

**USask and Government of Saskatchewan celebrate post-degree nursing graduates**



Post-degree students celebrate completion of accelerated nursing program, alongside University of Saskatchewan leadership and the Government of Saskatchewan. Breanna Pochipinski.

In January 2025, 28 students who were part of the University of Saskatchewan (USask) College of Nursing’s accelerated Post-Degree Bachelor of Science in Nursing (PDBSN) program, officially became one step closer to entering the Saskatchewan health-care workforce as registered nurses (RN).

This group of nursing students were part of the first cohort to graduate from the reinstated accelerated nursing program aimed to help address staffing challenges in the province.

“Our faculty, staff, and leadership are extremely proud of the achievements of this group of PDBSN students,” said Dr. Solina Richter (DCur), dean of the College of Nursing. “We look forward to following these graduates as registered nurses and interprofessional healthcare providers within the Saskatchewan healthcare system.”

The purpose of the PDBSN option is to recognize previous university achievements of qualified students and give them the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Science

in Nursing (BSN) degree in a shortened period of time. Due to uncertainties during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), the accelerated nursing program was temporarily on hiatus as the college navigated health restrictions to ensure all nursing students could finish their program requirements.

The early return of the program in the 2022-2023 academic year was made possible by the Government of Saskatchewan’s Health Human Resource (HHR) Action Plan. Funding provided through this initiative enabled USask to admit students to the PDBSN program in January 2023. Additional students from the initial cohort completed their fast-tracked nursing degrees in April 2025.

“Our government remains committed to supporting health professionals at every stage of their career as part of our province’s ambitious HHR Plan,” Health Minister Jeremy Cockrill said. “Our goal was to create more opportunities for students and new grads to study and work in Saskatchewan and build a

rewarding career right here. We look forward to the contributions of these new nursing graduates in the communities they’ll serve.”

**“Our government remains committed to supporting health professionals at every stage of their career as part of our province’s ambitious HHR Plan.”**

– GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH MINISTER JEREMY COCKRILL

**Dr. Christine Huel receives teaching excellence award**



The University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing is pleased to congratulate Dr. Christine Huel (PhD) on receiving a University of Saskatchewan Students’ Union (USSU) Teaching Excellence Award in 2025.

Huel was nominated by students in her fourth-year nursing class, NURS 440 - Interprofessional Perspectives Health Systems and Policy Development within a Global Context.

Each spring the USSU celebrates excellence at USask through awards for teaching, volunteerism, staff spirit, and contribution to campus culture.

“I am honoured to receive the USSU Teaching Excellence award during my first year at the University of Saskatchewan,” said Huel.

“The NURS 440 learners and I explored many topics related to healthcare, politics, global health, and policy development. Though some of the healthcare issues we explored were heavy, they had the courage to listen and reflect upon the diverse perspectives and experiences shared by our community of learners. Having this teaching experience with the NURS 440 class was an award in itself. I extend a heartfelt thanks to them for taking the time from their busy schedules to nominate me.”

Huel joined USask College of Nursing as an assistant professor in 2024. She is a family nurse practitioner and Doctor of Philosophy graduate from the University of Victoria. She has been a registered nurse since 2002, predominantly working in pediatrics, maternal child health, and primary care. In addition to her role as an assistant professor with USask College of Nursing, Huel continues to practice as a family nurse practitioner.

Her research interests include routine childhood vaccines, vaccine hesitancy, nurse practitioner practice and education, cultural humility and care of 2SLGBTQIA+ migrant youth, and intensive parenting.

“Dr. Huel has been a wonderful addition to the College of Nursing,” said Dr. Solina Richter. “She brings with her extensive global experience, the expertise of advanced nursing practice, and an evident passion for teaching. Our students are lucky to have her shaping their nursing education!”



Assistant Professor Dr. Christine Huel at USSU Awards Ceremony with her son Noah. Submitted.

**USask launches Canada’s first two-year Master of Public Health Nursing program**



As Canada grapples with record levels of homelessness, food insecurity, and public health workforce shortages, the University of Saskatchewan is stepping up with a bold new initiative: a graduate program designed to educate nurses as frontline leaders in community health.

The Master of Public Health Nursing (MPHN) program is a first-of-its-kind collaboration between USask College of Nursing and School of Public Health. The two-year online program equips nurses with advanced skills to address urgent public health challenges—from poverty reduction to disease prevention. The first cohort begins September 2026.

“This program prepares nurses to lead in prevention, education, and response,” said College of Nursing Associate Professor and Graduate Chair Dr. Wanda Martin (PhD). “Public health nursing skills are essential for improving community health, especially as we face rising food costs and record levels of homelessness and poverty.”

Students in the MPHN program will gain expertise as both practitioners and researchers through a combination of coursework and a thesis. The program is designed to be flexible and accessible—students do not need to reside in Saskatoon, and courses are delivered online with some live seminars.

“The Master of Public Health Nursing program is an appealing option as a clearer path toward practice and leadership roles in public health,” said prospective student Morgan Christensen (BSN’09). “I’m drawn to its potential to deepen my understanding of population health and enhance my ability to contribute to effective, equitable health services.”



**Nursing students receive Indigenous Achievement Awards**



College of Nursing Indigenous Student Achievement Award recipients (l to r) Janae Burnouf, Caitlin McNeill, Robyn Klassen, Kelly Tolley-Procyk, and Kellsey Brazeau. Submitted.

The University of Saskatchewan celebrates Métis, First Nations, and Inuit students, staff, faculty, and alumni successes annually during Indigenous Achievement Week.

“Congratulations to our Indigenous Student Achievement Award recipients Janae, Caitlin, Robyn, Kelly, and Kellsey,” said Dr. Solina Richter. “These students should take great pride in these nominations and celebrate these awards. To be recognized for their resiliency, leadership, academic achievement, and community engagement is an important acknowledgment of the successes that have led them to be selected as this year’s recipients. We are incredibly fortunate to have these students as part of the College of Nursing student body and I look forward to following them on their nursing journey in the future.”

**Janae Burnouf, Resiliency Award**  
**Program: Bachelor of Science in Nursing**  
**Current Location: Saskatoon**

Janae Burnouf is a proud Métis woman who has lived in more than five towns, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. She calls Beauval, Saskatchewan home, where most of her family is from. Her parents reside in Beauval and Lac Île-à-la-Crosse. Her mom is a dental hygienist and therapist, and her dad is a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. She has two younger brothers, one who is in computer engineering at USask, and one still in high school. After Janae completes her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, she would like to work at St. Paul’s Hospital in Saskatoon for two years before applying to the USask Nurse Practitioner program.

**Caitlin McNeill, Leadership Award**  
**Program: Master of Nursing Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner**  
**Current Location: The Pas, Manitoba**

Caitlin McNeill is a nurse practitioner student and a member of the Mosakahiken Cree Nation in northern Manitoba. She completed her Bachelor of Nursing at the University of Manitoba in 2015 and Master of Public Health at the University of Victoria in 2024. She has worked her entire career in the north. Her clinical experience includes emergency nursing, obstetrics, intermediate care, acute care, and working as the supervisor of an opioid agonist therapy (OAT) program, the first of its kind in a First Nation in Manitoba.

During her time with the Opaskwayak Cree Nation’s OAT program, she was instrumental in expanding access and improving the cultural relevance of opioid treatment in First Nations communities. She developed a policy and procedure manual for use in outlying nursing stations, acting as a consultant for the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba in the development of their prescribing practices manual, and became a faculty member for the OAT continuing competency course formerly required for physicians and pharmacists interested in providing OAT care.

In 2022, she became the director of health services for the Opaskwayak Health Authority, where she continues to advocate for reconciliation, equity, and the integration of Cree perspectives into health service delivery.

**Robyn Klassen, Leadership Award**  
**Program: Master of Nursing Thesis**  
**Current Location: La Ronge, SK**

Robyn Klassen has lived in La Ronge, SK her entire life and is a proud member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. She relocated to Saskatoon in 2011 to complete her Bachelor of Science in Nursing through the University of Regina and successfully completed her program in September 2014.

She practiced as a registered nurse at Lac La Ronge Indian Band Health Services as a public health nurse from 2015 to 2021 and as the public health nursing supervisor since 2021.

She is a certified First Nations Health Manager through the First Nations Health Manager Association.

