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Opening of Science Commons ushers in new era for University of Lethbridge

A new era in scientific research and education has dawned with today's official opening of the University of Lethbridge's \$280-million Science Commons.

The spectacular facility, which brings together the departments of Chemistry & Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Neuroscience, Physics & Astronomy and Psychology, is designed to foster transdisciplinary research by providing exceptional opportunities for collaboration and discovery.



At 38,500 sq. metres, it is the largest development on the U of L campus since the original construction of University Hall began in 1969.

“The history of the University of Lethbridge is steeped in a tradition of community visionaries coming together to make the improbable possible, just as they did in establishing the University over 50 years ago,” says Dr. Mike Mahon, U of L president and vice-chancellor. “It took a great community effort to bring the dream of Science Commons together as well. From our incredible faculty and staff, to alumni and donors, our Board of Directors and Senate and all our partners throughout southern Alberta, Science Commons will stand as a testament to visionary thought and perseverance and represent the very best our University has to offer.”

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney says the addition of Science Commons at the U of L is a boon for the province.

“On behalf of the Government of Alberta, I congratulate the University of Lethbridge on the opening of Science Commons,” says Kenney “This facility will help thousands of students to learn, innovate and collaborate for decades to come. This project will receive \$260 million from Alberta taxpayers, underscoring our province’s commitment to scientific progress, which is critical to our long-term prosperity.”

Demetrios Nicolaides, Alberta’s Minister of Advanced Education, adds that the province’s investment will bolster intellectual capital and strengthen the economy.

“The University of Lethbridge has an outstanding reputation for discovery research. The addition of this state-of-the-art facility will further attract international students and inspire more innovation, creativity and growth,” says Nicolaides. “A modern university research centre brings top talent and business to Alberta which builds the workforce and supports a stronger economy.”

Setting the stage for the next 50 years of scientific discovery and education at the U of L, Science Commons is a facility where science transcends disciplines. Large, flexible lab spaces designed with a shared-space ideology encourage collisions among researchers with diverse backgrounds and approaches. Researchers at all stages of their careers, from postdocs to doctoral, masters and undergraduate students and from kindergarten to Grade 12 will come together, sparking conversations and igniting discovery.

“From the outset, the vision of our faculty members was to stay true to our liberal education roots. The key to the success of this facility is to foster a culture of discovery and innovation that is outward-facing, responsive to societal needs and inspires the next generation,” says Dr. Matthew Letts, interim dean for the Faculty of Arts & Science. “Science Commons will build upon our collaborative approach to research and our experiential approach to learning.”

The facility also creates greater opportunity for the University to build on its relationships with southern Alberta industry partners.

“The U of L has long been an economic driver in our community and Science Commons will expand our ability to foster partnerships as we translate knowledge from the lab to industry,” adds Mahon.

Dr. Ute Kothe, a researcher in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, says the world-class research already being conducted at the U of L will be further enhanced by the amenities within Science Commons.

“This building will draw scientists to Lethbridge, and that will really ensure we are bringing the best minds to Lethbridge to conduct world-class research here,” says Kothe. “They will work in state-of-the-art facilities and they will learn to work collaboratively

because this is really the philosophy of the U of L — to bring people together and cross disciplinary boundaries and generate the best ideas.”

With glass the defining design feature of Science Commons, it embodies the concept of science on display, serving as an open invitation to the public to see the world’s brightest minds as they work to solve today’s greatest challenges. Further, the facility offers dedicated spaces that will double the University’s capacity for science outreach activities — a true science centre for southern Alberta.

“What makes Science Commons so extraordinary is by the manner in which the architecture and the facility have been structured to foster research, teaching, collaborative space, public space, all in a domain that actually brings together multidisciplinary researchers and the public at large,” says Dr. Fred Wrona, chief scientist, Alberta Environment and Parks, Government of Alberta.

Students are taking notice. New Fall 2019 registrants to Bachelor of Science (BSc) programs offered by the Faculty of Arts & Science are up over 23 per cent from last year, while total BSc registrants are up nearly 10 per cent.

“The open concept allows for a lot of collaboration between different labs, so I’m excited to learn with new tools and new techniques that I might not have had access to before,” says Catrione Lee, a fourth-year biochemistry student.

Already one of the country’s leading research universities, Science Commons positions the U of L at the forefront of science research and education, inspiring the next generation of research scientists and setting the stage for an unprecedented era of discovery.

Dr. Hans-Joachim Wieden, Alberta Innovates Strategic Chair in RNA Bioengineering, Tier I Board of Governors Research Chair in Biomolecular Design and Function and the founding director of the Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI), is succinct in his appraisal of Science Commons.

