



GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL SOURCING AND USE OF HUMAN ANATOMICAL MATERIAL IN EDUCATION

DECEMBER 1, 2024

During the Spring 2024 semester, the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/College Provost charged a committee to create guidelines for the ethical sourcing and use of human anatomical material at Montgomery College. These guidelines were to emphasize the importance of informed consent to the procurement process, and to make recommendations for the ethical disposal of materials that no longer meet the needs of Montgomery College.

This cross-functional team spent the Spring 2024 semester surveying their colleagues, contacting other higher education institutions, and gathering materials. A final document was completed in the Fall 2024 semester. Next steps will include the creation of an implementation plan by the unit with that plan being regularly reviewed at least every three years.

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While this document focuses solely on the ethical sourcing and use of human anatomical material, it is recommended that the College consider similar guidelines for the sourcing and use of anatomical material from animals.

Guidelines for Ethical Sourcing and Use of Human Anatomical Material in Education

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Guidelines

These guidelines memorialize Montgomery College's philosophy about and processes for acquisition, use, and disposition of human anatomical material utilized in educational instruction. The College offers degrees and career training in nursing and various allied health and health sciences professions. Two of the core concepts in those curricula are human anatomy and physiology, which are offered at two levels: Human Anatomy & Physiology I and Human Anatomy & Physiology II. At MC, a significant number of students complete one of these classes each semester. In addition, Montgomery College also offers The Human Body laboratory course.

MC has permitted but not required the use of anatomical material—nearly exclusively bones—in Human Anatomy & Physiology I and II, and in The Human Body laboratory course. Since at least 2020, there have been online and asynchronous sections of these courses, which do not use physical samples or prototypes. The College permits individual instructors to determine whether to use plastic models, 3D-printed models, or anatomical material to teach human anatomy and physiology. This document has been developed to ensure ethical behavior in obtaining, using, and disposing of anatomical material that were received by MC for instructional purposes.

1.2 Overview of the Importance of Ethical Sourcing

Recent news articles have documented atrocities against Indigenous populations, minorities, and poor persons that resulted in the harvesting of bones and body parts for medical studies and/or academic enrichment. For example, the Washington Post chronicled the work of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, who "considered people who were not White to be inferior and collected their brains and other body parts, convinced that he could decipher race primarily through physical characteristics."¹ Hrdlicka was said to have "preyed on Indigenous populations" and gone to "extreme, sometimes brutal, lengths to acquire remains."²

In addition, "(t)hroughout the 19th and 20th centuries, schools and museums amassed millions of skeletons from unclaimed bodies at morgues or overseas bone traders. While these practices were legal at the time, the deceased individuals never agreed to have their remains stored, studied, and showcased in perpetuity."³ This highlights a key reason for these guidelines: Even though anatomical material may be obtained in a manner that is legal, the sourcing of the remains may not have been *ethical*.⁴

Although MC has long permitted the use of anatomical material in human anatomy and physiology courses, prior to the development of this document, there were no college-wide guidelines to govern the acquisition, use or disposition of such material. In addition, there was scant documentation to prove

¹ Nicole Dungca, *et al.*, [The Smithsonian's "Bone Doctor" Scavenged Thousands Of Body Parts](https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/), Wash. Post, Aug. 15, 2023, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/>

² *Id.*

³ Bridget Alex, [Who are the Keepers of Academic Skeletons? Universities hold troves of human bones. Many of them came from marginalized communities that never consented to their use](#), *The Sciences*, Aug 19, 2023.

⁴ The definition and importance of ethical sourcing are discussed *infra*.

the provenance of such material in the College's possession. This document endeavors to close both of these gaps.

1.3 Audience and Scope

The College Community will have access to this document, which will remain dynamic so that it is updated and/or improved as appropriate. Because laws and knowledge change over time, this document will not be static but will be periodically reviewed and monitored for accuracy.

These guidelines memorialize MC's authorized processes for the acquisition, stewardship, and disposition of human anatomical material for instructional purposes. Included in these guidelines are the College's official view of what constitutes ethical sourcing. In addition, the following details are addressed regarding anatomical material: legal requirements for procurement and disposal; processes for storage, preservation, and disposal; respectful handling; instructional uses; and required training surrounding stewardship. The document includes legal and academic references, as well as a list of areas for further research and discussion.

