



## Creating a Shared Vision for AnthroSource

SUZANNE CALPESTRI  
UC BERKELEY

BONNIE A NARDI  
UC IRVINE

Just what is a scholars' portal? How does it differ from other portals? What would a scholars' portal for anthropologists look like? And how would it differ from other portals in other academic disciplines?

Many within the AAA are giving serious thought to these questions, particularly now that the Mellon Foundation has provided the Association support (\$756,000) for one-time development costs for AnthroSource as a portal for anthropologists.

### Far from Enriching Scholarship

On one level, a scholars' portal is a response to the growing crisis in scholarly communication. This crisis is characterized by the rising costs of journals and unbridled increases in scholarly output. Between 1986 and 2000 scholarly journal prices increased at nearly four times the rate of the consumer price index. During the same period global production of scholarly journals and monographs doubled (<http://libraries.university-ofcalifornia.edu/scholarly/economics.html#trends>). A recent study appearing in *Library Journal* (April 15, 2003) reports that in the last four years alone (1999-2003) the average price of journals in anthropology increased by 36%, or by about 1/3. Clearly, there are no realistic budget strategies to keep pace with these increases. Far from enriching scholarship, this situation is undermining research, study and teaching. Scholars have less and less access to the published literature on their field.

Underneath this economic crisis lies the fact that the scholars who create and consume content also often relinquish control over that content by giving away exclusive rights to commercial publishers/multinational corporations whose goals for profit and satisfied stockholders are at odds with the values of scholars for the free flow of ideas.

### A "Tool of Immense Value"

The term *scholars' portal* emerged in 1999 from a Strategic Issues Forum for Academic Library Directors organized by the Association of Research Libraries to address this predicament in the academy. A scholars' portal was envisioned by these research library directors as a web-based venue

embodying core academic principles for publishing and distributing scholarly works. First among these principles is that "scholarly and government information is a 'public good' and must be available free of marketing bias, commercial motives and unfair cost to the individual user." A scholars' portal would be the product of scholars creating, consuming and controlling content. Driven by core academic principles, the scholars' portal held out the possibility of a new "tool of immense value."

Within the anthropology community many have given serious thought to the promises and potential of a portal for anthropologists. The AnthroSource Working Group, in particular, articulated a vision for a portal, suggesting a broad array of services and content ([www.aaanet.org/anthrosource/mac.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/anthrosource/mac.htm)) that together would constitute a reliable starting point for those wanting to engage with anthropology. The first element of that vision involves a *transition* from print to an electronic format as the primary mode of access, and moving production editing and publishing processes from AAA to the University of California Press.

The decision to engage a university press in these processes is consequential in the overall picture of rising costs of scholarly journals and indicative of AAA's commitment to the principles of a scholars' portal as articulated by librarians in 1999. Importantly, in the agreement with UC Press, AAA retains ownership and control over all substantive elements of the AAA scholarly communications program, including content and pricing. Therefore, AAA will continue to make decisions based on the values of the Association. Other professional societies and associations, including some in related fields of anthropology, have chosen publishers whose commitment to investors competes with the goals of scholars and thereby compromises the ability to create a true scholars' portal.

### A Portal by and for Anthropologists

Having set the course for AnthroSource to be a true scholars' portal, it is now time to elaborate on the particulars that will distinguish AnthroSource as a "tool of immense value" for anthropologists. The newly appointed AnthroSource Steering Committee (ASSC) began that work at its inaugural meeting November 22 in Chicago. Members of that group are: Suzanne Calpestri (Chair), Leslie K W Chan, Patricia Kay Galloway, Hugh Jarvis, Wade Kotter, Robert Leopold, Ed

### What Is AnthroSource?

An electronic portal to full text anthropological resources, AnthroSource will offer AAA members access to all AAA journals, newsletters, bulletins, and monographs; a linked, searchable database containing all past, present, and future AAA periodicals; centralized access to a wealth of other key anthropological resources, including text, sound, and video; and interactive services to foster communities of interest and practice throughout the discipline.

For more information, see the AAA website, [www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org).

Liebow, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Bonnie Nardi, Susi Skomal, Rebecca Simon and Lorie VanOlst.

As a first principle, the ASSC determined that the development of AnthroSource will be informed by the working habits of anthropologists. To move in that direction, ASSC members, Norma Mendoza-Denton and Bonnie Nardi will conduct an ethnographic study of anthropologists at UC Irvine and the University of Arizona. The study will cover anthropologists from undergraduates to emeritus faculty, and will utilize surveys, in-depth interviews and observation. The research will investigate the fine-grained details of how anthropologists use information for tasks such as writing papers and grant proposals, designing courses, and preparing for fieldwork. A key goal of the research is to make sure that anthropologists can easily use the information they find online in real tasks where they need to print the information, to use it in slideware, to export it to bibliographic formats such as Endnote or to use it in other ways beyond reading it on the screen. Another goal of the research is to understand the kinds of services AnthroSource should provide in the future. The results of this research will be particularly valuable in guiding AnthroSource beyond the conversion of journals to electronic formats.

In addition to this work the ASSC began work on a communication plan that would establish several venues for dialogue about developing AnthroSource. Initial ideas include regular reports in *Anthropology News* and on the AAA website from those working on AnthroSource as well as electronic and annual meeting forums for AAA member input. In these ways it is hoped that AnthroSource will distinguish itself as a "tool of immense value" for anthropologists. ☐

*Suzanne Calpestri is Head Librarian and Director of the George and Mary Foster Anthropology Library at UC Berkeley. She is the first recipient of the John H Rowe Chair.*

*Bonnie A Nardi is an associate professor in the School of Information and Computer Science at the University of California, Irvine. She investigates how people use technology in everyday life.*