Annual Report of the Committee on Scientific Communication

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John R. Bowen, Outgoing Chair

2003 was the 2nd year of a 2-year CSC activity to develop a set of guidelines for the AnthroSource portal. We met in Washington on March 8-10, 2003, to develop some major principles for the portal, to transmit those to the Executive Board, and to carry out a smooth transition from the CSC to the new portal Working Group as the main body entrusted with ensuring the portal's success.

I have attached the "portal issues" memo from that meeting to this report; it should be read in connection with the motions passed at the March Executive Board meeting.

The November, 2003 CSC meeting was focused on (a) taking account of issues raised by sections with respect to the portal, and (b) welcoming the new portal oversight board, composed of editors and experts in electronic publishing. At that meeting, we urged the Executive Board to attempt to compensate, to the extent possible, sections who incur additional expenses solely as a result of their place in the portal implementation queue.

Looking forward, I see major challenges facing the CSC:

1) As the elected group with responsibilities regarding AAA publishing, the CSC will need to be especially vigilant to the concerns of sections leaders about the portal implementation process. The CSC should act as an intermediary between the portal working group and the sections (and of course the membership more broadly).

2) It is very difficult to stay up to date on the technical aspects of the portal, but the CSC members must do this, i.e., not simply assume that every detail will be taken care of by the Working Group or the oversight board. Therefore, I would urge the CSC members to be sure that they each understand the details of publishing, tempting thought it might be to let the experts take care of it.

3) The CSC must continually refer back to the 2003 Executive Board motions as ethical touchstones for making judgments about the portal implementation process. 4)

What follows is the March 2003 memo from the CSC concerning the portal:

Portal Issues: Notes from the March CSC meeting
John Bowen (Chair, CSC)
April 7, 2003

On March 8-10, the Committee on Scientific Communication held a special meeting in Washington with the AAA staff, and the President and President-elect, to discuss some of the issues raised by the AAA portal project. We structured our discussion around the Chain Bridge consulting group's report to the Executive Board on the portal.
We all were very enthusiastic about the prospect of developing an AAA portal. The portal will allow us all to better communicate with and learn from an international body of scholars and other colleagues. We are very grateful that the Portal Implementation Working Group now will take up the task of soliciting a broader set of ideas and opinions on these issues and of developing the portal. Here I present some of our thoughts on the issues discussed at the March meeting for the benefit of Working Group deliberations. These notes are not official minutes but my effort to communicate these ideas to you all as quickly as possible.

I. Main Messages from the Meeting

Several points came up again and again and form, for us, a set of high-priority desiderata. We understand that the AAA is still in process of negotiating with potential University Press partners, and that it will take some time to arrive at the final set of working arrangements.

1) Make publishing as transparent as possible

First, and most importantly, we need to make publishing as transparent as possible. What does this mean in practice? It involves agreement on rules, and transparency in reporting.

Before we implement the portal, all interested parties should agree at the beginning of the process to a set of explicit, written rules about the role and responsibilities of editors, section leaders, AAA staff, and publishing partners. We should ensure that these agreements are communicated widely, and that all sections and other parties consider that they have had the opportunity to communicate their views, that they have been full parties to the process of deliberation, and that they have agreed to the rules of the game from the outset. These rules should include methods of allocating costs and revenues.

Budgets and accounts should be as "narrowly tailored" as possible, with items as disaggregated as much as possible. For example, editors and treasurers should be able to see a breakdown of actual revenue and expense for each journal by specific sets of tasks, and not just an overall production and editing charge. They should be able to see a ledger of expenses and revenues. Publishing partners and AAA staff should be able to expect the agreed upon amount of copy delivered on a certain date, so that they may be able to fulfill their obligations to subscribers. Editors should know the consequences of delays in delivering material. Authors should know in precisely what format they will receive edited copy and galleys.

2) Develop knowledge of "best practices".

Secondly, we need to develop a corpus of "best practices" knowledge about all aspects of the publishing process. Every editor has tales to tell about what worked and what did not work in negotiating with deans, talking with recalcitrant authors, communicating effectively with AAA staff, and so forth. The AAA staff has similar knowledge to share about how best to budget, or how to work with publishing partners. This knowledge might include effective ways to communicate the value of each of our AAA publications (to deans, or to librarians). These ideas and the stories that make them more easily imaginable and usable should be compiled as an
ongoing repository of publishing knowledge. This repository should prove useful in attracting and guiding new editors and staff people.

3) **Evaluate decisions against a set of publishing principles**

Third, we need to evaluate all of our activities and decisions against a clear set of guiding principles for AAA publishing. These principles should include:

1. Make AAA materials as widely accessible as possible, to anthropologists in all countries and to other interested parties;
2. Establish a publishing environment that best enables sections to thrive in terms of membership, financial health, and scholarly activity;
3. Ensure the long-term financial stability of the publishing activities;
4. Maintain clear communication (including statements of rules and financial accounting) among all parties. 5.

**II. Discussion of the Portal Project**

We are all impressed with the possibilities presented by the portal to develop world-wide communication among anthropologists and people in related fields. The portal will make journals more widely available, will facilitate searching and linking across publications, and will allow the AAA to publish a wider range of materials (video, photos, illustrations, working papers) at low cost. We agreed that the AAA should explore ways to **make access to the portal as widely available as possible**, a goal that will require creative thinking about how to tier the pricing by country, or type of institution, or the financial position of individuals without institutional access. If we work to maximize access through public libraries, for example, where librarians often assist people in using computers, we would increase access by retired persons.

