

Why a Collective Portfolio? The History of Principles and Practices of the AAA Publishing Program

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We have been asked to recount the history of the “portfolio strategy” in the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) publishing program. This narrative rests on two important pillars at AAA: 1) The ongoing vitality of the AAA’s publishing program requires the creativity and energy of publishing sections. 2) The ability to build and manage AnthroSource and a publishing program for the future of the discipline rests on collective stewardship. These two support structures have always existed, as evidenced by the AAA by-laws, but the balance between them has changed over time. AAA has had to turn to more collective action solutions to meet the enormous challenges facing publishing. By acting collectively the society has been able to support both large and small section publications and to keep information dissemination viable and responsive to the discipline’s changing needs. The sidebars note some of the important consultations with section leadership.

According to AAA by-laws that have been in place since 1983, all section monies and contracts are the fiduciary and legal responsibility of the AAA. As provided for in Article X, Section 3 of AAA by-laws, only the AAA President or Executive Director may sign written contracts or agreements obligating the Association in any way. No section has the legal standing to enter into a publishing contract.

While this collective legal reality has existed for a long time, collective action was minimal before 2003. As owner of the publications, AAA staff managed copyright submissions and permission requests for the collective, but many of the decisions concerning individual journals were made solely by individual sections. The AAA staff handled the production on behalf of individual sections, but nobody handled the marketing and publicity. In those decades, AAA’s publishing program was print-only and submission, review and production, all conducted by post, took a long time. Library subscriptions were steady and growing in some cases; these subscribers were entirely in North America and only a few print copies were mailed to the handful of members overseas.

In early 2000, AAA began to explore how to produce digital versions of our publications, a process that led to AnthroSource. This conversation was seen as critical because:

- Librarians and members wanted digital access to materials. Ongoing relevance demanded that the society begin to produce its content electronically and also consider how to retrodigitize its archival materials.
- The number of journals had grown enormously from 9 in 1975 to 26 in 2000.
- In-house publication of print-only journals and newsletters had become financially untenable. AAA's publishing department comprised the largest department at AAA and staffing salaries and office rent escalated far more rapidly than the meager revenues from the journals.

2003 AnthroSource Outreach

To ensure section leadership was fully aware of these important changes, Frank Proschan and Mac Marshall attended both 2003 Section Assembly meetings and expressly invited Section Presidents, President-Elects, Treasurers, and Editors to attend an AnthroSource Working Group open discussion about AnthroSource, answer questions and provide opportunities for brainstorming. Further the AWG and EB members also held an "open forum" at 2003 meeting, chaired by Don Brenneis, and open to all AAA members in which AnthroSource and its larger vision were described. Brenneis noted the opportunity facing the AAA in his 2003 President's Report:

AnthroSource represents a major opportunity and challenge for AAA. It can only flourish through joint engagement, argument, refinement, and participation by sections, individual members, and AAA staff and officers. It should prove a remarkable resource for all of us, individually and jointly, affording access to what we know will be an ever extending range of publications.

Don Brenneis "2003 President's Report"
Anthropology News January 2004: 11.

Building AnthroSource required more definition of the relationship between AAA and individual sections. For instance, to have a stronger foundation for a collective publishing contract, AAA began producing Memoranda of Understanding with publication-sponsoring sections, to make it expressly clear which responsibilities belonged to the collective and which to the individual section.

On May 17, 2003, the AAA Executive Board passed a series of resolutions to make the creation of AnthroSource possible. These motions further clarified the relationship between AAA and individual sections:

- AAA would be the central publisher of the portal, whose responsibility would include entering into a publishing partnership on behalf of the society and individual sections.
- AAA would share costs, benefits, and risks in an equitable manner amongst participating sections and journals.
- AAA would allocate real costs and revenues to the unit that incurred or generated them but also protect individual journals from losses attributable to the transition to the portal during the initial four years of the project.
- The AAA Executive Board would appoint members to a committee to work with the AAA office to oversee the development of the portal, assess its structure and functioning, and develop procedures. This motion began a long precedent of member input and oversight of the publishing program through initially the AnthroSource Working Group (2003-2007) and then the Committee for the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing (2007-present).

Thus entered the phase when the AAA published in both print and electronic formats, (2003-2015). Sections expressed concerns about potential loss of members by offering member access to all AAA digital publications in AnthroSource. In response the AAA Executive Board on November 18, 2003 doubled the number of invited sessions at the Annual Meeting for publishing sections for the next four years; and adopted a motion to “minimize negative financial consequences” to individual sections resulting from AnthroSource. AAA membership has grown since 2003, in part because AnthroSource is a very valuable member benefit, something only possible because AnthroSource contains the collection of AAA content.

