

## **Proposal to Move the Fleming Museum to the School of the Arts**

**Submitted by the Provost's Office 6.5.2022**

**Revised 8.22.2022**

### **Abstract**

The Fleming Museum of Art is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, and as an academic museum it serves both UVM and the broader Vermont community. The museum currently sits under the Provost's Office. This proposal outlines the goals, rationale, and anticipated positive impacts of making the museum part of the School of the Arts. In this new location, the museum will remain a support center with considerable autonomy and a University-wide reach, but will also be more visible to faculty and students throughout the institution as an academic resource for teaching, learning, research, and collaboration. The School of the Arts will also benefit, with the enhanced connection to the museum, fostering exciting collaborations and assisting in the recruitment of faculty in a range of disciplines.

### **Description of the Museum**

The Fleming Museum of Art opened in 1931 with its beaux-arts entrance and broad lawn facing the busy thoroughfare leading through Burlington from Lake Champlain. The Museum was heralded by the *Burlington Free Press* as "a practical place of learning — a vibrant, ongoing educational institution for both children and adults." Built by the University of Vermont to house its growing collections, the Fleming was unusual in its founders' intention that it serve not only the academy, but also the community in which it resides: one of the missions of a land-grant institution.

The Fleming Museum has served the UVM campus and the greater Burlington community for almost ninety years. As the most extensive fine art and anthropological collection in the state of Vermont, the Fleming's holdings represent worldwide cultures dating from ancient Mesopotamia to present-day America. Now numbering over 25,000 objects, the collection supports teaching and learning at the University of Vermont in innovative ways and diverse areas, from the College of Arts and Sciences to the STEM disciplines and Medicine. Along with its collection, the Museum's ambitions and successes have grown exponentially, reflected in its educational reach, international exhibition profile, award-winning publications, and its evolving, innovative approach to the purpose and use of collections in the twenty-first century.

The Fleming's assets include: a broad collection of historical global art; the premier collection of Vermont landscape painting, covering three centuries; a strong teaching collection of fine art, anthropological artifacts, and material culture that richly supports curricular use by a broad range of disciplines; an outstanding staff, whose professionalism, creativity, and dedication achieving unexpected influence; a McKim, Mead & White building with one of the most elegant architectural spaces in the state; and, a location that faces both the heart of campus and the Burlington community.

The mission of the Museum emphasizes its role as an academic museum within the larger University as well as its accessibility to the community:

*The Fleming Museum of Art serves as a gateway for active cultural exchange and critical thinking in our communities and an essential learning resource for the University of Vermont. Through the experience of our diverse collection, dynamic exhibition schedule, and innovative educational programming, people of all ages are inspired to discover the arts and cultures of the world.*

The Fleming Museum is currently under the Office of the Provost and is led by Director Janie Cohen, who will be retiring on September 3, 2022. A search for the new Director was launched in May, 2022 and is expected to conclude by September 2022. Currently, there are a total of 8 staff in addition to the Director, including an Assistant Director, a Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, a Curator of Education and Public Programs, a Manager of Collections and Exhibitions, a Business Manager (position currently being searched), a Guest Services Coordinator, a Preparator, and a Collections Assistant.

The Fleming Museum Board of Advisors includes 15 leaders in the arts, the humanities, education, and business, appointed for the purpose of advising the Director of the Fleming Museum and the Provost and President of the University on all aspects of the Museum's operations. The Board plays an active role in advancing the Museum's programmatic goals and facilitating the growth of financial resources. The Museum also includes a seven-member Honorary Board who are benefactors and supporters of the Museum.

## **Goals and Rationale**

This proposal outlines a plan for the Fleming Museum to become part of the School of the Arts (SoA) in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). It is important to note that currently the Fleming Museum is a support center and it would remain so with the reporting line moving from the Provost's office moved to the Director of the SoA in CAS. At the same time, the closer connection with the SoA offers opportunities for faculty to become more aware of the Fleming staff and collections as a resource for teaching, research, and community engagement. While the Fleming staff support the use of collections by faculty and students, for research, teaching, and learning, the museum remains underutilized and undervisited by campus constituencies. By creating more direct and intensive connections between the Fleming and academic programs, the proposed move will enhance awareness of the academic focus of this accredited museum and support the mission of the Museum to be an essential learning resource for the University of Vermont. The move is also in alignment with UVM's Academic Success Goals, particularly in the areas related to offering integrative learning opportunities, educating engaged citizens, developing research and creative activities that involve outreach to local communities, and fostering advancement of research and creative arts throughout the institution.

