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UAP 6410: Museums and Collections

University of New Mexico

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Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual - Policy 6410: Museums and Collections

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Authorized by UNM Regents' [Policy 8.5 "Museums"](#)

Process Owner: Director of Safety and Risk Services



1. General

University of New Mexico (UNM) museums and collections increase knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the physical, cultural, and biological world by collecting, maintaining, researching, and interpreting material objects and the contextual data associated with them. They are essential to UNM's mission based on the recognition that material objects represent a tangible and irreplaceable source of information for teaching, research, and public appreciation. Each museum or collection maintains its own unique items, purpose, character, and role and represent a diverse range of materials and disciplines. They preserve the past, increase our understanding of society and the natural world in which we live, and support the research that expands human knowledge in the arts, humanities, and sciences. The scope, depth, and unparalleled quality of these collections make it imperative that they are properly preserved and made accessible for current and future generations to behold, enjoy, and study in accordance with this policy which is applicable to all UNM museums and collections, including but not limited to:

- Harwood Foundation of the University of New Mexico (Harwood Museum of Art)
- Health Sciences Center Art Program
- Maxwell Museum of Anthropology
- Meteorite Museum
- Museum of Southwestern Biology
- University of New Mexico Art Museum
- UNM's Public Art Collection

2. Governance

The Board of Regents is the governing authority for all UNM Museums and Collections. Each museum or collection at UNM is administered through the appropriate UNM administrative unit. The governance of the Harwood Museum is specified in RPM 8.8 ("Harwood"); the other listed museums and collections reside in a college or school. Museum directors and collection administrators report to the appropriate dean or assigned supervisor and are responsible for implementing policies and procedures to ensure protection and enhancement of collections and related programs. The UNM Museum Council is responsible for reviewing museum and collection policies, and procedures to ensure compliance with the specific standards of their respective academic disciplines. The Museum Council may raise any concerns with the Provost and the University President, including recommendations for funding to ensure UNM's museums and collections can fulfill their mission and are adequately protected. The UNM Museum Council membership shall include the museum directors or their designees, a member from UNM's Department of Safety and Risk Services, a member representing Art in Public Places, and two faculty members, one each from the College of Fine Arts and the College of Arts and Sciences who are appointed by their respective deans.

3. Operating Principles

UNM museums and collections are operated in accordance with applicable laws and regulations; professional ethics, guidelines, and standards; UNM policies; and individual museum or collection procedures and processes.

3.1. Codes of Ethics

All UNM museums and collections endorse and operate in accordance with the American Association of Museums (AAM) "Code of Ethics for Museums." All UNM museum and collection employees, volunteers, and contractors must adhere to the AAM Code of Ethics and any additional guidelines specific to the museum's or collection's academic discipline and adopted by museum directors or collection administrators.

3.2. Standards and Collections Stewardship

Each UNM museum director or collection administrator is responsible for maintaining written operating standards and procedures appropriate to their discipline that specify how to care for and grow museum collections and make them available for research and public education and enjoyment. These standards must specify individual roles and responsibilities pertaining to acquisition, accession, deaccession, disposal, loan, registration, security, storage, use and other collections-related activities.

3.3. Public Access

Each UNM museum or collection will provide reasonable public access to its collection items and collections information consistent with its stewardship responsibilities and available funding. Physical and intellectual access to the collection items must be balanced with the need for preservation and protection. Museum and collection staff will control, monitor, and document all access to, and use of, its collections. Each museum and collection will provide the following information to the public:

- a description of the range and types of objects in the museum or collection,
- specific programs relevant to the museum or collection, and
- information on any public exhibits, including how to visit and the days and hours the exhibit is open to the public.

4. Acquisition, Disposal, Donation, or Loan of Collection Items

The acquisition, disposal, donation, or loan of UNM collection items must comply with the following principles:

- the transaction must be relevant to the mission and goals of the individual museum or collection;

- written evaluation criteria must be used;
- written delegation of authority to conduct the applicable transaction must be in place;
- the transaction must comply with appropriate methods as authorized by museum standards;
- the transaction must adhere to professional ethics and all applicable laws and regulations relating to collections; and
- the transaction must be approved and documented in writing, including legal title or authorization.

