

NEXTcast 3.2: Jennifer Gordon and the Humber Galleries

In this episode, we speak with Jennifer Gordon, Director of the Centre for Creative Business Innovation & Galleries, about the new mandate for the Humber Galleries, and the ways faculty and students can get involved.

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to *NEXTcast*, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. I'm Nathan Whitlock, an editor at Humber Press. Every episode on *NEXTcast*, we talk to faculty and staff at Humber who are leading innovation both inside and outside the classroom. In this episode, we talk to Jennifer Gordon, director of the Humber Galleries, about the gallery's new mandate and how faculty and students can get involved. Welcome to *NEXTcast*, Jennifer.

Jennifer Gordon: Thanks for having me here, Nathan. I'm really excited.

Nathan Whitlock: Well, thank you for coming. I wanted to just ask you what your role is at Humber College. What are you doing right now?

Jennifer Gordon: So right now, I've got two different roles. I've been named the director of the Center for Creative Business Innovation, as well as the director of Humber Galleries as of the beginning of May this year.

Nathan Whitlock: You're wearing two hats.

Jennifer Gordon: I'm wearing two hats.

Nathan Whitlock: And the galleries sort of are getting revamped or are in the process of being revamped a little bit in terms of their mission. What do you see as the sort of new mission for the galleries at Humber?

Jennifer Gordon: That's a question that's super interesting right now, because we don't have a formalized mission or mandate at this point in time, which I personally find very exciting. We're going to be working with faculty and students and the communities around to sort of see what your needs are and respond to them in time. We don't want to come in and say, "This is going to be the mission and this is the mandate." Definitely have some ideas, but it's going to be built around what the community's needs are as opposed to from something internal to me.

Two words I think that I'd like for people to focus on are participatory and then openness. For participation, we're looking for

promoting students, staff and faculty artworks, and then for openness, we're looking at helping everyone to view the galleries as more than just a closed white box or a physical space. Instead, we want the Humber family to help everyone to see the campuses themselves as canvases that we'll be working with.

Nathan Whitlock: And you mentioned the physical spaces. I want to ask you about that in a second because there's been some changes there, as well. But just going back to the idea of this sort of mandate in progress, how are you getting that input? What do you have in place? Are you going and meeting with people and asking them directly, "What do you need? What do you want to see out of the galleries?"

Jennifer Gordon: Yes, I'm meeting with faculty primarily and then with some of the senior administration as well, and having one on ones and small group meetings and some of those will be evolving through the fall because of course, the faculty and majority of the student body weren't here over the summer, so we'll be looking at setting some of those opportunities up in the fall moving forward. And then informally as well, my door's always open for people to come by and they have an idea or they want to know if something is possible, come by and chat with me. Some change you'd like to see, I'd love to hear that as well.

Nathan Whitlock: Has anybody made any suggestions where you just feel like, "Uh, no"?

Jennifer Gordon: There've been some interesting suggestions that have involved animating areas of campus, so I need to work with facilities on those. If facilities is listening, don't be surprised. But we're looking at maybe doing some interactive work around the fire escapes and experiential pieces with the theater department, production department as well as the lighting and a few other areas, too. So there's put some big projects like that that we're excited to sort of have launch as an outdoor experience to highlight the campuses that we're on. So yeah, nothing I've turned down yet, no.

Nathan Whitlock: Nobody said, "How about faculty pets?"

Jennifer Gordon: Well, actually-

Nathan Whitlock: Or, "Projecting my grandson on the side of the LRC"?

Jennifer Gordon: That would be fantastic. We actually-

Nathan Whitlock: Three-dimensional.

Jennifer Gordon: We actually do have ... Yeah, three grandchildren only. We only have space for three.

Nathan Whitlock: Only your favorites.

Jennifer Gordon: Only the favorites. Yeah. We actually have a student piece in a vitrine just up the hallway from me here, which is focused on her dog named Hammy, and how she started an Instagram account with her dog Hammy in order to get over the death of her grandmother to help her sort of work through that. So we're hoping to bring Hammy in for a meet and greet, but we'll see how that goes.

