



Council for Museum Anthropology President's Report 2011

The Council for Museum Anthropology remains a strong and vital enterprise, representing the breadth of anthropological inquiry and interpretation in museum settings. While like any organization we face challenges, they tend to be of the pleasant sort—how to best use surpluses, and how to best meet the needs of a growing membership. This is something of a change; as some of you recall a few years ago the CMA was struggling, its membership declining and financial prospects grim. At least to some its long-term future was in doubt. Such concerns are a thing of the past—one might almost say they belong in a museum. Comparing October-to-October membership levels since 2009 the CMA has seen a 14% growth in membership, during a period when the main benefit of membership (access to the CMA's journal, *Museum Anthropology*, is provided free to all AAA members, regardless of whether or not they elect to join CMA. Our finances are strong, with current financial reserves (as of the end of October 2011) of \$73,233.27. And we've assured the continued strength of our journal, *Museum Anthropology*, by identifying the next co-editors to take office after Chip and Steve, and providing for a full-year overlap to promote continuity and a smooth transition.

Membership numbers are slowly increasing; despite this generally positive trend two concerns remain: 1) there is still a relatively high rate of "churn," or turnover of members who remain part of the larger AAA; and 2) we need to increase recruitment and retention of student members. Working with Richard Thomas of AAA Memberships, members of the CMA board drafted a membership renewal letter over the electronic signature of all board members to be sent to lapsed CMA members in hopes of increasing renewals and decreasing the "churn." Because membership dues are a minor component of CMA's overall revenues (most of which derive from publications revenues and revenue-sharing from the AAA Blackwell contract), we can continue to consider member numbers in terms of service and mission rather than as a revenue stream. As a result the option of very low cost student memberships (ca. \$5) is a practical option, and I recommend the Council adopt such a pricing strategy. There are also significant opportunities for cross-promotion and outreach to other sections. Analysis of section membership trends indicates that CMA currently shares the largest percentage of its members with the Archaeology Division (20.17%), followed by the American Ethnological Society (19.05%), Society for Visual Anthropology (15.97%), Society for Cultural Anthropology (15.41%) and General Anthropology Division (14.01%). Despite the high crossover between CMA and AD membership, traditionally CMA and SVA have shared the closest programmatic overlap and co-sponsorship of sessions.

Financially our position is enviable. Our reserves now stand at \$73,233.27, with an available reserves-to-expense ratio of 10:1. Net assets have increased slightly, and have almost doubled over the past four years. These reserves are not based on membership dues, fees or other direct revenues from our members, but instead reflect revenue-sharing arrangements with AAA based on the current Blackwell contract. The funding formula determining how much each section receives is quite complex, but I wish to note once again that CMA is in a particularly strong position because of strategic decisions taken several years ago to invest resources to digitize back issues of *Museum Anthropology*, which had the effect of significantly increasing CMA's share of overall shared publication revenues. One of our challenges in the year to come is to deliberately and prudently allocate these resources, while husbanding reserves against eventual need. While the financial benefits of the current publication arrangement are undeniable, this revenue ultimately derives from increased costs to libraries facing

budget cuts and thus is likely unsustainable over the longer term. There are also concerns about both the accessibility of these journals to non-academic audiences and the appropriateness of scholars volunteering their time to generate profits for a commercial enterprise. The AAA Committee on the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing (CFPEP) is currently discussing longer-term publication directions for the Association, with an emphasis on electronic publications and born-digital resources. In the meantime the Blackwell agreement has been renegotiated and renewed by AAA Executive Director Bill Davis, so that we have the luxury of discussing future publications and revenue options while enjoying a financially advantageous agreement for at least a few more years.

CMA's journal, *Museum Anthropology*, is on a solid foundation. Its current editors Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Steve Nash redesigned the format and editorial board of the journal, yet next year their role as stewards of the journal comes to an end. We are fortunate that two new and energetic co-editors have been selected--Jen Shannon and Cynthia Chavez Lamar will take up the editorship of the journal, following a year-long overlap to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. Christine Weeber will continue as editorial assistant, further ensuring continuity.

Howard Morphy, CMA President-Elect, has done an excellent job of preparing a strong program for these annual meetings. Our ability to offer equally strong programs in upcoming years depends on two factors (in addition to Howard's acumen): 1) your submission of papers and sessions for CMA review; and 2) your membership. The number of sessions CMA is assured of having on the AAA program is determined by membership count, not quality of papers alone. We have been fortunate in expanding our reach by co-sponsoring many sessions, and I urge you to explore the possibilities of collaborative or co-sponsored sessions, organized with other AAA sections, and remind you that registration fee waivers are available for some international or non-traditional scholars participating in sessions at the annual meeting.

We have a number of important issues to discuss—among them the revision of current NAGPRA regulations under 43CFR10, the status of the Belitung Shipwreck exhibition, the future of CMA print publications in an increasingly online world, and ways that CMA can better serve the ongoing needs of its members. CMA is a membership-based, volunteer organization—your organization—and I urge you to become part of the conversation. We share a common interest in museums as a venue for anthropological practice, but our membership reflects a wide range of values and viewpoints. That diversity is a potential strength which can only be realized by broader involvement and engagement.

If you're interested in getting involved, please contact me or any member of the CMA Board.

Respectfully submitted,

Alex Barker, President
Council for Museum Anthropology