Overview of the collections

The Wesleyan University Archaeology and Anthropology Collections (WUAAC) contain over 30,000 archaeological and ethnographic objects from around the world. These objects are used in the hands-on teaching of archaeology and biological anthropology. They consist of three distinct collections.

The “legacy collection” consists of ethnographic and archaeological objects that once belonged to Wesleyan’s Orange Judd Museum of Natural History (1871-1957). This collection includes thematically focused sub-collections as well as individual items. When the museum was closed in 1957, many items were disposed of or sent to other institutions, and others were damaged or stolen while in storage. Although a museum was never re-established on campus, the Archaeology Program has been making a concerted effort since 2000 to rehabilitate the “legacy collection” and facilitate its use by students, educators, scholars, and stakeholders.

The “Middletown excavation collection” consists of archaeological materials recovered from Wesleyan-directed excavations in the Middletown area since the 1970s. Many of these materials are still undergoing active laboratory analysis and interpretation by faculty and students.

The “extant and fossil primate cast collection” consists of fossil and primate skeletal reproductions and other materials routinely used in the teaching of human evolution, comparative anatomy, and related topics.

Mission statement

Wesleyan’s archaeological and anthropological collections are an irreplaceable resource with intrinsic cultural and educational value. Our goal is to balance good stewardship with efforts to enhance the educational value of the collections and to improve access to them.

This goal specifically entails:

1) Preserving, rehabilitating (to the extent possible), documenting, researching, and raising awareness of the “legacy collection”, ensuring that it will be available to future generations;

2) Accessioning archaeological materials from local Wesleyan-directed excavations and curating material in this “Middletown excavation collection” to standard preservation conditions so long as acquisition is agreed upon by the Archaeology Program;

3) Providing the Wesleyan community with unique opportunities to engage in interactive teaching, hands-on learning, and original research;

4) Working toward providing greater access to the collections – whether physical or virtual – to broader publics, with a special emphasis on serving the Middletown community, collections stakeholders, and scholars;

5) Working toward meeting all legal obligations and ethical standards.
Organization and management

Day to day operations of the WUAAC are carried out by the Collections Manager, who reports to the Chair of the Archaeology Program. The WUAAC is overseen by the Director of Collections, a member of the Archaeology faculty who is appointed to this position by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost of the University. A Collections Committee, appointed by the VPAA and Provost and functioning as an advisory body to the VPAA and Provost, makes recommendations concerning Collections policy, accessions, and deaccessions. It consists of six members: Dean of the Social Sciences, the Director of Collections, the Collections Manager, the Chair of the Archaeology Program, a staff-member representative from one of the other collections on campus (e.g., Davison Art Center, Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies, and Olin Library Special Collections and Archives), and one member from any academic department represented in the Archaeology Program (currently, Anthropology, Art and Art History, and Classical Studies) not represented in the person of the Director of Collections or the Chair of the Archaeology Program. The Collections Committee meets once per semester and additionally as necessary. Decisions to recommend proposed accessions to the VPAA and Provost require a simple majority. Decisions to recommend proposed deaccessions, or to recommend changes to this Collections policy, require unanimous approval of the committee. Final authority to accept or reject the committee’s recommendations rests with the VPAA and Provost.

Acquisition/Accessions

Legacy Collection

The WUAAC does not seek to expand the “legacy collection”, but the Collections Committee will consider prospective donations for accessioning provided that all of the following criteria are met:

- the object can be actively used for pedagogy in Wesleyan’s archaeology curriculum
- the object can be properly secured, stored, cared for, and accessed without incurring unusual expense or posing harm to other objects in the collection
- the object has not been acquired or exported from its country of origin in violation of pertinent laws and policies, domestic or international. In particular, WUAAC will not accept any object that violates the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970); the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (Public Law 96-95); the Cultural Property Implementation Act (Public Law 97-446) of January 1983; the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA, Public Law 101-601); or the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).
- the object is accompanied by clear title, established by Deed of Gift, receipts, and other documentation

Extant and Fossil Primate Cast Collection

Additional objects may be purchased for this collection, subject to available funding and approval by the Director of Collections, who reports such acquisitions to the Collections Committee. Since this collection receives intense pedagogical use, funding may be available by
application for Teaching and Pedagogy grants and related grant categories of the Grants in Support of Scholarship (GISOS) Program administered by Academic Affairs, or through application for Smith Funds administered by the Archaeology Program Chair.

