

Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program Willed Body Donation FAQs

1. What do we do?

Forensic anthropology entails the study and analysis of human skeletal remains, and associated factors related to death investigations. Here at WCU, we conduct research in human decomposition and human skeletal biology. We also provide an important resource for the education in forensic anthropology as well as 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 a unique identifying number for anonymity, collect a DNA sample unless the donor revokes consent in their paperwork, and prepare it for research. After initial research is completed, we recover the remains from the Forensic Osteology Research Station (FOREST) and clean them in our laboratories. The cleaned skeletal remains are then placed into the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection and labeled with their identifying number. At this step, the remains are inventoried, analyzed using standard data collection procedures, and this information is entered into an anonymous database with our other donors. Once added to 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, does that mean you cannot donate your organs or tissues?

No. You can donate your organs and tissues and still donate your body 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, when possible and within reason. You may make a special request regarding placement of your body after death, for instance "I do not wish to be buried" on the Contract. 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 someone's remains.

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. Unfortunately, we must 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), or are above our weight limit unless these individuals are cremated. Note, donations of cremated remains are still highly relevant and important for research, education, training, and outreach in forensic anthropology.

8. What is the difference between donating remains to Western Carolina University's Forensic Anthropology Program and donating to a medical school?

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Here at WCU, we examine the soft tissues of the body during decomposition, and then use the skeletal remains of the body for additional research, education, training, and outreach. Therefore, we do not return the remains to the family because as they continue to be used indefinitely. Medical schools typically only use donated remains for anatomical dissection. Medical schools embalm or otherwise preserve a body and use it for dissection and teaching for approximately three years. After use, medical schools typically cremate the body and may return those remains to the family afterwards.

9. Does your body need to be embalmed?

No. In fact, we require that bodies are **NOT embalmed**. Embalming is not required by law and even when it may be required, exceptions may be made for anatomical gifts such as this. We can assist in finding/working with a funeral home to ensure proper transport.

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

No. We do not return remains, because we continue to utilize the skeletal remains in research, education, training, and outreach indefinitely. After decomposition, the skeletal remains are retained and curated in the John A. Williams Human Skeletal Collection.

11. Do we cremate the body?

No. We do not cremate remains, as we continue to use the skeletal remains indefinitely.

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

Most likely, yes, but the laws for body donation in your state may be different. Please contact us prior to making arrangements for donation. Keep in mind that the body must be transported to us and out of state transportation costs could be significant. Transportation arrangements must be made by the legal Next-of-Kin after conformation with us at WCU. We strongly encourage you to make pre-arrangements with a local funeral home for the transportation of your remains prior to your death, if possible.

13. Are donor's records confidential?

Yes. Here at Western Carolina University, we take the confidentiality and privacy of our donors very seriously and have multiple checks in place to safeguard this information.

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

Unfortunately, no. Not only are tours not possible because we want to maintain control of the integrity of our research, but such tours could also impact our ability to maintain donor confidentiality and privacy. Furthermore, the FOREST is an active outdoor biohazardous research laboratory with various health and safety hazards, which we cannot expose visitors to, for liability reasons.

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

No. An donation may be made after your death by anyone authorized under N.C.G.S. § 130A-412.11 in the order of priority listed (For most individuals priority will begin with spouse of the decedent; followed by: adult children of the decedent; parents of the decedent; adult siblings of the decedent; etc.).

Details can be found here: <https://casetext.com/statute/utah-code/title-26b-utah-health-and-human-services-code/chapter-8-health-data-vital-statistics-and-utah-medical-examiner/part-3-revised-uniform-anatomical-gift-act/section-26b-8-308-who-may-make-anatomical-gift-of-decedents-body-or-part>

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

No. 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?

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No, our donation forms do not require notarization.

18. If you decide to donate your body to the Western Carolina University Forensic Anthropology Program 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 your death.

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

Yes. We strongly encourage you to make end of life plans and discuss your wishes with your family or legal Next-of-Kin. 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?

Yes. Regardless of what you want or have arranged, signed, or instructed, your family or legal Next-of-Kin have the final say unless a court intervenes on your behalf. We will not fight your family for your body. If your family are not supportive of your plans for body donation, we suggest you discuss this with them.

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

Yes. You can remove yourself from the donation process at any time prior to death. Please just let us know in writing.

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

That depends. We do not charge for body donations. However, there are expenses associated with transportation to WCU's forensic anthropology facilities. These must be arranged by the family or Next-of-Kin with the funeral home. Transportation costs vary depending on the distance traveled, however these costs are typically less than \$700. For those experiencing financial hardship, WCU's forensic anthropology program may be able to assist; please contact us if this may be the case for your situation.

23. It is legal for the Next-of-Kin to transport a loved one's remains within the state of North Carolina?

Yes. However, like any funeral home, these arrangements must be made with us prior to transport, and generally we suggest families seek alternatives to transporting remains themselves more numerous reasons. Additionally, for safety as well as out of respect for our other donors' privacy, we require that family members remain outside of the FOREST.

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

No. We cannot and do not provide any payment to you or the family.

25. 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 should contact the Assistant Director of Forensic Anthropology directly in order to make arrangements for a donation (828-227-2816). Note that there are separate forms for the donation of deceased individuals.

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26. Can you visit a family member who has donated their body to our facility?

Yes. Once skeletal remains are brought 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. If you may be interested in such a visit, please coordinate that with significant lead time, so that we can work with you to make those arrangements. Familial visits may be coordinated through the Assistant Director of Forensic Anthropology (828-227-2816).

27. Can I make a monetary donation to your program?

Yes. We gladly accept financial donations. They are a tremendous help to our program and are primarily used to support student research and/or families who would like to donate remains of a loved one but are having financial hardships affecting their ability to cover transportation costs. Donations can be made online using the link below, but you must designate the gift to Forensic Anthropology. Alternatively, you can contact us, and we can assist you with this.

<https://www.givecampus.com/campaigns/13332/donations/new>.