**Kelly Tolley-Procyk, Academic Achievement Award**  
**Program: Bachelor of Science in Nursing**  
**Current Location: Prince Albert**

Kelly Tolley-Procyk studied nursing at the University of Saskatchewan Prince Albert Campus. She is a proud member of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Western Region 2 with family roots in St. Louis and Batoche.

Once becoming a registered nurse, she hopes to work in neonatal intensive care in Prince Albert.

Kelly was nominated by the University of Saskatchewan Prince Albert Campus.

**Kellsey Brazeau, Community Engagement Award**  
**Program: Bachelor of Science in Nursing**  
**Current Location: Saskatoon**

Kellsey Brazeau is from Cote First Nation. She is committed to community care through practicums and summer employment in her home communities’ health centres. She has been a mentor in the Building Intercultural Resilience Mentorship Program (BIRM) for four years and also participated in the UPLIFT and Rivers to Success programs.

Kellsey was nominated by the University of Saskatchewan Office of the Vice Provost Indigenous Engagement.

**College of Nursing appoints new associate dean academic**



Dr. Marnie Kramer. Submitted.

The College of Nursing is pleased to welcome Dr. Marnie Kramer (PhD) as associate dean academic (ADA). Her tenure was effective November 15, 2025.

With a strong background in clinical expertise, educational leadership, and research innovation, Dr. Kramer brings a wealth of experience to the ADA portfolio. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Alberta, as well as a Master of Education in Adult Education and Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing from the University of Toronto.

“We are delighted to welcome Dr. Kramer to the University of Saskatchewan,” said Dr. Solina Richter. “Her collaborative spirit

and dedication to excellence will strengthen our community, help advance our strategic priorities, and support the continued success of our students and faculty.”

Coming to USask from the University of Manitoba, Dr. Kramer was previously an assistant professor and a nurse education researcher focused on understanding affective learning, stress and coping, academic literacy, and remediation practices for undergraduate nursing students.

She has expertise in supporting students writing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), is a national expert on NCLEX-RN remediation strategies, and an educational developer for NCLEX-RN resources.

“I am excited to begin my new role at the University of Saskatchewan and to continue to support undergraduate nursing education across the province,” said Dr. Kramer. “I am thankful to be working alongside the faculty, staff, and students in the College of Nursing.”

– DR. MARNIE KRAMER

The College of Nursing looks forward to Dr. Kramer’s leadership as she works with faculty, staff, and students to advance the college’s academic mission and prepare the next generation of nursing professionals.

USask College of Nursing continues to expand educational opportunities



Nursing student Gracie Paul from the Yorkton distributed nursing site. © LF Photography.

For decades, “going to university” meant exactly that: moving to a major centre to take your degree on campus. For Saskatchewan’s nursing students, the university now “goes to you.”

Dr. Solina Richter emphasizes the importance of the institution as a university for all of Saskatchewan. “We are really trying to be inclusive to give people living in rural and remote areas the opportunity to learn where they live.”

In addition to the college’s two campuses in Saskatoon and Prince Albert, there are eight distributed learning sites where students can earn their nursing degree: Île-à-la-Crosse, La Ronge, Yorkton, Lloydminster, North Battleford, Muenster, Swift Current, and Weyburn.

In addition to making a nursing degree accessible for Saskatchewan students, the program also plays an important role in addressing critical nursing shortages in the province’s rural areas.

“We know that if our students do their nursing education in these communities and become registered nurses, they are also likely to stay in these communities,” said Richter. “Especially in our northern communities, nursing students are very acquainted with the local context. They are really familiar with the people and the culture. That helps a lot.” She adds that just over 15 per cent of the college’s students have self-identified as Indigenous.

Gracie Paul has been studying nursing without relocating from her home town of Canora, a 30-minute drive north of Yorkton. Her program has involved a mix of regular and online classes, plus clinical work in a hospital setting.

“All my family lives here in Canora. When I’m able to stay at home and study, and commute back and forth to Yorkton, I can have all my support systems here — my friends and family,” said Paul, who adds that class size can be another benefit.

“I went to a small-town high school, so it’s nice to have class sizes of about 10 to 15, so we all know each other. We’re all really good friends. We also get a lot of focused time with instructors.”

When she was in Grade 12, Paul was interested in pursuing a career in healthcare, but unsure of what area to pursue. The Learn Where You Live model played a major role in convincing her to choose nursing.

For many students, Learn Where You Live makes a nursing degree much more accessible in a number of ways. Completing their studies while based in their home community not only saves the cost of relocating to a larger centre, it also keeps spouses and families together, helps to maintain current employment, eliminates feelings of isolation and generally reduces the psychological, as well as financial burden.

Paul is in the Canadian Armed Forces’ Regular Officers Training Plan (ROTP), so she’s not sure where she will be posted. Many of her classmates, though, are planning to stay in Yorkton and area. She, too, likes the idea of someday being a nurse in a community the size of Canora and she understands the challenges these communities face, along with the working environment.

“It’s a lot of organization to offer programming across Saskatchewan,” admits Dean Richter, “but it is so rewarding.”

Paul echoes that sentiment from a student’s perspective.

“Nursing is a very challenging program, but a very rewarding program, so if you’re thinking about nursing, you should really give it a try.”

*This story is adapted from an article by Ray Penner that originally appeared in the Saskatoon StarPhoenix and Regina Leader-Post 2025 Nursing Week special feature.*

Nursing wellness rooms established in Greater Saskatoon Catholic School



College of Nursing students working with an Elder on a moose hide during a community clinical at St. Frances Cree Bilingual School. © Dr. Marcella Ogenchuk.

University of Saskatchewan nursing students complete a community clinical placement in their fourth year of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. Now a clinical placement at the new awâsisak kâ-nîmîhtocik – St. Francis\* School will include dedicated wellness rooms for nursing students.

Nursing students have been involved in a partnership with the St. Frances Cree Bilingual School in Saskatoon since 2007, when the 1950s-era St. Frances School began its Cree language and cultural programming. Until now, nursing students at St. Frances gathered in the boot room, library, or were juggled from room to room based on availability to work with students. But at the new awâsisak kâ-nîmîhtocik – St. Francis School, there is a dedicated space for USask Nursing students to use.

“Students come to St. Frances from all over the city and from all walks of life,” said Kelley Cardinal, superintendent of learning services at Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools.

“Access to health services can be an issue for some families, so being able to offer those services where students come every day can better their overall health and equip them to make good, healthy decisions as they grow and mature. We’re grateful for our partnership with the College of Nursing, and we’re happy to be able to offer dedicated space at the new school.”

College of Nursing Associate Professor Dr. Marcella Ogenchuk (PhD) oversees the clinical placements at the school. “Nursing students work with the school community to learn about their strengths and needs to enhance wellness,” said Ogenchuk.

“The nursing students collaborate with a multidisciplinary team, build relationships, provide screenings, referrals and treatments, deliver presentations, demonstrate wellness skills, and teach about oral health, nutrition, and addiction.”

“The nursing students have successfully collaborated with the school community over the years working with the space they

“ Access to health services can be an issue for some families, so being able to offer those services where students come every day can better their overall health and equip them to make good, healthy decisions as they grow and mature. ”

– SUPERINTENDENT KELLEY CARDINAL

were given, but to have dedicated space for them to work with students in the new school is an incredible opportunity.”

“Students at the new school know where to find the nursing students, it increases the types of teachings the nursing students can offer, and the space will help to build the community connection with nursing students within the school,” added Ogenchuk.

*\*Along with the addition of the Cree new name, the school’s patron saint and namesake changed from St. Frances Cabrini to St. Francis of Assisi.*

**College of Nursing ASPA member spotlight on Research Coordinator Dr. Vanessa Ellis Colley**



College of Nursing Research Coordinator Dr. Vanessa Ellis Colley. © Dave Stobbe.

Dr. Vanessa Ellis Colley (PhD'23) is a research coordinator in the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing – Nursing Unit for Research and Scholarship Excellence (NURSE). She joined the college in November 2023 and was highlighted in 2025 as a member of the Administrative and Supervisory Personnel Association (ASPA).

Colley plays a key role in supporting faculty with post-award research activities. She acknowledges “the work of research coordinators is central to the success of researchers and ensuring adherence/ compliance with funding requirements to avoid any form of mismanagement at the college and institutional level.”