With a clear link to an academic unit, as well as to programs in Art and Art History, Music, and Theater and Dance, the Fleming aligned with the SoA will also be better positioned to reach a broad, University-wide audience and become a greater locus for interdisciplinary programming, teaching, and research – indeed, to fulfill the mission of an academic museum. After the

proposed move, the Museum will maintain its interdisciplinary approach to engaging students and faculty across the institution but will have a more visible academic home that fosters our efforts to enhance integrative learning across the institution. Rather than making the Fleming less accessible to faculty outside CAS or the SoA, the move will in fact significantly raise awareness of the museum and its resources, opening up new collaborations, in which all academic units at UVM engage. The Museum provides excellent opportunities for learning, where students are encouraged to make connections inside and outside the classroom, and most importantly to consider the broader relevance of art and historical objects to the study of diverse topics and disciplines. The museum also offers excellent opportunities for applied and experiential learning through internships, part time jobs, and service learning courses.

The missions of the Fleming and the SoA are very much aligned. We see the move as a way to better support and strengthen our efforts in preparing our students, integrating arts into the broader University curriculum, centering creative practice, theory and history of the arts as a means to promote social justice, and preparing our students for real world challenges as makers, cultural producers and consumers, and informed global citizens. Collaborations across disciplines and community outreach are a core part of both missions. Bringing the Fleming under the umbrella of the SoA will provide better opportunities for our students, faculty and community members, better integrate the Fleming into the University's academic programs and mission, allow for better marketing and community engagement, strengthen fundraising outreach, and provide better administrative support to the Museum through access to the CAS Business office and other administrative functions within the College.

## **Impact**

There are several positive impacts to this requested move. First, there will be greater academic integration among staff in the Fleming and faculty in the SoA. Discussion of these possibilities has already created opportunities for the Fleming to attract highly qualified candidates to the Director search, all of whom were excited by the opportunity to have an affiliate faculty appointment and to teach a class in their area of expertise. The new Fleming Director will be granted affiliate faculty status and be part of the SoA Leadership Team, but will maintain autonomy to develop a strategic vision and guide the Fleming forward. The museum will continue to have a Board of Advisors; two members of this board served on the Director search committee and have been highly supportive and indeed energized by the possibilities opened up by the new affiliation.

As part of the SoA within CAS, there will be greater opportunities for student internships including potentially creating a Community of Practice for museum studies. There will be increased synergies with the community and faculty about justice, equity, diversity and inclusion issues important to the Fleming and the SoA. In fact, the Fleming has just gone through a process of reimagining itself as it considers how to become an anti-racist museum that's more responsive, relevant and inclusive. As the SoA builds its action plan for inclusive excellence this is a perfect opportunity to build on the steps the Fleming has already begun, while the Fleming can benefit from working more closely with faculty who are deeply engaged in projects and programs with local communities. There will be numerous opportunities for collaborative fundraising as many current, active donors are shared between the Fleming and the SoA. There

will also be better opportunities to coordinate activities within the institution and the community, rather than having two University entities with overlapping missions competing for time, space, money, and donors.

Having the Fleming Museum as part of the SoA and particularly a closer connection to the program in art and art history will support faculty recruitment efforts and it also establishes a greater connection for developing a museum studies program and certification. Further, with the combination of the expertise of the new Fleming Director and the Executive Director of the SoA, there are greater grant writing opportunities especially with Foundations with a stronger academic focus. Ultimately, our goal is to create increased integration, lessen the Fleming's relative isolation from the broader campus, and establish a community of engagement with individuals and units that have many shared interests.

As noted above, the Fleming Museum will remain a support center, so there will be no additional space or other costs to CAS. The Fleming Director will maintain the autonomy to develop Fleming strategic priorities and collections practices, as well as maintaining a separate Fleming Board of Advisors. The proposed move is similar to the relocation of the Lane Series, which moved under CAS in 2015: the director was given an academic appointment, autonomy continued for programming, and Lane Series Board of Advisors continue to provide advice to the Director. This successful integration of a unique University asset into an academic unit provides a helpful model for the proposed Fleming move.

## **Budget**

The Fleming's annual expenses are between \$1 and \$1.5 M depending on activities and exhibitions in a given year.

The Fleming Museum's continuing general fund budget is \$660K. This budget is used to fund the majority of the Museum's personnel salary and benefit expenses. Portions of some personnel expenses (about 7% of the total) are also distributed to gift and endowment resources.

