



# Member Highlight:

## Heather Hedden

Heather Hedden has been a taxonomist most of her career, dating back about 30 years when she got promoted from an indexing role into controlled vocabulary management at a periodical article database library vendor, then Information Access Company (since merged into Gale). Considering herself an information professional rather than a librarian, Heather joined SLA as soon as its Taxonomy Division was created in 2009. She then attended and presented at her first SLA conference immediately thereafter in 2010.

“Unless they specialize in a subject area or are very lucky, taxonomists tend to change jobs relatively often,” Heather observed, and this has been the case with her career, too. Since getting laid off from Gale (then a part of Thomson Learning) in 2004, she has been employed in taxonomist roles for a search software startup that didn’t make it, two consulting companies, a wind energy company, a return to Gale (then a part of Cengage Learning), a taxonomy/ontology software vendor, and since March 2025, as taxonomy manager with a market and competitive intelligence vendor, Northern Light LLC, in her local city of Boston.

What is less typical is that Heather has also been self-employed between employed jobs, and this has even been by choice. Three times she left employment to be an independent taxonomy consultant/freelancer, in addition to other times after being laid off. Heather started freelancing in 2004 as a back-of-the-book indexer, since she had prior experience indexing and book indexing is mostly freelance work. She then gradually added in the freelance taxonomy work, which was just starting to be an option. “I see benefits in both self-employment and employment, so I have enjoyed a career of both,” Heather observed. “But at times it was a difficult decision between one path or the other.”

Professional teaching has also been part of Heather’s career. She taught an online course in taxonomy creation through Simmons University School of Library and Information Science for many years until Simmons sunseted its continuing education program in 2016, when Heather continued to teach the course on her own. She further developed conference and customized corporate taxonomy workshops. The original Simmons workshop also served as the basis for her book, *The Accidental Taxonomist*, which was first published in 2010 and is now in its 3rd edition (2022). To promote her freelance services and book, Heather has presented at many conferences in multiple fields that related to taxonomies: taxonomies, indexing, library science, knowledge management, enterprise search, text analytics, information architecture, content strategy, digital asset management, technical communication, digital employee experience, semantic technologies, data, and knowledge graphs. She has presented at eight SLA Annual Conferences and several New England Chapter and Taxonomy Division events. Although she has no plans to write another book or edition, Heather continues to write on taxonomy topics in her blog, <https://accidental-taxonomist.blogspot.com/>. Her February 2025 post is about getting work as a taxonomist.

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## MEMBER HIGHLIGHT *continued*

SLA has been especially valuable to Heather for the network of taxonomists in the Taxonomy Community, in which she has volunteered in various capacities, but she has also had other beneficial networking SLA connections. SLA Fellow Brandy King, also an independent information professional, whom Heather got to know through SLA chapter events, brought Heather in as subcontractor on a project for Berklee College of Music. At the time, spring 2019, Heather was still employed at Gale but was thinking of a change, so this SLA contact opportunity made Heather decide to quit to become a freelance taxonomist again. Also that year, a previously unknown contact through SLA who worked at Facebook (not yet Meta), invited Heather to give a paid onsite two-day taxonomy training workshop to Facebook employees at the company's headquarters in Menlo Park, California. This turned out to be the first of several onsite corporate taxonomy training workshops that Heather gave through February 2020. Most recently, through attending the SLA Asia Community meeting at the SLA Annual Conference in 2024, Heather met SLA Fellow and award-winner Nabi Hasan, who arranged for her to present at one-day workshop on open access publishing hosted by the Central Library of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, when Heather visited India as a tourist in January 2025. "I've always appreciated the international aspect and connections of SLA," says Heather. This has also included SLA Europe meetups in London associated with the Taxonomy Boot Camp London conference (which is now virtual).

In addition to international travel, non-professional interests and activities of Heather's include walking, jogging, cross-country skiing (when there is enough snow locally), singing in a choir, and photography.

Heather is also active professionally outside of work through her involvement in standards committees. She previously served on the NISO (National Information Standards Organization) Content and Collection Management Topic Committee's Bibliographic Roadmap Project's working group, which created NISO Technical Report TR-06-2017 "Issues in Vocabulary Management." Currently she is serving on the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) working group ISO/TC 46/SC 9/WG 8, for which she has contributed to the review and revision of the international standard for thesauri, ISO 25964-1:2011 "Information and documentation: Thesauri and interoperability with other vocabularies: Part 1: Thesauri for information retrieval." The working group is led by Marjorie Hlava, SLA Fellow and Past Chair of SLA Taxonomy and Information Technology Divisions. As taxonomies are more informal, no best practices standard exists, but the thesaurus standard comes the closest, and professional taxonomists often refer to the thesaurus standard in their work. NISO also has a comparable thesaurus standard to ISO 25964, which is ANSI/NISO Z.39.19, and Heather hopes to be involved whenever a committee forms to revise that standard again.



**Heather Hedden**

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