Colley provides guidance on various processes, including early fund release, hiring research staff, and assisting with ethics applications, continuing her support through to the final closeout of project funds.

Despite her extensive experience managing research grants at the University of the West Indies (Mona, Jamaica), Colley quickly realized the importance of being able to “adapt and learn the nuances that come with a new job”, especially as new responsibilities emerge. Navigating the

various platforms used to assist faculty was a fast-paced, but rewarding learning process, because it helped her create a proactive approach to supporting their research work more effectively. Colley has developed and delivers Research 101 presentations to guide faculty and research support staff through various stages of the research lifecycle.

Although drafting ethics applications can be complex and time-consuming, Colley finds it gratifying knowing her work helps speed up and advance research productivity within the college. She also values every learning opportunity that comes from reviewing impactful nursing project with significance for Saskatchewan and beyond. “As I am passionate about research, reviewing research proposals to prepare USask Research Ethics applications provides a sense of fulfillment,” said Colley.

When asked about her most memorable accomplishment, Colley speaks with pride about earning her doctoral degree.

“Crossing the stage at Merlis Belsher on June 5, 2023, during the College of Education convocation ceremony to accept my PhD was a significant and most memorable accomplishment for me. This marked the culmination of years of dedication and sacrifice! Oh, there were many! Reaching that milestone was a moment of pride – even more so for the unwavering supporters I had in the audience and across the globe. This achievement is a testament to hard work, discipline, and focus commitment.”

Her PhD thesis in Educational Administration was focused on academic deans and their evolving roles.

Colley remains involved in the academic community by reviewing articles for scholarly journals and being involved in academic and professional associations. As a member of the Jamaican community in Saskatoon, she extends support to individuals and families in numerous ways in achieving a healthy work-life balance.

Colley also volunteers with her colleagues through various initiatives to contribute

to bridging the food security gap for international students on the USask Saskatoon Campus.

*This story is adapted from an article written by Mariam Alaverdashvili and was originally published in the Administrative and Supervisory Personnel Association quarterly newsletter.*

“ **As I am passionate about research, reviewing research proposals to prepare USask Research Ethics applications provides a sense of fulfillment.** ”

– DR. VANESSA ELLIS COLLEY

**Canoe Lake First Nation sisters study nursing together at USask**



They look alike—you can tell they’re sisters. On a Zoom call, they speak as if they’re tossing a volleyball back and forth, each handing off their answer before passing to the next.

The Woodward sisters Hilary, Kylee, and Deanna are all in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the Saskatoon Campus. They’re from Canoe Lake, a Cree First Nation on Treaty 10 territory about five hours north of Saskatoon.

Although they are sisters and are all currently studying nursing, they didn’t all take the same path to get here.

Hilary, the youngest, was the first one – right out of high school – to begin her first year of studies to apply into nursing.

“I picked this program because I wanted to choose something right away,” said Hilary. “I didn’t want to figure myself out. I figured I would do that while studying in a program. So far, it’s been going well!”

The next to fall in line was Kylee, who had already started university where she was taking a variety of courses, when she saw her younger sister enjoying nursing.

“She went directly into nursing, and I was like, that will give me a career, and she’s going to be in it, so I guess I’ll give it a try as well,” said Kylee.

The eldest, Deanna, had already completed post-secondary studies as a veterinary medical assistant and worked for a year as a continuing care aid when she decided she wanted to pursue her nursing degree and joined her sisters the same year Hilary began the USask Nursing program.

With a close childhood and many memories of playing together, riding bikes, hanging out with their three brothers, and going on family vacations, the sisters are tight knit. Their shared education allows them to work as a unit, scheduling their classes together, which is great for sharing notes and supporting each other.

“It’s nice in labs because you basically have a designated partner already,” said Kylee.

Sometimes they study together, and Deanna appreciates when her sisters remind her



USask Nursing students (l to r) Hilary Woodward, Kylee Woodward, and Deanna Woodward. © Submitted.

about upcoming due dates.

While they are all in the same program, there are individual preferences. Kylee loves clinical the most, Deanna prefers the hands-on experience in the labs, and Hilary finds her passion in theory classes.

Their career goals are also different.

Hilary would like to get a few years of experience working in Saskatoon, but then return to Canoe Lake. “I miss home a bit, and I want to see how everyone’s doing, even for a little while. I don’t think I’ll stay in Canoe Lake my whole life, but I do want to go back for a couple of years,” she said.

Deanna wants to work in geriatrics, especially to help patients with dementia. Kylee started out wanting to work in labour and delivery, but is now thinking about working with older individuals as well.

Not surprisingly, the sisters are close outside of the classroom. Kylee and Hilary live together, and Deanna lives nearby. They’ve all played volleyball together, with Hilary and Deanna on one nursing student team and Kylee on another.

With their strong connection to their First Nation, the sisters also appreciate the support they’ve found for celebrating their Indigenous culture at USask.

Hilary attended a powwow her first year and danced in her traditional jingle dress. Deanna notices the difference between USask and her past education experiences.

“The University of Saskatchewan is so much different than the college I went to in the beginning because you didn’t see Indigenous people on campus, and they didn’t have anything to connect us together. Going to USask is so much different because we get emails almost every week about different things we can join for Aboriginal group activities,” she said.

Kylee added that she appreciated the specialized tutoring support she received in first year with her statistics course, and the guidance she has received from College of Nursing Academic Advisor Gina DiPaolo.

While Hilary, Kylee, and Deanna are all engaged in nursing together, they also appreciate the profession is big enough to choose their own pathway.

“You go into nursing not knowing there’s so many doors for you with this degree,” said Deanna. “Then you start studying and you’re like, ‘I have so many options.’ Just because we’re sisters and we all want to go into the same profession, having the option of different careers within nursing once we complete our degrees is really nice.”

Uganda trip transforms nursing student's life



Bachelor of Science in Nursing student Jayne Waterhouse in Uganda. Submitted.

For Bachelor of Science in Nursing student Jayne Waterhouse, finding room in her studies to join the One Health Community Partnerships (OHCP) project in Uganda from May to August 2025 was transformative, not just professionally, but emotionally.

"My eyes were opened to how these under-resourced communities experience both moments of joy and the harsh realities of daily life," said Waterhouse.

"I was inspired by the resilience of women who, despite gathering water, raising families, growing produce, caring for animals, and making baskets or beads to sell, are some of the most joyful people I've ever met."

"I am so glad to have challenged myself to experience nursing in a setting very different than here at home, as I feel it will really benefit my practice once I become an RN," said Waterhouse.

Supported by Global Affairs Canada, the OHCP project focuses on improving the health of vulnerable women and girls by empowering poor and marginalized rural farmers, especially in female-headed households.

The program serves communities in Uganda, Ghana, and Ethiopia.

For Waterhouse, the experience included preparing and planning lessons to teach school children in project villages.

"We taught at five different schools in the communities we worked with," said Waterhouse. "We also observed health centres to gain a ground-level perspective on health concerns, emergency preparedness, and safety and hygiene practices."

For Waterhouse, a highlight of the experience was the students' enthusiasm, particularly as they taught them about water and sanitation practices.

"I was pleasantly surprised by how warmly we were received by both teachers and students, and I truly felt the love and joy of these children," said Waterhouse.

After choosing USask for her nursing education because it was close to home with a great reputation, Waterhouse sought out the OHCP opportunity because she wanted to gain cross-cultural experience.

Now she advocates strongly for the benefits

of volunteering with OHCP. "If you want to grow personally and professionally, this program offers the chance to collaborate with students from different academic and cultural backgrounds, a valuable way to practice teamwork, just as you would in healthcare," she said.

This final experience of her undergraduate nursing education is one Waterhouse will carry with her into her professional life.

"The people I met in Uganda truly touched me. Life there is centered around a collective community, where everyone is involved in each other's lives and supports one another. Being part of a close-knit team of volunteers was a blessing, and I am very grateful for the students I went with and the friendships I formed."

Once becoming a registered nurse, Waterhouse hopes to work at the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital in pediatrics.

Celebrating 20 years of nursing education in Prince Albert



Nursing alumni, stakeholders, partners, and supporters gather at the USask Prince Albert Campus to celebrate 20 years of nursing education in Prince Albert and northern Saskatchewan. JazCatte Photography.

