

Stanford

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4.2.4 DEPARTMENTAL SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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Over the years, many Stanford departments have acquired valuable special collections of artifacts, specimens, and historical objects. These departmental acquisitions have reflected the interests of a particular faculty member, concerns growing out of a specific research project or departmental initiative, or the sense that an available collection could enhance the pursuit of an academic discipline. However, such acquisitions carry with them institutional obligations. This Guide Memo provides administrative guidelines to assist departmental managers with such collections.

Authority:

Approved by the Vice President for Development.

1. Planning Policies

a. Cost-Benefit Considerations

When deciding whether to acquire or deaccession¹ collections, departments should consider the short- and long-term benefits of the items for research, teaching, and historical significance in relation to the short- and long-term costs of maintaining the collection. Obligations to the donor must be considered and any written restrictions placed on the donated collection by the donor must also be honored in deaccession decisions.

Costs for personnel; space, security, and environmental needs; preservation; insurance; and use of the collection (for display, loan, research, or teaching aids) should be estimated in relation to departmental priorities for teaching and research as well as the current and prospective availability of funding. These funding estimates should take into account:

- Current available monies for personnel, and facilities that could be employed, without increased costs, for the management and protection of the collection
- Additional monies needed to cover current estimated costs
- Projected changes in costs for the future
- Sources of future internal funding
- Sources of external support (grants, gifts)

b. Administrative Structure

To facilitate ongoing management, departments should:

- Establish procedures for periodically reviewing benefits of the collection in relation to its cost
- Clarify lines of authority for making decisions to deaccession collections
- Establish policies on the reuse of funds gained from selling a collection

¹"Deaccession" is a technical term used by librarians and museum curators. It means to remove an object permanently from a collection.

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2. Management Policies

a. Responsibility

When a school or department makes a decision to accept as a gift or loan or otherwise develop or acquire a collection of artifacts or other materials, it takes on the responsibility to fund, house, manage, preserve, and, if appropriate, dispose of these items. Before entering into a written agreement with a prospective donor that carries restrictions on the use, care, or disposition of a collection, the school or department may wish to consult with the Office of Planned Giving in the Office of Development and/or the Cantor Arts Center, Libraries and Archives.

b. Inventory and Control

(1) Record-keeping

Departments should have an inventory system for current and new acquisitions of collections and on-going record-keeping practices for controlling their use and protection. See also [Guide Memo 4.2.3 \[1\]: Records of Donated Equipment](#), for policies on recording gifts of capital equipment.

(2) Cataloging

To facilitate the use of a departmental collection, departments may want to prepare a catalog, either manual (such as a card catalog) or computerized (such as a data base file).

(3) Security

[Guide Memo 2.4.5 \[2\]: Protection of Property](#), outlines departmental responsibilities for safeguarding precious and high value items.

(4) Control of Access/Facilitation of Use

Departments should develop access and lending policies (where applicable), information about the availability and display of the collection, and a system for tracking the collection over time which will serve to increase and facilitate the use of the collection, and at the same time provide appropriate protection and security for the contents. Departments have the discretionary authority to restrict the use of a collection; any such restrictions should be noted in the publicity.

c. Care of Collections

(1) Preservation

Collections should be stored, used, lent out, and displayed in a manner that will minimize the risk of loss, theft and damage (see [Guide Memo 2.4.5 \[2\]: Protection of Property](#)). All policies for preservation should be developed to maximize the enhancement of the collections for their present and future use. Policies developed for the preservation of collections in the Cantor Arts Center, the Libraries and Archives can be referred to as useful models in the development of departmental policies.

(2) Space Allocation and Use

The space used to store and display collections should be environmentally appropriate and secure.

(3) Personnel

Departmental collections must be supervised by an assigned individual. When the advice of curators is needed, departments should utilize the expertise of curators in Green Library, the Hoover Archives and the Cantor Arts Center.

(4) Budget

Funding for personnel and other costs of the care, display, and use of the collections is a departmental responsibility.

d. Disposition of Deaccessioned Collections

(1) Considerations

Deaccessioned collections must be disposed of in a manner that respects the intentions of the donor and does not diminish the assets of the institution. If there are written restrictions pertaining to the gift they must be honored unless waived by the donor.

(2) Consultation

If necessary, departments should seek legal counsel, including staff counsel in the Office of Development, and independent expert opinion. If possible, they should also inform the donors and/or their heirs of the proposed action. If the collection was a gift, the Office of Development should be notified of the department's plans.

(3) Means of Disposal

The department should develop policies on appropriate means of disposal, such as sale, transfer to another institution, or destruction. Policies developed for the deaccessioning of collections in the Cantor Arts Center, the Libraries and Archives can be referred to as useful models.

(4) Further Information

Departments considering selling a collection should consult [Guide Memo 5.2.4](#) [3]: Surplus Property Sales.

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