

The ASAO Website: A Brief History 1997–2015*

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I created the ASAO website early in 1997. It was my third website, following on the heels of a website dedicated to the people from Rotuma, where I had been doing research for nearly forty years, and a website for the Anthropology Department at the University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa (UHM). I designed the site using Claris Home Page on a Macintosh computer. The website was initially housed on a University of Hawai‘i server without a domain name and the URL <http://www2.hawaii.edu/oceanic/asao>. Alex Mawyer, who was a UHM graduate student at the time, guided me through the process of uploading the site.

The design of the website was purposefully kept quite simple and straightforward, with the only ornamentations a New Zealand Māori design also used on the *ASAO Newsletter* and a few thumbnail photos at the top of some pages. My primary concern in designing the site was to make navigation as easy and transparent as possible, so that visitors could readily find the information they were seeking.

The website was first introduced to the membership in the April 1997 *Newsletter* with the simple announcement, “Basic information about the Association is now available on the Internet,” followed by the website’s address (*ASAO Newsletter* #97: 4). (Some of that “basic information” had formerly been circulated in the form of printed brochures.) Later that year the website was moved to another UHM address with the URL <http://>

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www.soc.hawaii.edu/asao/pacific/hawaiki.html, which was announced in the September 1997 *Newsletter*, along with the following information:

In addition to background information and updated session announcements, contact information for current ASAO members can be obtained by clicking on “Membership” on the homepage. This will bring up dialogue boxes into which you can type the name of the person you are trying to locate. If you are looking for people with particular geographical or topical interests, you can enter key words into the respective boxes & generate a list. Contact information for the people on the list is available one at a time, by clicking on each name. (*ASAO Newsletter* #98: 2)

This online directory at the time was in addition to a printed membership directory that was available to the membership for a modest fee to recoup the cost of printing.

In a memo to the ASAO Board dated February 2, 1999, I addressed the topic of “Some Possible Expansions of the ASAO Website”:

- 1) A systematic effort could be made to link the website to the URLs of members who have personal or project websites. This would require a survey of the membership (which could go out with a Newsletter mailing) and the development of a format for presenting the data.
- 2) A set of webpages could be constructed listing the contents of each ASAO monograph (and other ASAO-generated publications) with links to the publishers’ websites where these publications can be ordered (or ordering information obtained).
- 3) The content of all previous ASAO Newsletters could be put on line with an accompanying index and search mechanism, making it possible for officers and members to easily search for relevant precedents. Jan’s estimate is that the total corpus amounts to about 1200 pages, which would have to be scanned (and a few early issues, of which we have only faint photocopies, would have to be retyped). This would be quite time consuming.
- 4) We could establish an online journal that would accommodate papers prepared for ASAO sessions that are not intended as book chapters or journal publications. This would allow members to get their research findings out quickly to a broad audience. Publications of papers in this form would be relatively easy, but if standards are to be maintained there should be some peer judgment involved as well as editing and proofreading. To bear the costs of editing and proofreading authors might be charged a modest fee (e.g., \$1 per page/250 words) to have their articles put online.

5) We could also post online a selection of pictures from previous meetings and from this and subsequent meetings as an historical pictorial record of ASAO. We might scan most of the better pictures and store them digitally as an archive that could be tapped for news events involving members or ex-members.

I am prepared to take the responsibility of webmaster for the ASAO website and to put in an effort to make any or all of the above expansions following my retirement in June of this year. I am prepared to donate my time and only ask to be compensated for software and hardware maintenance and upgrades, in the form of a stipend to be determined by the Board.

May I also suggest that if the ASAO website becomes integral to the operation of the organization the Board might consider making the webmaster an officer of ASAO.

Prior to the 2000 annual meeting in Vancouver, BC, items #1 and 2 were implemented; item #3 (posting past newsletters) was still being contemplated a year later. During the 2000 annual meeting, the ASAO Board voted to make the website manager an officer position.

My annual report after the 2000 meeting in Vancouver included the following:

I have discussed plans for posting the contents of past newsletters on the website with the Secretary/Treasurer/Newsletter Editor. She would like to have the newsletters available in pdf format (essentially photographs of the originals) so that page numbers and formatting are faithful to the originals. This would allow users to print out replicas of the originals on their own printers.

I am looking into the mechanics of this, but there is a problem prior to December 1994. Before this only paper copies exist, and they would have to be scanned, corrected, and formatted, which would take a great deal of time. One possibility is for me to take on the task on a time available basis, which would probably take years. Another option is to allocate funds for a student assistant to do the job. I would estimate that the costs involved would be in the vicinity of \$2000–3000.

