

FAQ: Mimbres (Feb 2022)

Q: What are the Mimbres artifacts and what is their history with the University?

A: Mimbres cultural material (ca. 1000-1150) came to the University following excavations in southern New Mexico, which were conducted by University of Minnesota faculty and students from 1928 to 1931. This includes thousands of Mimbres objects and more than 150 human burial remains. The objects ranged from stone tools, arrowheads, points to animal-bone awls, beads, pendants and painted bowls. These shallow bowls were originally found in or near graves at the Mimbres excavation sites, covering the head of the deceased or stacked up beside the remains; some of the deeper containers were used to hold cremated remains.

These artifacts were largely kept together by the Anthropology Department until 1989, when the Mimbres ancestors (human remains) were transferred to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) under state law. The funerary objects, other items, and historical documentation were transferred to the Weisman Art Museum in 1992, where they remain today.

Q: What is the purpose and aim of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)?

A: [As summarized on the National Park Service website](#), “Since 1990, Federal law has provided for the repatriation and disposition of certain Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. By enacting NAGPRA, Congress recognized that human remains of any ancestry ‘must at all times be treated with dignity and respect.’ Congress also acknowledged that human remains and other cultural items removed from Federal or tribal lands belong, in the first instance, to lineal descendants, Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations. With this law, Congress sought to encourage a continuing dialogue between museums and Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations and to promote a greater understanding between the groups while at the same time recognizing the important function museums serve in society by [preserving the past](#). (U.S. SENATE REPORT 101-473).”

Q: What is the University doing to ensure it is in full compliance with NAGPRA?

A: The University will continue working closely with the Department of the Interior, and specifically the National Parks Service, to ensure full compliance with NAGPRA moving forward.

Q: Are there any displaced objects that the University will not repatriate?

A: The University intends to repatriate every object it holds that was part of the original collection.

Q: Does the University hold all the objects—including what were later discovered to be human remains—that were removed from the original dig sites?

A: Not at this time. The resolution passed by the Board of Regents on February 11, 2022 charged University staff with continuing their work with other institutions that may currently house some of these objects to hopefully facilitate their repatriation, along with the objects being repatriated directly by the University.

The Mimbres ancestors associated with the objects at the Weisman currently reside at Hamline University’s Osteology Repository under an agreement with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. The University intends to coordinate with the Council on this repatriation process.

Q: When will the University begin returning these objects to the Tribes?

A: As soon as the necessary and respectful conversations can be completed with the ancestral Tribal Nations and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. This ongoing work takes time, but the University is committed to working to complete these conversations with care and coordinate next steps with the Tribal Nations involved.

Q: What will happen to these materials once they are no longer held at the University?

A: The University will return the Mimbres objects it holds to the ancestral Tribal Nations, consistent with the prior and ongoing consultations, research into the ancestral lineage of the objects, and any additional obligations the University may have under NAGPRA. What happens with those objects once they are repatriated is entirely the decision of the Tribal Nations.

Q: What is the University doing generally to repair relationships with Native American community members and groups?

A: In recent years the University has invested more time and resources into acknowledging the past and doing the necessary work to begin rebuilding and strengthening relationships with Tribal Nations and Native people. These actions are just a beginning in this process. They have included:

- Doing more listening, with President Gabel meeting with leaders of each of Minnesota's 11 Tribal Nations and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.
- Dedicating more personnel and expertise to this work, notably through the hire of Karen Diver to serve as the University's first-ever Senior Advisor to the President on Native American Affairs.
- Committing significant research funding to collaborating with Tribal communities to chronicle the University's history with Native people, work that will build an informed record of this history from which mutually constructive paths forward can be developed.
- Revitalizing Ojibwe and Dakota language programs in our American Indian Studies program, which is the oldest such program in the nation.
- Launching the Native American Promise Tuition Program, offering substantial financial support—in many cases completely free tuition—on any of its five campuses statewide to first-year undergraduate students and Tribal college transfer students who are also enrolled citizens in one of the state's 11 federally recognized Tribal Nations.
 - This program is in addition to a full tuition waiver program on the University's Morris campus, which has long been in place.