



OPEN ACCESS

Advances in information technology enable open access publication models that grant anyone connected to the internet access to published work. Along with other scholarly communities, AAA faces difficult choices on if and how to pursue a transition to open access publications. This question involves considerations of the viability of journal finances, the quality of scholarship accessed by various publics, and AAA's commitments to its mission and ethics statements. The articles in this series, co-edited by Jason Cross and Stacy Lathrop, examine these high-stakes choices.

Open Access and AAA

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AAA President Setha Low and President-elect Virginia Dominguez encourage a rethinking of what we want AAA to be five and 15 years from now. As the conditions of scholarship and its public relevance change, we are called to reconsider the roles and functions of associations like AAA and its sections. In this spirit, the contributors to this In Focus address open access (OA) publishing and knowledge exchange in relation to the mission, values and disciplinary interests of AAA.



Jason Cross

In our recent past, changes in the world of publishing and their relation to AAA governance and finances have been a source of uncertainty and internal tension. These same changes, however, might offer the conditions for reorganizing the exchange of anthropological knowledge in ways that maintain (or improve on) the quality of scholarly review while expanding the access and participation of those invested in the stakes of that knowledge.

Wiley-Blackwell now has a five-year contract to manage AnthroSource and AAA journal distribution, taking on any financial risks, and granting our sections a breath of fresh air. The deal also presents AAA with an important opportunity to carefully consider OA in an informed, deliberate manner—without fears of hasty decisions.

What is OA?

OA publishing refers to online posting of material accessible by anyone connected to the internet—that is, not requiring a sub-

scription, membership or payment for viewing. Any OA model can include a print-on-demand feature, providing hard copies for the relatively few who demand them at a fee. Ease of access is key. Otherwise, unless researchers who are not subscribed to AnthroSource (be they students, academics, school teachers, activists, policymakers or interested citizens) have a strong enough desire to read a AAA journal article and the ability to pay for it, or make the effort to access it by connecting to an institution with a subscription, they will move on to an OA information source—and US anthropology gives up an opportunity to contribute to the research of a non-AAA-member who is not connected to a subscribing institution.

activities less dependent on physical capital, and therefore more open to nonexclusive models of production and distribution. Open source software, online communities, even material-heavy realms like biotech and manufacturing are being transformed by production and exchange practices that are less dependent on exclusivity.

OA publishing is part of this revolutionary transformation. The access-expanding effects of this change, however, are in trouble. They rely on increased connectivity that is in danger of being dampened and controlled by major players in various industries. From WTO negotiations to municipal broadband, these companies use legislation (eg, intellectual property) and consolidation to sustain exclusivity-dependent business practices, impeding the rise of less (or non) exclusive models.

think that OA deserves to be a priority. By deliberating OA options in relation to our stated mission and ethics, we can decide if OA objectives should help guide AAA decisions, or if OA should merely be a value that supplements decision making but does not play as central a role as other priorities.

Among our professional interests, we need to consider our presence and relevance in a changing public sphere. Researchers and diverse publics are accessing OA information more often. OA articles get cited more, and research is increasingly done away from university library portals, channeling investigators toward OA knowledge. Here, we should consider our stated mission to disseminate anthropological knowledge (and our own personal interests in doing so), as well as the quality of social science research relied on by academic and non-academic publics doing online research. Expanding calls for AAA to promote public, engaged and practicing anthropology should also lead us to think about public interest values in going OA. Additionally, commitment to a World Anthropologies initiative and other attempts to “decolonize” knowledge should include reexamination of publication models that sustain asymmetries of access to knowledge and participation in knowledge production and exchange.

Ethical analysis of our knowledge exchange models should also be greatly affected by the feasibility of OA. If we were no longer to need an exclusivity-dependent business model for quality review and dissemination of research, would we be consistent with our ethics in maintaining a system premised on restricting access? Are informants who often give researchers “open access” to their knowledge owed access themselves, especially if their participation in research was under some impression of contributing to general knowledge or understanding?

Deliberations about whether or not OA should even be a priority would do well to include

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In a stronger vision of OA, articles and other online content is licensed under a Creative Commons license. The research can then be used for various public interest purposes without needing to seek permission, so long as the source and author are cited.

Many AAA members are beginning to see how OA practices can advance our mission and ethics. Still, the anticipated trade-offs and uncertainties of any OA transition makes caution (and even assertive hesitation) reasonable. We will need careful research on business models to assess whether and how to make an OA transition. The potential value of OA to our scholarship and its role in the world, though, should at least merit consideration of whether or not OA is a priority deserving careful, even creative, attention.

Political Economy of Knowledge

As anthropologists, we like to think about things in context. So let's also put our own situation within a broader political economic context: New technologies have made many knowledge-intensive


Activists in the Access to Knowledge (a2k) campaign (linking movements from healthcare and software to public education and science) claim that the ways these struggles play out will determine the institutional architecture of the knowledge economy for several decades to come. Our decisions on OA anthropology will also align our long-term professional interests with one or the other governing values for the knowledge economy—exclusivity-dependent commodification or OA.