The University of Saskatchewan Prince Albert Campus was vibrant on May 10, as 20 years of nursing education was celebrated during a reunion organized by College of Nursing alumna and chairperson Joanne Mercredi (BSN'06), alongside a large committee.

The reunion was open to all alumni who graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from USask College of Nursing Prince Albert and northern distributed sites between 2006 and 2025, as well as graduates from the USask Master of Nursing, Nurse Practitioner, and Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing programs.

"This is a significant milestone recognizing the graduates who completed their nursing education in these communities and a celebration of previous partnerships between First Nations University of Canada, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, and the University of Saskatchewan, that resulted in nursing graduates going on to do incredible things," said Mercredi.

The reunion included tours of the previous nursing campus at First Nations University

of Canada and morning presentations about everything from careers in nursing, an Indigenous nurse's journey, to cultural safety. Attendees were also offered a tour of the Victoria Hospital and attended a program and reception in the afternoon at the USask Prince Albert Campus.

With alumni attending from all over western Canada and as far as Toronto, approximately 260 people were in attendance throughout the day of celebration.

"Alumni from Prince Albert and northern Saskatchewan are practicing in northern Saskatchewan, including Stanley Mission, Montreal Lake, Southend, Pelican Narrows, and Dechambeault Lake, which is testament that distributed nursing education really works," said Dr. Solina Richter.

"These graduates completed their nursing education in Prince Albert or at a distributed nursing site through our partnership with Northlands College, then some returned to their home communities to practice. These are great examples of why distributed nursing education is so important for our rural and remote communities in this province."

“ These graduates completed their nursing education in Prince Albert or at a distributed nursing site...then some returned to their home communities to practice. These are great examples of why distributed nursing education is so important for our rural and remote communities in this province. ”

– DR. SOLINA RICHTER

Master’s graduate aims to elevate nursing in Ghana



Kofi Junior Effah Frimpong with supervisor Dr. Natasha Hubbard Murdoch. © Matt Smith.

Kofi Junior Effah Frimpong (MN’25) is a nurse from Ghana, who came to the College of Nursing to pursue his Master of Nursing (MN) degree. But he’s not stopping there. While most nursing students celebrated the completion of their program during USask’s fall convocation November 12, 2025, for Effah Frimpong, it marked both an ending and a new beginning — the conclusion of his MN thesis studies and the start of his journey towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing.

After earning his Diploma in Nursing from Berecum Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery in Ghana, his Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Cape Coast, and his Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) specialty training, Effah Frimpong built his career as a specialist in ENT nursing, while also working in acute care and emergency.

Three years into his profession, he began to wonder what the next step in his nursing journey might be. His search for new challenges led him to apply to schools in Canada and when he received a scholarship

offer from the University of Saskatchewan, he knew it was time to take the leap.

With excitement and determination, he packed his bags for Saskatoon.

He admits life in Canada has been quite different from what he was used to in Ghana, where it’s common for extended families to live together under one roof. Adjusting to a new culture and language came with its challenges at first, but the experience has been overwhelmingly positive.

“Canada has been very welcoming... the people, the faculty... everyone has been so friendly,” said Effah Frimpong, who is also registered to practice as a nurse in Canada.

When Effah Frimpong first arrived in Canada, he planned to focus his thesis on ENT nursing — the field he knew best. But after discovering that ENT nursing wasn’t recognized as a specialty in Canada, he began to rethink his path. In searching for a new direction, he looked inward, drawing

on his experiences and connections to his home country of Ghana. That reflection led him to a field where he could make a real difference and shine a light on issues close to his heart.

After connecting with his supervisor, Dr. Natasha Hubbard Murdoch (BSN’02, MN’09, PhD’19), and committee member, Dr. Sithokozile Maposa (PhD), both from the College of Nursing, Effah Frimpong found himself drawn to the topic of burnout.

He wanted to understand what drives nurses, especially those working in challenging rural settings, to keep going despite exhaustion and limited resources. His master’s thesis, *“Driven to Nurse in Rural Africa: A Scoping Review of the Experiences of Burnout,”* brought together existing literature on the topic, but he also wanted to hear real voices behind the data. To do that, he conducted a small qualitative study with African rural nurses, who are now students at USask, capturing their stories and the realities they’ve faced on their nursing journeys.

The findings confirmed what Effah Frimpong had suspected all along.

“I found burnout is quite high in Africa. Almost all the nurses I spoke with said they had experienced signs of burnout,” Effah Frimpong explained. “Some of the main factors were heavy workloads, low salaries, and a sense of being excluded from decision-making.”

Participants also shared how they cope, often through prayer and spirituality, as well as the support of family and community.

“Because of the way we live in Africa, when someone is experiencing burnout, we come together to support them,” said Effah Frimpong. “If a person is facing financial difficulties, we pool money to help. If they are going through emotional stress, we provide support and encouragement.”

Despite this strong informal network, he noted no formal burnout mitigation strategies existed within the healthcare facilities in Ghana; it’s a gap he suggests should be addressed.

With his Master of Nursing now complete, Effah Frimpong is moving into his doctoral research, taking a slightly new direction while remaining focused on Africa. His PhD will explore migrant health, with a particular focus on HPV immunization among children.

Effah Frimpong is enthusiastic about beginning his PhD. “I have this need to continue reading and learning,” said Effah Frimpong. “I am deeply committed to expanding my horizons. In Ghana, there are currently no ENT nurses with a PhD.”

When Effah Frimpong completes his PhD and returns to Ghana, he knows he will do so with a full heart.

“It’s not just the guidance from my supervisors and professors that I’ve appreciated,” he said. “I’ve really enjoyed connecting with fellow students. The College of Nursing has dedicated graduate student spaces where we meet, chat, and share ideas. I’m constantly meeting new people and learning from them. My educational experience in Canada has been more than I could have imagined.”

“My educational experience in Canada has been more than I could have imagined.”

– KOFI JUNIOR EFFAH FRIMPONG

Dr. Jodie Bigalky receives Provost’s Teaching Award



College of Nursing Assistant Professor Dr. Jodie Bigalky. © Dave Stobbe.

A commitment to lifelong learning, an empathic and passionate teaching style, and dedication to using health equity research in the classroom earned College of Nursing Assistant Professor Dr. Jodie Bigalky (BSN’02, MN’12, PhD) a USask Provost’s College Award for Outstanding Teaching, as the College of Nursing 2025 recipient.

Dr. Bigalky has over 20 years’ experience as an educator, but appreciates although she has nursing knowledge, her students bring their own lived experiences to the classroom.

“My experience teaching in nursing education has shaped how I teach and as I reflect on my career, I can see how my teaching philosophy has evolved over the last 20 years,” said Bigalky.

“As a novice educator, I saw myself as the expert, imparting my knowledge onto the learners I taught. However, over the last number of years, my perception of teaching has shifted to the current view of teaching as a dynamic, reciprocal relationship between the educator and the learner. While I hold more knowledge related to nursing, my learners also bring their experiences to the learning environment, and these can be used to broaden the depth of the knowledge shared.”

Not only has Bigalky’s teaching philosophy changed over the years, so has the classroom. Dr. Bigalky is located in Regina and previously taught undergraduate theory, lab, and clinical courses in-person, but with the College of Nursing Learn Where You Live model, Bigalky has embraced the challenge of teaching theory in a distributed online format, demonstrating adaptability and innovation.

Her teaching philosophy is aligned with the College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan practice standards emphasizing professional responsibility and accountability, knowledge-based practice, ethical practice, service to the public, and self-regulation. “Both educators and learners share responsibilities in the learning environment,” said Bigalky.

During her two-decade tenure at USask College of Nursing, Dr. Bigalky has been a part-time clinical instructor, lecturer, clinical associate, instructor, and most recently, assistant professor since 2023.

She teaches in the undergraduate nursing program, with a passion for teaching perinatal nursing. Dr. Bigalky has recently expanded her role to teach at the graduate level. “At the conclusion of each course, I hope my learners leave my classroom, lab, or clinical setting with the skills needed to succeed, but also an eagerness to continue learning,” said Bigalky.

“My ultimate goal is to foster competent, confident, professional, and knowledgeable practitioners who are equipped to provide safe and compassionate nursing care. I anticipate my teaching philosophy will continue to evolve in the dynamic environment of nursing education, as I continue to grow both personally and professionally throughout my career.”

