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Essentials of Collection's Management

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### Policy Evaluation: McClung Museum

The McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture, located on the campus of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, is home to a diverse collection from 27,000 to millions of objects that span a wide range of disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, geology, paleontology, and natural history.<sup>1</sup> The museum's collection management policy plays a crucial role in ensuring the preservation, documentation, and accessibility of these objects for research, education, and public engagement.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in its mission statement: "The McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture seeks to advance understanding and appreciation of the earth and its natural wonders, its peoples and societies, their cultural and scientific achievements, and the boundless diversity of the human experience. The Museum is committed to excellence in teaching, scholarship, community service, and professional practice."<sup>3</sup> The mission effectively communicates the goals and values of the McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture, emphasizing its commitment to education, research, community engagement, and professional integrity.<sup>4</sup> The collection management policy of the McClung Museum is outlined in a

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<sup>1</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections | McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture," [mcclungmuseum.utk.edu](http://mcclungmuseum.utk.edu) (University of Tennessee at Knoxville, April 16, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Keene, "Museums, Collections and People," in *Managing Conservation in Museums*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2002), 17–29, 19–23; Helena Robinson, "Remembering Things Differently: Museums, Libraries and Archives as Memory Institutions and the Implications for Convergence," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, no. 4 (October 2012): 413–29, 421–422.

<sup>3</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Boles, "Collection Policy," in *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* (Society of American Archivists (SAA), 2005), 64–73, 67–68.

comprehensive document that provides guidelines and procedures for the acquisition, accession, deaccession, cataloging, documentation, conservation, storage, and use of the museum's objects. The policy outlines the museum's commitment to ethical practices, legal standards, and professional best practices in managing its collection, as well as its mission to promote understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage of the region and beyond. The policy outlines the museum's commitment to preserving and providing access to its diverse collection of artifacts and specimens, which reflect the natural history and cultural heritage of the region.

One of the strengths of the McClung's collection management policy is its emphasis on the ethical considerations and legal requirements governing the acquisition and disposition of objects. McClung dedicates a whole section to "ethics" from general information to law compliance. The policy outlines the museum's commitment to adhering to the principles of the American Alliance of Museums Code of Ethics, as well as the guidelines set forth by the Association of Art Museum Directors, the Society for American Archaeology, and other professional organizations.<sup>5</sup> This ensures that the museum's collection is acquired and managed in a responsible and transparent manner, with due consideration given to issues such as provenance, cultural sensitivity, and the rights of indigenous communities under NAGPRA.<sup>6</sup> The policy also highlights the museum's commitment to ethical collecting practices, with specific guidelines for acquiring objects from indigenous communities and other marginalized groups.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Varner, "Deaccessioning in Museums," *Collections* 9, no. 2 (June 2013): 209–21, 214–215; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 6–7, 12–13, 19, 32.

<sup>6</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Developing a Collections Management Policy" (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums, 2012), 6; Marilyn Phelan, "Legal and Ethical Considerations in Museum Acquisitions," in *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hugh Genoway (AltaMira Press, 2006), 27–46, 29, 34.

<sup>7</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Developing a Collections Management Policy" (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums, 2012), 6; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 21–22, 31, 35–36.

In terms of acquisition, the museum's collection management policy outlines the criteria for accepting new objects into the collection, which include considerations of relevance to the museum's mission, research value, condition, and potential for public engagement.<sup>8</sup> As Simmons and Kiser explain, "the acquisition section of a collection management policy carefully defines the types of objects that are collected by the museum."<sup>9</sup> The policy also outlines the procedures for documenting the acquisition process, including the completion of accession records, acquisition forms, and legal agreements, as well as the establishment of clear title and provenance for each object.<sup>10</sup> McClung emphasizes it will not "knowingly accept or acquire archaeological, biological, historical or ethnographic objects if there is reasonable cause to believe that the object was illegally obtained, imported or collected [...]."<sup>11</sup> These procedures help to ensure that the museum's collection is well-documented and legally sound, crucial for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the museum's holdings.

The policy also includes guidelines for deaccessioning objects from the collection, which is a critical aspect of collection management that is often overlooked or never discussed in the archival field. Deaccessioning is the process of removing objects from the collection, either through transfer to another institution, sale, exchange, or disposal.<sup>12</sup> The policy outlines the criteria for deaccessioning objects, which include considerations of redundancy, poor condition,

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Craig, "An Overview of Appraisal: What Is It? Who Does It? Why Is It Done?," in *Archival Appraisal Theory and Practice* (K. G. Saur: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), 7–22, 11–16; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 14.

