

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a federal law passed on November 16, 1990 to provide a legal process to return Native American human remains and other cultural items to descendant Tribal Nations. Any institution that receives federal funding and federal agencies are considered museums under NAGPRA and have to comply. Auburn University is considered a museum under NAGPRA.

NAGPRA requires museums to conduct inventories and summaries of their holdings and report them to National NAGPRA and consult with all potentially culturally affiliated federally recognized Tribes. Auburn University submitted inventories and summaries in 1997. The inventories include a detailed description of Native American human remains and associated funerary objects. Summaries include a generalized description of items that could be an object of cultural patrimony, sacred object, or unassociated funerary object.

In 2018, the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work began conducting NAGPRA work with the known anthropological and archaeological collections. Since then, we have identified more NAGPRA collections and have opened up communication with Tribal Nations related to our collections.

New NAGPRA regulations were passed on January 12, 2024. The new regulations streamlined some of the legal processes and created new legal deadlines. The new Deadline is for museums to update and submit inventories is January 10, 2029.

The NAGPRA Project has been conducting inventories in the archaeological collections and identifying new NAGPRA collections and updating our records. Tribes have asked if there are other NAGPRA eligible items across campus. The NAGPRA Coordination Office is working to conduct a campus wide survey to identify any human remains or cultural items subject to NAGPRA.

Departments with a chance to have NAGPRA eligible items are:

- Library collections
- Biology/Kinesiology
 - Anatomy labs
- Art Studios/Museums
- Geology
- Agriculture
- Student Farm
- History
- Fish and Wildlife
- Forestry
- Pebble Hill
 - Projectile points

If you are unsure if an item or human remains falls under NAGPRA or about the NAGPRA process, please contact Michael Walters, NAGPRA Coordinator, at mcw0121@auburn.edu.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)

- Federal law passed in 1990
 - Sets up process to return Native American remains and certain cultural items to descendant communities
- Any institution that receives federal funds must comply
- Civil penalties for failure to comply and not work in good faith
 - Potential loss of federal funding if failure to comply
- Items Subject to NAGPRA
 - Sacred Objects
 - Objects of Cultural Patrimony
 - Funerary objects
 - Human Remains

NAGPRA Campus Survey

- Survey includes all departments and offices on campus
 - All employees
- A response is required from each department
 - Will follow up if no response in 60 or 90 days
- Aiming to get Survey out over the summer or early in Fall Semester
- It's ok if you find something after this survey
 - Legal deadlines start when finding a new item or human remains
- The first step of many in the repatriation process
- My office is here to help!

Contact Information

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