The Fleming has an unrestricted gift account that is funded through its twice-yearly appeal letter and personal solicitations by the UVM Foundation and Museum Director, raising between \$40K and \$150K per year (this year \$95K was raised). This account supports all general spending. The museum has several restricted gift accounts totaling approximately \$400K that are designated for education, outreach, marketing, visitor services, and an alumni exhibition.

The museum has five endowments generating about \$120K per year, with an additional \$200K currently in unspent endowment reserve funding. Two endowments are dedicated to exhibitions, two to acquisitions, and one to collections care.

The Fleming has three active grants with the Vermont Arts Council, the Vermont Humanities Council, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services totaling \$100K. These grants will end in fall 2022. Several additional grant proposals have been submitted; decisions will be released in late summer and early fall.

The museum also has income-producing activities that vary year to year, raising \$16K in FY22.

## **Evaluation**

The Fleming Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, and is due for its 10-year reaccreditation visit in Spring 2024. In the self-study process for reaccreditation, which will take place in Fall 2023, the Museum will have the opportunity to evaluate and demonstrate excellence in a range of areas, including collections management, exhibitions, educational programming and outreach, leadership, financial stability, and fulfillment of its mission. As part of this process, there will be opportunities to evaluate the impact of the new reporting line of the museum. Academic museums vary in their location and reporting line, and a number are directly affiliated with Schools or Colleges of the Arts. At the current time of transformation and change for the Fleming, coinciding with the establishment of the SoA, the proposed move offers great potential benefits for the Fleming, the SoA, and most importantly UVM faculty, students, staff, and the local community.

As noted in the Goals and Rationale and Impact sections, the administrative move of the Fleming offers opportunities for increased faculty and student engagement with the Fleming by highlighting academic and research synergies. Tracking metrics of University-wide and off-campus partner engagement with the museum will also provide means to evaluate the impact of the move. These metrics might include, for example, tracking activities such as the following:

- Visitorship (increases or decreases number of visitors in different categories)
- Group visits/tours (University; K-12; community organizations)
- Collections used by classes, students, faculty, outside researchers
- Research presentations, gallery talks, and academic events hosted at the Fleming
- Classes taught/co-taught by Fleming staff
- Exhibits curated by classes and/or faculty in collaboration with Fleming staff
- Extent and success of outreach projects with off-campus partners
- Outreach projects conducted with campus partners for on and/or off-campus audiences
- Public talks, workshops, or publications on museum topics by Fleming staff
- Fundraising and grant-writing in support of Fleming exhibitions and projects, including in collaboration with faculty

## **Summary of communications**

A series of meetings have occurred among staff and Board of Advisors of the Fleming as well as faculty in the SoA and those in CAS. These meetings are outlined below:

- Provost Prelock met with Fleming Director Janie Cohen to discuss the possibility of this move and discussed the advantages and potential impact on **February 23 and April 5**

- Provost Prelock, Dean Falls, Associate Dean and SoA Director Kelley Di Dio and Fleming Director, Janie Cohen met to discuss a potential move and to answer questions from Janie on **April 5**
- Fleming Director Cohen met with her staff to discuss a potential move with Dean Falls and Associate Dean and SoA Director Kelley Di Dio on **April 12**.
- Dean Falls and Associate Dean and SoA Director Kelley Di Dio met with the Fleming Museum Board of Advisors on **April 15**
- Provost Prelock met with Fleming Director Janie Cohen on **April 25** to discuss affiliate status for the Fleming
- Provost Prelock communicated with Dean Falls and Director Di Dio on **April 25** to discuss affiliate status for the Fleming
- Provost Prelock communicated with Director Cohen about affiliate status on **May 3** and the preference for all to have Fleming fully integrated in the SoA as already they were seeing greater interest in the SoA for faculty applicants and for Fleming Director applicants because of the integration of the SoA & the Fleming
- The potential move of the Fleming to the SoA was warned in the CAS faculty meeting agenda distributed on **May 10**.
- Dean Falls presented the potential move of the Fleming to the SoA to the faculty in CAS on **May 17**.
- SoA Director Kelley Di Dio met with SoA faculty and presented the potential move of the Fleming to the SoA on **May 17**.

## Schedule

The expected timeline for this move is Fall semester 2022, as the new Fleming Director joins the institution; however, some financial components may not be moved until July 1, 2024, the start of fiscal year 2024.