Middletown Excavation Collection

All proposed acquisitions to the Middletown excavation collections must be approved first by the Archaeology Program and then by the Collections Committee. Consideration will include, but not be limited to,

- Accessioned objects and records are consistent with the pedagogical, research and access goals as outlined in the mission statement;
- Adequate preservation, curation and storage standards can be met, including proper documentation and cataloguing of objects and records;
- All legal obligations and ethical standards can be met.

Care of collections

The WUAAC strives to observe the highest possible professional standards of documentation, preservation, and security in caring for the objects in its collections.

Access to collections

The WUAAC primarily serve in a research and teaching capacity and are not generally accessible to the public. Most objects are in storage and are only accessible by prior arrangement. Requests for information and access from scholars, educators, collections stakeholders and community members are welcome. The ability to honor such requests depends on numerous factors, most significantly the availability of space and staff, and tends to vary throughout the academic year. The best way to ensure access to the legacy collection and to the extant and fossil primate cast collection is to contact the Collections Manager or Director of Collections well in advance of anticipated needs. Requests for access to the Middletown archaeological collections may be addressed to the collections staff or to the Principal Investigator for the relevant archaeological project.

Loans

Objects from the WUAAC are generally not available for outgoing (off campus) loans. Many objects are available for short-term loan on the Wesleyan University campus. Loan requests should be directed to the Collections Manager or Director of Collections. The Director of Collections must approve all loans.

In general, WUAAC does not solicit or accept incoming loans.
Deaccessioning/Disposal

Deaccessioning

The Collections Committee will determine what items are appropriate for deaccessioning, following the recommendation of the Director of Collections.

Criteria for deaccessioning:

● Is the object no longer relevant to the mission of WUAAC?

● Is the object subject to NAGPRA and being repatriated according to the law? (In such cases, reference should also be made to the University’s NAGPRA policy document.)

● Is the object subject to international repatriation?

● Is the university no longer able to preserve the object properly?

● Has the object deteriorated beyond usefulness?

● Is the object a fake, forgery or reproduction and not useful for instruction purposes?

● Is the object a duplicate?

● Will this deaccession provide the means for improving or strengthening collections in order to further the goals of the WUAAC?

● Is the object intended for exchange with another object from another educational facility?

Deaccessioned objects that have educational value or historical significance will be deaccessioned only after an appropriate institution can be found to accept the object.

Process for deaccessioning:

● The university will follow ethical practices in deaccessioning. Items from the WUAAC may not be deaccessioned with the intent to give the items as gifts to employees, trustees, or students.

● The Director of Collections will review application of all international, federal and state laws governing collections, such as the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970); the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (Public Law 96-95); the Cultural Property Implementation Act (Public Law 97-446) of January 1983; the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA, Public Law 101-601); and the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).
• Proceeds from the sale of collection objects will be directed toward maintenance and care of the collections.

• The Collections Committee must make a unanimous decision to recommend deaccessioning to the VPAA and Provost, who makes the final decision. Outside opinions may be solicited before reaching a decision.

Documentation for an object to be deaccessioned will consist of findings of the Collections Manager and Director of Collections research, the Collections Committee’s recommendations, official receipts, correspondence, and final disposition of the object. All documentation will be filed with the registration records of the object. In the case of NAGPRA or international repatriation, some information may remain confidential in the Repatriation Coordinator’s files.

Disposal

The university may occasionally dispose of items in the WUAAC that have been deaccessioned by the Collections Committee that are not subject to NAGPRA or international repatriation. Objects will be disposed of when the University no longer has a need for an object or can no longer properly care for it.

Order of Actions for Disposal:

1. Donate, exchange, or transfer deaccessioned objects to another museum or educational institution.

2. Sell deaccessioned objects to another institution or at auction. In the event of such sale, to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest Wesleyan University employees and members of the Collections Committee shall not be eligible to bid on offered objects.

Proceeds of items sold will be directed toward maintenance and care of the collections. Under no circumstances will ownership be transferred to any employee of Collections nor any member of the Collections Committee.