



To: H-Net Council  
From: Peter Knupfer, Executive Director  
Date: November 13, 2007  
Subject: Executive Director Annual Report

I am happy to report that H-Net's financial and administrative condition continues to improve. We still have many significant issues to face concerning our future funding, content development, and essential programming tasks. I do believe that, as I said here last year, the organization is at a crossroads concerning what path it wishes to take as it enters a period of intense technological change. Our greatest assets -- the editors and the vast audiences they serve -- will remain our most important strength as we move forward and make those critical decisions.

H-Net continues to attract new subscribers, networks, and reviewers, but at a slightly lower *rate* than the previous fiscal year. During the reporting period we launched 7 new networks, certified 87 (123 the previous year) new advisory board members, 86 (86) new list editors, 42 (51) new review editors, and 11 (11) new web editors. Subscription numbers continue to rise, with 188,791 (165,328) registered subscription addresses as of the middle of October 2007. Our donations appeal letter went out to a subscription list of 114,692 unique addresses, suggesting that our real subscription numbers are closer to 115,000 individuals and organizations. Bearing in mind that listserv tracks email addresses, not individual people, our figures indicate that 89,000 addresses have one subscription each and about 31,000 account for a total of 100,000 subscription entries. A little over 700 addresses have ten or more subscriptions. On the other hand, you'll see from the accompanying charts that the number of postings to our lists continues its steady, moderate decline since 2000. In other words, we are attracting subscribers, but sending less mail to them. Interestingly, the web logs of our lists remain the most popular stop on our website, drawing millions of page views per year. These figures raise interesting questions about the changing habits of information retrieval by academics, students, and the interested public.

Perhaps our most significant achievements this year have been collaborative, as befits our mission. The Publications Committee, under the expert direction of Vice President Ian Binnington and with the very productive involvement of Reviews Associate Editor Patricia Rogers and her copyediting staff, labored over and produced our first collaborative in-house style sheet for H-Net Reviews. Based on the Chicago Style Manual and the style sheet we had created at the beginning of the Reviews project, this style sheet represents the consensus of our Review Editors about publications policy and style for a new medium. I know of no other publisher that can boast of a similar accomplishment. The committee also provided direction to the Reviews staff for purging the enormous backlog of unreviewed books in our inventory, and is developing new policies dealing with conflicts of interest, the solicitation of reviews, and the enforcement of policies across the organization. These are difficult issues that involve political, organizational, and professional interests that are very hard to balance.

The teaching committee, under Vice President Kelly Woestman and with the earnest and intensive efforts of H-TAH editor Rachael Ragland, organized and sponsored our second annual Teaching American History symposium in partnership with the Organization of American Historians. The symposium attracted almost 140 people, the largest audience of any session at the OAH annual meeting and was a tremendous success. Dr. Woestman also worked with MATRIX staff to develop H-TAH's resources for the TAH program and to launch planning for a third symposium in 2008. She also organized a panel on TAH and public history that was held at the annual meeting of the National Council on Public History in Santa Fe.

Vice President Matthew Gilmore has continued and intensified his efforts to forge a

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### **H-Net Council:**

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community of practice among our list and web editors. This work requires constant correspondence, communication, and monitoring of list activity that has often been the thankless task of that office. The vetting of editor and list applications and his collaboration with new list editors to develop more substantive startup content resources has been an extremely valuable and innovative feature of his tenure.

We can also point with pride to the work of the Council's Subcommittee on Rules and Procedures, created by you at our last business meeting. Council member Jean Stuntz shepherded the restated Articles of Incorporation and a recasting of our bylaws through this subcommittee, so that these are now before you for approval. That committee will now turn to the difficult work of examining H-Net administrative policy – what we formerly called our “bylaws” – to update and adapt it to our changing practices and structure. This is difficult but necessary work.

H-Net's fiscal condition continues to improve and enable us to assume more of our expenses and to lessen dependence upon the generosity of our friends at Michigan State University. Thanks to an improving job market and to the fee increase you voted last year, revenues from our Job Guide are up again this year, from \$148,800 (1997 paid notices) to \$171,985 (2206 paid notices), an increase of 209 notices, or \$23,000. Donations, however, fell from \$54,493 in FY05-06 to \$45,982 in FY06-07. Details may be found in the spreadsheets distributed for our meeting. Projections for our revenues are promising, but they also suggest caution about overreliance upon a single revenue source, the Job Guide, which is itself a hostage to changing market conditions.

The improved revenue picture has enabled us to make our first major investment in programming since the Job Guide went online in 2001. Throughout the winter and spring of 2006, Professor Abdol H. Esfahanian, a MATRIX fellow and member of the MSU Computer Science & Engineering Department, studied the Reviews management system and investigated alternative programming packages to replace it. At his recommendation, H-Net hired its first dedicated programmer in almost ten years, who has made steady and remarkable progress in rebuilding the entire Reviews management and publications system. An initial version of the inventory control module will be previewed at our business meeting this year; we hope to be able to unveil a modest version of the system to review editors attending the American Historical Association conference next January.

We also have been able to hire more clerks and copyeditors to keep up with the demand for professional reviews online. I cannot overstate value of the tremendous sacrifices and professional service that review editors and copyeditors have made on behalf of H-Net Reviews; we remain the largest professional reviews publishers on the internet thanks to their efforts, with 743 reviews published so far in 2007, and well on our way to the decadal average of 1000 reviews per year. This represents a decline from the 1466 published in 2006, which can be attributed to a slowdown in submissions, technical issues with the portal and internal management system, and more intensive efforts at quality control by the copyeditors and review editors.

Significant issues and challenges remain. Despite increases in staff, our backlog of reviews awaiting copyediting and publication to the web is too large and is unacceptable. We also are investing too much of our scarce resources in technical support for electronic mail issues that could be handled or eliminated with a better content delivery platform. MATRIX will be moving from its offices in the Auditorium Building to new space that the University is preparing; the move will present some difficult problems concerning the amount of space we need for growing staff and our huge inventory of books. Associate Director Heather Hawley is overburdened with managerial tasks and unable to delve into project management as intensively as we need.

An item on our agenda last year that we have not made sufficient progress on is the Editors'

Professional Development Fund. I still believe that it would be very valuable to our editors to be able to offer internal support for professional activities they perform that redound to the organization's benefit. The funds for this program must be balanced against other needs as well, however. We need to consider hiring an Assistant Director to relieve Heather Hawley of managerial, training, and oversight responsibilities; I think we are in a position now to recruit a dedicated web designer and programmer to collaborate with the MATRIX design pool.

On December 31, a number of veteran members will be ending their terms as officers and members of the Council. Their services will be sorely missed, and we hope that they will continue to serve H-Net in other capacities as editors, board members, and advisors to the Council and officers. I hope that the members will join me in thanking them for their service to our organization:

Steven Mintz, past president and at-large member of the Council  
Melvin Page, at-large member of the Council  
Greg Downey, at-large member of the Council

In addition, my term as Executive Director is scheduled to expire on December 31. Because we have never established a formal process to search for and hire an Executive Director, I will be asking the Council to go into executive session to lay the groundwork for doing so and to determine the proper course for the organization's administrative leadership after January 1.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Knupfer', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Peter Knupfer  
Executive Director