The Chain Bridge report sets out a series of phases for the portal. Phasing will allow us to try out ways of publishing on a small number of journals, and to draw on that experience in designing the next stage. Once these phases have been completed, AAA publishing will involve three main sets of institutions: the AAA, which will continue to publish all material (meaning that the AAA has legal, scientific, and ethical responsibility for journals and other material) and will maintain the portal; the academic editorial offices and (in the case of section-affiliated journals) their sponsoring sections, which will prepare the content of journals and other materials for publication; and the partner, probably a university press, which will take these materials and turn them into web copy and print runs.

The initial stages of the portal project, which we hope will be funded by external grants, will include several distinct types of activities. The AAA will digitize past issues of AAA journals (and here we agree with the recommendation for a combination of PDF files and "dirty" OCR text, similar to the JTOR format). We will begin digital publishing of AAA journals in the phases discussed in the report. The Portal Editorial Board will consider digitizing other materials. We discussed the ethical and scientific issues raised in publishing "gray literature", all of which will need to be considered in full by the Editorial Board.
We recommended that print copies be kept of all AAA published materials, and that more be learned about methods of preserving digitized records. We also need to learn more about the future relationships between our own database (using the "metadata"--keywords, bibliographic information--created by the AAA) and the large databases currently available for search and retrieval, and the ways in which we will link to other, non-AAA journals (called "third-party journals" in the report). Our eventual partner will, no doubt, have much information on these issues.

Under the heading "business models," the report sets out some options, and makes recommendations, about how we will finance the portal. We agreed that the "aggregated" model, where a subscriber buys access to all AAA journals, creates the broadest access to AAA materials. We also agreed with the arguments for adopting an "electronic plus" model, where a subscriber receives access to electronic materials for a flat fee and can receive a print version of a journal for an additional fee. We must develop appropriate ways to tier prices.

This model implies a new set of relationships among journals, sections, readers, and the AAA. It will become much easier for all anthropologists and other interested people to read all AAA materials. That is the clear increase in access. However, access to journal content no longer will be a reason to join a section of the AAA. If I work at an institution that subscribes to the portal, or if I belong to the AAA, I will be able to read the MAQ and the AE without having to join either section. Will this change lead fewer people to join sections?

The answer depends on how sections view their goals and activities. People join sections for a number of reasons; receiving the journal is one, but not the only one, of these reasons. Sections are forums for discussion and exchanging ideas and experiences, whether at the AAA meetings, at section meetings, or in other ways. Sections act as interest groups, e.g., in sponsoring sessions at the AAA meetings. Sections may wish to create new such reasons to join. Sections would be able to create members-only segments of the portal, for example, which could contain specialized materials, discussion forums, bibliographies, etc. Furthermore, the AAA now will index all journals and make possible cross-referencing, allowing someone reading an article in, say, the AE to view the referenced article in, say, JLA. Moreover, the system will allow access to articles in any other non-AAA journal that is available electronically, and to which the individual or institution subscribes. We appreciated the benefits for all readers and for sections considered as interest groups, of this enhanced set of scholarly tools.

We do not yet know what the financial impact of the portal on sections will be, because we have not yet received cost estimates for publishing, and we have not yet established pricing policies for the portal. By the time of the May meetings of the Working Group, the CSC, and the Executive Board we hope to be in a better position to estimate production costs. The Working Group, the CSC, and the Executive Board will develop principles for allocating publishing revenue and expense that do not unfairly burden journal-producing sections and that could make it possible for sections to keep dues low and journal quality high.

At our meeting we recommended several principles that should point us toward equitable sharing of revenue and expense:
First, we recommended that the AAA make the method used to allocate indirect costs as fair and equitable as possible. Indirect costs are those costs such as rent, legal fees, and administrative salaries that are not directly related to publishing. Sections and journals should not be unfairly burdened with more than their share of such costs.

Secondly, AAA plans to fund all start-up costs for the portal, including the costs described for the first four years of the portal project in the report, from outside funding sources. In other words, sections will emerge from these first years of the project with their back issues digitized and their current issues ready to be produced, with all portal software and development costs already paid for.

Third, publishing costs (which are all "direct costs" from the point of view of sections, that is, having directly to do with publishing) will be divided into "common direct costs" (for shared activities, such as maintaining the portal) and "section-specific costs" (for activities attributable to one section or other activity or unit, such as staff time spent on editing a journal). AAA will charge section-specific costs by the hour. The bookkeeping system will allow sections to see a maximally disaggregated budget report, with costs listed by specific activity, by journal or other section activity. AAA will ensure that it obtains maximally disaggregated revenue and expense reports from the new publishing partner. AAA will allocate the common direct costs by a principle agreed to at the start of the implementation process by all interested parties (the sections, the AAA Executive Board, the Portal Editorial Board, and the AAA staff). Similar principled decisions will be made concerning the allocation of publishing revenues and other AAA revenues.

Please note that AAA publishing activities that are not sponsored by sections, such as the AA or AN, will not be supported by journal-producing sections, but by separate budgets. Each AAA publishing activity that involves staff time will have its own budget. This approach to budgeting ("maximize disaggregation") should mean that all direct costs born by sections are either expenditures initiated by those sections or common costs allocated according to a fair principle.

There is much left to do. We now turn over to the Working Group the results of our work to date, and anticipate the group's report to us as part of our overlapping mid-May 2003 meetings.