



---

## Stanley Museum of Art

January 29, 2021

Lois J. Geist, MD  
Associate Provost for Faculty  
Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost  
Professor, Department of Internal Medicine  
111 Jessup Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242

Dear Dr. Geist,

Thank you for organizing and coordinating the 2020 departmental review of the UI Stanley Museum of Art. The committee's report is thorough and insightful, and it will be a helpful guide as we relocate and manage our world-class art collections, prepare for the opening of the new museum building in August 2022, and continuing to grow and sustain vital programs that serve our campus and community audiences. Please share my warm thanks with the committee members.

In formulating their review and recommendations, the committee members relied in part on a self-study that the museum submitted to the Provost's Office in November 2019. During the year that passed before the committee convened to conduct their review, some key circumstances within the museum had changed. Below, I have noted these changes and also responded to the substance of the committee's report and recommendations.

### **Changes post self-study**

#### Education:

In the wake of COVID-19, the museum has already begun to enhance its digital presence in the following ways:

1. We have added significantly to the percentage of the collection searchable through the Iowa Digital Library with the goal of making the collection completely accessible by 2023.
2. We created a remote teaching studio that allows us to support UI courses and K-12 classes with synchronous and asynchronous videos featuring museum educators presenting works from the collection.
3. We launched a host of online public programs.

Our challenge will be to continue building on this progress after we open the new building and are managing exhibitions and programs in that space.

#### Collections care:

1. In the past year, the university has built a secure, climatized collections storage area for the museum at Independence Road in Iowa City, adjacent to the UI Library's remote storage space. In the short term, this space will be a staging area for us to use as we move our collection home and prepare it for installation in the new building. In the long term, it will provide space for our collection to grow.

## Stanley Museum of Art

2. In May 2020, the museum completed a collections plan that will guide (and judiciously limit) the growth of our collection over the next decade by ensuring that any works we acquire support the educational and research missions of the university. That plan is publicly accessible on our website here: <https://stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu/assets/PDFs/2020-2030-Collection-Plan-UI-Stanley-Museum-of-Art.pdf>.
3. To move the collection as safely and efficiently as possible, the museum has added three temporary positions (two preparators and one registrar) to our Collections department; however, these are 1- and 2-year term positions supported by a limited quasi-endowment fund. They will not help us address our long-term staffing needs.

### Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as it pertains to staff:

Over the past year, the museum has further diversified its staff. Seven museum staff positions are now filled by members of underrepresented groups including BIPOC and LGBTQ people and first-generation college graduates from rural areas; however, five of these positions are temporary and funded by soft money. Therefore, equity continues to elude us, and retention is a significant problem.

### **Substance and Recommendations**

As both you and the review committee members are aware, the museum's primary goals are to support the University of Iowa's commitment to excellence in research and teaching, enhance DEI and the student experience, and bolster recruitment and retention of both students and faculty. The committee's observations and recommendations acknowledge that it will take additional financial resources and staff for us to achieve these goals. As the reviewers noted, beyond allocating funding for utilities and security in the new building, adding a collections care specialist (specifically, a museum preparator trained to move art and install exhibitions) and a building operations manager will be crucial. We also currently lack an administrative assistant to manage the museum offices, another vital position.

The reviewers pointed out that the student labor pool could ameliorate our staffing shortage and also serve DEI. We wholeheartedly agree, and we also recognize that pre-professional work opportunities significantly enhance the student experience. In order to effectively leverage student labor through work-study jobs, internships, and graduate assistantships, and to make these opportunities truly beneficial to students, most of our peer museums have created a staff position to recruit, train, and manage student employees and to tailor museum programs to best serve university audiences. Creating such a position at the Stanley would be enormously beneficial and a wise investment of resources. See for comparison:

- [Eskenazi Museum of Art](#), Indiana University  
University Experiences Manager
- [University of Michigan Museum of Art](#)  
Curator for University Learning and Programs
- [Weisman Art Museum](#), University of Minnesota  
Director of Student Engagement and Programs



---

## Stanley Museum of Art

- [Snite Museum of Art](#), University of Notre Dame  
Outreach Specialist Campus Engagement
- [The Block Museum of Art](#), Northwestern University  
Campus and Community Education and Engagement

Expanding cross-unit collaboration was another excellent suggestion in the report. Shared staff positions facilitate this work, as we have already seen with the museum's Chief Curator, who holds a faculty teaching appointment in SAAH. To cite another possibility, a position shared between the museum and the UI Libraries could help us unify our collections databases, making it easier for faculty and students to find relevant resources. Such a position would require a degree in Library and Information Science, but it could be created as a term, entry-level, pipeline opportunity for recent MLS recipients on campus, helping to launch these UI alumni into their professions.

I look forward to exploring these possibilities with the Provost and other relevant administrators.

Sincerely,

Lauren Lessing, Director  
(207) 660-3605  
lauren-lessing@uiowa.edu