Encounter, Engagement, and Exchange

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Library Professional Development
As today’s panel illustrates, there are many ways to develop professionally. You can become active in organizations like SALALM. You can publish a book or an article, make a presentation at a conference, or perhaps be the editor of a journal. Something else you might consider doing is being a HAPI indexer. What does a HAPI indexer do and why would you want to be one? 

HAPI, the *Hispanic American Periodicals Index*, relies on volunteer indexers to do much of the indexing of the over 300 journals it covers. Each volunteer selects a certain number of titles that his or her library subscribes to and agrees to look at and index each new issue when it comes out. Indexers are responsible for: (1) describing the physical characteristics of the articles, noting things like the page numbers and the presence of any illustrations, charts, statistics, etc.; (2) trying to verify the authors’ names in a standard bibliographic source; and (3) assigning subject headings that best describe the content of the articles. Indexers are given the necessary tools to work with. They receive a template to fill in for each of the journals they index, a listing of authorized HAPI subject headings, and a detailed set of guidelines to follow. After indexing an issue of a journal, the indexer E-mails the filled-in templates to HAPI headquarters. That, in a nutshell, is what a HAPI indexer does.

Why would someone want to be a HAPI indexer? Rather than give only my own ideas, I decided to ask my fellow HAPI indexers about the benefits they see in being an indexer. To do that, I sent an E-mail message to forty current and former HAPI indexers. The message I sent was not a formal survey; rather, it was a way for other indexers to speak through me. Seventeen people out of forty replied, which was a response rate of approximately 42.5%. Fifteen of the respondents were current indexers and two were past indexers. The length of time the respondents had been indexers ranged from less than one year to over thirty years. About half the respondents had been indexers for ten years or less, and about half were indexers for more than ten years. What was impressive was how long some people had been indexers. One person reported indexing for fifteen years, one twenty-four years, and two for over thirty years. Clearly those indexers enjoy and derive some benefit from the activity.
I especially wanted to find out how HAPI indexing helps those librarians with their professional development. To do that, I asked them the following question: “At your institution, does the indexing you do for HAPI count as a professional development activity for your promotion and tenure process and/or during your annual performance review? Comments?” In looking at their answers, we need to remember that some academic librarians have faculty status and are concerned with fulfilling the requirements for promotion and tenure, which usually include professional activities like publication and being active in national organizations. Other academic librarians do not have faculty status but might still be held responsible for engaging in similar professional activities. Thirteen respondents said that HAPI indexing counts as a professional development activity and four said it did not.

When asked, “How has being a HAPI indexer helped you with your professional development?” respondents mentioned that it:

- Helps with collection development work.
- Makes one familiar with using the HAPI database which in turn helps them with their library instruction and with their reference work.
- Is a consistent, ongoing professional activity that can be highlighted in one’s annual performance review.
- Serves a continuing education function by keeping the indexers current with Latin American happenings and scholarship.
- Helps the indexers stay proficient in reading Spanish and Portuguese.
- Provides an excuse to take the time to read articles.

The final question was very open-ended, asking, “Do you have any additional thoughts or comments on indexing for HAPI?” Here are just some of their comments:

- HAPI indexing provides a respite from one’s typical day-to-day work activities.
- It is a way for catalogers to be involved because they have skills that are easily transferable to HAPI indexing.
- Being associated with a high-quality independently-owned database makes the indexing experience enjoyable.
- Indexing is seen as a way to get involved in SALALM activities.
- HAPI indexing is a way to give back to the profession.

Two people addressed the issue of how much time it takes to index for HAPI. One said that the indexing is time consuming and that it is difficult to find time to do the indexing because of other job responsibilities. Yet someone
else said that it is an intellectually demanding activity that does not take a lot of time to do and does not interfere with one’s daily work schedule. So the question of time seems primarily to depend on an individual’s circumstances. Speaking for myself, I have found that my job has busy times and slower times, and I do most of the indexing during the slower times of the semester.

It makes sense for librarians to be indexers. Indexing is a way for librarians to contribute to the world of knowledge by helping people find information while also providing them with a way to contribute to the profession. Nineteenth-century librarian William Poole realized this when he prepared an index to the periodicals in the society library where he worked. That index, when published, was the first general index to multiple periodicals.¹

The goal of today’s presentation was to get those in the audience who are not HAPI indexers to start thinking about including HAPI indexing among their professional development activities. Clearly the indexers who replied to my E-mail enjoy being HAPI indexers and see it as a means of professional development. Anyone searching for professional development opportunities and wanting to find HAPIness by being a volunteer indexer should contact the director of HAPI.

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