



To: H-Net Council
From: Peter Knupfer, Executive Director
Date: February 1, 2012
Subject: Executive Director Annual Report, FY 2010-2011

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University of Houston-Downtown
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When I became executive director in January 2005 I proposed to the H-Net Council that H-Net write a strategic plan that includes not only a modernized and flexible communications platform, but also a formal agreement with our host, Michigan State University, a budget target of \$500,000 per year to fund a professional headquarters, and a revision and updating of H-Net's organizing documents, bylaws, and policies. Our goal has been to institutionalize our organization on a firm budgetary, legal, and technology foundation, and I am happy to say that with the vital assistance and direction of H-Net's Council and officers, we have made significant strides toward these goals during the reporting period. We rebuilt and improved H-Net's Job Guide; launched the building of H-Net 2.0, a new web-based platform for our networks; wrote a new agreement with Michigan State; and revised our fundamental bylaws and policies. Considered in light of previous achievements – especially the reconstruction of H-Net Reviews – H-Net's prospects look bright indeed as we approach our 20th anniversary in 2013.

Our revenues continued to be stable over the fiscal year. Job Guide income rose \$29,680 over the previous fiscal year to \$205,610, with 1869 ads placed compared to 1617 previously. We continued to receive welcome assistance from the Department of History at Michigan State, for which we remain very grateful. Some spending restraint enabled us to end the period with a slightly improved cash reserve of \$66,601, about \$5,000 above the same time the previous year. A direct appeal in November 2010 brought in \$22,762. This level of revenue has been sufficient to support base operations, but we will need to supplement it to make up for nonrecurring investment in a new platform, the shift to a paid executive director, and the expected implementation of a new agreement with the Department of History.

The listserv activity trends of the past few years continue. New subscribers join our discussion forums (255,444 subscriptions for 156,687 unique addresses as of this writing, compared to 146,609 last year) and new networks apply to join our organization (193 networks exist as of this writing, an increase of seven over last year), the number of postings per month declined slightly (from an annual average of 6,390 per month in calendar year 2009 to 6,381 in 2010; this average was 10,094 in 2000). During the reporting period we certified 55 (23 last year) new advisory board members and 70 (63) new editors.

H-Net Reviews continues its admirable rate of publication. During the reporting period 917 reviews were published on our site, bringing the archive to 31,178 reviews. Our readers owe a debt of gratitude to the productive efforts of the reviewers, review editors, copyeditors, our Vice Presidents for Publications Christopher Ball and David Benac, and the programming staff for such a successful program.

H-Net made very important strides in its effort to migrate to new content delivery and service platforms. Our programmer, Ronald Nussbaum, rebuilt

the Job Guide with new functionality; as I indicated last year, under the new system clients now create and manage multiple postings through their own accounts, staff members can set and revise prices, create invoices, and change posting status without intervention from a programmer, and clients are now able to choose different kinds of posting, including “featured ads” that display at the top of each page. Editors now can create customized job digests of recent ads in their specific fields for automatic posting to their lists.

After trying out several prototypes that were tested with the patient and helpful involvement of the H-Net Council and the H-SOUTH editors serving as guinea pigs, we contracted with Zengenuity, a software development firm in Ann Arbor that specializes in Drupal platforms for nonprofit organizations, to build a prototype for H-Net 2.0, our next-generation communications system. By June 2011 the software development team (Dennis Boone, Douglas Priest, and Zengenuity developer Wayne Eaker), headed by Associate Director Heather Hawley, had sketched specifications for the prototype. As of this writing, that prototype is largely finished and is being tested by a group of volunteer editors. The new system will enable editors to devote valuable time managing content as opposed to managing subscribers or coding outdated websites, as they now have to do; they will be able to moderate and edit discussions, documents of various types, custom pages and services, and blogs within a network presence that is integrated with the rest of their partner networks at H-Net. Members will be able to receive email notifications of new content, save content searches across H-Net, and manage their selected H-Net content and subscriptions within a “My H-Net” console. Once a stable version is located on our server, we will incorporate new features, including a sponsored advertising module, customizable calendars for each network, and a bibliographical module.

