

University of Arkansas

1 August 2007

Digging into Archaeological Information

University of Arkansas researcher receives Mellon Foundation grant to build a digital library for archaeologists.

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. - Archaeologists have more information about mankind's buried history than ever before, and the amount of information grows every day. Unfortunately, most scientists can't use the bulk of this information because they can't get to it. There is no easy way for one group of researchers to share what they've learned with other scientists, to compare each other's data, or to combine information from different studies, old and new. Even worse, information is being lost every day, partly because there is no uniform system for storing it.

Scientists at the University of Arkansas and four other institutions hope to address this problem by creating a cooperative, self-sustaining organization, archaeoinformatics.org, to develop a system that will make existing archaeological documents, data and images more accessible. The project will develop new software tools and strategies that will be used to increase the accessibility of existing electronic data in ways that will make it possible to link previously isolated data together - helping archaeologists better understand the past. The work is made possible with the help of a \$152,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to the University of Arkansas.

W. Fred Limp, University Professor of anthropology, geosciences and environmental dynamics, Leica Geosystems Chair in Geospatial Imaging and director of the Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies at the University of Arkansas, serves as the project's principal investigator. Keith Kintigh of Arizona State University, Dean Snow of Pennsylvania State University and Timothy Kohler of Washington State University along with Chris Dore and Clay Mathews from the archeological consulting firm Statistical Research Inc. will serve as key collaborators on the project.

"There is a massive amount of data that has been acquired by archaeologists and much of it is now in digital formats. Unfortunately much of it is in incompatible forms, and data from one site or project cannot be easily located and compared to data from another site," said Limp. "Over the next year it will be our job to lay the groundwork for archaeoinformatics.org. We'll review what has already been done in archaeology and other disciplines, develop an implementation plan for the project, and put together a financial model to insure we will be creating a long-term, self-sustaining organization. "We will be designing a foundation for a digital information infrastructure for archaeology. While we are taking the long view, we intend that this project quickly provides new digital tools that archaeologists can use right away, and then continues to build from that foundation."