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Scripps Collections in Peril

At the University of California, San Diego, a letter writing campaign and extensive internal lobbying have convinced university administrators to grant the Oceanographic Collections at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography a one-year reprieve and not cut funding for the collections. While stable, long-term funding has yet to be found, administrators recognized the critical role these collections play and extended state funding through September 2004.

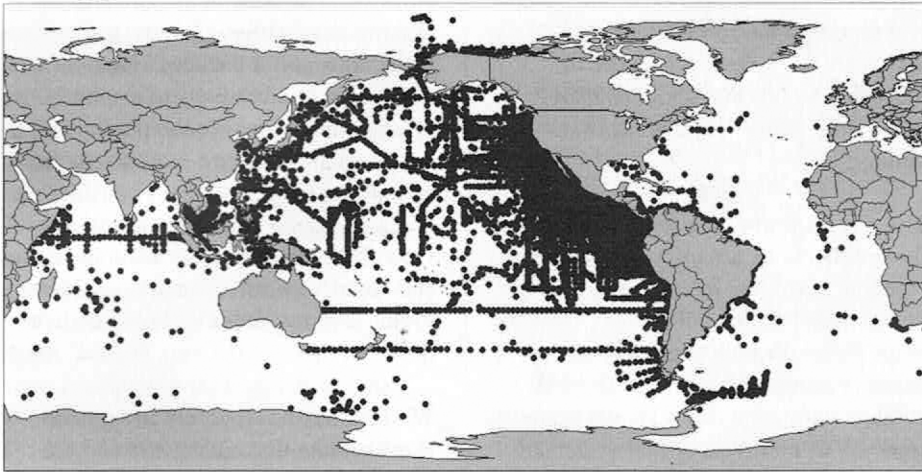
The current budget crisis in California led to a state-mandated 10% reduction of research funds to all University of California campuses. At SIO/UCSD, administrators decided to protect academic research salaries rather than implement these reductions in research funds across the board. This led to total elimination of UC funding for remaining components of the research budget, including collections and the CalCOFI program. There are indications that additional cuts are forthcoming in the next state fiscal year.

The Scripps Collections are world-renowned and among the leading collections in their field. They comprise 3 zoological (*Pelagic Invertebrates*, *Benthic Invertebrates*, *Marine Vertebrates*) and 2 geological collections (*Sediment Cores and Microfossils*, and *Dredged Rocks*). *Pelagic Invertebrates* appears to be the largest such collection in the world; it includes the remarkable CalCOFI zooplankton collection, a component of the most comprehensive oceanographic time series in existence. *Marine Vertebrates* houses an unparalleled collection of deep sea fishes as well as 40% of all described marine fish species. *Benthic Invertebrates* is the leading collection of Pacific deep sea invertebrates and houses W. Newman's worldwide collection of barnacles. *Sediment Cores and Microfossils* contains 6,600 cores from all ocean basins and is the most complete repository of Pacific core material. *Dredged Rocks* includes seafloor rocks from over 3,500 dredge hauls, representing all major tectonic features of the ocean as well as many rare rock types. One



S.I.O. Pelagic Invertebrates Collection

N ~ 110,000



colleague at the University of Oldenburg referred to these collections as the "great Alexandrian Library of the marine sciences."

Collections holdings date to before the founding of Scripps, in 1903, and include materials from many historic expeditions. It is curious that collection holdings that have taken a century to build should be called into question during the centennial year of the institution. A period of rapid growth of these collections began in the post-World War II era, as the era of expeditionary science led to geographically extensive sampling of the world ocean (*see map above*). Collection holdings are searchable digitally ([see http://collections.ucsd.edu](http://collections.ucsd.edu)) and are well-curated. The three biological collections were recently relocated to a new climate-controlled building on the SIO/UCSD campus, with support from three independent NSF awards.

The five collections are used actively by researchers and students from around the world. Last year the collections supported the research of over 210 scientists, one third from SIO/UCSD and two thirds from elsewhere. Topics addressed include evolutionary biology, marine biodiversity and conservation, fisheries issues, marine genomics, earth systems history, the rates and consequences of climate change, and myriad other subjects.

The collections play a major role in classroom teaching, including support of 27 courses at SIO/UCSD at both the graduate and undergraduate level, as well as courses from other universities and colleges. Twenty current SIO graduate thesis research projects (and 7 postdoctoral investigators) depend directly on collections materials, as well as student research from other institutions.

Governmental agencies at federal, state, and local levels utilize the collections for expert taxonomic assistance, help in the delineation of marine reserves, and support of fishery-independent population assessments of harvested marine vertebrates and invertebrates. These collections are crucial to assessing: marine pollutants and the efficacy of pollution remediation efforts; historical variations in sea level and coastal sedimentation; as well as the potential for harvesting hydrocarbons and minerals from beneath the seafloor. Collections curators also provide expert testimony in courts of law.

Now at risk are five professional collection managers who are essential to the operation of the collections, as well as modest annual expenses for materials and supplies. The total sum involved is \$375,000 per year. It is noteworthy that these annual operating expenses are leveraged 5:1 by extramural funding, and thus the collections are a revenue-generating component of the institution.

The core funding provided by UC is exceeded by the indirect costs recouped on extramural awards.

Under the current rules of the Biological Research Collections program at NSF, operating expenses cannot be gained from this source. Other sources of federal support are actively being sought.

The SIO administration is embarking on a campaign to raise private funds to support collection operations, but there are differences of opinion as to whether exclusive reliance on private funding is a viable funding model for sustained collections support. If SIO collection operations were to be sustained by endowment proceeds alone, a \$10-million endowment would be required.



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Charitable Gifts

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a non-profit, donor-funded organization that accepts charitable gifts. Your donations go to fund such activities as advocacy and outreach, communications tools and member services.

In the past, donations have been made to support such programs as the National Science Foundation's 50th Anniversary Web Gallery, which highlights projects completed by NSC Alliance member institutions that were funded by the NSF.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a nonprofit, tax exempt organization with 501(c)(3) status. Gifts, bequests and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

If you are interested in learning more about the *Dinosaurs to DNA* toolkit, other current activities of the organization or making a gift, contact Karen Kajiwarata at:

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