


Arts community reacts with sadness, anger to Lyme Academy decision

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Old Lyme — When Josh Barish found out that the University of New Haven would stop offering degree-granting programs at the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts after his freshman year, his first reaction included an expletive. In more newspaper-appropriate terms, he said, "it was dumbfounding."

He is one of 20-some students hit with the news shortly before the start of their freshman year. Barish said his plan is to stick out the year and transfer next year, likely to the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

The appeal of Lyme Academy to him was that "they really focus on the classical arts, drawing and painting from observation, whereas other schools, a lot of it is imaginative and conceptual."

The University of New Haven **announced on Monday** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20180813/unh-to-stop-offering-bfa-degrees-at-lyme-academy-college-of-fine-arts>) — in an in-person meeting for faculty, and in an email to students — that its bachelor of fine arts and certificate programs will end at Lyme Academy after the 2018-19 school year. Lyme has been granting BFAs since 1996, but the two institutions only affiliated in 2014.

Citing struggles with finances and enrollment, UNH President Steven Kaplan

(<https://www.newhaven.edu/lyme/>) said the challenges faced at Lyme "have been greater than anticipated," and that operating a campus 40 miles from the main campus in West Haven presented "serious challenges."

Professor Nancy Gladwell, who has been at Lyme Academy for 25 years, also feels that the 40-mile gap "proved too insurmountable" in the end.

She thinks UNH lacked understanding of the art school. She said, "It's sort of like Pepsi-Cola buying out the corner lemonade store," noting that it became harder for students to get answers.

But she also feels that those at the academy could have been more attentive to some things UNH did, noting that the "us versus them" dynamic that developed was not helpful.

"It didn't seem like anyone was happy to make that decision. It didn't seem like it was from a lack of effort," said Kimberly Monson, professor and alumna. But she added, "UNH possibly didn't realize the unique needs of a fine-arts school, specifically."

Monson said that after Lyme Academy began offering degrees, professionals slowly were excluded from

coming in to take classes, which she views as the beginning of the problem.

And Gladwell feels that Lyme "missed the boat" by not offering a robust selection of children's courses or a summer arts camp.

Both are hopeful that the institution can survive in some form.

"There's overwhelming support and passion for keeping the place going, as far as the alumni," Monson said. She added, "It's almost like a gift-wrapped box of self-contained artness, that could be opened by any institution pretty easily."

She can't see Old Lyme not having an art institution, especially given the proximity of the Florence Griswold Museum and the Lyme Art Association.

According to an FAQ (<https://www.newhaven.edu/lyme/>) on the Lyme Academy website, "The Lyme Board of Trustees will retain ownership of the campus facilities and may attempt to develop plans to reconstitute the academy as a non-degree community arts program in the future."

Local arts community expresses disappointment

Lyme Art Association board President Kathy Simmons said she's confident there still will be strong support for the arts in the community, though she was surprised and saddened to hear the news.

Tammi Flynn, director of marketing for the Florence Griswold Museum, said in an emailed statement, "Training in the fine arts has played an important role in the history of Old Lyme since the Art Colony days. We hope that the tradition of a fine arts education can continue in some way. The alumni, faculty, and students have always been valued members of our arts community, and friends of this institution."

Like Gladwell, local art curator and philanthropist Alva Greenberg said she wasn't surprised by the decision. But she was surprised at the timing, thinking the programs "would hang on for a little longer."

"They built a great facility, and they did a lot for the community," she said, "so I hope that there's a way that they can figure out how to move forward and do something with it."

Greenberg would love to see Lyme Academy offer a one-semester intensive, as at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, or transform into an artist residency program that also serves writers and musicians.

Lyman Allyn Art Museum Director Sam Quigley said of the news, "It was kind of something that I had an inkling might be happening. That situation had been deteriorating for a while now, but it was sad to see it come to this."

He added that this is a real blow because not too many institutions are teaching the foundational skills that Lyme Academy does.

Best-selling author Luanne Rice called the decision a disappointment and tragedy.

Lyme-Old Lyme Public Schools Superintendent Ian Neviaser said in a statement that the school district has had a good relationship with Lyme Academy before and since the arrival of UNH, and he hopes that whatever happens, it still can work with LACFA to support Lyme-Old Lyme students in their artistic pursuits.

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