“Dr. Bigalky is a talented professor and passionate researcher in the area of health equity for women and gender diverse populations and we are very fortunate to have her in the College of Nursing,” said Dr. Solina Richter.

“Her enthusiasm to teach students is evident and her teaching philosophy inspires students. She is committed to educating the next generation of nurses about the disparities in the social determinants of health and uses her background in perinatal nursing to author textbooks and present her work to shape the future of perinatal nursing practice.”

**Governor General’s Gold Medallist uses virtual reality to level up nursing education**



Dr. Geneveave Barbo. Submitted.

Long before she became a Governor General’s Gold Medallist, Dr. Geneveave Barbo’s (PhD’25) first experience with digital caregiving came in the form of a Tamagotchi, a pocket-sized virtual pet. Now, she has taken her lifelong love of video games and leveraged it into immersive virtual reality (IVR) simulations that help nursing students support migrants facing mental health challenges.

Before pursuing her doctorate at the University of Saskatchewan, Barbo worked as a nurse in both urban centres, as well as remote rural areas. While working as a community health nurse in northern Manitoba, Barbo recalled meeting a teenager experiencing suicidal thoughts. With few mental health resources available in the community, Barbo did her best to offer compassionate listening and support within her professional role. The experience stayed with her, reinforcing her belief that far more must be done to ensure young people, particularly those navigating complex social or personal challenges, receive the care and support they deserve.

“It just struck me that there’s really limited access to mental health supports in rural or remote areas. I also began thinking about urban settings, where barriers to

accessing mental healthcare persist, and how healthcare professionals play such a critical role in bridging these gaps,” said Barbo. “Even after graduating, many nursing students are still unprepared to meet mental healthcare needs for the general population, and even more for marginalized populations.”

Having immigrated to Canada years ago, Barbo thought about her own experiences and the barriers that prevent other migrants from accessing mental healthcare, including cultural differences, language barriers, stigma, and discrimination.

“There are systemic and structural barriers, but at the same time, healthcare professionals, such as nurses, have an important role to play in being part of the solution. Through the way they interact with patients and approach care, they can gradually help dismantle these barriers from within the system. There’s this avenue we have as nurses that can be part of the solution in our practice.”

Under the supervision of Dr. Pammla Petrucka (BSN’93, MN’97, PhD) and with guidance from advisory committee members Drs. Donald Leidl (BSN’01, EdD), Hua Li (BSN’09, MPH’13, PhD’18), Solina Richter, and Marjorie Montreuil (PhD), Barbo started her doctoral journey at the University of Saskatchewan. She built an immersive virtual simulation where nursing students at USask and McGill University practiced supporting a virtual Filipina immigrant patient (Mrs. S.), in a safe environment that allowed them to make mistakes and learn without fear of real-world consequences.

The IVR simulation was built using Unity, a game development engine that offers a blank canvas for developers, and AI tools like ChatGPT were used to assist in coding. Barbo created a simulated emergency department and community health clinic where students could meet, communicate, and follow the care journey of Mrs. S., who was experiencing a mental health crisis and diagnosed with anxiety and depressive disorders.

Student reception for the IVR simulation has been positive.

“Students are really interested, and it helps them practice in a safe space to make mistakes,” said Barbo.

Based on evaluations before and after participating in the simulation, students have demonstrated growth in cultural competency, as well as a modest reduction in stigmatizing attitudes towards individuals with mental health challenges. Some students reported the experience helped them to reflect on their practice and how inequities and stigma impact patients in the Canadian healthcare system.

“The cultural competency piece of it is very, very important, because it helps them prepare for the nuances they may only see later in their career,” said Barbo.

As a teacher herself, Barbo is excited to see a shift towards tools like this.

“The curriculum doesn’t prepare you as much as actually going out there and talking to somebody with mental health challenges does.”

Currently, Barbo is in talks with course coordinators about integrating VR into mental health areas of the curriculum, but she thinks there are more opportunities to leverage the technology to create a more interactive learning experience.

The cultural competency components of the IVR can be adapted and developed into Indigenous anti-racism modules for nursing students and may even help to prepare students for critical care and community placements.

The safe space offered by IVR may also be helpful to prepare students for sensitive topics when learning about ethics in the classroom.

“Students can have a safe space to grapple with their own biases or experiences and learn how to better navigate them,” said Barbo.

For Barbo, being recognized with the Governor General’s Gold Medal is an immense honour, and she carries deep

gratitude for her mother, whose sacrifices and strength have inspired her to keep striving to make a difference through her work.

“I am very thankful to my mother, who gave so much to my sisters and me,” said Barbo. “She’s the one who encouraged me to pursue a career in nursing and instilled in us the values of compassion, respect, and humility that continue to guide me today.”

College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Dean Dr. Debby Burshtyn (PhD) said Dr. Barbo’s work is a powerful example of how compassion and innovation can come together to create meaningful change.

“Barbo’s dedication to improving mental healthcare and nursing education through technology is inspiring,” said Burshtyn. “We’re proud to see her recognized with the Governor General’s Gold Medal.”

Dr. Louise Racine (PhD), associate dean research and graduate studies at the College of Nursing, believes Barbo’s work challenges the traditional perceptions of nursing.

“Dr. Barbo illustrates what it means to be a nurse scientist—using evidence-based research to develop practical tools enhancing both nursing education and quality of care for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.”

Barbo is currently a postdoctoral fellow at McGill University, where she is working on how digital innovations can contribute to improving youth mental healthcare. In the future, Barbo hopes to continue to research and use virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and other technologies to enhance the accessibility of mental healthcare, health education, and health literacy.

*This article is adapted from a piece written by Cassidy Guy for the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website.*

“**Dr. Barbo illustrates what it means to be a nurse scientist—using evidence-based research to develop practical tools enhancing both nursing education and quality of care for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.**”

– DR. LOUISE RACINE

**Congratulations to Dr. Susan Fowler-Kerry**



Dr. Susan Fowler-Kerry. Dave Stobbe.

The College of Nursing wishes to celebrate the distinguished career of Dr. Susan Fowler-Kerry (BA’77, BSN’79, PhD’08).

Dr. Fowler Kerry joined the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing in 1986 and became a tenured full professor in 1994. Her research contributions focused on pediatric pain management, palliative care, and maternal and child health.

Through collaborations with various non-governmental organizations, she contributed to the development of critical healthcare initiatives worldwide, including work in Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa.

Throughout her career, Dr. Fowler-Kerry was committed to inspiring and empowering her students, encouraging critical thinking and advocacy on behalf of patients and communities. Her efforts in the classroom, nursing practice, and research have left a lasting impact on the nursing profession.

We honour the contributions of Dr. Fowler-Kerry, who retired in 2025, and wish her the very best in her well-deserved retirement.

**Dr. Shehnaz Alidina appointed associate dean engagement and development**



Dr. Shehnaz Alidina. Dave Stobbe.

The College of Nursing welcomed Dr. Shehnaz Alidina (ScD) as associate dean engagement and development in May 2025.

Dr. Alidina joins USask from Harvard University, where she served as a health delivery systems researcher focused on improving the quality of care, service integration, and the performance of health systems globally. Her research

has encompassed global surgery, primary care innovation, and capacity-building initiatives for health providers in low-resource settings.

Dr. Alidina brings with her decades of experience leading strategic health reforms. She previously served as the founding executive director of the Nipissing-Timiskaming District Health Council and the Child Health Network in Canada. Internationally, Dr. Alidina has spearheaded the planning and development of regionalized health delivery systems in Tajikistan and East Africa.

“We are incredibly lucky to have Dr. Alidina join the College of Nursing,” said Dr. Solina Richter. “Her lived experience and scholarly expertise will be instrumental in advancing the college’s commitment to globalization, engagement, development, and inclusive excellence.”

Dr. Alidina holds a Doctor of Science (ScD) and a Master of Public Health from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, as well as a Master of Health Administration from the University of Ottawa.

Her scholarship has been recognized with a number of awards including the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Research Fellowship, the Alice E. Wilson Dissertation Award, and Duke University’s Global Health Fellowship.

Born in Uganda, raised in Canada after living as a refugee in Italy, and having worked across North America, East Africa, and Central Asia, Dr. Alidina brings a truly global perspective to the new associate dean engagement and development position in the College of Nursing.