1.4 Commitment to the College's Values

This report was born out of the recognition that adherence to MC's values requires integrity in the procurement and documentation of anatomical material, adaptability to respond to members of the College's community who had lingering concerns about the provenance of the remains in the College's possession, and responsiveness so that faculty may continue to teach with excellence in a manner that respects all views regarding the use of anatomical material for instructional purposes.

Montgomery College's Values:

At our core, we believe in welcoming all students and all employees into a community that emphasizes belonging. We believe in giving every individual what they need to succeed (Equity and Inclusion). We believe in conducting our teaching and service duties with distinction (Excellence) in an ethical and trustworthy manner (Integrity). We are dedicated to being a transformational institution seeking social justice and are continuously updating and improving all our learning environments, the curriculum, and student services (Innovation) to meet the changing needs of our community (Adaptability). We make decisions about our operations in a way that respects and sustains the environment (Sustainability). We conduct ourselves with civility, courtesy, and professionalism in all our interactions (Respect).

2. Understanding Ethical Sourcing of Anatomical material

2.1 Definition and Importance of Ethical Sourcing

Ethical sourcing refers to a set of normative commitments governing the supply of material and services to organizations by purchasing managers and business partners. Broadly, these commitments include

social responsibility, sustainability, engagement with stakeholders, and respect for human rights throughout the supply chain.⁵

As a component of corporate social responsibility, ethical sourcing has been associated with increased public trust and support for an organization's mission.⁶ Trust in educational institutions, specifically, is positively correlated with funding awards from granting agencies.⁷ Further, organizations that have failed to fulfill a commitment to ethical sourcing have faced criticism and backlash from an increasingly ethics-conscious public.⁸

Through ethical sourcing, the college will ensure that vulnerable people affected by purchasing are protected, and that stakeholders are treated with dignity and respect. This commitment aligns with the college's mission, and enhances its reputation and credibility among students, faculty, and the wider community. By prioritizing ethical sourcing, the college supports the creation of a more just and equitable society.

2.2 Legal and Ethical Considerations

The procurement of anatomical material used for educational purposes requires commitment to ethical sourcing, and satisfying this commitment entails adherence to relevant law. Additionally, professional associations of anatomy educators have espoused commitment to principles of bioethics that govern medical practice and research, and have applied these principles to the acquisition of anatomical material by educational institutions.⁹

Principles of bioethics include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.¹⁰ Respect for persons requires, most generally, respect for the autonomy of the individual, including the autonomy to decide

⁵ Seongtae Kim, Claudia Colicchia, and David Menachof, "Ethical Sourcing: An Analysis of the Literature and Implications for Future Research," *Journal of Business Ethics* 152 (2018): 1033-1052, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-016-3266-8>

⁶ Chun-Ju Hung-Baesecke, Yi-Ru Regina Chen, and Ben Boyd, "Corporate Social Responsibility, Media Source Preference, Trust, and Public Engagement: The Informed Public's Perspective," *Public Relations Review* 42, no. 4 (2016): 591-599, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.03.015>.

⁷ David B. Resnik, "Scientific Research and the Public Trust," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 17 (2010): 399-409, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-010-9210-x>.

⁸ Isabelle Maignan, Bas Hillebrand, and Debbie McAlister, "Managing Socially-Responsible Buying: How to Integrate Non-Economic Criteria into the Purchasing Process," *European Management Journal* 20, no. 6 (2002): 641-648, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373\(02\)00115-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373(02)00115-9).

⁹ International Federation of Associations of Anatomists, "Recommendations of Good Practice for the Donation and Study of Human Bodies and Tissues for Anatomical Examination," IFAA, accessed June 3, 2024. <https://ifaa.net/recommendations/>.

¹⁰ Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

whether and how others may interact with one's body during life and after death. In the context of the donation of anatomical material, respect for autonomy demands that suppliers obtain informed consent from donors—that donors be free from coercion and undue influence, understand their situation and its consequences, be competent to decide the disposition of their remains, and authorize their ongoing use in an educational setting.

