

**ADDENDUM TO THE
FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY**

CURATION OF AND ACCESS TO HUMAN REMAINS

Purpose.

The Field Museum continues to work toward a consistent and systematic treatment of all human remains held within its collections. This Policy section provides standards for the curation of and access to all human remains held by the Museum.

Introduction

Human remains must at all times be treated with dignity and respect. They should be curated responsibly and carefully, available for appropriate scientific study, and be accessible for legitimate scientific, educational, or cultural purposes. This Policy recognizes the complexity of the required care and curation of human remains held within educational and research institutions, and it establishes Museum policies for the continued care of these sensitive collections. Such complexity stems from many different—sometimes opposing—socio-cultural, spiritual, political, scientific, and academic perspectives and values surrounding human remains. This Policy seeks to ensure the appropriate protection and continued care of human remains in the Museum’s collections, weighing ethical issues and communities’ concerns with the Museum’s fiduciary obligations to preserve its collections and their potential for scientific advancement through investigation and study. Of particular concern are investigative studies that involve invasive sampling and associated analyses. This Policy defines the Museum’s responsibilities for the respectful care and management of human remains and outlines processes for managing access for cultural and research visits to these collections.

The Museum is committed to providing the utmost respect to all groups or persons whose ancestral remains are in the Museum’s possession. The Museum will strive to treat all parties (of lineal descent or otherwise) who have a legitimate and valid interest in human remains with dignity and respect. Related to this, the Museum has a responsibility to conform to federal and state laws, including, but not limited to, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

The Museum houses the remains of individuals from all over the world. The Museum desires to follow protocols and policies throughout its human remains collections to meet museum standards for care and, where possible, that are appropriate to the human remains’ regional, cultural, or temporal origins. While recognizing the great value and potential of human remains for contributing to scientific knowledge, this Policy also takes into consideration the various cultural and religious concerns of indigenous and descendant communities when they can be identified.

Human Remains Defined

For purposes of this Policy the term human remains is used to mean the bodies, parts of bodies, of once living people from anatomically modern humans. This includes osteological material (whole or partial skeletons, individual bones, or fragments of bone and teeth), soft tissue including organs and skin, hair and nails, embryos, and slide preparations of human tissue. Human remains also include any of the above that may have been culturally modified or that may be bound up with other non-human materials to form an object composed of several materials. For the purposes of determining cultural affiliation, human remains incorporated into an object are considered a part of that item. The term does not include remains or portions of remains that may reasonably be determined to have been freely given or naturally shed by the individual from whose body they were obtained, such as hair made into ropes or nets.

Care and Curation of Human Remains

All human remains at the Museum shall be housed within a single climate- and access-controlled facility, the Human Remains Facility, excepting those human remains incorporated into objects, those requiring certain specialized storage (such as fluid-preserved remains or frozen tissue), those in a Museum exhibition, or those stored in the comparative collections of the Geology or Mammals Collections Areas lacking specific cultural affiliation or lineal descendency.

The human remains in the Museum's collections represent a variety of states of preservation and presentation (i.e., entire skeletons, individual components, incorporation into objects). This variation necessitates adaptable care and curation guidelines, so that each individual situation can be addressed to the best of the Museum's abilities. Specific guidelines for the continued care and curation of the human remains housed in the Museum's collections shall be as stated in the Policy Guidelines for the Curation of and Access to Human Remains as approved by the Vice President ("Guidelines"), but care of each individual set of remains will vary as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

Conservation of Human Remains

Any interventive conservation work should be undertaken only by qualified conservators in accordance with strict protocols, and only when necessary. The principle of minimum intervention and reversibility should always be applied, avoiding treatments that will contaminate or damage human remains.

Access to the Human Remains Facility and Collections

Human remains hold the potential for great scientific value while also possessing significant cultural importance. Therefore, once full documentation has been completed they shall be used only for appropriate educational, research, or teaching functions. Human remains collections are unique, fragile, and irreplaceable and shall not be used for entertainment purposes. The use of human remains in museum exhibitions will be considered carefully by the relevant Collection Administrative Team (CAT) before a recommendation is made for their inclusion in an exhibition (see below). In keeping with the Museum's fiduciary obligation to preserve its collections, Museum staff shall resist short-term trends or opportunistic uses of human remains to ensure their long-term preservation and scientific potential.

Visitor Access

Due to the highly sensitive nature of the human remains in its collections, the Museum strictly limits access to its human remains. A select and minimal number of staff members are allowed independent access to these collections. Staff having independent access shall be designated in writing by the Vice President Science and Education (“Vice President”) and shall include the members of the appropriate CATs, the Directors of Collections, Research, and Repatriation, and other staff deemed appropriate by the Vice President. All non-designated visitors to the Human Remains Facility shall require prior written approval from the appropriate CAT. Unofficial visits (e.g., tours) to the Human Remains Facility are prohibited.

Digital access to human remains media and documentation shall be limited via extra security clearance protocols as specified in the Guidelines.

Research Access

Prior to any research access to the Museum’s human remains collections, all researchers (both internal and external to the Museum) shall agree in writing to follow Museum policies and procedures regarding access to and handling and documentation of human remains as described in this Policy and the Guidelines. Non-invasive analyses are the preferred research method whenever possible and appropriate. Proposals for non-invasive research projects involving only visual assessments of human remains require prior written approval by the appropriate CAT. Proposals that require any handling and manipulation of human remains require prior written approval from the appropriate CAT and notification will be provided to the Directors of Collections, Research, and Repatriation. All research projects (both internal and external) requesting invasive sampling require prior written approval by the appropriate CAT and the Vice President or his/her delegate and these must follow the protocols specified in this Policy and the Guidelines. External research requests for invasive sampling will be administered and treated as institutional loan requests.

Analysis of Human Remains

Analysis of human remains should be undertaken pursuant to the highest standards by appropriately qualified researchers. All human remains must be properly documented prior to the commencement of any investigative analyses. Any results of the analysis (including genetic analysis) that will be used for commercial purposes or for purposes outside the scope of the approved research proposal also will require prior authorization by the appropriate CAT and the Vice President or delegate, and will be memorialized in a written agreement prepared in consultation with the Museum’s General Counsel.

Invasive Analysis

Invasive or destructive analysis of human remains is defined as any form of analysis that leads to the partial or complete destruction of any aspect of the human remains being studied. Common analyses in this category include but are not limited to: DNA extraction and sequencing, destructive isotopic or elemental assessments, and radiometric dating. In such cases, the smallest possible quantity of material necessary for the scientific purpose should be extracted.

As provided in the Guidelines, researchers requesting access to the human remains collections for invasive analyses must provide extensive justification for the study. Factors to

be considered shall include the overall rarity of the requested collection or individual, the potential cultural significance of the remains, and the scientific potential of the proposed research.

Exhibition of Human Remains

The Museum collections exist both for research and for public education through exhibitions. Careful thought should be put into the reasons for and circumstances of the display of human remains. Human remains should be displayed only when it is culturally appropriate as decided by the relevant CAT and provides a material contribution to the educational mission of the Museum. The public shall be notified that human remains are included in the exhibition and such display should always be accompanied by sufficient explanatory material.

The Museum will not permit display of human remains when a descendant group expresses a specific objection to the public exhibition of the human remains. In the case of human remains from foreign countries, the Museum will look to the exhibition policies of those countries and to the cultural practices of the communities within those countries.