

Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program and Facilities Body Donation FAQs

1. What do we do?

We primarily conduct research in human decomposition and skeletal biology. We also provide an important resource for the training of forensic scientists, law enforcement, and health and human service professionals.

2. As a donor to our program, what happens when you die? How do we know when you die, and how will your body get to our facility?

We will be contacted by the funeral home. Your family should contact the funeral home who will then contact us to arrange transportation to Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program Facilities.

3. What happens to your body after it is donated to our program?

Once we receive a body, we accession it, assign it an identifying number, collect a DNA sample if the donor permits, and prepare it for research. After initial research is completed, we recover the remains and clean them. The cleaned bones are then placed into the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection and labeled with the identifying number. At this step, the remains are inventoried, analyzed using standard data collection procedures, and this information is entered into an anonymous database. Once part of the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection, all skeletal remains are utilized by researchers and educators from all over the world.

4. If you donate your body to the Western Carolina Forensic Anthropology Program and Facilities, does that mean you cannot donate your organs or tissues?

You can donate your organs and tissues and still remain a body donor to our program. We should be contacted **after** organ donation is complete.

5. Do we honor any special requests for the placement of your body or any kind of special request regarding the use of your body?

Yes, you may make a special request regarding placement of your body after death, for instance "I do not wish to be buried or placed in water". Special requests must be arranged prior to donation. We will attempt to honor any special requests within reason but may be limited by the particular research requirements ongoing at the time of donation. We put all requests on file so that they are known to us when we receive a body.

6. How much longer will we be accepting body donations?

We do not anticipate a time when we will not be accepting body donations.

7. Would there be any reason why we would not accept your body as a donation?

Yes, we decline the donation of individuals who have infectious diseases such as HIV, any form of Hepatitis, tuberculosis, or antibiotic resistant infections such as Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). However, we **DO ACCEPT** these individuals **IF** they are cremated.

8. What is the difference between the Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program and Facilities Body Donation and a medical school donation program?

We use the body/remains for research and teaching. We do not return the remains to the family after a period of time. We do not embalm the body. Medical schools typically embalm a body for teaching anatomy to medical students. After use, the body may be cremated and, at the request of the family, the remains are returned.

9. Does your body need to be embalmed?

No, in fact we require that bodies **NOT** be **embalmed**. Embalming is not required by law in most states. The exceptions to this are for transporting a body out of the states of Alaska, New Jersey, and Alabama. Typically this is when they are transported via common carrier. However, exceptions may be made for anatomical gifts. We can work with the funeral home in these states to ensure proper transport.

10. Do we return remains or cremains to your family after we are finished with the research?

We do not return remains to the family because we continue to utilize the skeletal remains in research indefinitely. The skeleton is retained and curated in the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection.

11. Do we cremate the body?

No, we do not cremate the remains as our emphasis is skeletal studies.

12. If you live in a state other than North Carolina, you can still donate your body to our facility.

The body must be transported to us. Arrangements must be made by the family or Next-of-Kin. We strongly encourage you to make pre-arrangements with a local funeral home for the transportation of your remains prior to your death.

13. Are donor's records confidential?

Yes, the Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program and Facilities protects the confidentiality of its donors.

14. If you fill out the paperwork to donate your body to us, can you visit the research facility first?

We do NOT host visitors to our research facility. This is to ensure the anonymity of the donors and protect the integrity of the research.

15. Do you have to be "pre-registered" to donate your body?

No, your family or a family representative can contact us after your death and make arrangements.

16. Can you fax/scan your forms or submit photocopies?

Please do not fax/scan your forms. We require original, signed documents for our files. It is suggested that you print several copies of the forms and sign all of them as originals.

17. Do the donation forms have to be notarized?

The donation forms do not need to be notarized if you are donating your own body. However, if you are legally donating someone else's body, the forms must be notarized.

18. If you decide to donate your body to the Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program and Facilities after your death, should you put this in your will?

You may put this in your will, but keep in mind that a will is typically read after the funeral. Please make sure that your family knows your wishes prior to a funeral.

19. Do you need to tell your family that you want to donate your body?

We strongly recommend that you discuss your wishes with your family. If you do not tell them, they may not have any idea of your wishes. This may result in a traditional funeral, burial, or cremation of your body rather than donation.

20. If you want to donate your body but your family does not like that idea or does not agree with you, can your family prevent your final wish of body donation?

Regardless of what you have arranged, signed or instructed, your family or Next-of-Kin has the final say. We will not fight your family for your body. We urge you to convince your family that the donation is what you want at your death.

21. Can you change your mind about donating your body?

Yes, you can remove yourself at any time prior to death from the donation process.

22. How much does it cost to donate your body to our program?

We do not charge for body donations. The only expense may be transportation arranged by the family or Next-of-Kin with the funeral home.

23. Do we provide any payment to your family when you donate your body? Do we pay you for donating your body?

We do not provide any payment to you or the family.

24. If you are trying to make arrangements for a family member to donate to our program, who do you call?

If you are a representative to the family (POA, Next-of-Kin, or funeral home) you will need to contact the Facility Curator directly in order to make arrangements for a donation (838-227-2817). There are separate forms for donation of deceased individuals.

25. Can you visit a family member who has donated her/his body to our facility?

Once skeletal remains are accessioned into the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection, you may visit the remains of a family member. We do NOT host visitors to our research facility. This is to ensure the anonymity of the donors and protect the integrity of the research.

26. If you like the idea of donating your body, but cannot decide what you want to do, can you make a monetary donation.

We gladly accept financial donations and they are a tremendous help to our program. If you wish to do this, please contact us so that we may direct any of these donations accordingly.