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School of Physics

# Ed Muirhead Physics Museum

Acquisitions Policy

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# 1. Background

This acquisitions policy aims to provide a set of useable guidelines to assist in the management of the Ed Muirhead Physics Museum at the University of Melbourne, with regard to the acquisition of objects for the Museum collection.

It is suggested that this policy be reviewed in 10 years' time, being 2028. The last major similar document was developed in 2007. This current iteration reflects some simplification in format and language, though is similar in ethos.

The Museum continues to be the responsibility of the Public Programs Committee of the School of Physics, which in turn reports to the Head of the School via the School Committee.

## 2. Ed Muirhead Physics Museum collection

The Museum is named in honour of Associate Professor Ed Muirhead, Chairman of the School of Physics from 1980 to 1986, who fostered its initial formation, while simultaneously developing a new academic agenda for the School, which has helped position it for the 21st century.

The collection has its origins in the formation of the School of Natural Philosophy at the University, as the School of Physics was originally known. The circumstances unique to the collection's formation include that several hundred of the objects were directly made at the University for teaching and experimental purposes. Other elements of the collection include photographs and documents, thus rounding it out as both a technology and social history collection, with connections to a wide range of physics related areas. These areas are as diverse as Antarctica, health research, WW11 optics, climatology and Dark Matter, and many other realms.

Whilst the thrust of this acquisitions policy is to align the acquisitions policy to the activities of the School, it is evident that the diversity of areas of interest covered by the School's own history is such that this focus is reasonable and has value in itself. Taking this focus will encourage rigour within the Museum's activities and for the collection to deepen its own sense of character.

The School of Physics at the University of Melbourne has an embedded practice in research, hence its record of international participation and leadership over 130 years. The Museum collection demonstrates the integrity of its research methodologies, which is also the basis of its integrity as a collection.

As at mid-2017 some 400 items have been catalogued of an estimated pool of c.2,000 located in two main storage areas and on display, however, virtually all items have been sighted by the Public Programs Committee and are known as the property of the University of Melbourne.

## 3. Aim

The guiding aim of this Acquisitions Policy is to support the acquisition of objects that illuminate the contribution that the School of Physics has made to the University and wider society, by through its teaching, learning and research activities, for the benefit and enjoyment of students, alumni and visitors.

## 4. Issues for consideration

- I. **Administrative openness;** this policy recognizes that it is essential that the collection is seen as an asset held by the University of Melbourne and that no object shall be removed from the collection, whether currently documented or not, without the approval of the Head of the School.

- II. **Clear legal title;** this policy recognizes that all objects deemed to be part of the Museum collection must have a clear legal title that confirms the Museum’s right to possess the object.
- III. **Relevance;** this policy recognizes that, as the Museum becomes more well-known, it is likely to be offered donations which test the limits of the stated aim of the Acquisitions Policy with its emphasis on relating to the activities of the School of Physics. However, this policy is designed to act as a guideline to achieve outcomes, which may in turn allow for well-deserved exceptions, providing there is an exceptional outcome.
- IV. **Other University of Melbourne collections;** this policy recognizes that the University has many cultural collections and that care must be taken to not overlap collections.
- V. **Authenticity;** this policy recognizes all objects shall be correctly attributed, with attributions and explanations updated pending any new research.
- VI. **Documentation standard;** the following cataloguing fields represent the required minimum standard for documenting all objects in the collection, either in-situ or on arrival as new acquisitions:
  - a. allocation of museum object numbers
  - b. maker
  - c. name of object
  - d. size
  - e. donor/source
  - f. extended description of the object
  - g. condition
  - h. value
  - i. cost
  - j. image of the object

## 5. Accessioning process

This policy recognizes that for the foreseeable future that there will be two main pathways for accessioning objects into the collection (1) in-situ objects awaiting cataloguing and (2) new acquisitions which conform to the aim of the Acquisition Policy.

- I. **In-situ objects;** continue to be catalogued with regular updates to the Public Programs Committee.
- II. **New acquisitions;** may derive from any source and are documented as indicated above prior to formal accepted by majority vote by the Public Programs Committee, which shall in turn seek confirmation by the Head of School.

## 6. De-accessioning

This policy recognizes that from time to time objects may be de-accessioned from the collection, in which case 6 months’ notice shall be given by the Public Programs Committee to the Head of School to seek approval for the action. The recommendation shall state a reason for the proposed de-accession and catalogue details commensurate with the documentation standard noted above, so as to ensure the reputation of the Museum as a reliable facility.

In addition, this policy recognizes that in the case of significant proposed de-accessions, that the Cultural Collections Advisory Group will be consulted by the Head of School.

This policy recognizes that funds derived from de-accessioning shall be allocated to the possible acquisition of other objects for the Museum collection.

*(Joe Pascoe, Visitor School of Physics 2017)*