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Anthropologists give back: offer wider access to online anthropology archive

With a view to enabling teachers and their students at resource-poor institutions of higher learning around the world to access a vast online archive of anthropological research, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) announced today that it will offer its digital publications portal, AnthroSource, free of charge to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges, and qualifying institutions from less developed countries. The long-planned initiative is effective immediately.

The principal motivation behind the initiative, AAA officials note, is justice. At present, more than 90% of the roughly 145 HBCUs and Tribal Colleges in the United States and Canada do not subscribe to AnthroSource, a circumstance that deprives thousands of students in marginalized areas of North America access to 100 years of anthropological content, including the most recent issues of 15 peer-reviewed journals. AAA president Alan Goodman, one of the chief promoters of the initiative, declared that "Nothing - especially financial hardship - should stand in the way of these communities using AnthroSource to access anthropological scholarship. Our initiative is entirely consistent with the mission of the AAA - to disseminate anthropological knowledge."

Qualifying institutions include the 105 HBCUs recognized by the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 38 federally recognized Tribal Colleges in the U.S., the First Nations University of Canada (at the University of Regina) and the Canadian Arctic College network that includes Nunavut Arctic College in the Canadian province/territory of Nunavut. Outreach plans are currently being developed by the AAA to invite these institutions to receive access to the AnthroSource portal.

Free or low-cost access will also be offered to eligible institutions in 113 less developed countries participating in the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI), managed by the World Health Organization in partnership with more than 60 publishers. HINARI - together with a sister online information delivery service known as AGORA (Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture) - provides free or low-cost online access to 3,300 major journals in biomedical and related social sciences to local, educational non-profit institutions in developing nations. AnthroSource content will be made available by HINARI/AGORA either free of charge or at a significant discount to the 2,000 registered organizations in these countries.

A recurring theme in the AAA's deliberations on offering free access to AnthroSource was the notion of "giving back" to those who have given anthropology so much. Leith Mullings, a member of the AAA Executive Board, observed that "Anthropologists have been studying subordinated communities for years. The people in these communities have given our discipline its voice, its beauty, and its richness. They took us into their homes, trusted us, and supported our work. While these are gifts that can perhaps never be repaid, sharing the fruits of our collaboration with them through AnthroSource may help nurture future scholars in these communities."

Inquiries regarding the AnthroSource initiative are welcomed and should be directed to Jasper Simons, AAA Director of Publishing at jsimons@aaanet.org.

Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world's largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in anthropology, with an average annual membership of more than 10,000. The Arlington, Va.-based association represents all specialties within anthropology - cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and applied anthropology.

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