

Approval Date: July 16, 2009

Parent Policy: [Museums and Collections Policy](#)

Return of Cultural Property and Repatriation of Museum Objects Procedure

Office of Administrative Responsibility:	Museums and Collections Services
Approver:	Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Scope:	Compliance with University procedure extends to all members of the University community.

Overview

The University of Alberta's collections include museum objects such as **human remains**, funerary objects, ethnographic objects, natural history specimens and works of art. The University may receive requests from representatives of identifiable groups or from individuals for the return of **cultural property** or **repatriation of museum objects**. Although the University may have obtained the **objects** in good faith, it respects the legitimate interests of others. The University of Alberta will work, within its resources, with identifiable groups or individuals in order to determine whether **deaccession** or removal is appropriate considering all of the circumstances. Such requests for the return or repatriation of cultural property will be considered on a case-by-case basis, guided by the policies of the University and applicable laws.

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to:

- ensure that consistent procedures are followed at an institutional level, in an impartial manner, based on scientific, professional and humanitarian principles as well as applicable local, national and international legislation;
- ensure compliance with ethical and professional standards;
- provide guidance to University of Alberta individuals and units that receive requests for the return of cultural property;
- sustain public accountability.

PROCEDURE

1. Museums and Collections Services will coordinate all return of cultural property and/or human remains requests on behalf of the University of Alberta Museums.
2. Any University unit or employee receiving a request for the return of cultural property or human remains must contact the Executive Director, Museums and Collections Services. Individual employees are not authorized to negotiate requests.
3. Requests for the return of cultural property must be made in writing by an authorized representative of an identifiable group, or an individual, to the Executive Director, Museums and Collections Services.
4. Museums and Collections Services will identify units holding requested cultural property and work with that unit to assess the request and identify any additional requirements based on special circumstances surrounding the request. Units holding requested cultural property are responsible for checking all factual details of the request for completeness and accuracy.

5. The Executive Director, Museums and Collections Services, will notify the Policy and Planning Committee and request that a Return of Cultural Property Committee be struck to guide the process of responding to the request for the return of cultural property. Committee members will be chosen for their knowledge and understanding of return of cultural property-related issues and knowledge of the cultural property specific to the request.
6. A review process will be developed that ensures broad consultation and notification of any additional interested parties.
7. The Return of Cultural Property Committee is authorized to make a recommendation to the Policy and Planning Committee, which in turn will make a recommendation to the Board of Governors or designate, currently the Provost and Vice-President (Academic).
8. If the request is approved then deaccessioning procedures, as per the *Deaccessioning and Disposition of Museums Objects and Collections Procedures* are followed.
9. The University will not be legally liable for the retention or disposition of any cultural property nor will it be financially responsible for the costs of return and/or **reburial**. The costs are the responsibility of the claimants, as these are considered costs associated with the acceptance of returned cultural property and/or human remains. Any research on the cultural objects and/or human remains will be conducted at the claimants' request and expense.

DEFINITIONS

Any definitions listed in the following table apply to this document only with no implied or intended institution-wide use. [[▲Top](#)]

Human Remains	The physical remains of any deceased human individual.
Cultural Property	Any item that, regardless of its place of origin, may be considered important from an archaeological, prehistorical, historical, artistic or scientific perspective, can be considered "cultural property."
Repatriation	The process of restoring or returning objects to the culture, nationality or country of origin. Repatriation can be requested by representatives of the object's culture, nationality or country or it can be initiated by the museum. The process can be undertaken on legal and/or moral grounds.
Museum objects / Museum objects and collections	<p>Museum objects and collections are rare and unique, and hence irreplaceable, or represent declining or limited resources. The museum objects and collections governed by this policy shall include, but may not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - objects acquired by University staff and students, current and past, as part of their teaching, research or curatorial activities at the University, and for which the University holds title; - objects acquired by the University that relate to its mission, history, and teaching and research programs, and for which the University holds title; - objects acquired by University staff and students, but which are the property of the Crown and are held at the University; - information resources that provide documentation for an object or collection. <p>Exceptions to the above include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - living material; and

	- objects that may normally require replacement after study or research.
Object	An artifact or specimen. Artifacts are objects created, manufactured or produced by humans; a product of human art, craft or workmanship. A specimen is an individual or part that serves as an example of a class or whole; refers to an individual plant or animal or piece or a mineral, etc. collected and used for scientific or educational purposes.
Deaccession	The process of formally removing an object from the permanent collection or an object that has been permanently removed from the collection. The first stage, "deaccessioning," is the formal review and decision-making process that leads to the removal of objects from the collection and to the formal adjustment of registration records. The second stage, "disposition," is the actual discard or transfer of ownership and possession of deaccessioned objects.
Reburial	The re-interment of human remains and funerary and/or sacred objects either in their original resting place or in another agreed upon location.

FORMS

There are no forms for this Procedure. [[▲ Top](#)]

RELATED LINKS

Should a link fail, please contact uappol@ualberta.ca. [[▲ Top](#)]

[Ethical Guidelines \(1999\)](#) (Canadian Museums Association)

[International Council of Museums Code of Ethics for Museums](#) (ICOM)

[Museums and Collections Services](#) (University of Alberta)

[Return of Cultural Property Committee Terms of Reference](#) (University of Alberta)

[University of Alberta Policy and Planning Committee Terms of Reference](#) (University of Alberta)