In July 2000 I added an archives section to the website that included, in PDF format, all of the *Newsletters* from 1995 through 1999. Rick Feinberg has sent me on disk the *Newsletters* from 1987 to 1991; however, there was a gap between then and 1995 (the files were not available on disk), so those issues would have to be scanned in along with issues prior to 1987. The plan was

to add *Newsletters* to the website one year after their publication so that members would maintain the benefit of having current *Newsletters* that would be unavailable to non-members.

Item #4 (an online journal) has never been implemented nor has it been further discussed to my knowledge, but item #5 (a photographic archive) was added as part of the archive section with the initial posting of photos from the meetings of 1998, 1999, and 2000. Margaret Rodman offered to scan photos from previous meetings contained in albums from David and Dorothy Counts going back to the 1982 meeting in Hilton Head, and these were added to photographic archive in 2002.

Other additions to the website during the year 2000 were a section listing employment opportunities of interest to Pacific specialists, and a listing and links to sites of general interest to our membership. The initial list included seven sites: the European Society for Oceanists; the Australian Anthropological Society; the Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies (Nijmegen, Netherlands); the Micronesian Seminar; Pacific Islands Report (News); Pacific Island Web Resources; and Pacific Studies Syllabi and Bibliography. As of this writing (December 2015), the list of sites had been expanded to fifteen. In addition, a page was added listing websites of anthropological significance created and/or managed by ASAO members. In 2003, a section was added listing current and deceased Honorary Fellows, along with copies of the letters nominating them.

The year 2006 was one of major changes for the ASAO website. Because of limitations imposed by the University of Hawai'i, where the website had originally been located, we moved to iPower, a commercial server. We also purchased the domain name asao.org from a Japanese individual who owned it. iPower provided us with 100 gigabytes of disk space and greater bandwidth at a reasonable price (less than \$100 per year). This gave us ample opportunity for

expansion as well as the opportunity to archive high-resolution photographs and PDF copies of newsletters. The move necessitated some renovations, particularly with regard to the membership database. Whereas the UH server had directly accommodated the Filemaker database we use, iPower required a conversion to MySQL, a rather esoteric programming code that took me some time to learn, but the new database gave us more direct control over changes in content.

In 2008, with a bulk scanner provided to me by the association, I scanned all the undigitized issues of the *ASAO Newsletter* back to the organization’s beginnings in 1967, when it was known as the Association for Social Anthropology in Eastern Oceania.

Table 1 provides a history of visits to the website back to 2001. Data from 2001 to 2004 were obtained from the web manager’s annual reports. There were no data for 2005, but from 2006 to the present I was able to access comprehensive data from the server at iPower.

Table 1
Daily Average of Visits by Year

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Daily average	22	13	25	40	31	75	77	90	84	87	91	108	122	121

As one can see from the table, the number of visits has steadily increased over the years. To some extent this reflects an increase in ASAO membership over the same period, but it also may indicate an increased reliance on the website for pertinent information.

The peak period for usage, from September through February, is the time leading up to the annual meeting and immediately thereafter. Thus the “future meetings” page, containing information about the meeting site, received the highest number of visits in each of those months in almost all of the years between 2006 and 2015 (see table 2; numbers in parentheses indicate visits during the month). Anomalies—exceptionally high numbers for pages other than future

meetings—are usually the result of particular attention and repeated visits to pages of special interest to a small number of members.

Table 2
Pages Most Visited by Month (September through February) and Year

	January	February	September	October	November	December
2006				future mtgs (144)	future mtgs (128)	future mtgs (143)
2007	future mtgs (249)	sessions (257)	sessions (342)	sessions (307)	future mtgs (270)	future mtgs (271)
2008	future mtgs (481)	future mtgs (354)	future mtgs (222)	future mtgs (235)	future mtgs (284)	future mtgs (240)
2009	future mtgs (358)	future mtgs (382)	future mtgs (170)	future mtgs (225)	future mtgs (196)	future mtgs (289)
2010	future mtgs (394)	future mtgs (468)	future mtgs (291)	future mtgs (330)	future mtgs (288)	future mtgs (307)
2011	future mtgs (549)	future mtgs (461)	honoraryf (350)	future mtgs (261)	future mtgs (228)	future mtgs (268)
2012	future mtgs (442)	future mtgs (465)	future mtgs (219)	future mtgs (275)	bulletin board (216)	honoraryf (348)
2013	future mtgs (410)	future mtgs (450)	honoraryf (393)	othervols (914)	othervols (425)	honoraryf (238)
2014	future mtgs (318)	future mtgs (225)	future mtgs (418)	GRIKPIC (790)	GRIKPIC (573)	future mtgs (397)
2015	future mtgs (643)	books (422)	future mtgs (237)	future mtgs (290)	othervols (295)	future mtgs (247)