<sup>9</sup> John E Simmons and Toni M Kiser, "Acquisitions and Accessioning," in *MRM6: Museum Registration Methods*, Sixth ed., (Lanham, Maryland: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2020), 42–49, 42.

<sup>10</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 15–17; John E Simmons, "Collections Management Policies," in *MRM6: Museum Registration Methods*, Sixth ed., (Lanham, Maryland: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2020), 30–35, 33; Rebecca Buck, "Initial Custody and Documentation," in *MRM6: Museum Registration Methods*, Sixth ed., (Lanham, Maryland: American Alliance Of Museums, 2020), 38–41, 40.

<sup>11</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 16.

<sup>12</sup> John E Simmons, "Collections Management Policies," in *MRM6: Museum Registration Methods*, Sixth ed., (Lanham, Maryland: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2020), 30–35, 34.

lack of relevance to the museum's mission, and legal or ethical concerns.<sup>13</sup> The policy also establishes procedures for conducting a thorough review of deaccession requests, obtaining approval from the museum's governing board, and documenting the deaccession process to ensure transparency and accountability.

Another strength of the McClung's collection management policy is its emphasis on cataloging and documentation standards. The policy outlines the museum's commitment to maintaining accurate and comprehensive records for each object in the collection, including information on provenance, condition, materials, cultural context, and any associated research or publications.<sup>14</sup> The policy also outlines procedures for cataloging objects using standardized terminology, numbering systems, and data management, which helps to ensure consistency and accessibility of information for researchers, educators, and the public.<sup>15</sup> In terms of conservation, the museum's collection management policy outlines the procedures for ensuring the long-term preservation and care of the objects in the collection. The policy establishes guidelines for monitoring environmental conditions, implementing pest control measures, handling objects safely, and conducting regular assessments of the collection's condition.<sup>16</sup> The policy also

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<sup>13</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Developing a Collections Management Policy" (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums, 2012), 4; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 19–21; Mark A Greene, "I've Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell about It: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser," *Archival Issues* 30, no. 1 (2006): 7–22, 11–13; Elizabeth Varner, "Deaccessioning in Museums," *Collections* 9, no. 2 (June 2013): 209–21, 211.

<sup>14</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 7, 9, 13–16, 27, 37–38, 43.

<sup>15</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Developing a Collections Management Policy" (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums, 2012), 4; Frank Boles, "Collection Policy," in *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* (Society of American Archivists (SAA), 2005), 64–73, 71–72; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 18, 27, 29, 39–40.

<sup>16</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Developing a Collections Management Policy" (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums, 2012), 5; Marie Demeroukas, "Condition Reporting," in *MRM6: Museum Registration Methods*, Sixth ed., (Lanham, Maryland: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2020), 249–60, 249, 251; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 26–29, 45, 48.

outlines the procedures for conservation treatment, including cleaning, stabilization, repair, and restoration, which are carried out by trained conservators following professional standards and ethics.<sup>17</sup> The policy also addresses issues related to storage and security, outlining the procedures for storing objects in appropriate facilities that meet professional standards for temperature, humidity, light levels, and security.<sup>18</sup> The policy also establishes guidelines for handling and moving objects, loaning objects to other institutions, and ensuring the safety and security of the collection at all times.<sup>19</sup>

The collection management policy of the McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture is well-researched and thoughtfully constructed to meet latter-day principled regulations. It demonstrates the museum's dedication to responsible stewardship of its collection and its commitment to serving as a resource for research, education, and public engagement within ethical boundaries.<sup>20</sup> The collection management policy is comprehensive, well-documented, and aligned with professional best practices in the field of museum studies. By adhering to the guidelines and procedures outlined in the policy, the McClung ensures the preservation, documentation, preservation, and accessibility of its objects, as well as promote understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage of the region and beyond.

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<sup>17</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 25, 29, 45, 48.

<sup>18</sup> McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 28–29.

<sup>19</sup> John E Simmons, "Collections Management Policies," in *MRM6: Museum Registration Methods*, Sixth ed., (Lanham, Maryland: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2020), 30–35, 35; McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, "Collections Management Policy 2020" (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee in Knoxville, 2020), 7–8, 12, 13–15, 22–26.

<sup>20</sup> Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *The American Archivist* 49, no. 2 (April 1, 1986): 109–24, 111.

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