

Policy: Collections

Purpose

To set out the principles governing the recognition, management, activation, and engagement of/with the University's collections.

Overview

- The University's collections are valuable assets that reflect the heritage of the Australian National University (ANU) and support the research, teaching, and engagement activities of the institution.
- The University's collections include Australian First Nations¹ Ancestors, objects, and cultural material. The University is committed to truth-telling around its collections and supporting the empowerment and self-determination of communities in their leadership, protection, and management of Ancestors, cultural objects, and material.
- The University's collections also include non-Australian Ancestors, objects and cultural material. The University is committed to the respectful management and restitution of this material and supports the empowerment and self-determination of origin communities to lead, protect and manage this material in accordance with their cultural values.
- The appropriate management of this material is essential to ensure that they can be curated and made accessible to support the academic community with complex, multi-disciplinary research, teaching and learning, and to ensure that the ANU meets its responsibilities to Australian First Nations and Asia Pacific communities by respectfully managing cultural material.
- The management and use of University Collections, identified collections and orphaned or legacy research material must align with the ANU Collections Policy and Procedure, and associated Guidelines.

Scope

This policy applies to all collection material, including:

¹ The terms 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander', 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous' and 'First Nations' can be, and are, used interchangeably in Australia. Through the use of these terminologies, the ANU seeks to acknowledge and honour the diversity, shared knowledge and experiences as well as the right of individuals and communities to define their own identities.

- University Collections (i.e., Collections that have had a Collection Management Plan formally recognised by the ANU Collections Advisory Group and approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation. This includes First Nations Ancestors, objects and cultural material, Research Collections, Heritage Collections, Teaching Collections and Art Collections);
- Identified Collections (i.e. material that has been identified as potentially being significant, but is awaiting formal recognition through the ANU Collections Advisory Group);
- Orphaned or legacy research material (i.e. research material – not currently included in an identified or University collection – deposited at the University from past student or academic research. The original collector is no longer at the University in an official capacity).

It is important to note that Australian First Nations Ancestors, objects, and cultural material may be present within University Collections, identified collections and orphaned or legacy research material. The ANU acknowledges the inherent rights of Aboriginal people to cultural self-determination, and the ongoing need for reconciliation and healing.

As stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):

Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. (Article 12).

Embedding the key UNDRIP Principles of self-determination, acknowledgement, respect and First Nations sovereign ownership of Country, Culture and Heritage into collection practices at ANU, and the return of Ancestors to Country, is an important part of this process. The ANU First Nations Portfolio will be involved in the management, use and repatriation of all Australian First Nations Ancestors, objects, and cultural material to ensure that First Nations sovereignty and culturally safe practices are embedded into collection management, activation and engagement.

This policy does not apply to material loaned by external institutions or collection material managed by the ANU Library, ANU Archives (including the Noel Butlin Archives, University Archives, National HIV/AIDS Archive and the Pacific Research Archives), the ANU Art Collection (managed by Drill Hall Gallery) and collections of administrative records (not managed by the ANU Archives).

Definitions

A Collection can consist of Australian and non-Australian First Nations Ancestors, objects and cultural material, historical objects, art and scientific specimens and samples, that form a coherent group, where ownership or responsibility is vested in the University and where approval for continuance as a collection has been granted by the ANU Collections Advisory Group on behalf of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

The process of formally recognizing a collection can be broken down into two stages:

- **Identified Collection:** a 'collection' that has been identified as potentially being significant, but

still needs to be assessed and formally recognized through the ANU Collections Advisory Group; and

- **University Collection:** a 'collection' that has an approved Collection Management Plan and has been formally recognized by the ANU Collections Advisory Group as a University Collection.

For avoidance of doubt, this definition intentionally does not mention the format of the 'collection'. A collection could include physical and/or digital material. Digital metadata connected to a physical collection is not a separate collection but exists to support the functionality of that physical collection. Issues relating to the management of different formats in a collection should be discussed in the collection's Management Plan.

The Collections Advisory Group provides advice and recommendations to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) on the management and use of 'collections', as defined by this Policy. This advisory body plays an instrumental role in supporting the University's mission to manage its diverse collections in-line with industry best practice standards.

A **Collection Management Plan** is a formal document that outlines the scope and significance of a 'collection', as well as strategies guiding the way the collection should be managed and used. This document is a vital step in having a 'collection' formally recognised as a University Collection by the ANU Collections Advisory Group. A Collection Management Plan should be routinely reviewed (as part of the broader auditing process) to ensure that the management and use strategies are still relevant and align with central University Collection Guidelines.

A **Collection Manager** is responsible for managing and curating University Collection/s, identified collection/s and any orphaned or legacy research material.

This work includes: significance assessments, cataloguing, conservation and restoration work, pest management and improving storage and display areas, management of internal and external loans, reporting and auditing, provenance research, digitisation and disaster management planning and coordination.

A **Collection Stakeholder** is a professional or academic ANU staff member, preferably employed by the same School, Centre or Division as the Collection/s, who has a vested interest in the collection, may actively use the collection in research and teaching or be part of projects to 'activate' the collection, but is not involved in its day-to-day management.

Culturally-safe Practices or cultural safety refers to processes that create a safe and respectful environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for First Nations Ancestors, objects and cultural material. It is based on the UNDRIP Principles of self-determination, acknowledgement, respect and First Nations sovereign ownership of Country, Culture and Heritage.

