

Editorial

Teaching and our profession

Since the mid-1990s there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people considering indexing as a career. In the USA, much of this interest is a result of the 'working-from-home movement', advertising for 'How to make money reading books', and popular press articles suggesting easy \$50,000+ annual incomes from book indexing. There is a hodgepodge from quickie workshops on how-to-index to online forums offering training. Anyone can hang out their shingle and call themselves an indexing instructor. Unfortunately, all too often there is a glaring lack of experience in curriculum design, heuristic methodology, and assessment and evaluation of student work. At some point in the evolution of a profession there comes a time when it is necessary to codify an educational program that will instruct and develop new members. In North America we have no such professional program. To this end, five experienced teachers of indexing were asked to contribute articles about teaching to this issue of *The Indexer*. They were given no specific guidelines about the topics to cover. What has emerged is a stimulating collection of perspectives on the teaching of indexing.

James D. Anderson (Rutgers University) outlines 20 essential attributes needed in the design of all information retrieval systems. His students apply these 20 features to a wide range of media, ranging from back-of-the-book indexes to large-scale, web-based information resources. Ann Hall (Book Indexing Postal Tutorials) describes the 18-year development of her distance-learning tutorials in book indexing. Of particular interest are her reflections on enrollment over the years and her methods of assessment. The 28 percent completion rate for Hall's course is extremely high for any distance-learning course; her article sheds light on why she enjoys such success. Nancy Mulvany (formerly,

University of California and USDA) presents a specific curriculum that was developed during 15 years of teaching in classroom and distance-learning environments. Sylvia Coates (USDA) addresses the difficult problem of teaching term selection. She discusses not only the qualities the teacher must bring to this task, but the cognitive skills that the students must already possess. Pat Booth (Society of Indexers' accreditation program) provides a holistic overview of training for indexers at all stages of professional development. She makes a strong argument for training of beginning indexers and reminds us of the need for ongoing continuing education during our careers.

At times it seems that our profession is under siege by pretenders. We have books about indexing technical documentation with shoddy indexes, yet these books sell. US editors complain of being deluged with slick marketing packages from people with little or no indexing experience and, as it sometimes turns out, with no indexing ability. There is something amiss. We must realize that the instruction of new indexers in the basics is fundamental to the health of our profession. Such instruction will encourage those who have the ability to index and weed out those who lack that ability. I hope that this collection of papers serves as a starting point for discussion of and reflection upon methods and materials for the teaching of indexing.

Nancy Mulvany

If we follow Pat Booth's excellent advice to continue our professional education, there is no better place to turn than the pages of *The Indexer*. This issue also includes Susan Klement's article about open- and closed-system indexing and Hazel Bell's entertaining description of compiling an anthology of indexes.