Collective action was required to meet these costly challenges. AnthroSource was an expensive undertaking, beyond the means of any individual section. AAA invested over two million dollars to establish this collective benefit. The investment was offset by \$756,000 in grant funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, \$22,928 in grant interest, and some \$300,000 in digital subscription revenues. By 2008, the AAA had used more than one million dollars of its reserves to produce this collective resource. AAA retrodigitized back issues of section-sponsored publications if this had not been done previously, and did not charge individual sections for these expenses.

Managing AnthroSource also required developing new collective processes. The 2004 AAA Executive Board minutes detail concerns about sections becoming insolvent as a consequence of the fee-for-service publishing agreement with the University of California Press. (AnthroSource debuted in 2005.) In May 2004, the Board moved to share digital AnthroSource revenues with sections. In 2006, the Section Assembly requested budget relief from AAA and on June 2, 2007, the Executive Board offered consultations with the publishing director and section treasurers about a loan program. The AAA Executive Board expressly affirmed the intention of these various policies by formally adopting the “portfolio principle” to guide practices related to the publishing program and to protect a diverse collective.¹

In 2007, AAA took the portfolio from the University of California Press to Wiley-Blackwell because three sections had ceased publishing and many other sections were deeply concerned about insolvency. The new contract dramatically reduced the costs of online development and AnthroSource hosting; helped compensate for the decline in

Responding to Section Needs

Comments like “[w]e don’t want to expire because of costs” and “[o]ur section was on the brink of folding” describe the level of anxiety that pervaded section leadership during the years with University of California Press. This context is important for understanding why the AAA Executive Board adopted a collective strategy in its next contract, which enabled the Association to pool costs and revenues, rather than assessing individual sections their true expenses.

Carol Greenhouse, Alisse Waterston, Lee Baker, “CFPEP Section Liaison Report April 2008,” p. 14. See: <http://aaanet.org/cmtes/CFPEP.cfm>

¹ Alisse Waterston "Disseminating Anthropological Knowledge Today: AnthroSource as an Evolving Resource" Anthropology News September 2009: 21; and Alisse Waterston, Ed Liebow "The State of AAA's Publishing Program: The Portfolio, Open Access and Sustainability" Anthropology News September 2012: 22.

library subscriptions; and provided editors and authors more robust marketing, such as Wiley-Blackwell's support of virtual issues. Moving the portfolio to Wiley-Blackwell helped AAA titles reach a global readership, through digital collections sold by Wiley-Blackwell and also through participation in philanthropic initiatives like HINARI, OARE, and AGORA. The new partnership also further modified the relationship of individual sections with the collective, as Wiley-Blackwell's agreement pooled revenues and pooled costs.² By aggregating the portfolio's revenues, AAA could support sections whose journals cost more than they produce in external revenues. In 2014, preliminary accounting shows that 14 titles produced a net cost (i.e. cost more to produce than the title generated in revenues), costs not assessed to the section generating the expense.

In the context of declining subscriptions, producing print and electronic copies and expanded marketing meant rising costs at a time when subscriptions revenues continue to decline. Further, the pace of change escalated, creating more pressure to adopt new digital models and functionalities.

In early 2012, the Committee for the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing (CFPEP) hired a publishing consultant to quantify the problems with short- and long-term sustainability of the AAA publishing program. AAA Executive Board authorized release of Raym Crow's report in October 2012, which was then sent to section leadership with the request that section leadership email questions for discussion at the San Francisco Annual Meeting Section Assembly. In addition, the committee compiled results from an all-members survey to help AAA and section leadership envision options.³

That discussion at the November 16th 2012 Section Assembly was followed up with calls for ideas from Oona Schmid. After sharing and analyzing section comments with all section leaders, it was clear that section leadership had arrived at a consensus to support a move for the collective to become digital primary. That decision was not made at an individual level, which might have harmed individual and smaller sections, but made in terms of collective interests.

2012-2013 Outreach

The Committee for the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing announced its charge to review the Wiley-Blackwell agreement in October 2011 *Anthropology News*. This article ends with an invitation: *As always, CFPEP invites you to share your thoughts on how to sustain and support a diverse portfolio of publications over the long-term, and how to make the most of the internet in scholarly dissemination.* Further, the committee conducted outreach in four blog posts; produced a webinar on Promotion and Tenure on 10/14/2011; and organized a double session at the 2011 AAA Annual Meeting and posted these materials on Vimeo for any member to view.

Deborah Nichols, Oona Schmid "The Present and Future of AAA Publishing" *Anthropology News* October 2011: 15.