4.1. Acquisition and Accessioning

As a general rule, collection items are acquired for UNM museums and collections only when there exists a good faith intention to retain the material in perpetuity. Accessioning is the formal process used to acquire legally and catalog the accessioned collection item or group of items into a UNM museum or collection. Museums or collections may acquire items by a variety of methods including but not limited to gift, bequest, purchase, exchange, transfer, and field collecting.

4.2. Deaccessioning and Disposal

Accessioned items are retained as long as they continue to serve the goals and objectives of the individual museum or collection and can be properly maintained and used. Deaccessioning is the process used to formally approve and record the removal of a collection item or group of items from a museum or collection. Disposal of collection items is a legitimate part of responsible collections management and occurs for a variety of reasons, such as deterioration beyond usefulness, duplication or redundancy, insufficient relationship of collection items to the mission and goals, selection for consumptive research, or educational use. Museums or collections may dispose of items by a variety of methods including, but not limited to, donation, transfer, exchange, sale, repatriation, and destruction.

4.3. Loans

A loan is a temporary transfer of possession of collection items for an agreed purpose and on the condition that the item is returned at a specified time. Loans do not result in a change of ownership. Lending and borrowing collection items for public exhibition, research, and education is an integral part of the mission of UNM museums and collections. UNM collection items will not be loaned for commercial purposes or private pecuniary gain. Loans may be between UNM museums or collections or to and from other educational and scientific organizations. All loans of collection items will adhere to the "Guidelines for Exhibiting Borrowed Objects" issued by the AAM. Items on loan to a UNM museum or collection or UNM items on loan to or in the custody of others will be insured as stipulated by an authorized loan agreement.

5. Collections Information

Collections information is the documentation of the intellectual significance, physical characteristics, and legal status of collection items, as well as the collections management processes and transactions they undergo. Collections information must support and meet individual museum and collection missions and public access goals subject to available funding. UNM museums and collections will seek to provide the widest dissemination of collections information consistent with the stewardship responsibilities for its collections, associated documentation, and intellectual property rights. UNM museum directors and collection administrators are responsible for maintaining policies and procedures for addressing collections data development, maintenance, preservation, and retention. All media containing collections information are maintained for long-term use and must be preserved according to current archival policies and standards.

6. Security and Preservation of Collections

Museum directors and collection administrators are responsible for maintaining proper procedures and processes for securing and preserving UNM collections and ensuring their appropriate use. The President is responsible for providing adequate resources for museum directors and collection administrators to meet these responsibilities. Museum and collection staff are responsible for implementing these procedures and processes and notifying museum directors and collection administrators of any security concerns. The resources required to ensure collections are secured and preserved should be identified by museum directors and collection administrators and submitted to the appropriate dean and the Museum Council.

6.1. Preservation

Museum and collection staff are responsible for preserving, protecting, and securing all collections acquired, borrowed, and in the custody of the individual institution, including their associated information. Each museum and collection will balance current research and educational use with the preservation requirements of items to ensure that collections are maintained for future generations and rightfully serve their intended purpose. Any conservation intervention, restoration, destructive sampling, or consumptive use of collection items must be authorized, documented, and justified by professional standards of the applicable discipline for the purpose of preservation or professional scholarship in accordance with [Section 3.2.](#) herein.

6.2. Risk Management and Security

The programmatic activities of UNM's museums and collections naturally involve an exposure of collections to risks of damage or loss. Museum directors and collection administrators will maintain formal operating standards and procedures that assure sufficient control and individual accountability designed to minimize and control the level of risk of loss or damage to collections. These standards and procedures must:

- ensure collections are maintained in controlled areas that are adequately protected against fire, theft, vandalism, and natural disaster;
- include a written disaster preparedness plan and program;
- establish a security plan that protects collections during both normal and high-risk activities; and
- establish procedures for immediately reporting and documenting any damage, loss, or possible theft of collection items.

6.2.1. Inventory

Effective collections management requires a continuous inventory system to support decisions regarding collections use, growth, storage, and security. In addition to facilitating research, documentation, and storage, an ongoing inventory system is an essential security device to deter and detect theft. Full inventory control requires creating and maintaining reliable information about the identification, location, and accessibility of collection items. In order to safeguard assets, assure compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and promote efficient use of resources, museum directors and collection administrators must determine the level of inventory, cycle, and methods most appropriate for their collection items. Museum and collection staff members are responsible for conducting inventories and maintaining accurate and current inventory records.

7. Related Website

[American Alliance of Museums](#)

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