“It is a privilege to join a college that is deeply invested in shaping the future of nursing and health systems by enhancing globalization efforts, fostering development, strengthening engagement at all levels, and advancing inclusive excellence,” said Dr. Alidina.

**Prince Albert student returned to post-secondary as an adult learner**



Nursing student Bukunola Bamimore at the Prince Albert Campus. Submitted.

Bukunola Bamimore began her studies in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program after being away from school for a number of years.

When deciding to continue her education as an adult learner, Bamimore knew nursing was her calling.

“I have always been drawn to the idea of helping people, and after witnessing the impact compassionate care can have on patients and their families, I knew nursing was the right path for me,” said Bamimore.

“It is a field that combines science with genuine empathy, and it was a calling to make a difference in the lives of others. As someone who has gathered years of life wisdom outside the classroom, I felt USask would value what I bring to the table and help me integrate my past experiences with the latest in nursing education.”

Bamimore says choosing to return to school and pursue a BSN feels both challenging and fulfilling. Her advice to those considering taking their first step to becoming a registered nurse is to go for it!

“Embrace every moment of this journey. Your life experiences are an asset, and they will enrich your learning and your practice as a nurse. Nursing school can be tough, but it is also incredibly rewarding. Stay true to your passion, do not be afraid to ask for help when you need it, and remember it is never too late to follow your dreams.”

“After finishing my program, I hope to work in community health, where I can directly contribute to the well-being of my community,” she shared.

“Whether it is through patient care, health education, or mentoring younger nurses, I want to use my background and skills to help people navigate their health challenges. Nursing is about connecting with others and making a difference, one person at a time.”

**Celebrating years of service**



During the annual College of Nursing retreat in August 2025, the college was proud to recognize and celebrate faculty and staff with 5, 10, 20, and 25 years of service.



(l to r) Dr. Karen Juckes, Jennafer Klemmer, Lorraine Garchinski, Lisa Duffield, Regine Gerow-Scissons, Dr. Carol Bullin, and Dr. Louise Racine. Missing: Mobola Ogunbiyi, Dr. Helen Vandenberg, and Dr. Phil Woods. Breanna Pochipinski.

**5 YEARS**

**Lisa Duffield**  
Lecturer, Prince Albert

**10 YEARS**

**Lorraine Garchinski (BSN’13, MN’19)**  
Instructor, Prince Albert

**Regine Gerow-Scissons (BSN’12, MN’19)**  
Instructor, Saskatoon

**Jennafer Klemmer (BSN’10, MN’14)**  
Instructor, Saskatoon

**Mobola Ogunbiyi**  
Instructor, Yorkton

**Dr. Helen Vandenberg (PhD)**  
Associate Professor, Regina

**20 YEARS**

**Dr. Carol Bullin (BSN’97, MCEd’04, PhD’14)**  
Assistant Professor, Saskatoon

**Dr. Louise Racine**  
Professor, Saskatoon

**Dr. Phil Woods (PhD)**  
Professor, Saskatoon

**25 YEARS**

**Dr. Karen Juckes (BSN’84, MN’01, PhD)**  
Assistant Professor, Regina

Master of Nursing student receives prestigious scholarship



Master of Nursing student Robyn Klassen. Submitted.

University of Saskatchewan Master of Nursing student Robyn Klassen was named the recipient of the College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) Indigenous Graduate Leadership Scholarship (IGLS) in 2025.

Klassen is in the Master of Nursing thesis program and is located in La Ronge, Saskatchewan. She is a proud member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and practiced as a registered nurse at Lac La Ronge Indian Band Health Services as a public health nurse since 2015, before becoming the public health nursing supervisor in 2021. She is a certified First Nations Health Manager through the First Nations Health Manager Association.

“It is a true honour to have been selected as a recipient of the Indigenous Graduate Leadership Scholarship,” said Klassen. The scholarship is aimed towards Indigenous students who have taken an active role of leadership within their community.

Klassen has coached with the La Ronge Figure Skating Club for 12 years, serves as treasurer on the Tri-Community Dance Club Board of Directors, and is on the Prenatal and Breastfeeding Support Committee, a joint initiative between the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Saskatchewan Health Authority, Nisto Ihtāwina Early Years Centre, and Northern Medical Services.

Klassen has a love of physical activity and her research for her master’s program is focused on Type 2 Diabetes (T2D) prevention with Indigenous Youth from two reserves in Saskatchewan exploring the experiences of the youth after participating in T2D educational lessons and physical activity.

“Coaching figure skating has allowed me to engage with the youth in my community, promote physical activity, and help them build self-confidence,” said Klassen. “I am committed to fostering positive change in my community by empowering youth to express themselves in healthy ways.”

Master’s students are eligible to receive up to \$20,000 for up to two years as part

of the Indigenous Graduate Leadership Scholarship.

“The IGLS was established in 2018 to recognize and support Indigenous graduate students who embody that special combination of academic excellence and leadership in the community,” said College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies Dean Dr. Debby Burshtyn.

“Robyn Klassen exemplifies these qualities, highlighted by her research focused on early education to prevent poor health outcomes in ways that will resonate with Indigenous youth. Clearly a changemaker on the rise!”

Klassen says she’s fortunate she’s been able to work towards completing her advanced nursing education online from her home community of La Ronge and not relocate to Saskatoon.

“I have had the incredible opportunity to connect with fellow students from diverse areas across Canada, exploring nursing through a critical lens of exploration and discovery.”

When Klassen isn’t practicing as a registered nurse or volunteering in her community, she enjoys spending time with her two young children cross country skiing, hiking, swimming, and painting.

“Clearly a changemaker on the rise!”

– DR. DEBBY BURSHTYN

USask graduates first cohort of nursing students from Lloydminster distributed site



Nursing students in Lloydminster celebrate during Lakeland College graduation celebration. Submitted.

Gillian Studer (BSN’25) celebrated the completion of her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree during USask spring convocation, alongside 11 of her classmates from the first cohort at the Lloydminster distributed nursing site. Studer was able to complete her nursing degree in the same town where she grew up, thanks to the College of Nursing’s Learn Where You Live philosophy.

USask Nursing announced the partnership with Lakeland College and accepted the first class of BSN students in fall 2022. Prior to the partnership, students located in the Lloydminster area relocated to a USask campus after completing their pre-professional year in the university transfer program at Lakeland College.

Having the opportunity to study in Lloydminster allowed Studer to maintain the support network she’s known all her life. It gave her the chance to develop nursing skills that she is eagerly waiting to apply to help her community, a place where she is familiar with the hospitals and care centres.

“All of my friends and family are here, and this is where I grew up,” said Studer. “Being able to take my entire nursing degree from Lloydminster worked out well for both my finances and convenience,” she said.

Given the demands of the busy nursing program, the option to learn where you live makes it that much easier for students to choose nursing. Case in point: when reached over Zoom for an interview,

Studer shares that she is fresh off a night shift. Eager to get started in the nursing profession, she’s been working as a graduate nurse in nearby Vermillion.

“When we announced the partnership with Lakeland College in 2022, I told the students I was excited to celebrate their program completion in 2025 and here we are today,” said Dr. Solina Richter.

“Watching these first students complete their nursing program in Lloydminster and soon become the registered nurses the world needs, has been an honour. I wish to thank our faculty, staff, and instructors, Lakeland College, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, Government of Saskatchewan, and local clinical placement partners, for making this collaboration an astounding success. But most importantly, to our students, the BSN Class of 2025 from Lloydminster, thank you for choosing USask Nursing and for being part of this moment in college history!”

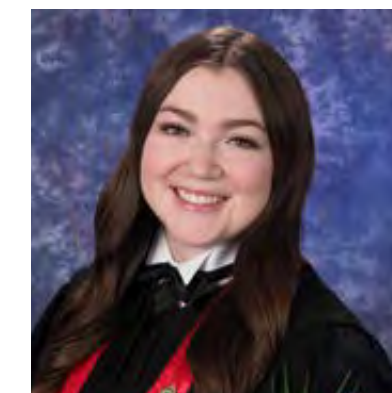
“Today marks a milestone for Lakeland College as we proudly celebrate the first graduating class in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program,” said Jackie Bender, Lakeland College dean of university transfer and foundational learning.

“This achievement is a testament to the strength of our academic partnership with the University of Saskatchewan, the dedication of our faculty and staff, and the incredible perseverance of the students.”

