Electronic Collections Databases Policy

The purpose of the Peabody Museum's electronic collections databases is to streamline the management of the Museum's rich and expansive collections, and thereby advance scientific research and our understanding of the natural world by maximizing the utility and accessibility of information about the specimens/objects. An *electronic collections database* is defined here as an organized collation of information about museum specimens/objects stored in electronic format, with elements usually assembled and visualized in a multidimensional manner (e.g., horizontally as records and vertically as fields).

The Museum's electronic collections databases are structured to reflect closely the history of specimens/objects and the transactions in which they have been involved. The electronic collections databases consist of derivative data and are proxies for the specimens/objects and their physical documentation, and do not replace these. Use of the contents of the electronic collections databases is governed by this document and the Museum's Policy on Usage Rights and Reproductions.

Ownership and Authority

Electronic collections databases represent logical extensions of the Museum's collections and their physical documentation, and are the property of the museum, along with all rights in such property.

The Museum supports a centralized software model/system for electronic collections databasing that is administered through the Systems Office, in contrast to separate divisional systems. Responsibility for this software model/system rests with the Systems Office, which coordinates with collections staff and curators to insure electronic database implementations that address both museum-wide and divisional needs.

Standards: Data Model

All curatorial Divisions at the Museum share a core history and philosophy, which is reflected in a core data model applicable to all Divisions. The Museum's electronic collections databases are maintained in a manner that preserves this shared data model while also allowing latitude to implement division-specific

requirements. The Museum's data model maintains consistency with discipline-wide standards (e.g., the Association of Systematic Collections), with appropriate modification for the Museum's common agenda.

Standards: Data Elements

Where appropriate, the following core data elements that arise from the institutional data model are recorded for each specimen/object:

- *History of use*, including formal transactions, conservation treatments, preparation techniques, states of physical condition and location within the Museum

- *Collecting event and related field data*, including collector, date(s) of collection, details of collecting locality, and collecting method

- *Determination events*, including authority, date(s) of determination, name applied, formal status and reference

Authority files and other methods of controlled vocabulary are implemented for specific electronic collections database elements whenever feasible, in order to minimize data transcription errors and inconsistencies and maintain compliance with the underlying data model. The Systems Office coordinates regularly with divisional staff to assess the accuracy of information in the electronic collections databases.

Access

Access to the hardware, operating systems, and underlying source/executable code that support the electronic collections databases is restricted to staff in the Systems Office. The ability to access and manipulate the content of the electronic collections databases is limited to users authorized by the Systems Office. Access to output from the electronic collections databases (e.g., printed reports, derivative electronic data made available to the scientific community through networking technology) is authorized by the collection managers and curators, in consultation with the Systems Office. The Systems Office insures appropriate physical and electronic access to the electronic collections databases and the integrity of the electronic collections database management system.

Ethical Computing

Collections staff will use only legally obtained computing software and hardware. All users of the Museum's electronic collections databases are expected to be familiar with and follow University-wide policies governing use of institutional computing resources, protocols established by the Museum's Systems Office, as well as division-specific procedures.

Approved, Board of Curators, September 14, 1998