



**35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**  
**Sheraton Colony Square, Atlanta, Georgia, April 26-May 1**

**Poster Session:**

**New Directions – Exhibit/Gallery Space in the Library**  
**Deale Hutton, Art Librarian, Penfield Library, SUNY - Oswego**

**Gallery / Exhibit Policy**

Penfield Library offers students and faculty an opportunity to exhibit artwork. We encourage interdisciplinary/interdepartmental exhibits. Frequently, we offer an audience.

At first, we had no policy. The Director and I discussed what was to be shown, but it was relatively free and easy. THEN, we became popular and people were requesting exhibit space. This was good, but I am the only Art Librarian and only Curator and, up until recently, had no assistant. We decided to take work involving our students, faculty and community not only due to my time constraints but our commitment to our students and faculty is very strong. That being said, we are looking at bringing in one exhibit next year....let's see where it goes.

**What we don't do**

Penfield Library does not take outside (of SUNY Oswego) artists' portfolios. Time is the main factor. Reviewing portfolios takes enormous amounts of time and would limit student/faculty opportunities to exhibit. We show artists outside of our college if they are working in conjunction with students or are involved in a community issues. For example, we had an *Intellectual Freedom* exhibit that included posters and a speaker from the American Civil Liberties Union. We, also, showed *Walking and Working the Winter*, which was collaboration among striking Union 1099 nursing home employees, the English and Women's Studies Dept., and our gallery.

Penfield does not show overly explicit work. This is a subjective decision. We attempt to promote artistic freedom and pay attention to our audience. This has not been a great problem, but it has surfaced. (Let me tell you about the fruit people!)

**Benefits**

**Art exposure** – This works both ways – our community is exposed to art that is innovative and thought provoking. Artists/art is examined in a contemporary context. SUNY Oswego is rural/small city...we need all the art

opportunities we can get, and we have a relatively strong community interest in the arts.

**Student opportunities to exhibit** – Our College is in a rural/small city community. As such, opportunities to exhibit are limited for students and faculty. Penfield Library is a relatively non-intimidating place for students to begin showing.

**Non-art faculty opportunities to exhibit** – Oswego's Art Department has an excellent faculty show, and our professors are required to exhibit as part of their tenure, so, Penfield Library encourages other faculty members to show, which may cover a 'creative' area of tenure requirements and encourages their creativity.

**People in the library** – Who does not want more people in the library? If it is an artful, beautiful place, people will come, and if you feed them, at openings for example, they will come and be more comfortable in the library. It is an excellent opportunity for librarians/staff to talk with faculty and students and leads to better relations.

**Discussion** – Art can be controversial, for e.g., the abstract graffiti art and body pillow sculptures students created for Quest. While I, as curator, do not always appreciate the criticism, it is an opportunity for to elaborate on the pieces or the technique, which can lead to understanding. Also, the work is widely discussed among faculty/students/staff/community.

**Beautification** – White bare walls, ugh! Now, between exhibits, people are anxious for upcoming exhibits. You create your own monster with this...once you start, people will not want to look at bare walls.

**Interaction with faculty, students and community members** – This is not merely a good pr move. We become more of a community through art, I believe. When the parents of students or the families of faculty/staff come to view exhibits, we talk, eat together, and share.

## **Concerns**

**Time** – An incredible amount of time is involved in finding jurors, jurying, hanging, arranging receptions. Find a good assistant. You will not believe the amount of time required.

**Scheduling of exhibits** – We try to have exhibits up by the beginning of each semester and during the summer. It is good to have a break, but not too long a break, between exhibits. When we began, I scheduled too many exhibits, not realizing how much time preparation and hanging took. Things got very hectic. Now, we are doing 4-5 per year with appx. 3 weeks between them.

**Money for openings** – Oswego's budget is limited. The Director and I decide which exhibits require openings and which do not. Individual artist's,

we have an opening; Faculty/Staff exhibit, we have staff contribute food for the opening. We do not want to over-ask our faculty/staff, however. For funding, we turn to our unions, provost, sponsoring departments. For example, the unions usually contribute to the Faculty/Staff Exhibits, the Photography area paid for the Experimental Photography exhibit.