“I’m convinced that this facility is the best facility for research and science education in Canada.”

Photos (hi-resolution) of Science Commons may be downloaded here (courtesy University of Lethbridge):

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1PLD2MzW_vnllknwHMgY8ScnB522ySZvS

Attached mp3 files include the following:

DrFred Wrona – Chief Scientist, Alberta Environment and Parks, Government of Alberta, discusses the design of the building and its multidisciplinary, science-on-display focus

DrDavid Logue – Psychology professor speaks to how Science Commons is inspirational

DrRobert Sutherland – Director of the CCBN discusses how neuroscience research benefits from having other disciplines in the same facility

DrRoy Golsteyn – Biological Sciences professor speaks to the buzz on campus

Kael Opie – KPMB Architects discusses the sustainability approach of the building's design and how it saves on energy consumption

Steph Elder – Destination Exploration, the U of L's science outreach group, now has its own dedicated lab space

DrUte Kothe – Chemistry & Biochemistry researcher discusses how the new facility attracts the best researchers to Lethbridge

DrHJ Wieden – Founding Director of ARRTI sums up his review of Science Commons by simply stating it's the best in Canada

Science Commons video: <https://youtu.be/z2WG56nc5io>

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/opening-science-commons-ushers-new-era-university-lethbridge>

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Backgrounder

Science Commons Fast facts

— 38,500 sq. metres in size

— Construction began with sod turning on June 23, 2016

— Home to Departments of Chemistry & Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Neuroscience, Physics & Astronomy, Psychology

— Home to Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI), the Alberta Terrestrial Imaging Centre (ATIC), the Canadian Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience (CCBN), the Canadian Centre for Research in Advanced Flourine Technologies (C-CRAFT), the Institute for Space Imaging Science (ISIS), the Southern Alberta Genome Sciences Centre (SAGSC)

— \$280 million construction cost, with \$260 million in funding from the province of Alberta and \$20 million in funding through the University of Lethbridge's SHINE campaign

— Designed by KPMB Architects / Stantec Architecture, Architects in Association

— Constructed by PCL Construction

- More than 50 Lethbridge-based companies contracted to work on the project
- 14 major contracts awarded to Lethbridge-based groups at an approximate value of \$35 million
- \$15 to \$20 million paid in wages as part of the project, benefiting the southern Alberta housing market, rental market and established local businesses
- 50 years of science relocated, moving 350-plus individuals, 200 labs, 700 pieces of equipment

Unique Spaces

- Synbridge is the first synthetic biology makerspace in Alberta
- Science Commons has a dedicated science outreach space, doubling its capacity for outreach activities
- Central Analytical Facility is a core group of scientific instruments available for use by any member of the University of Lethbridge and beyond. The primary aim of the facility is to advance research in all fields by providing access to highly specialized analytical instrumentation that is not typically available to all researchers.
- Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) facility creates an external magnetic field which can essentially align nuclei in order to examine and image the electronic structure of a molecule
- Agility Innovation Zone is a co-working space open to everyone that encourages creative making, hands-on learning, exploring and sharing of ideas, fostering a multidisciplinary collaboration and collision of ideas.
- Physics & Astronomy lab houses the largest cryogenic test facility in Canada
- Clean Room in Dr. David Naylor's lab is where equipment destined for space is prepared for testing
- BMO Auditorium is the largest classroom in Science Commons, seating 250 students. It is wheelchair accessible on three different tiers, has electronic plugs at the seats and left and right-handed desks.
- Atrium is now the largest on campus and can accommodate approximately 380 people. With flexible options for seating, it can be booked for major events such as booth fairs, science fairs and weddings.
- Lecture halls seating 120, 120 and 140 students respectively are fully equipped with plug-ins/internet access at each seat, whiteboards, projectors, TVs and are wheelchair accessible
- Periodic Table houses actual examples of elements with a fully interactive video screen

Architectural features

- Science Commons was shortlisted for an award at the World Architecture Festival
- The facility demonstrates Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and aims for Gold LEED certification

- Upper hung meeting rooms cantilevered to the building such that they require no pillars or support
- Specialized wind testing was done on models of Science Commons well before construction to help shape design alterations and wind mitigation techniques for areas around the new building
- Wintergarden is a crucial part of the building's sustainability. Through automated blinds and huge glass windows, air is pre-heated or cooled and then distributed throughout the building
- There are double façades on the east and west-facing offices that act as an air collection system for the entire building. Air enters through fully automated vents with windows opened to react to sun exposure, time of day, wind speed and direction, interior temperature and humidity