



University of
Lethbridge

NEWS RELEASE

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International education leader, artist and mentor, Dr. Rita L. Irwin, named ULAA Alumna of the Year

A respected national and international educational leader, Dr. Rita L. Irwin (BEd '77) is both a well-known artist and renowned researcher who has long strived to improve education for all learners through artistic and creative avenues. A teacher of teachers, collaborative mentor and educational leader for inquiry through the arts, she has been named the University of Lethbridge Alumni Association's (ULAA) 2023 Alumna of the Year.

"Dr. Rita Irwin is an exceptional representation of how influential ULethbridge alumni are both in our community and beyond. She is a well-known artist and highly respected arts education researcher who has positively shaped the philosophies and practices of countless teachers and made a meaningful impact in the lives of students across Canada and around the world," says Deirdre McKenna (BA '94), ULAA president. "As a widely exhibited artist herself, Dr. Irwin exemplifies the value of a well-rounded liberal arts education."



Irwin will be recognized at 2023 Fall Convocation on Saturday, October 14, 2023, at 10 a.m. in the 1st Choice Savings Centre gymnasium. As well, she will be celebrated as part of the [Let There Be Light Night Alumni Achievement Awards](#) celebration on Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023, at 7 p.m. in Science Commons Atrium. Tickets are currently available [online](#).

Alumna of the Year — Dr. Rita L. Irwin

Throughout her career, Dr. Rita L. Irwin, has maintained a deep commitment to the arts, curriculum studies and education. A teacher of teachers, Irwin is known for her community-oriented, participatory teaching style.

With roots in rural southern Alberta, Irwin's interest in the arts stems from a shared love of creative exploration with her mother. From that interest came a desire to improve education for all learners through artistic and creative avenues, leading her to the University of Lethbridge's Faculty of Education in 1973. Following her time at ULethbridge, Irwin began her teaching career with the Lethbridge School Division, where she started as an art and drama specialist for elementary students. She soon became a district-wide visual arts consultant and arts and music specialist. Irwin continued her own education while teaching, first completing a Master of Education at the University of Victoria and then pursuing a doctoral program in art education at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

After a few years as an assistant professor at Lakehead University in Ontario, Irwin returned to UBC in 1992 where she has remained firmly rooted as an integral part of the Faculty of Education. While impacting the education of countless students as a respected professor, Irwin has also served in administrative roles that include heading UBC's Department of Curriculum Studies (1999-2005) and serving as the Associate Dean of Teacher Education (2005-2015) before being named a Distinguished University Scholar in 2017.

At the heart of her work, Irwin explores a range of questions and topics through photography, painting, poetry and prose. Her work has been published prolifically, and she has secured millions of dollars in research funding, including numerous Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grants. Irwin's research interests have spanned in-service art education, teacher education, socio-cultural issues and curriculum practices. She is perhaps best known for her work in the development of a/r/tography, or inquiring through the process of art making, as a research methodology.

Even with such a wide-ranging impact, Irwin has remained connected to southern Alberta, establishing an endowment to ULethbridge early in her career for the long-standing Rita L. Irwin Scholarship for Arts Education, generously giving back to the program that began her career path.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/international-education-leader-artist-and-mentor-dr-rita-l-irwin-named-ulaa-alumnus-year>

-- 30 --

Contact:

Trevor Kenney, News & Information Manager
403-329-2710
403-360-7639 (cell)
trevor.kenney@uleth.ca
@ULethbridge

Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.