# ONLINE PUBLISHING AND ANTHROPOLOGY

# Research Environment for 21st Century Anthropology

SUZANNE CALPESTRI, CHAIR
AAA ANTHROSOURCE STEERING COMMITTEE

What tools will anthropologists need for their research in the future? And how will these tools change the way we work?

The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), with support from the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, has appointed a national Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities & Social Sciences to investigate and report on the needs of humanists and social scientists in the digital workplace.

"Cyberinfrastructure," a term coined by the NSF, describes the *new research environments* in which capabilities of the highest level of computing tools are available to researchers in an interoperable network. Using the existing infrastructure as an analogy, the scholarship environment consists of the libraries, archives and museums that preserve information; the bibliographies, finding aids, citation systems and concordances that make that information retrievable; the journals and presses that distribute the information; and the editors, librarians, archivists and curators who link the operation of this structure to the scholars who use it. All these tangible structures have both extensions and analogues in the digital realm. The infrastructure of scholarship was built over centuries with the active participation of scholars. Because cyberinfrastructure will be built more quickly, it is especially important to have broad scholarly participation in its construction. Once in place, it will be much harder to shift, alter or improve its foundations, thus it is critical that the humanities and social sciences participate in the design and construction of these new research environments.

## Real Life Examples in AnthroSource

Anthropology's broad scope, multiple methodological approaches, small-scale detailed analysis language and data format requirements offer the most thorough test for cyberinfrastructure in the humanities and social science. Add to these the multiple legal and ethical contexts in which anthropological research is conducted. The AAA's new research environment known as AnthroSource provides the ACLS Commission with real-life examples of challenges and promises that a cyberinfrastructure might enable. The commission is also looking to AnthroSource as a model for developing both a new platform for publishing in anthropology and a forum for enhancing communication within a scholarly community.

In particular, the commission is interested in the ways anthropologists conduct research, how they use digital tools and technologies networked in cyberspace, and how these tools are transforming the practices of anthropological research, the nature of collaboration and scholarly communication.

## ACLS Research Agenda

The ACLS initiative is a response to the recent NSF report, "Revolutionizing Science and Engineering through Cyberinfrastructure," which makes a case for large-scale public and private investments to develop a shared technology infrastructure in support of robust networked technological capabilities enabling research in science and engineering.

From May through October 2004, the commission conducted six hearings across the country to gather expert testimony about 1) the current state of humanities and social science cyberinfrastructure; 2) requirements and the potential contributions of the humanities and the social sciences in developing a cyberinfrastructure for information, teaching and research; and 3) recommendations for areas of emphasis and coordination for the various agencies and institutions—public and private—that might contribute to the development of this cyberinfrastructure.

Within these three areas the commission is hoping to learn how disciplines are transforming themselves through the use of computing and networking technologies. It would like to know which organizations and structures have either empowered or impeded the digital humanities and social sciences, and where people are being trained to support and engage in such collaborations. What role, for example, do libraries, archives and publishers play in this transformation, and what are the barriers that confront humanities and social science users who wish to take advantage of state-of-the-art computational, storage, networking and visualization resources in their research? In addition, the commission is interested in which investments in cyberinfrastructure are likely to have the greatest impact on scholarship in the humanities and social sciences.

Beyond gathering expert testimony in these public meetings, the commission is also documenting ongoing practices and projects within the humanities and social sciences and consulting with foundations and funding agencies. AAA's AnthroSource Steering Committee has already begun to collaborate with the ACLS Commission, and will report on the findings as they become available. ∾

*Suzanne Calpestri is director of the George and Mary Foster Anthropology Library, UC Berkeley*