**Finding/training assistant** – Curating an exhibit is difficult, meticulous, time-consuming, work and many work-study students do not have the patience or interest to follow directions. It took me a long time to find a student who was capable, had the time, and enjoyed it. My assistant is a graphic design student. He is very meticulous, can offer valuable opinions, and will take direction easily. And, at the same time, he is learning. He is excellent.

**Artists not bringing work on time** – This, unfortunately, happens frequently. You will have to decide whether you will take late work or not. I strongly advise telling students that work will not be accepted after the deadline. However, the situation will still occur with all artists – students, faculty and outside artists. I cancelled an entire exhibit due to an unforeseen illness. So, the situations might not be avoidable. However, I have students not turn work in on time and still expect to be shown; faculty give students wrong dates; faculty canceling or not dropping off work on time. For the most part, my patience has paid off in good relationships. I also taught Exhibition Preparation and gave a lecture on gallery protocol, which allowed me to explain to the class the value of being professional.

**Too many submissions** – When we do not jury an exhibit, we may receive too many entries. We recently used an instruction room for additional exhibit space allowing us to include all the artwork submitted.

## **Suggestions**

**Begin small** – Once your community becomes accustomed to seeing art exhibited, they want it all the time. It is easier to start small and increase the quality and number of exhibits than it is to cut back.

**Buy a good hanging system** – Penfield Library uses the Walker Display System. It is excellent and can hang most anything. There is a limit as to weight, but it is much, much easier than attempting to level wire.

[www.Walkerdisplay.com](http://www.Walkerdisplay.com)

800-234-7614. Delivery is prompt, and the people are helpful.

**Involve students and professors** – Usually, art professors are elated to have space for students to exhibit. Students are excited and grateful. Our space offers students a professional opportunity and I get to teach students about professionalism in exhibition and presentation. Our first exhibit was a student's idea...we have grown from there.

**Have a policy and be flexible enough to allow it to evolve** – We did not have a policy initially, but found we needed one when a professor wanted to

show an artist outside our college. This led to our current policy, which will be revised again as we are going to bring in an exhibit next year.

**Know what you are doing and ask for help** – I do consulting work. If you are lucky enough to have an on-campus gallery, that director can be invaluable. I know ours is. And you can always feel free to call or email me if I can be of any help.

**Keep the number of people involved small** – Having exhibits takes so much time, and I found that doing this 'by committee' is just too annoying, so, if you can keep the people making decisions small, it seems to work well (for me). Penfield's director and I decide on what will be shown. Our primary campus gallery, however, decides by committee on exhibits. I ask for help from specific people that know me and understand that I am tense when getting this together. I also know the people who will do an excellent job.

**Be able to make decisions and take suggestions** – The role of director/curator can be frustrating. My most frustrating moments are when people want things done immediately, or if I have finished an exhibit, and a person wants to know why I hung a picture where I did. My funniest one: a student wanted me to move a picture of a spider so she did not have to see it on the way to the Café.

**Be patient and gracious** – While this seems elementary, it is very important. Neither you nor your assistant should be negatively discussing a work in public. Encourage the artists when they drop off work. If a work is bad, it is still someone's artistic vision and all artists, hopefully, grow. This is especially important with student or non-art faculty work. Do you really want someone to stop creating because of your comments?

**One curator/director** – This, again, is my preference. Obviously many venues have more-than-one curator. However, in a library, with all our other duties, it is simplest, in my opinion, to have one curator. I do ask for others' opinions and help.

**Invite all library staff and art department staff to openings** – Involvement equals commitment. The library staff will not always like the work on the wall, but if they are included, they will support the gallery (and make cookies on occasion). This is an excellent opportunity for staff to interact with students. This is an excellent opportunity for students to tell 'us' what they do. We have one librarian who is the best 'mingler' I've ever seen. She always makes the artists feel welcome and is always interested in their work. She's worth her weight in gold.

**Interact with campus gallery** – Tyler Art Gallery is SUNY Oswego's primary exhibition space, and we have a wonderful curator. I discuss with her the dates of openings, what we are showing, so that we do not conflict in time or focus. Sometimes, people think two openings in one night are great – lots of art and food. Others feel one will take away from the other. Take

second place to the primary gallery, first because you are primarily a library and second, it builds good will.

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