Get up close to the Northwest’s past, present, and future at the Burke. The Burke Museum cares for and shares natural and cultural collections so that all people can learn, be inspired, generate knowledge, feel joy, and heal.

About the Museum

Founded in 1885 and declared the Washington State Museum in 1899, the Burke is the premiere museum of natural history and culture in the Pacific Northwest. It serves the campus and the community with scientific and cultural exhibits, educational programs for all ages, nationally ranked collections, and research. The Burke is part of the University of Washington’s College of Arts and Sciences and is supported by the Burke Museum Association, a non-profit organization.

The Burke opened a new building in October 2019, designed by Tom Kundig of Olson Kundig. The 113,000 square foot building turns the museum “inside-out,” breaking down traditional museum barriers and inviting visitors to part of a working research facility. Featuring 12 state-of-the-art visible labs, six galleries, views into collections storage spaces and an artists’ workshop, see the work typically happening behind the scenes of a natural history and culture museum unfold right before your eyes. At the Burke, you see—and feel—a world alive.

Collections and Research

Totaling more than 18 million pieces, the Burke collections are used by students, scientists, scholars, public agencies, tribal and community members, and museums throughout Washington state and around the world. In each of its areas of study, the Burke holds the most extensive research collection of its kind in the Northwest, and some special collections rank among the best in the nation: Northwest Coast and Alaskan Native art, Northwest botanical specimens, fish, birds, and frozen tissues for genetics research.

Faculty curators, jointly appointed by the Burke and the UW, oversee care and development of the collections and conduct research on topics such as the evolution of plants, animals, ecosystems, climates, and Native American cultures and art.

Collections

- Birds
- Cultural pieces and artifacts
- Fish
- Fossils
- Frozen tissues
- Insects and spiders
- Mammals
- Mollusks
- Plants and fungi
- Reptiles and amphibians
- Rocks and minerals

Audiences Served (FY 2019-2020)

- Museum visits: 87,573
- UW student visits: 8,890
- Website visits: 1.9 million
Education and Public Programs

Burke educational programs serve and inspire learners of all ages. Subjects range across the museum's diverse disciplines and include archaeology, fossils, biodiversity, rocks and minerals, Native cultures of Washington State and the Pacific region, and environments of the Northwest.

Pre-K-20 Schools: On-site and outreach programs for preschoolers and K-20 students deliver over 105,000 student experiences a year. They include guided, self-guided, and hands-on discovery tours; summer programs; teacher workshops; classroom curricula; and “BurkeMobile” and “Burke Boxes,” which send Burke collections and educators into classrooms across the state.

Lifelong learners: The museum also offers an active calendar of events and activities geared to family audiences and lifelong learners. They range from popular family science days and cultural festivals to lectures, films, workshops, and special member events.

Outreach

Service to the University: Located on the UW campus throughout its history, the Burke Museum supports the University's diverse missions of research, education, and community service. UW faculty in many departments make use of the collections for teaching and research; UW undergraduate and graduate students benefit from classes held at the museum and research opportunities in its collections; and Burke exhibits and programs introduce public audiences to UW research. The museum welcomes UW students, faculty, and staff with free admission, discounted memberships, and a variety of special programs.

Service to the State: The Burke Museum serves schools and communities around Washington through educational outreach programs, including classroom visits, online curricula, and study boxes designed to help meet Washington State learning requirements. The Burke cares for state collections of natural and cultural heritage, as well as numerous collections held in trust for state, local, federal, and tribal agencies. Related research projects, such as surveys of native and invasive plants, expand the collections and support the work of state agencies.

Service to Tribes and Indigenous Communities: The Burke Museum is the Washington state museum responsible for maintaining state collections of natural history and cultural heritage. Relationships maintained between communities and the Burke Museum preserve the ingenuity, creativity, science, and complex knowledge of natural and cultural resources. Tribes and community members are the experts in these areas, and we are the caretakers. Changing these patterns of cultural dominance means actively involving communities in every aspect of our work. The Burke recognizes our colonial legacy, and we dedicate ourselves to learning from communities and building a more ethical and collaborative future together. The Burke Museum's Native American Advisory Board and other Indigenous leaders consult with the museum on cultural protocols, ceremonies, collections, collaborative research, education programs, events, exhibits, and more.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Celebrating the New Burke during the museum's ribbon-cutting ceremony. Photo by Andrew Waits.