Visual Arts and Design

April 3, 2013

Dear University of Maryland community:

Today the University of Maryland signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Corcoran Gallery of Art and its College of Art + Design to explore a potential partnership.

The Gallery has a renowned collection of 17,000 works of art valued at $2 billion, housed in an iconic Beaux Arts building a block from the White House. The College has 550 art students pursuing BFA and MA degrees. We have strong art and art history programs that offer BA, MFA, and PhD degrees. We are also prominent in fields that integrate with art and design, including architecture, business, education, engineering, journalism, liberal arts and sciences, and performing arts.

The combined and complementary strengths of our respective institutions could lead to transformative excellence in education, scholarship, and exhibitions in ways that would benefit our entire University, the region, and beyond.

Our strategic plan, Transforming Maryland, identifies the creative and performing arts as one of our four "institutional priorities." It calls on us to "expand collaborations with museums and performing arts organizations" so that we become "a major contributor to the cultural life of the state and the region." Today, we take a step to realize this vision.

A partnership with the Corcoran would provide our faculty and students with access to its world-class collection. We could develop together, for example, new courses, joint degrees, and innovation studios in product design and digital arts that involve interdisciplinary teams of artists, engineers, computer scientists, and entrepreneurs. We will gain a physical footprint in a historic landmark, magnifying our presence in the nation's capital.

Some of our most prominent donors, for whom our colleges are named (Robert H. Smith School of Business, Philip Merrill College of Journalism) were Trustees of the Corcoran. Several Corcoran faculty and staff are our graduates. In fact, one of the dignitaries at the 1859 opening ceremony of the Maryland Agricultural College, as our University was then known, was a Washington philanthropist, William Corcoran, who went on to found the institution that now bears his name.

There are only a few universities in the country with such a partnership, none with a cultural organization as large as the Corcoran. For example, Johns Hopkins University formed a partnership with the Peabody Conservatory of Music some 35 years ago. UCLA and the Hammer Museum of Art entered into a partnership about a dozen years ago. Its exhibits are integrated with UCLA's academic programs. USC is now in negotiations on a partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art of Los Angeles.

The University System of Maryland Board of Regents has endorsed our MOU with the Corcoran Trust. A copy is posted at http://www.president.umd.edu/pdfs/Corcoran_Trust/umd_mou_4_3_2013.pdf. We will now begin a period of due diligence and consultations with faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends of the University to evaluate this opportunity. I have appointed a Task Force on Visual Arts and Design to assist this process, chaired by Provost Mary Ann Rankin. Members of the Task Force will be announced
in the coming days.

This study process – and a determination of whether and how to move forward with the partnership – will be completed before the end of this summer. If an accord is reached, it would have to be reviewed and endorsed by our Board of Regents and by the Corcoran Board of Trustees.

This is a moment of remarkable possibility. In the coming weeks, we will be seeking your input and ideas. With your engagement, the University of Maryland will continue on its upward trajectory of creative excellence.

Sincerely,

Wallace D. Loh President
University of Maryland