During the informed consent process, suppliers must inform donors of matters of material fact related to how their bodies will be prepared, shipped, handled, stored, and ultimately retired before, during, and after their use in an educational environment. Donors must reflect on how these facts bear on personal and religious values prior to giving their consent. Supply-side employees with technical information should be available for ongoing conversation throughout the process, in a manner consistent with a collaborative model of informed consent. Efforts should be made to discover and overcome barriers to a donor's understanding of relevant facts (such as language barriers and false beliefs), and donations should be refused in situations where questions about understanding and voluntariness cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

Beneficence demands that one act so that those with whom one deals are benefited. Although the financial compensation of body donors is ethically murky, it is clear that many donors are motivated by the belief that through the use of their bodies they are aiding in the education of the next generation of professionals. Delivering this benefit requires that the college acquire only as many remains as will be useful to achieve its educational goals, and that these remains be used to good educational effect for our students. This, in turn, requires that faculty and staff who handle anatomical material do so in accordance with best standards of practice, that access be restricted to those with proper training and legitimate educational purpose, and that students who handle or are exposed to anatomical material receive guidance on respectful use.

Justice requires that the costs and benefits of an enterprise be distributed fairly. Choices about the final disposition of one's body number among the most personal decisions one can make and touch on related beliefs about the nature of the self, the soul, the meaning and purpose of life. Depending upon one's beliefs, donating one's body to science may be understood as paying a great cost for the betterment of humankind. Justice requires that this cost be borne fairly by different members of society, and that it likewise delivers benefits that can be enjoyed widely.

In the context of the donation of anatomical material, an obvious sign of injustice would be that donors are consistently members of vulnerable classes of persons, or of a single race, economic class, or national origin. A just program of sourcing anatomical material, by contrast, requires that the diversity of our world is reflected in the remains from which our students learn. That no one demographic group is disproportionately represented among the remains used for educational purposes raises confidence that standards relating to voluntariness and avoidance of exploitation have been met.

Another sign of injustice in this area would be that those benefiting from the study of donated anatomical material are demographically homogenous, as this would indicate that the benefits of the study of anatomical material are enjoyed by a select few, even if the costs paid are not. Fortunately, the incredible diversity of Montgomery College's student population in terms of age, ethnicity, and national origin ensures that the benefits of learning from anatomical material will be widely shared.

Montgomery College has established policy on the procurement and pedagogical use of anatomical material in a manner consistent with the law and these principles of bioethics (see sections 3, 4 and 5 below). The college will conduct a regular review of policy and practice to honor the legacy of donors, and to ensure that standards of ethical sourcing continue to be met.

2.3 Historical Context and Cultural Sensitivity

The principles of bioethics described above have roots in the Belmont Report. Crafted by the President's Commission on Bioethics following the National Research Act of 1974, the Belmont Report sought to establish guiding principles for the conduct of research with human subjects, and has informed regulations governing human subjects research issued by the Department of Health and Human Services. Since their publication, these principles of bioethics have shaped a wide variety of practices in medicine and research, and inspired a vast body of professional literature addressing issues in applied ethics.¹¹

The National Research Act was passed in response to the abuse of human subjects during the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, in which African American men with syphilis were deceived as to their disease status and were denied treatment in order to study the disease's progression. Further, the experiment continued long past the point at which available and effective treatment rendered such a longitudinal, nontherapeutic study, of little practical benefit.¹²

Along with other similar instances, the Tuskegee syphilis experiment highlighted the need for ethical oversight in research involving human participants, but also for the establishment of principles governing medical research and education more broadly. The deception of participants, the failure to obtain informed consent, the indifference of the study design to the welfare of participants, and the unjust distribution of risks and benefits in the Tuskegee experiment all offend common mores surrounding the moral limits of scientific research, and help to motivate our nation's commitment to the principles outlined in the Belmont Report.