I am not suggesting that we determine our publishing models based on a2k politics. However, understanding this context helps explain why AAA deliberations on OA are watched closely by knowledge industries and a2k activists. It also makes us aware of the future political context in which we participate as we determine where our professional interests and values lead us.

Let's Deliberate OA

Serious consideration of OA options will require attention and resources. Therefore, we might first determine whether or not we

concrete consideration of possible OA business models, transition options, lessons from other OA projects, and assessments of how crucial exclusive access to AAA journals and AN is in attracting and maintaining AAA members. To that end, a short-term AAA OA Task Force (6-month term) could research business models and present a report on options and probable impacts to the Committee on the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing and the AAA Executive Board. The general findings of this report could then be presented publicly at an executive board-sponsored public policy forum at the next AAA Annual Meeting, where we could host experts from several publishing entities and experts on OA policy. Sections, journals and other AAA communities can discuss OA and

express their general positions through their AAA representation. These steps can help us determine whether OA is a AAA priority. Reading through mission, ethics and planning statements on the AAA website, you will likely find that many objectives would be advanced by an OA anthropology. The question for most of us then will turn on the details of OA alternatives and their impact on our finances and other priorities. How we approach that assessment, however, will depend on our knowledge and the framing concerns, concepts and assumptions we bring to the analysis. The contributions to this In Focus series invite us to rethink our possible OA futures and their compatibility with AAA and its partnerships. So let's get informed and creative. 

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ly completing a JD at Duke Law School, specializing in intellectual property and access to knowledge.



What do you think?

This In Focus series will be accessible through the new AAA website at www.aaanet.org, launched in early February. Recognizing that open access is of great interest to AAA members and larger anthropological communities, www.aaanet.org will now feature a blog where members and non-members alike can offer both their reactions to the In Focus series and their general thoughts on the open access issue.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Mission Improbable and the Possible Mission

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The most coveted real estate on any English language website is the upper left hand corner. On the AAA site, our logo—with its prominent “Founded in 1902”—graces that spot. The first tab, right below the logo, is a section called “About AAA.” Click it, and you are presented in boldface type with the Mission and Goals of this storied organization dating back over a century.



Lee D Baker

As I was preparing to write this short essay on the value of open access, I thought that I would use our mission statement for a little rhetorical purchase to help me make a persuasive argument that we are not in the business of selling anthropological knowledge, but we choose to associate in order to disseminate this knowledge to solve human problems. As posted on our website, the statement reads:

Section 1. The purposes of the Association shall be to advance anthropology as the science that studies humankind in all its aspects, through archeological, biological, ethnological, and linguistic research; and to further the professional interests of American anthropologists; including the dissemination of anthropological knowledge and its use to solve human problems.

Section 2. To advance the science of anthropology, the Association shall: Foster and support the development of special anthropological societies. . . Publish and promote the publication of anthropological monographs and journals. . .

As a footnote on the web page explicitly states, this statement is “taken from” the original constitution, as published in *American Anthropologist* (5[2] in 1903). The statement, however, did not sound the way WJ McGee, Franz Boas, and George Dorsey would have penned it over a century ago. It was too explicitly four field, too concerned with professionalization, and the gender neutral “humankind” was a dead give away that it was not taken verbatim from the organi-

zation's original constitution. So, I checked.

As a faculty member at a major research university, I can get the 1903 volume of AA online through my library's home page, and as a member of AAA I can access it online through AnthroSource. I

simply input the volume, year, and issue. Instantaneously, I have full access to all of that volume's content. It is easy access, but not open. My university pays for the former and I pay for the latter.

To my chagrin and dismay, the mission statement was not there. As is often the case, I naively assumed that the person who posted the statement simply got the volume or year wrong and took the editorial license to change mankind to the more felicitous humankind. So, I began to search for key phrases. I chose “The purposes of the Association shall”, “the dissemination of anthropological knowledge,” and “foster and support the development of special anthropological.” I thought these key phrases were unique and distinctive enough to the statement that a search of *American Anthropologist*

between 1900-1910 would locate it. Nothing. It was not there.

I eventually tracked it down, in 1903 (5[1]:178-190). It is an anonymous article simply titled “American Anthropological Association,” which recounted the association's founding and concluded with a copy of its first constitution. There is no mission statement, but under Article II the constitution addresses the objects of the association, which sort of sounds like the mission

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statement so prominently placed on the association's website. For the record it reads, in full:

The objects of the Association are to promote the science of Anthropology; to stimulate the efforts of American anthropologists; to coordinate anthropology with other sciences; to foster local and other societies devoted to Anthropology; to serve as a bond of union among American anthropologists and American anthropological organizations present and prospective; and to publish and encourage the publication of matter pertaining to Anthropology.

Within the span of 15 minutes, I was able to verify that the citation of the AAA Mission

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