

New HAPLR elements

I have noted previously that measures of building size and output measures for electronic and Internet use are sorely needed in the ratings, but they are unavailable nationally as data elements. Recently I have given thought to the best way to incorporate the building and electronic materials data that the FSCS is expected to begin supplying in the next several years.

Should the score for each library be based on whether or not it meets some percentage of the median for its population category? For example, if a library has high scores on all other measures in HAPLR but doesn’t have at least 50% of the median number of square feet per capita, it would not make it into the top-10 ratings. Or should the number of square feet per capita be graded on a curve, just like all the other measures?

At present only input measures exist for electronic resources, with no output measures. Even the input measures for level of funding are reported only sporadically by libraries, making it difficult to incorporate them into HAPLR. It seems reasonable to assume that FSCS will begin reporting some of the e-metrics in the recently issued NISO Z39.7 Draft Standard. See www.niso.org/emetrics/emetrics.cfm.

Readers with suggestions on how to expand the HAPLR coverage are urged to contact the author at thenen@haplr-index.com. ♦

HAPLR HISTORY

This fourth edition of HAPLR Ratings is based on 2000 data from the Federal-State Cooperative Service (FSCS) as published on the World Wide Web in July 2002. The federal agency compiles the data reported annually by state library agencies for nearly 9,000 libraries into a single dataset. A fall 2001 edition of HAPLR had to be postponed and then abandoned because of FSCS delays in publication of the data. The results for 1999 data should have been available in spring 2001, allowing publication of HAPLR scores in fall 2001, but those results were delayed for almost a year and not published until May 2002. The 2000 data was published just eight weeks later, in July 2002. FSCS indicates that it intends to publish the data in a more timely fashion from now on; let us hope that is true.