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Laurier to launch research and service centre for bilingualism and language learning

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University, along with community and academic partners, will celebrate the opening of a research and service centre dedicated to bilingualism and language learning during a launch event **Friday, Oct. 11** at Laurier’s Waterloo campus.

[Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier](#) is the first Canadian partner in a worldwide network of research and outreach sites located at 26 universities in 14 countries. [Bilingualism Matters](#) was founded at the University of Edinburgh in 2008 and is the largest research network in the world focused on language learning and multilingualism.

“We are extremely excited to bring Bilingualism Matters to Canada,” said [John W. Schwieter](#), a Laurier professor of Spanish and linguistics and director of the new centre. “Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier will carry out research on a broad range of issues related to cognitive, educational and social dimensions of bilingualism and language learning. The knowledge we gain from our research will serve to inform workshops, seminars, talks and other activities for the public.”

“Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier is poised to address issues and opportunities associated with Canada’s many bilingualisms,” said **Jonathan Newman**, Laurier’s vice-president: research. “With nearly a quarter of Waterloo Region residents speaking a first language other than English, the centre’s research and educational mandates are more relevant than ever.”

Local partners of the centre are the Region of Waterloo, City of Kitchener, City of Waterloo and Waterloo Region District School Board. Academic partners are the University of Edinburgh and University of California, Santa Barbara. All partners are represented on the project’s steering committee, with local partners providing input based on their knowledge of the community’s linguistic and cultural needs.

“Among the 120 mother tongues in Waterloo Region, speakers of some languages have grown by triple digits in the past five years whereas speakers of other languages have dwindled,” said Schwieter. “The international and local scope of Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier will offer a unique opportunity for us to engage with thousands of researchers and speak to emerging needs resulting from linguistic diversity, not only in our community but globally.”

One of the studies planned will examine how speaking more than one language may lead to cognitive benefits across the lifespan. Another will explore the dynamics of multilingualism in classrooms, comparing learning in non-immersion and immersion environments. In another study, the team will also investigate patterns of language use, societal attitudes, and speakers’ identities.

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The Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier launch takes place **Friday, Oct. 11** in the **Arts Atrium**, located on the ground floor of the **Schlegel Building** on Albert Street near University Avenue. The event begins at **3:30 p.m.** with a social gathering including refreshments. A ribbon cutting and official launch ceremony will begin at **5:30 p.m.** Speakers will include researchers as well as representatives from Laurier, community partners and Bilingualism Matters headquarters in Scotland. An informal tour of the Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier centre, located in **room 368 of the Frank C. Peters Building**, will follow. All are welcome to attend.

Bilingualism Matters @ Laurier is funded through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant with support from all community and academic partners including Laurier.

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