While the use of anatomical material for educational purposes is not human subjects research, adherence to the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice is nevertheless a core component of the ethical sourcing of such remains. Among other things, this demands we respect and honor the diverse cultural and religious beliefs surrounding death and the treatment of the deceased. Many communities observe highly-organized rituals regarding the handling of anatomical material, for example, and violating these standards of community practice can lead to significant offense. Additionally, historical factors, such as the exploitation and mistreatment of African American and Native American remains, necessitate a thoughtful and respectful approach to avoid repeating past

¹¹ National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, "The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, April 18, 1979. <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "The USPHS Untreated Syphilis Study at Tuskegee," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January 9, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/index.html>.

injustices.¹³ Ensuring cultural sensitivity fosters trust and collaboration between educational institutions and communities, and helps to create an inclusive educational environment.

Global perspectives on the historical context and cultural relevance:

Both scientific research and education have a deep-rooted history of applying discriminatory practices like genetic determinism and racial biases at least partly stemming from colonization. However, these misrepresentations have been periodically dismantled by several scientists and scientific organizations.¹⁴ ¹⁵ Regarding education, institutions of higher education must do their part to ensure appropriate communication of scientific information to provide equitable and inclusive learning environments for the students.

The students, faculty and staff at Montgomery College come from different parts of the world, hence with different cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. In embracing this rich diversity, Montgomery College is responsible for being culturally sensitive and ethical in our institutional practices, including the curricular content in the courses. As part of decolonizing the curriculum, we are developing processes to ethically source anatomical material (specific set of bones and tissues) that can be used for classroom instruction. These will replace the remains of unknown sources that were obtained several decades ago.

3. Procurement

Ethical procurement practices related to the acquisition of anatomical material ensure material is sourced from commercial entities that adhere to established legal requirements and regulations. Supporting documentation must be received from those entities prior to purchase.

To further ensure that Montgomery College sources anatomical material in accordance with established guidelines, the institution shall work closely with the Maryland State Anatomy Board (MSAB). A few materials can be purchased online by setting up an account by emailing MSAB at SABrequests@som.umaryland.edu. However, MSAB “deal(s) with entire donor (bodies) for medical study more than individual bones” and “no longer prepares large scale skeletal material preparation or plastination/casing of wet specimens due to the costs/workload required.”¹⁶

¹³ See, for example, Smithsonian Institution. “Human Remains Task Force Report to the Secretary,” Reckoning with Human Remains in the Smithsonian Collection. Smithsonian Institution, January 10, 2024, <https://www.si.edu/collections/human-remains>

¹⁴ Gould, S. J. (1981). *The mismeasure of man*. New York, NY. W.W. Norton & Company.

¹⁵ Harden, K. P. (2023). Genetic determinism, essentialism and reductionism: semantic clarity for contested science. *Nature Review Genetics* 24: 197-204.

¹⁶ Dr. Adam C. Puche, Maryland State Anatomy Board Chair, email message to Dr. Leah Allen and Dr. Michael Mills, October 24, 2024.

If requested material is not available from the MSAB, verified commercial entities will be utilized to fulfill need. All requests for the purchase of anatomical material will be facilitated by the Office of Procurement, via the submittal of a completed requisition.

The MSAB recommends ordering large scale skeletal material from Skulls Unlimited. Skulls Unlimited is a company that works with accredited donor programs and has informed MC that it will qualify for their research quality bones program after filling out the form at the link below. Material purchased from Skulls Unlimited's Research Quality Bones identifies the race, sex, and age of the specimen along with a redacted consent form.

<https://www.skullsunlimited.com/pages/skulls-unlimiteds-research-skulls-and-skeletons>

All requests for the purchase of anatomical material will be facilitated by the Office of Procurement, via the submittal of a completed requisition.

4. Stewardship and Respectful Handling

4.1 Creating a Culture of Respect and Dignity

Individuals who voluntarily offer their biological remains for the purposes of biomedical education are honored for their selfless decision, and as is consistent with their donation, their remains are to be preserved and used in a respectful manner that upholds and preserves their human dignity. In its effort to achieve the highest standards in education and community engagement, Montgomery College provides proper education to faculty, staff, and students to ensure proper treatment of the donated anatomical material. The College will insist that faculty teaching courses in which these remains are used utilize an appropriate amount of time early in the course to educate students in proper handling and treatment of biological tissue. Likewise, the College will post policies regarding the use of anatomical material in its courses on appropriate websites to educate the general public, set a standard of care of remains, and provide a resource to other educational institutions in developing their own protocols for similar purposes.