By the end of the fiscal year, Council member Ian Binnington had shepherded a complete revision of our founding documents – the by-laws and council policies, including a new Terms of Use policy – through the Council and ratification by the membership. The bylaws include new policies governing vacancies from the council, ratification of amendments, and management of members. Ian’s tenacity at this detailed and demanding task has been a source of admiration and wonder on the Council. The impact of this work will be felt far beyond his term on the board, which, sadly for us, ended with the close of last year.

H-Net also took significant steps toward a final agreement with the History Department and Michigan State University to house H-Net’s home office. We have drafted an agreement that transfers H-Net from its current base at the MATRIX research center to the History Department, a regular academic line unit. The agreement covers a number of practical issues related to staffing, payroll, space, and administration and connects us to a vibrant community of scholars and teachers who share our mission. The agreement is under review by University legal counsel and has already received preliminary acceptance by History. If approved within the next few months, the agreement enables H-Net to move its offices to History’s new location on the campus. The next step will be to define a process for identifying, selecting, and hiring an executive director.

I want to give a special nod of gratitude to Jean Stuntz. During her year as past-president of H-Net, she volunteered to fill the vacancy of our Vice President for Networks, a very high-profile and demanding job during a year when many other vital matters called for her attention. She tackled this work with great dedication, a good dose of Texas humor, and tireless effort, jump-starting stalled network applications, conducting a long-overdue survey of editors, and revitalizing our internal editors’ discussion forum. She also spearheaded an effort to revise the duties of this office, also long-overdue, while assisting Ian Binnington with bylaws revisions. Thank you, Jean, from all of us.

And particular mention must be made of our hard-working president, Julie Hofmann, now rotated over to serve as our past-president. Julie threw herself into the work of the Council last year and was able to leverage her past experience with software development, her knowledge and skill as an historian, and her spunky and energetic management style all for the greater good of this organization. She managed several difficult internal issues with diplomacy and

skill, while simultaneously helping the staff identify and repair serious design and functionality problems with the prototype under development. I am grateful that we still have her for another year as we implement this new system that bears so much of her influence.

As they rotate off the Council I would like to offer my thanks to outgoing members Ian Binnington and Mark Lilleleht for their wonderful service to the organization. Joyce Youmans briefly served as the HNET-STAFF editor with much good cheer and forbearance in a sometimes difficult job; her successor, Ryan Dunch, brings remarkable tact and balance to that position, as well as his wealth of experience from serving on the Council. The organization also owes much gratitude to the remaining members of the board – Charles Muller, Deborah Vess, David Benac, Randolph Hollingsworth, Justin Scott-Coe, Joe Ferreira, and Matthew Davis – for their advice and participation during a busy year in the leadership. We also welcome a new member, Scott Hendrix of H-WAR, as well as a new Vice President for Networks, Jon Anuik of H-EDUCATION. With a full leadership team we can confront upcoming challenges with every confidence of success.

This coming year we will be planning our celebration of H-Net's 20th Anniversary, to be held in conjunction with the American Historical Association's annual conference in New Orleans in January, 2013. A program committee chaired by president-elect Melanie Shell-Weiss (herself a former H-Net Assistant Director) and comprising all of our past presidents, is already at work planning events and developing a call for sessions from networks and individuals. Twenty years is a long time when measured in the digital age, and we have come very far as an organization. I look forward to an invigorating program of reflections on our achievements and future prospects, as well as the opportunity to reunite with so many colleagues from H-Net's storied past.

Finally, I again offer a heartfelt word of thanks to our wonderful staff at the home office: copyeditors Charlotte Weber and Basia Nowak, system administrator Dennis Boone, programmer Ronald Nussbaum, graduate assistant Doug Priest, our clerks Kelly Knupfer, Melanie Foley, Jessica Young, Caroline Johnson, Megan Anderson, and especially Associate Director Heather Hawley. All of them have shown consummate professionalism and sincere dedication to our mission; we owe much of our success to their labor.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Knupfer", written in a cursive style.

Peter Knupfer
Executive Director