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Mellon Foundation Funds E-Book Initiative Six University Presses to Develop Digital Publishing Platform for Archaeology Research

Boulder, CO—The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded a \$282,000 one-year planning grant to six university presses to collaboratively develop a digital collection of New World archaeology scholarship.

The University Press of Colorado, Texas A&M University Press, University of Alabama Press, University of Arizona Press, University Press of Florida and University of Utah Press will jointly explore ways to deliver data- and illustration-rich digital editions of cutting-edge archaeological research. The project, called the Archaeology of the Americas Digital Monograph Initiative, will give scholars and professional archaeologists the ability to review supplemental data not often contained in conventionally published volumes.

"This initiative will push the boundaries of the scholarly monograph," said Darrin Pratt, director of the University Press of Colorado. "To date, most digital publication has been the simple replication of print books in PDF or HTML format."

Enhanced by large data sets, color illustrations, video components, three-dimensional, rotatable images and, in some cases, interactive components such as reader commenting, the digital platform could "stretch our very conception of the book," Pratt said.

The University Press of Colorado will administer the planning grant, which will fund a shared project manager. If the program reaches full implementation, the presses could potentially create a third party entity devoted to the creation and maintenance of the digital platform. The presses also plan to work on a business model for the proposed platform.

Meredith Morris-Babb, director of the University Press of Florida said development of a strong fiscal model is critical to the project's success.

"Generating sustainable levels of revenue from digital publications has proved tricky for university presses," she said.

University of Arizona Press Editor-in-Chief Allyson Carter said the strength of the archaeology-focused digital initiative lies in the depth and breadth of the participating presses in New World archaeology.

Together, the University Press of Colorado, Texas A&M University Press, University of Alabama

Press, University of Arizona Press, University Press of Florida and University of Utah Press publish more than 70 titles in this field annually, focusing on the southeastern and southwestern United States, the Mountain West, Great Basin, Texas, Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean as well as the early hunter-gatherers that peopled the Americas.

The presses plan to develop a prototype digital book, providing a workable platform that could potentially be used by scholarly presses around the world. While the initiative will involve publishing many of the same books both in print and digital form, the participating presses will enhance digital editions with data not currently available in most printed books in the field.

Like scholarly books in other humanities fields, sales of archaeology titles remain limited. Presses also must enforce strict length and image limitations to constrain production costs.

“Many archaeologists have turned to supplementary CDs and personal Web sites as a place to post important context missing from their print work,” said Mary Lenn Dixon, editor-in-chief of Texas A&M University Press. “We hope this initiative will help these authors reconnect that context to the arguments made in their books.”

The archaeology-focused collaboration is one of seven multi-year, joint university press projects the Mellon Foundation has funded since the launch of its Monographs Initiative in 2007. The initiative serves to encourage presses to work together in publishing a larger number of first books in under-served and emerging areas of humanistic scholarship.

For more information on the foundation's monograph initiative, visit <http://aaupnet.org/news/press/mellon12008.html>.

Archaeology of the Americas member presses:

University Press of Colorado
Darrin Pratt, Director

Texas A&M University Press
Charles Backus, Director
Mary Lenn Dixon, Editor-in-Chief

University of Alabama Press
Daniel J.J. Ross, Director
Judith Knight, Senior Acquisitions Editor

University of Arizona Press
Kathryn Conrad, Interim Director
Allyson Carter, Editor-in-Chief

University Press of Florida
Meredith Morris-Babb, Director
John Byram, Associate Director and Editor-in-Chief

University of Utah Press
Glenda Cotter, Acting Director
Reba Rauch, Acquiring Editor