Posts dated 10/18/2011, 10/25/2011, 11/9/2011, and 2/3/2012. See: <http://blog.aaanet.org/>

<http://vimeo.com/album/1821564>

² Alan Goodman and Bill Davis "A New Partnership" *Anthropology News* November 2007: 67.

³ Deborah Nichols, Ben Orlove, Hugh Jarvis "Publishing Survey Findings" *Anthropology News* May/June 2013: 17.

The 2016 transition to digital primary will be preceded by a relaunch of AnthroSource to improve digital design, including making content easier to read on smart phones and tablets and providing more visual content, full-text searching, and access to full-text content within two clicks.⁴ These enhancements to AnthroSource would not be financially viable to build for an individual title; the investment is only possible because it supports a collective portfolio.

To hear individual section needs and ideas, while also balancing divergent ideas within the broader collective, the AAA Executive Board adopted recommendations from CFPEP in November 2013 to establish the Publishing Oversight Working Group and request five-year plans from publishing sections. In response to recommendations by Raym Crow and to facilitate this review, the committee in conjunction with section leadership developed a multi-dimensional values statement. Sections were requested to submit five-year plans that address these values: Quality, Breadth, Accessibility and Sustainability.⁵ This process necessarily starts with the individual sections, but the intended outcomes of the five-year planning process will produce the best possible collective agreement.

Alongside these efforts to build and support a collective enterprise, some sections have published content on their own websites. For instance, CSAS, FOSAP of GAD, NAPA, and SACC publish newsletters; AFA and NASA publish peer-reviewed journals; and SAFN publishes book reviews. Some of these sections include their content in AnthroSource (e.g.s, AFA, SACC) but they are not required to do so. In 2014, the AAA Executive Board worked with Wiley-Blackwell to respond to SCA's request to leave the Wiley-Blackwell publishing partnership and self-publish its journal *Cultural Anthropology* on its own website prior to the conclusion of the Wiley agreement. The AAA Executive Board wished both to honor SCA's enthusiasm and to gain more experience about open access publishing to benefit collective knowledge. SCA agreed to maintain *Cultural Anthropology* on AnthroSource and to share information.

These self-publishing activities have allowed sections more flexibility and experimentation than they might have had within the collective agreement, but many of the funds for these activities come from the collective portfolio. No self-publishing activity has taken the form of contracting with a competitor to the collective agreement such as contracting to sell subscriptions or display advertising, or breaking away from

⁴ Mike O'Riordan "AnthroSource 2.0" Anthropology News September/October 2014 URL: <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2014/09/02/anthrosource/>

⁵ Oona Schmid "Getting to Journals 3.0: Changes to the Publishing Program" Anthropology News March/April 2014.

Responding to Section Needs

In response to specific concerns about whether online-only publications "count" for Promotion and Tenure, the committee authored a "Statement on Electronic Publishing." Peer-reviewed digital journals have become widely accepted, if not the norm, in the academy.

In response to questions about transition to digital-primary, AAA and Wiley-Blackwell coordinated a webinar on "Transitions to Digital Only and Digital Primary Publishing" on August 15, 2013.

<http://www.aaanet.org/resources/departments/upload/ElectronicPublishingStatement.pdf>

<https://aaanet.webex.com/aaanet/ldr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=125905032&rKey=ae84342af8c193b7>

the portfolio entirely. For a section to request the AAA Executive Board sign a contract with another publisher for their individual title to secure services would undermine the collective agreement that AAA signs to protect the publishing portfolio as a whole.

By signing agreements that cover the collective, the AAA Executive Board acts in accordance to its by-laws, as the fiduciary and legal entity of the entire society. Signing an agreement at the behest of an individual section that competes with this collective agreement puts the AAA in competition with itself because the AAA would also have the collective contract at the same time. This competition would seriously undermine the viability of a collective portfolio. Furthermore, since the content of section publications are each unique, and each contributes to the whole, the value of the collective contract lessens if AAA allowed publishing sections to go their own way. In short, signing an agreement for the benefit of a single section might comprise a violation of the fiduciary responsibilities encoded in the AAA by-laws.

As an organization AAA must choose between a commercial model in which the survival of titles is exclusively a matter of finances, or a collective model in which the diversity of titles is maintained to enhance the scholarly exchange of ideas. AAA cannot pursue this latter strategy if individual interests overtake the collective. All signs indicate future challenges will be as large as those faced earlier. The Association's ability to identify opportunities will continue to require collective and section creativity and voices but the means to respond to those possibilities will inevitably draw on collective resources and collective action.