Moving through the BSN program, Studer has been grateful to complete almost all her placements in Lloydminster, giving her the opportunity to get to know the different specialities, while also learning about the medical community and opportunities in the city. She’s thankful for her professors and classmates, especially this first Lloydminster graduating class that she is part of.

“We’ve been through it all together; the new students in a new program,” she said with a laugh.

“We all helped each other out. That’s a big part of nursing school is your classmates, working together and figuring things out as a team.”



Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduate Gillian Studer. Submitted.

“I’m very glad the nursing program opened in Lloydminster. Since I plan to live in the community, now I have my foot in the door in different areas in healthcare. I’ve had clinical placements all over, so I have contacts and I’ve been able to network where I want to further my nursing career,” Studer added.

Turning life's challenges into compassionate nursing care



USask Nursing alumna and current nurse practitioner student Celeste Paquette. © Matt Smith.

When asked why she chose to return to school after working as a registered nurse, USask Master of Nursing – Nurse Practitioner student Celeste Paquette (BSN'14, MN'20) gives an answer that beautifully reflects the motivation shared by many who pursue advanced nursing education.

"After years of bedside nursing as a registered nurse and providing clinical instruction to students, I wanted to influence care delivery at a higher level—helping patients navigate complex systems, while empowering them through education and prevention," said Paquette.

She credits her undergraduate education and early nursing career with both deepening her empathy and expanding her understanding of healthcare as a complex ecosystem.

"My years at the bedside opened my eyes to the challenges faced by both patients and healthcare providers - the time constraints, emotional toll, and the moments when

people simply need to be heard and seen for who they are, and where they are at in their journey toward health and well-being," said Paquette, adding her Catholic faith has been a driving force throughout her journey.

For Paquette, nursing is more than a career; it's a vocation.

"The education I will complete in the nurse practitioner program will allow me to live that calling more fully by providing care that is both clinically competent and deeply human."

Paquette's wisdom has been forged through both professional and personal experience.

During her second year of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at USask, her husband passed away suddenly. The compassion she received from classmates, faculty, and staff became a defining moment.

"Their kindness helped me turn one of the

most difficult experiences of my life into a source of strength and empathy that continues to shape my daily encounters with patients."

Since beginning her nurse practitioner (NP) journey, Paquette has faced further hardships including her father's cancer diagnosis, the tragic loss of her son's best friend, and the passing of her father-in-law. Each experience tested her resilience, but also deepened her belief in humanity at the core of nursing.

"They've reminded me of the deep humanity that underpins nursing, the privilege of supporting others through vulnerability, loss, and healing," said Paquette.

Despite the challenges she has faced, Paquette considers herself blessed, with her three children serving as constant reminders of the importance of balance and resilience.

"My children have been my greatest motivation to keep learning and growing;

they've taught me it's possible to pursue your goals, while nurturing family life," she said.

Fueled by the inspiration her children provide, Paquette is showing them the breadth of opportunities a nursing career can offer.

Before entering the program, as a registered nurse, Paquette worked across diverse areas of nursing including obstetrics, pediatrics, oncology, public health, home care, and acute medicine. In addition, Paquette has served as a practical nursing instructor at Dumont Technical Institute and as a contract teacher for the USask BSN program.

"Teaching and mentoring students has been one of the most rewarding parts of my career, it keeps me grounded in the foundations of nursing, while inspiring me to model critical thinking, compassion, and professional growth," said Paquette.

When reflecting on her decision to return to school to become a nurse practitioner, Paquette highlights the role of the University of Saskatchewan in shaping her path.

"USask has a strong reputation for producing practice-ready nurse practitioners grounded in evidence, collaboration, and community engagement. As both a USask teacher and alumna, I've experienced firsthand the university's commitment to mentorship, accessibility, and excellence in nursing education."

For Paquette, the combination of the College of Nursing's academic excellence and welcoming collegial environment has been a key reason she keeps returning.

She adds that she values the flexibility of the program's distance-learning model, which has enabled her to continue teaching, while pursuing her studies.

Paquette cites the real-world clinical experiences and guidance from preceptors and faculty as her most rewarding aspects of her program so far.

"Collaborating with other NP students and

healthcare providers has reminded me how strong nursing is when education, clinical skill, and advocacy align," said Paquette.

Paquette plans to remain in Saskatchewan and practice primary care in a rural or semi-rural community. She has particular interests in pediatrics and end-of-life care, areas that require compassion, presence, and the ability to meet people where they are. She's also excited to see how the role of nurse practitioners continues to evolve across the province.

"NPs bring a unique perspective to health care, one that blends the art of nursing with the science of medical diagnostics," said Paquette.

"I see the NP role becoming an essential cornerstone of the healthcare system, improving access, collaboration, and holistic care for communities across Saskatchewan."

As she advances toward completion of her program, Paquette continues to embody the heart of nursing - grounded in compassion, strengthened by faith, and inspired by family.

"This program has transformed me, strengthening my voice as a clinician, educator, and advocate," she said.

"I strive to bring the heart of nursing into every encounter by listening deeply, caring fully, and helping others find strength in their own story."

“ Collaborating with other NP students and healthcare providers has reminded me how strong nursing is when education, clinical skill, and advocacy align. ”

– CELESTE PAQUETTE

Faculty member celebrates earning PhD



College of Nursing Limited-Term Lecturer Dr. Anne Hyde. [@DaveStobbe](#)

Completing her Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (PhD) in 2025, Dr. Anne Hyde (BSC'01, BSN'04, MN-NP'08, PhD'25) is both a dedicated practitioner and an accomplished academic.

She is interested in pushing the overall nursing profession forward, while also embracing the ability to make a difference at the bedside. Hyde credits USask College of Nursing with helping her to do all this and more.

"I've certainly felt the college has always supported me to continue to the next phase of my nursing journey", said Hyde. "That is something I think is really special."

Knowing she wanted to work in healthcare, but unsure of her pathway, Hyde had already completed a bachelor's degree in microbiology before applying to nursing. She was admitted through the Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan.

"It was a great decision," she said. "Nursing has really aligned well with who I am and how I like to interact with my patients, in that very relational kind of way."

As a nursing student, Hyde thought she would go into pediatrics, but instead gravitated to cardiology and medicine, working in an intensive care unit (ICU) when she became a registered nurse. "I really liked

the focus on one patient and the ability to interact closely with the patient's families," said Hyde. "Also, the complexity of care in the ICU."

After working for a while, she applied to the University of Saskatchewan nurse practitioner program. Upon graduation, she went on to work in primary care in both small urban and rural areas and ended up working as a nurse practitioner with a geriatrics program in Saskatoon.

"It turns out the population I really like to work with is geriatrics, instead of pediatrics - the other end of the spectrum," she said with a smile. "I like the geriatric patient population and in general, just talking with my patients. From a medical perspective, they are really interesting, as there is often a lot of complexity, so you need to think about the whole person, their home, their community, and supports, as that really forms who they are as a person and the care they require."

When she applied to do her PhD, Hyde knew she wanted to both boost her research skills and fill in gaps in her knowledge of older adult health.

Supervised by College of Nursing Assistant Professor Dr. Mary Ellen Labrecque (BSN'92, MN'02, PhD'08) and Dr. Michael Szafron (BEd'09, PhD'09, MD'00), professor with USask School of Public Health, Hyde wrote a doctoral dissertation titled, "*Canadian Rural and Urban Older Adults: A Comparison of Functional Status.*"

Using the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging's data set to look at what factors might shape the health of rural and urban older adults, she found that both sets of adults are affected by age, gender, socio-economic status, and self-rated health.

Finding no difference between the two populations led her to realize the difference may lie in the level of service available to each.

"What my research tells me is that perhaps we need to think about how we serve these populations differently," said Hyde.

"When their needs are the same, the things

that affect them are the same, but we know things like healthcare service, for example, or the demographics in rural and urban areas are very different, we need to think about how we can meet those needs in the two different contexts."

Hyde also began teaching as she completed her PhD, most recently taking on a limited-term lecturer role with USask Nursing.

"It's exciting to meet people who are going to carry the NP role forward," said Hyde.

"You can see what some of our former students have done with advocating for the NP role in Saskatchewan and that's really exciting. It's particularly rewarding to be with students as they move from RN to NP and see the possibilities of the advanced nursing education."

