



American Anthropological Association Statement on Electronic Publishing

Adopted by AAA Executive Board on November 20, 2011

The rise of digital publishing presents opportunities as well as challenges for scholars. Digital publishing benefits the environment, lowers production costs, speeds the dissemination of new work, allows access to new forms of data, and broadens the audience for anthropological research. It reflects the ever-growing trend for journal articles to be searched for, accessed, and read in a digital format. At the same time, it complicates professional evaluation practices developed during an earlier time, when scholarship moved at a slower pace and there were fewer legitimate publishing channels. As a scholarly association the AAA offers perspective on assessing digital contributions to knowledge.

Most well-established journals and academic publishers now offer digital versions of their publications and scholarly e-books are increasing. Many will become digital-only in the future. For the purposes of evaluating faculty for retention and promotion, review committees and administrators should assess the standing of electronic publications according to the same criteria as they judge traditional print venues. Such factors as acceptance rates, the robustness of peer-review, and the strength of a publication's editorial board are relevant indicators of impact. Scholars under review working with publishers and editors can provide such information. Citation indices and journal impact factors may also be useful, but their limitations should be recognized. Particularly in disciplines in which scholarly information is disseminated heavily through journals, the Impact Factor is a useful reflection of the journal's connection to other English-language journals, albeit limited to a very narrow timeframe. While the standard period for tracking citations is two years after publication, the "journal cited half life" for anthropology publications across the subfields is, by Thompson Reuters' own reckoning, more than ten years. Standard citation reporting only begins to capture the post-publication impact of articles in Anthropology. In disciplines in which scholarly information is disseminated through journals, monographs, non-English works, and other kinds of literature, the h-index may be a more useful reflection of a journal's connection to other scholarship indexed by Google Scholar.

Emerging short-form serials will almost certainly appear more frequently in anthropologists' cv's in coming years. These publications typically lack the rigorous peer-review of traditional academic journals but have particular value in that they provide wide visibility and may be published rapidly in response to new discoveries, public events of note, or ongoing intellectual debates. Review committees and administrators should recognize that such vehicles provide a valuable service to the profession by informing the public about anthropological perspectives and research findings much as media interviews have done more traditionally.

Radical changes in the publishing landscape are reshaping writing careers in anthropology. To adapt to these changes, the AAA advocates both flexibility and an unwavering commitment to high standards of quality.

The Committee on the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing members comprised: Deborah Nichols, chair; Don Brenneis, Michael F Brown, Andrew Canessa, Hugh Jarvis, Janet Dixon Keller, Ben Orlove, Lynne Schmelz, Rebecca Storey.