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Handbook of Latin American Studies. Fundacion MAPFRE America.

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Published in Fall 1995, the retrospective CD-ROM of the Handbook of Latin American Studies is of tremendous benefit to researchers of Latin American history and related fields. The single disk includes all of the bibliographical entries and introductory essays from volumes 1-53 (1936-1994), amounting to some 250,000 records. The CD-ROM's great achievement is that it relieves researchers of the task of leafing through fifty-odd heavy tomes to survey the literature indexed and reviewed in the Handbook since the first volume, which covered materials published in 1935. <p> The Handbook, an annotated bibliography of works in the humanities and social sciences, has long been considered the most important bibliographical guide in Latin American Studies, but the CD-ROM makes the Handbook much more accessible than ever before. Searches can be conducted in English or Spanish and may be limited by any combination of keyword, author, subject, date, volume number, and publisher. Search results can be modified to display entire records, bibliographic entries or introductory essays. <p> Two search modes (novice and expert) allow the user to choose the level of complexity of searches. Based on the experiences of researchers at Tulane University's Latin American Library, the novice mode should satisfy most users. Consequently, this review refers to the novice mode only. <p> The Handbook has been available electronically for several years, covering volumes published since 1990 only. But prior to publication of the CD-ROM, most researchers had electronic access only through the Internet, which required using the Library of Congress' highly complex search system. The CD-ROM not only covers the entire publication history of the Handbook, but provides very user-friendly electronic searching. The CD-ROM's great quantity of bibliographic information is shown in a sample search for "Guatemala" and "History" (in the subject headings). The search results contain a total of 568 items published in each decade between the 1930s and 1990s, and older publications are listed as prominently as new ones. <p> The search software has few serious limitations, but there are several problems of which the users and developers should be aware. Individual records may be downloaded only as they are viewed on the screen. Sets of short titles may be downloaded easily, but to download entire bibliographies, each record must be marked on the screen before downloading. These steps can be cumbersome if the user wishes to download a large number of records. A second limitation involves the differing record numbers used in the CD-ROM and print versions, which cannot be used jointly without difficulty. Researchers must refer to the print version for some purposes, such as easily identifying the authors of the introductory essays. <p> The online help features could also use some improvement (such as placing on-screen icons in the same part of the screen with explanations of the icons' functions), but the help menus should be relatively familiar to those who have used other Windows programs. <p> The disk is available for the remarkably low price of $150.00, due to the generosity of funding from Fundacion MAPFRE and other private sources. The developers are also discussing the possibility of a World Web Wide version, which could eventually supplant the CD-ROM to some extent. But for now, HLAS/CD is certainly the best resource for bibliographic research in Latin American Studies. The release of update disks are planned on an annual or biannual basis.

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