Nathan Whitlock: Okay. This could be the next in the president's lecture series. Hammy could come and-

Jennifer Gordon: Exactly. @HammyExplores is the name of the Instagram. So let's all come and meet Hammy.

Nathan Whitlock: So again, you mentioned the physical spaces and you were talking about these ideas of using spaces, even the fire escapes and things like that, getting out beyond that white box mentality. How is that looking right now? Are you sort of completely open or are you starting to focus on ... There are still physical spaces that are yours that are called the galleries, is that right?

Jennifer Gordon: Yeah. The physical space that we have pavilioned to us right now is the L Space Gallery in the L building on Lakeshore Campus. The former North Space Gallery is no longer pavilioned to the galleries. It's become a shared space for events, one entire unit of space as opposed to having a gallery sort of dividing up that space.

Nathan Whitlock: That's the space that's sort of right by the Starbucks there on the-

Jennifer Gordon: Exactly, that big open lobby. And then there's a, as you know, a very large wall behind there. That wall, we currently have a group showing of the photography students' pieces and that'll probably stay up for most of the semester. And then we're planning on having an interactive mural piece go up January, and we're looking at bringing in a mural artist who works with garbage. So we'll be collecting, hopefully working with sustainability and then facilities and then students, faculty and staff can all interact and help build this ... usually like landscapes or something, but she's assembled everything out of garbage. And then hopefully we'll be able to take

that down on giant plywood boards and then find a permanent home for them elsewhere come the end of semester there, just so we just don't have a big bare wall, right? It's not a specific gallery-owned space, but we are programming that wall and behind it so that it looks exciting and shows off all the great work that the students are doing here.

Nathan Whitlock: I mean, your background is in arts administration and with this specifically, and you said you had those core sort of terms that you're using to guide your mission. Looking to the future, are there things you would love to see happen? I mean, are there things that you want people to bring to this whole project?

Jennifer Gordon: Yeah. Right now we're working with some external partners on bringing in an artist in residence, and that would be sort of a year-long project with the artists in residence coming in and doing some focus weeks and hopefully that'll be worked ... It's in its nascent stages right now, but worked through with faculty and students moving forward. We'd love to be more involved with things like Nuit Blanche, and Doors Open and the Toronto Biennial of Art and just in any other types of celebrations that happen in the local neighborhoods as well.

Nathan Whitlock: And do you have any plans for even offsite projects or is it strictly on campus that you're mandated?

Jennifer Gordon: I think I have enough to handle right now with the on campus.

Nathan Whitlock: You don't need a third hat.

Jennifer Gordon: Yeah, a third hat. But I mean, we're always open to that. There has been discussion about maybe doing some mural boxes or some bell boxes with some artwork on those as well. But I'm not looking too far down the road or too far off of the campuses at this point.

Nathan Whitlock: And in terms of faculty who want to find out more about the galleries and what's happening and how to talk to you, who's on your team, where can they go?

Jennifer Gordon: Well, they can always check the new HRMS system. I have a very small team and a very great team. I have one full-time coordinator, Kyla Ross, and one part-time coordinator, Casey Norris, and the three of us are the ones that handle everything, so I can always be reached by phone. My extension is 3445, or if you Google Humber Galleries, we'll come up on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter.

Our website is going to be revamped I think sometime this fall as well, so I'm working with information on there as well.

Nathan Whitlock: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

Jennifer Gordon: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Nathan Whitlock: *NEXT*cast is produced by Kristin Valois for Humber Press. To listen to previous episodes of *NEXT*cast and to read issues of the magazine, go to HumberPress.com. You can also find free downloadable transcripts of every *NEXT*cast episode at HumberPress.com. To suggest stories for future episodes of *NEXT*cast or to just let us know what you think, email humberpress@humber.ca. That's Humber Press, all one word, at Humber dot CA. Thanks and see you next time. That is still not a pun.