Orphaned or Legacy Research Material refers to objects or specimens that were collected through research and teaching (including past academic and student research as well as field schools) and have been deposited or left at the ANU. Though this material does not currently fall into an

‘identified collection’ or ‘University Collection’, it is subject to the same collection standards.

The ANU seeks to organize and reduce its holdings of Orphaned or Legacy Research Material by:

- Assessing the significance of the material and making it an ‘identified collection’ or ‘University Collection’ where appropriate;
- Where possible, reviewing research agreements to determine the length of time physical research material should be kept;
- Restitution and repatriation of Ancestors, objects and cultural material; and
- Transferring it to the most appropriate institution or, in the case of ‘loaned’ material, returning it to individuals.

Recognition is the status granted by the ANU Collections Advisory Group to a ‘collection’ that is assessed as significant and that meets other eligibility criteria (such a collection can be described as ‘recognised’ or as a ‘University Collection’).

Significance is the historical, artistic or aesthetic, scientific or research, and socio-cultural or spiritual values that an object or collection has for past, present and future generations.

Significance assessment is the process of studying and understanding the meanings and values of an object or collection, enabling the development of sound and reasoned judgements and statements about the importance of objects and collections, and their meanings for communities.

Policy statement

Recognition of Collections

1. All items in a collection governed by this policy are the property and/or responsibility of the University, unless other arrangements are agreed.
2. The University is committed to managing and developing its collections in accordance with national and international best practice standards. It grants recognition to each collection that is assessed as significant and that meets other eligibility criteria.
3. To gain recognition, a collection must submit a Collection Management Plan to the ANU Collections Advisory Group. This Plan must include a significance assessment, with respect to at least one of the four primary criteria, namely:
 - a. Historic significance;
 - b. Artistic or aesthetic significance;
 - c. Scientific or research significance; or
 - d. Socio-cultural or spiritual significance.
 - e. The comparative criteria used to assess the degree of a collection’s significance are:
 - i. provenance; rarity or representativeness;

- ii. condition or completeness; and interpretive capacity.
 - iii. The recognition criteria for a collection by the University is guided by *Significance 2.0: A guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections* (Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 2009).
4. Any 'collection' submitted for recognition to the ANU Collections Advisory Group should have a focus on how the material can be activated for the purpose of research and teaching, engaging with First Nations communities and/or strengthening relationships with other national institutions.

Management of Collections

The management and use of collections (including acquisitions, cataloguing, loans, use of collections in research, disaster management planning and deaccession and disposal of collection material) align with the **ANU Collections Guidelines. Australian First Nations Ancestors, objects, and cultural material.**

5. The ANU First Nations Portfolio is involved in the management, use and repatriation of First Nations Ancestors, objects, and cultural material to ensure that First Nations sovereignty and culturally safe practices are embedded into collection management, activation and engagement.
6. The Research Initiatives and Infrastructure team will work with Colleges and Service Division to ensure the respectful management, use and restitution of non-Australian Ancestors, objects and cultural material.

Research

7. All requests to use University Collections, identified collections and orphaned or legacy research material in research (both internal and external) are made in writing to the Collection Manager, Collection Stakeholder or Senior Collections Advisor. The Collection Manager, Collection Stakeholder and/or Senior Collections Advisor will follow the [Guidelines for Using Collections in Research](#).
8. Where the use of Australian First Nations Ancestors, objects or cultural material is requested, the Collection Manager, Collection Stakeholder and/or Senior Collections Advisor will seek advice from the ANU First Nations Portfolio.
9. Where there is a request for non-Australian objects and cultural material to be used in teaching, the Collection Manager or Collection Stakeholder will seek advice from the Senior Collections Advisor and relevant cultural authorities.

Teaching

10. To use University Collections, identified collections or legacy/orphaned research material within an ANU course, the request is sent to the Collection Manager or Collection Stakeholder in writing. For cross-College loans of material for teaching, the Collection

Manager or Collection Stakeholder will follow the internal loans process outlined in the [Loans Guidelines](#).

11. Where there is a request for First Nations objects and cultural material to be used in teaching, the Collection Manager or Collection Stakeholder will seek approval from the ANU First Nations Portfolio. It is forbidden and inappropriate for First Nations Ancestors to be used in teaching.
12. Where there is a request for non-Australian objects and cultural material to be used in teaching, the Collection Manager or Collection Stakeholder will seek advice from the Senior Collections Advisor.

Auditing

13. Recognised University Collections will be audited annually to review compliance with the ANU Collections Policy, Procedure and [Guidelines](#) (this includes gathering information regarding acquisitions, deaccessions, repatriation and/or restitution, loans and use in research and teaching).
14. Annual audits will be undertaken by the Senior Collections Advisor.
15. Information from this audit will be supplied to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) via the ANU Collections Advisory Group.

Donations

Collection Managers and Stakeholders obtain advice and support from ANU Advancement regarding potential donations to ANU Collections, especially where those donations are significant or complex, or where assistance managing donor relationships would be helpful. Please refer to the [ANU Gift Acceptance Procedure](#).

Restitution and Repatriation

Restitution and/or repatriation requests for Collection material (as defined in this Policy) are made in writing to the Senior Collections Advisor. The Senior Collections Advisor will involve the ANU First Nations Portfolio as well as College and Division stakeholders during the investigation of the request.

Document information

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