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# University backs off in transfer of remains

## School, tribes don't have hand-over pact

By [Steve Schmidt](#) Union-Tribune Staff Writer

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### OVERVIEW

**Background:** UCSD sought federal approval to hand over skeletal remains unearthed near the chancellor's home in La Jolla to the county's Kumeyaay tribes.

**What's changing:** The university has withdrawn its request because it does not have a hand-over agreement with the Kumeyaay, who do not want the bones as long as they are classified as “culturally unidentifiable.”

**The future:** The Kumeyaay can submit their own request for the remains, provided they have solid evidence linking the bones to their tribes.

LA JOLLA — UC San Diego is backing off a proposal to hand over a collection of ancient bones to the region's Kumeyaay tribes, leaving the fate of the remains in question.

In February, the University of California San Diego requested federal approval to transfer the nearly 10,000-year-old bones, now locked in a safe near Escondido, to the tribes.

But David Tarler, an administrator with the National Park Service, said the absence of a formal hand-over agreement between the university and the Kumeyaay made the request moot.

“There has to be a meeting of the minds,” he said yesterday.

Gary Matthews, UCSD's vice chancellor for resource management, said the request was a good-faith attempt to respond to long-standing Kumeyaay demands for the remains, which were unearthed near the chancellor's cliff-top house in the 1970s and are believed to be among the oldest found in the Western Hemisphere.

Tribal representatives, who were unavailable to comment yesterday, consider UCSD's handling of the bones disrespectful and want to give them a proper burial.

But the Feb. 23 request, rather than settling the issue, only brought the university grief.

UC anthropologists and others said that there's not enough evidence to link the bones to Kumeyaay or any culture, and that turning over the relics would undermine research of the peopling of the New World.

The Kumeyaay said they don't want the bones as long as they are classified as “culturally unidentifiable,” calling the designation inaccurate and insulting.

Matthews said this week that campus administrators are running out of options for resolving the dispute. He believes scientists have had enough time to study the remains and that UCSD wants to do right by local American Indians.

But “there's not much more that we can do,” he said.

UCSD wanted the federal panel that oversees the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act to consider the hand-over request at a meeting later this month.

Tarler said the request has been scratched from the meeting agenda.

He said the Kumeyaay can submit their own repatriation request with the park service. In that instance, he said, the tribes would need to submit solid evidence linking the remains to modern-day Kumeyaay.

The tribes say they've been in the San Diego area since the “beginning.”

The remains include the bones of a young man and an older woman buried together about 9,000 to 9,600 years ago.


Some UC scientists believe that with the development of new research technology, such as DNA sequencing, the remains could shed new light on human migration in North America.

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