


UCL Museums Controversy Cards: For students

Cut out individual cards

UCL MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS




1) I run the Archaeology Collections. We have been offered a valuable collection of pottery from Iraq.

We do not know when they were collected or by whom, or where they have been since they were excavated, but they would be a fantastic addition to the collection.

I do not think we should accept them.


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2) I run the Archaeology Collections. I am on holiday in Norway and I have found a beautiful Viking sword, complete with jewels, in a cave on the coast.

This would be an amazing object to bring back to UCL, but I think that I should give it to local authorities.

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3) I run the Geology Collections. I am making a display about British dinosaurs. Like every big dino on display in the UK, the skeleton I am including is a plaster cast of a fossil.

I think that the fact that the skeleton is a copy is not important—people will find it more interesting if they think it's real.

I do not want to tell the public that it's made of plaster.

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4) I run the Art Collections. Because of the recession, UCL is looking for ways to make money, and they want to sell pieces of art.


Our collection is used for teaching and research, but the objects are by famous artists and could be sold for huge amounts.

I think selling art is a good way of ensuring the long-term survival of the Collection.

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5) I run the Anthropology Collection. We have the skull of a Maori collected in 1887 when New Zealand was a British colony.

Modern members of the same community now want the skull to be returned to them for burial.

I regularly use this object in teaching and do not want to return it.

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6) I run the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. One of our star objects is the world's oldest dress, collected in 1912.

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo say that this object is part of Egypt's history and that it should be returned to them.

I believe that we should keep it.

UCL MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS




7) I run the Grant Museum of Zoology. We regularly use our collection to teach about and research endangered animals in order to aid their survival.

There are only 138 northern hairy-nosed wombats left in the world alive.

I want to go and collect a specimen for the Museum before it goes extinct.

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8) I run the Grant Museum of Zoology. We have one of the world's few preserved Tasmanian tigers, which went extinct in 1936.


Australian zoologists want to use our specimen to attempt to clone the species.

I believe that we should take part in this project.

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9) I run the Art Collections, and I am an expert in Central Asian art.

I have been contacted by the Afghan Government - they want me to go to Afghanistan to help rescue art from their museums, which could be destroyed by the ongoing conflict.

I think that the risk to myself is less important than the priceless artefacts that could be lost.

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10) I run the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. We have 80000 objects from the ancient world.

Educators want to use our objects for handling to teach schools and family visitors. This will inevitably lead to some damage.

I do not want them to be used for handling.

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11) I run the Galton Collection. Galton was a Victorian scientist whose work included arguments against everyone having the right to reproduce. Ultimately his theories fed into Nazism.

Some people think the Collection should be destroyed as a protest against his work.

I think the Collection should be maintained.

UCL MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS





12) I run the Grant Museum of Zoology. As part of the ape exhibit, we have a human skull on display.

Some people think that material like this should be removed and buried out of respect for the dead.

I think that we should treat humans the same as all the other species in the Museum.

Spectrum cards

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<p>UCL MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS</p> 	<p>UCL MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS</p> 
<p>Agree / Yes</p>	<p>Disagree / No</p>

Facilitator's briefing notes

- 1) Why might you not want to accept them? Why is it important that we know their recent history? With the case of conflict zones, like Iraq, many museum treasures were looted or destroyed and are now for sale. What should museums do about this? Would it be worse to leave such stolen objects in private hands. How do we return them?
- 2) Is it a case of finders keepers? Does everything found in a country belong to that country's government? Should all archaeological finds be reported or can individuals own them? Do country's own all the rights to their own heritage?
- 3) Is ok to lie about something when it makes it easier to teach a message which itself is true? Do the public always need to know whether an object is real? Will knowing that it's a cast make people less likely to learn anything? Will they be less engaged?
- 4) Is selling a collection sustainable? If you keep selling it off will there be anything left to work with? Do museum collections have more than monetary value? What happens if you sell something now that you realise was really important later?
- 5) Are human remains any different from other museum objects? Would you be happy if your relatives' remains were held against their wishes on the other side of the world? Are people's cultural beliefs more important than research and teaching? Is it possible to own someone's remains?
- 6) How do you feel about objects from foreign countries being held? Who owns them? Where would the object serve the most public benefit? Would you mind if the oldest British artefacts were kept in Egypt?
- 7) Is this what museums should be doing? Is it more important to have a specimen dead in a museum where it will last for centuries or allow it to live and breed? Will enough research be done on a collected specimen to outweigh the consequences of killing it?
- 8) Is cloning extinct species a sustainable way of conserving wildlife? Should we be able to bring species back from the dead that we caused to die out? Would resources be better directed by trying to save species we still have? Is this an appropriate direction for science to move in?
- 9) Who should make this decision? What value can we place on heritage and art? Is it ever worth risking your life for?
- 10) Is the cost of damaging objects greater than the benefit of being able to allow people to handle them? If handling leads to damage, then only a few people will be able to use them—should those few be school children? Should we be keeping things we can't touch?
- 11) Can the collection do any good if it is maintained? How important is what you say about a collection in the way you use it? Who should make this decision. Will the protest make a difference? Should we destroy things that relate to a negative aspect of history?
- 12) Is there a difference between human remains and the remains of other animals? Is it disrespectful to display them? Who should decide? If it can teach people a lot about human history, is it ok to treat remains like this?