4.2 Proper Storage and Preservation

The College will properly store and preserve all anatomical material in adequate laboratory space or adjacent storerooms, whether in their original form or encased in plastic or other materials or preserved in chemical preservatives. Specimens will be categorized as anatomical material and set aside in specific compartments within the storage space to indicate the special nature of the specimens, as deemed most feasible by the laboratory staff. The laboratory staff in coordination with appropriate faculty will regularly inspect the human tissue on site for signs of breakage, splintering, or other forms of decay or spoilage. The College may allow student employees or student volunteers, under the supervision of faculty or regular laboratory staff, to handle and human anatomical material as a means of instruction in proper care and respectful handling.

4.3 Ensuring Confidentiality and Privacy

The College will maintain adequate records of acquisition of anatomical material and will procure only from reputable vendors that have substantial history of providing human anatomical material to educational institutions. The College will seek evidence from vendors certifying their expertise and competence in procurement, as well as documentation demonstrating ongoing support of ethical procurement practices. It is vital that a vendor's records reflect donors' wishes regarding the use of their anatomical material.

4.4 Respectful Disposition and Closure

Upon thorough inspection, if the anatomical material are deemed inadequate to their intended purpose, or if their purpose as expired, the College will make every effort to dispose of them properly according to standards developed by such reputable institutions as The British Museum, The Red Cross, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists or other similar institutions dedicated to proper treatment of anatomical material. If the materials are to be transferred to another educational institution, the College will ensure the receiving institution has developed protocols to ensure proper care and utilization of the remains for honorable purposes. Such disposition or transfer will be recorded by laboratory staff utilizing standards developed by such institutions indicated above (or other reputable institutions). These records shall be made available for inspection to interested parties approved by the administration of Montgomery College as needed.

5. Instructional Uses of Anatomical material

5.1 Curriculum Development and Integration

Montgomery College (MC) will consult on and publish a set of protocols, principles and procedures governing the treatment of anatomical material in the service of teaching and learning, which all faculty and students will be required to observe as a condition of access and use. Destructive treatment of anatomical material will not be permitted. Each department responsible for a collection of anatomical material will identify which activities the remains can best be utilized in teaching, whether in higher education, with school groups, or the general public for outreach activities. Such decisions will consider the age and ability of the students, the learning objectives of the course or session, the appropriateness of the material to support such objectives, the methods of teaching and the rarity and fragility of the material. Interaction with the anatomical material will only be permitted under the direct supervision of MC faculty and/or staff trained in their utilization for educational purposes.

5.2 Faculty and Staff Training and Professional Development

Prior to accessing anatomical material, faculty and students will be required to familiarize themselves with MC's protocols, including the ethical and legal obligations involved, and demonstrate an awareness of what is meant by dignified and respectful treatment of anatomical material. Mechanisms to achieve this include:

1. **Professional Development:** Faculty and Staff will participate in a workshop that will address ethical sourcing of anatomical material, genetic determinism, racial biases, and related social issues. This workshop's goal will be to train faculty and staff in acceptable treatment of anatomical material and how to address student questions. Students may ask questions related to the source/origin of the anatomical material used in the classroom instruction. Failure to address their questions – often stemming from concerns – may be socially consequential and impede their learning experiences. For these reasons, it will be critical for the faculty and staff to stay informed of the history of racism in science, to help students differentiate scientific data from social structures and associated biases. Effective science communication along with the humanness of faculty and staff should be evident to our students, so they see our genuine efforts to provide them with the learning experience that respects diverse cultures and boundaries.

2. **Student Instruction:** Prior to their participation in laboratory instruction involving the use of human anatomical material, students will be informed that such material will be used, will be provided with a rationale for using real as opposed to simulated anatomical material, and will be educated in the standards of best practice regarding the handling of anatomical material. Students will be informed that they are not required to touch human material. Instead, a lab partner and/or the instructor will be available to move the remains for these students. Students will only interact with the anatomical material under the direct supervision of MC faculty and/or staff.

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