Hyde aspires to stay both teaching and in nursing practice. She continues to work in primary care in a small, rural area. She's also furthering her research, into older adults and into ways to improve nurse practitioner teaching.

“Nursing has really aligned well with who I am and how I like to interact with my patients, in that very relational kind of way.”

– DR. ANNE HYDE

Nursing student experiences growth through international exchange



USask Nursing student Queen Tayab enjoying a quiet moment in front of the Parliament Building in Budapest, Hungary. [@Submitted](#)

Queen Tayab (BSN'25) chose to attend the University of Saskatchewan for her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree because she wanted to live close to her support network in Saskatoon.

In her final year, she decided to spread her wings and chose to apply for the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Program Scholarship and study in Finland to expand her horizons, both culturally and professionally.

She now looks back on the exchange as a life-changing experience.

"I've always kept my eye out for international learning opportunities, as I love to travel and learn from different places to improve the quality of my practice or for inspiration," said Tayab.

"I thought the scholarship exchange was a good opportunity to network and connect with other likeminded people. I also heard of

Finland's renowned healthcare system and wanted to see it for myself."

The Erasmus+ Scholarship took Tayab to study nursing at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (UAS), Finland's largest university of applied sciences. Tayab says the best part of her study abroad experience was meeting new friends, both from Finland and also fellow exchange students from places like Africa and Sri Lanka.

Tayab says she is grateful she was given the opportunity to grow professionally, while fulfilling her love for travel. She visited 10 countries in five months, including Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, and Greece.

In addition to extensive travel, Tayab made the most of her time at Metropolia University, taking in as many classes and labs as she could.

"I found the learning approaches similar between Metropolia and USask, but especially enjoyed the simulation labs at Metropolia," said Tayab.

"Metropolia had interesting technology, multiple simulation rooms, and students got to act out a wide variety of scenarios as part of the simulated learning. I always volunteered to participate because I found it fun and engaging."

"Immersing myself in other cultures broadened my perspective and deepened my humility, reminding me that nursing is not just about care, but about relationships and understanding," adds Tayab.

"I have to be able to pick up on cultural nuances to be able to connect and provide care, which is such a huge part of nursing. We learn a lot about cultural competency, cultural humility, and cultural safe care in theory at USask, but this exchange gave me the chance to live it out on a global scale and really see the differences, even just among fellow nursing students."

While abroad, Tayab jumped at the opportunity to attend the 2025 International Council of Nursing Conference in Helsinki,

with over 7,000 attendees from more than 130 countries.

Overall, Tayab says the biggest reward of the exchange experience was personal growth.

"Navigating a new country on my own in a language I don't speak taught me independence and adaptability. It was also a multicultural experience, from the classmates I had at Metropolia to my roommates from Belgium and Poland and the people I met during the Erasmus student network trips. We all brought different views, and I learned how to navigate challenges, including situations where our values, even in nursing care, didn't align. I also became more aware of cultural differences in everyday interactions."

Tayab says the exchange has energized her to seek out more international opportunities, but also reaffirmed her appreciation of Canada.

"There is no place like home, and for me that's where my family is. But I also carry with me the friendships and connections I made during my exchange, and I hope one day to cross paths with them again."

"This opportunity inspired me to keep exploring, whether that's through research, further studies, or future international experiences. I know this is only the beginning of my journey."

“Immersing myself in other cultures broadened my perspective and deepened my humility, reminding me that nursing is not just about care, but about relationships and understanding.”

– QUEEN TAYAB

**USask College of Nursing Huskie Athletes achieve academic excellence**



(l to r) Téa DeMong, Dr. Solina Richter, Abbey Klein, and Chigozirim Okechukwu. Missing: Rayne Butler-Siemens and Jade Houmphanh. [Submitted](#).

The College of Nursing congratulates five nursing students who were recognized in 2025 by Huskie Athletics for their academic excellence. Go Huskies!

**Rayne Butler-Siemens (BSN'25)**

Sport: Women's Cross-Country, Women's Track and Field

**Téa DeMong, Year 4 Bachelor of Science in Nursing**

Sport: Women's Basketball

**Jade Houmphanh (BSN'25)**

Sport: Women's Soccer

**Abbey Klein, Year 2 Bachelor of Science in Nursing**

Sport: Women's Volleyball

**Chigozirim Okechukwu, Year 3 Bachelor of Science in Nursing**

Sport: Women's Track and Field

"Effective time management is crucial in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, especially given the demanding course load," said Dr. Solina Richter.

"These students have successfully balanced their nursing studies with their rigorous sports commitments, excelling in both areas. It was a privilege to attend the Huskie Athletics U SPORTS Academic All-Canadians Breakfast alongside all USask athletes, and it was especially rewarding to celebrate our outstanding nursing students."

**Assistant Professor Dr. April Mackey celebrates PhD convocation**



College of Nursing Assistant Professor Dr. April Mackey. [Dave Stobbe](#).

Dr. April Mackey (BScN'12, MN'19, PhD'25), assistant professor at the College of Nursing, undertook her doctoral journey motivated by a deep commitment to justice and the elimination of violence against women.

Mackey successfully defended her Doctor of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Studies in June 2025.

Her dissertation, *"Her Story, Her Power, Her Transformation: Narratives of Women's Resistance to Intimate Partner Violence,"* combined rigorous qualitative research with deep personal reflection. While grounded in academic scholarship, it was her lived experience and empathy that gave the work its depth and power.

Over six months of fieldwork, Mackey immersed herself in the stories of two women who were survivors of intimate partner violence, meeting with them weekly to listen, learn, and explore their experiences.

"My time with them was just a small part of their lives, but the interviews were so powerful, they really gave my thesis an emotional charge," said Mackey.

The methodology used isn't very common, but it's deeply relational.

"I don't think I could have gotten the

answers any other way," adds Mackey.

"I had to sit with both of them every week for six months—for them to trust me, to process their experiences while we talked, and to lead the conversation themselves, which was really important. I didn't come in with a list of questions. I just said, 'Hey, tell me about your experience, and let's see where that takes us each week.'"

Mackey notes one of the major grounding points for her dissertation is intersectionality, which involves looking at the many overlapping factors that influence someone's experience of violence.

"Women, or anyone experiencing violence in a relationship, aren't defined just by their gender, race, or socioeconomic status," she said. "It's all of these things layered together and overlapping."

Mackey adds that taking a broader perspective could improve support services, which are often limited by a narrower lens.

"We still tend to see people as just one thing when they're not," said Mackey.

In studying intimate partner violence, Mackey's PhD dissertation built on what she learned from her Master of Nursing thesis, which explored how technology empowers women. She credits her MN supervisor College of Nursing Professor Emeritus Dr. Sandra Bassendowski (EdD) not only for nurturing her academic interests, but also for igniting her passion for social issues.

"Nursing has a part of my heart, but I have always been drawn to social issues," said Mackey. "Those are the classes and the professors I connected most with."

After completing her master's thesis, Mackey found a mentor in her PhD supervisor, College of Nursing Professor Dr. Pammla Petrucka, who helped her refine and solidify her research focus.

"She sat me down and asked, 'What do you want to be known for?' In that moment, I reflected on my own experiences and said, 'I think women don't have enough power in our society, and I've seen that since my childhood.' It made me pause and really

think: how can we tip the scales back to women? How can we reclaim that power? That's when I realized this is the work I could dedicate my life to."

Since completing her PhD, things have moved quickly for Mackey, who was an instructor in the College of Nursing throughout her studies.

"I finished my PhD in June. There were openings for assistant professors at the College of Nursing, and I thought, 'I'm probably too new, but I'll apply and see what happens.' And then, on September 1, I started as an assistant professor."

Mackey is eager to pay the mentorship forward in her new teaching role, while remaining deeply passionate about the research side of academia.

"Teaching has a special place in my heart. I've been doing it for about eight years now, but research, being able to take ideas that have been rattling around in my mind for five years and bring them to life, is incredibly fulfilling."

Of course, she has already jumped onto her next research project, planning a symposium day for women on agency and empowerment.

Mackey says she's grateful to have found her place at the College of Nursing, where she can pursue the work that truly defines her.

"I'm so thankful I love what I do. Some people say, 'I've got to go to work,' but for me, coming here is a joy. This research, it brings me to life. It reminds me why I started, and why I'll keep going."