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Laurier plans to integrate Robert Langen Art Gallery into University Library

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University continues to find ways to stretch its financial resources and improve services to students and the community at large.

The university has announced plans to create exhibition space in the University Library as part of a strategy to integrate the Robert Langen Art Gallery into the library operations.

The move addresses a recommendation in Laurier's Integrated Planning and Resource Management initiative to close the art gallery's current space in the John Aird Centre because of the location's poor design and limited visibility. It also reinforces a plan to evolve the Laurier Library into a cultural and learning commons.

President and Vice-Chancellor Max Blouw said the integration strategy will create new exhibition space within the University Library for special temporary exhibitions and will also provide additional display opportunities for the university's permanent collection.

"This is a very positive outcome," said Blouw. "Our students, faculty and staff make great use of the library facilities. In exploring options for the Robert Langen Art Gallery, it became apparent that we can bring more art to our community through the university library as well as other locations elsewhere on our campuses."

University Librarian Gohar Ashoughian said the proposed integration reinforces her vision for the library to fulfill the role of a cultural and learning commons at Laurier.

"A recent exhibition of photo-based research about immigrant women by PhD candidate Bharati Sethi showed that we can create extensions for our academic programs within the library and bring new audiences and new perspectives to exhibiting art at Laurier," said Ashoughian.

The proposal to use exhibition space in the library and to integrate the art gallery operations into the library's administrative structure will provide greater visibility for Laurier's art collection and artist exhibitions. It will also provide Curator Suzanne Luke with a dynamic space with which to continue the work of the Robert Langen Art Gallery, which aims to foster creative thinking, the exploration of ideas, critical debate, and to ignite community dialogue on issues surrounding arts and culture.

Ashoughian commended Luke for her creativity and resourcefulness in finding ways to bring highly regarded artists to the university and incorporate their work into the curriculum and pedagogical life of the university. For example, Luke recently curated *Urban Res Studies*, an exhibition of works by acclaimed Canadian Cree artist Kent Monkman. Luke worked with Laurier's Office of Aboriginal Initiatives to present a free public lecture in conjunction with Monkman's exhibition and Aboriginal Education Week at Laurier.

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Deborah MacLatchy, Laurier's vice-president: academic & provost and acting vice-president of research, applauded the integration plan.

"The collaborations between the gallery and faculty have brought international-quality visual art to Laurier and intentionally incorporated artistic works into academic programming," said MacLatchy. "The planned integration of the gallery into the library will continue this intentional partnership of visual art and academic programming in a more accessible venue, reaching a broader base of Laurier student, staff and faculty and community members."

Stephen Preece, an associate professor of policy in the School of Business & Economics and chair of the Robert Langen Art Gallery advisory committee, was pleased with the innovative approach to maintaining the role of the art gallery and giving greater prominence to visual art at Laurier.

"The visual arts are such an important aspect of our lives," said Preece. "It is gratifying that Laurier has found an innovative way to continue the work of the Robert Langen Art Gallery, which is to make art an integral part of life at the university. On behalf of the advisory committee, I look forward to continue working with Curator Suzanne Luke, University Librarian Gohar Ashoughian, and other members of the Laurier community to develop and present outstanding exhibitions."

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