In the months between March and August there is considerably more variation in the popularity of particular pages (see table 3). The pages most frequently topping a month were the “board and officers” (17), “bulletin board” (10), “future meetings” (8), publications [“books”, “other publications,” “other volumes”] (6), and “sessions” (4).

Table 3

Pages Most Visited by Month (March through August) and Year

Year	March	April	May	June	July	August
2007	board (717)	board (574)	board (445)	board (398)	board (244)	future mtgs (200)
2008	archives (348)	board (147)	future mtgs (124)	board (169)	pubguide (127)	board (148)
2009	board (264)	board (267)	board (169)	board (171)	board (161)	future mtgs (173)
2010	board (181)	board (135)	board (173)	board (112)	future mtgs (133)	future mtgs (229)
2011	pisf (119)	bulletin board (144)	otherpubs (121)	bulletin board (194)	bulletin board (210)	honoraryf (334)
2012	archives (403)	bulletin board (186)	bulletin board (154)	bulletin board (179)	sessions (157)	sessions (142)
2013	archives (245)	future mtgs (301)	sessions (444)	sessions (390)	honoraryf (251)	honorary (611)
2014	archives (163)	bulletin board (135)	bulletin board (262)	books (393)	books (871)	bulletin board (272)
2015	books (673)	otherpubs (2016)	future mtgs (211)	othervols (607)	future mtgs (186)	bulletin board (280)

Note: Only html pages were used in these tables. High numbers of visits to the membership directory were prevalent throughout the entire period, but since they often involved multiple searches I did not consider them comparable to visits to specific html pages.

The job of the ASAO web manager is to keep all of the sections of the website up-to-date in the service of providing members with as much relevant information in a timely manner as possible. Among the tasks regularly performed by the web manager up until the redesign of the site and transfer of its management to Zakea Boeger in December 2015 were as follows:

1. Announcements concerning upcoming meetings were uploaded as soon as available and were constantly updated as new information became available.
2. Information regarding sessions at the annual meetings was updated three times a year in conjunction with the publication of newsletters in April, September, and December each year. The information was provided by the Newsletter Editor and Program Coordinator.
3. Following the election of new board members and appointment or changes of officers, the relevant page was updated.
4. Reports from the Pacific Islands Scholarship Fund committee, including information about and application forms for PISF awards for the new meeting, were updated each year under the guidance of the PISF Chair(s).
5. Information regarding membership (joining, renewing), with links to relevant forms, was updated twice a year. Prior to the meeting (usually around early December), preregistration information was included and a combined membership and registration form was available for download. Following the

meeting, information regarding registration was removed from the page and the form was replaced by a membership-only version.

6. When individuals were elected as Honorary Fellows of the association, they were added to the list on the relevant page and the letters nominating them were uploaded and linked to their names. Following the deaths of Honorary Fellows, their names were transferred to a list of deceased honorary fellows.

7. The publications section of the website was updated as items that were recognized by the Board as ASAO publications, including monographs, special publications, and collections deriving from symposia in either book form or special issues of journals. Links to relevant pages on publishers' websites, including ordering information, have been made whenever possible. A bibliography of publications that had arisen from ASAO sessions (including those published singly), compiled and edited by Rick Feinberg, Susan Win, Karen Peacock, Lynette Furuhashi, and Joy St. James, was also posted (second revision 2005).

8. Besides lists of past Distinguished Lectures and of locations of ASAO annual meetings (updated annually), the archives section of the website consisted of two sections: photographs from the annual meetings and copies of previous *Newsletters*. Photos were uploaded as soon as possible after each annual meeting, and copies of the *Newsletters*, with a one-year delay, were uploaded as each new edition is published.

9. Whenever job announcements of interest to Pacific Islands specialists were made known to the web manager, they were uploaded to the relevant page and then removed after the deadlines for submission contained in the job descriptions.

10. The page about the Grant to Return Indigenous Knowledge to Pacific Island Communities (GRIKPIC) was updated each time there was an award.