

## CARE AND MANAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE CULTURAL COLLECTIONS

### SUBMISSION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE INFORMATION FUTURES COMMISSION

The University owns 33 principal cultural collections, of extraordinary significance and immense cultural and monetary value.

These collections represent the development of the cultural and intellectual life of the university, and chart the beginnings of a number disciplines in Australia. Donors who gift cultural items to the collections also often provide financial support; they expect that the University will honour their gift and look after these objects appropriately.

The cultural collections provide substantial support for knowledge transfer on campus. Many however are not fully catalogued making access problematic. A substantial amount of cultural material is in extremely fragile condition, making its future insecure and its access impossible. This state of affairs is exacerbated by the poor storage of much of this material.

A 2001 assessment of Information Services' Special Collections identified over 7,250 items inaccessible due to their poor condition; triage conservation of these items was estimated well over \$3.6M. In the meantime the University incurs ongoing costs for management and housing of these items.

If collections are to be used more actively in teaching and learning, and research and knowledge transfer, then additional funds will be required.

In order for the University's cultural collections to support the four platforms of Research, Learning and Teaching, Knowledge Transfer and Philanthropy, and in order for the collections to be available for new creative and high impact uses, a University-wide approach that addresses issues that are common to all collections, specifically **Cataloguing, Conservation and Housing**, needs to be established.

The following staged program provides a means by which to address issues of preservation and access of these valuable assets.

1. *Immediate*. Review current funding and current outcomes and problems, including identifying opportunity cost and detrimental impacts of current model.
2. *Six months in 2008*. Provide enterprise wide collections data regarding the overall scope and nature of needs relating to cataloguing, conservation and housing of the University's cultural collections.
3. *2009 – 2011*. Establish a three year collections coordination project to complete cataloguing, condition and treatment quantification, and significance assessment of collections not yet surveyed. This will identify the annual expenditure level required on a university-wide basis as well as identify special projects suitable for special purpose donations.
4. *Ongoing*. Secure ongoing central University funding for continued care of the University's Distributed Cultural Collection, in line with industry best practice, based on the three year assessment project.
5. Assess the impact of continued cultural material benefaction without adequate funding support.

This document seeks to support increase in active management of collections, ensure university-wide assessment of priorities and costs, identify and seek consistent funding levels, and provide integrated management of the University of Melbourne Distributed Cultural Collection.

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