



January 25, 2013

Dr. Richard Lariviere
President and Chief Executive Officer
Field Museum
1400 Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Dear Dr. Lariviere:

I am writing to you as president of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), an international organization founded in 1934 and dedicated to research, interpretation, and the protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With 6,500 members, the Society represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. The SAA has members in all 50 states as well as in many nations around the world.

SAA has recently learned that the Field Museum plans to restructure its academic departments of zoology, botany, geology, and anthropology in response to budgetary concerns. On behalf of the SAA, I strongly urge you to reconsider this plan and to keep the anthropology department, its collections and its scientific staff and researchers intact as a unit within the Field Museum.

The Field Museum has been one of the nation's flagship collections-based institutions for more than a century. The breadth of its collections is well known and the achievements of its scientific researchers are recognized globally. Through their publications, presentations, exhibitions, and the inspiration the Field Museum's researchers have provided to younger students and colleagues, the Field Museum has been viewed as a world-class model for museums as critical and inspirational places for the generation of new knowledge through science, rather than being just interpreters of science.

We applaud the Field Museum for the efforts made recently to upgrade its storage facilities through the creation of a Collections Resource Center. However, proper care for collections includes the maintenance of a well-trained and scientifically literate curatorial staff able not only to oversee the collections but also to understand their components, their histories, and their potentials. SAA is concerned that without its scientific staff and researchers to oversee the institution's collections, provide historical continuity, maintain current research, and guide future development, the Field Museum's collections will cease to have the care they require for current and future generations.

These collections are important not only to researchers but also to educators and heritage communities in the United States and around the globe, as a result of the Field Museum's

leadership role in building collections and supporting research over the course of more than a century. We are concerned, therefore, that a retreat from proper collections care will damage relations with cultural groups around the globe that will affect not only the Field Museum but also other museums' abilities to conduct research in, or to hold collections from, these regions. We are further deeply concerned that without properly trained research staff, including anthropologists and archaeologists as well as collection managers, the Field Museum will be unable to maintain its commitments to federally recognized Native American, Alaskan, and Hawaiian communities, as required under federal, state, and local laws, including but not limited to NAGPRA. We recognize that the Field Museum also curates collections owned by the Federal government and potentially other state and local agencies, as well as other institutions and individuals. We are concerned that without a scientific staff rigorously trained not only in the laws but also in the field and analytical methods required for such collections' interpretation, conservation, and management, the Field Museum may be unable to care for those collections properly, in accordance with the laws, regulations, and commitments governing their curation.

We note in closing that basic research is an investment that pays both short-term and long-term dividends in the form of new knowledge, innovation, and training. Through these investments, collections become valuable educational tools and the cornerstone upon which great institutions, such as the Field Museum, are built – and on which their reputations are ultimately maintained. Without these investments, collections become simply things, and experience shows that with the degradation of an institution's commitment to those who care for and use such “things”, collections and their records deteriorate until they cease to be useful. With that, the brand and the capacity of the institution itself become degraded or, ultimately, irrelevant. In short, it is impossible to be a scientific institution or a collections-based institution that can responsibly teach scientifically without having a staff that does scientific research on its collections.

On behalf of the entire body of the SAA, I urge you and the Field Museum's board to continue to support the anthropological and archaeological collections that you hold and to retain your commitment to the exceptional scientific and curatorial staff that your institution has built as a dream team over the course of generations. I am willing to meet with you or with appropriate members of your staff to be of assistance in any way our organization can help.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this issue. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Sincerely,



William F. Limp, PhD
President