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## **New Student Orientation takes on even more importance for first-year University of Lethbridge students**

The University of Lethbridge is welcoming over 1,990 new students into the fold this fall, and the themes of welcoming, informing and lessening anxiety remain the same — even if the experience has moved online.

“New Student Orientation (NSO) has always been a crucial first step for new students because it lays the foundation for their engagement with campus and their learning,” says Asheley Cowie, coordinator of orientation and transition in the University’s Student Affairs team. “NSO is a chance for students to learn how things work at uLethbridge, meet faculty and staff and other new students.



“It’s a time for new students to feel excited to be starting university and should smooth the transition to campus life and the independence that comes with this. This year, it’s even more important for students to take part in NSO given that building connections to staff, faculty and other students will be essential when learning in a primarily virtual setting.”

NSO 2020, running Aug. 31 through Sept. 8, has been designed to meet students in the virtual space, supported by a welcome box that began arriving at students’ residences earlier this week. Packed with all the essentials to get the academic year off to a great start, the boxes include:

- Fall 2020-specific student services and support department resources
- Commencement coin and page
- Faculty-specific information and giveaways
- NSO giveaways

— U of L ID card (if submitted)

Current students who are part of Cowie's transition team helped design and build the packages. Having been through the first-year experience, they lent a valuable perspective to the exercise.

"In my first year, NSO provided me with my first true sense of belonging at the U of L," says Courtney Derksen, a fourth-year science student and current student mentor on Cowie's team. "Attending the sessions and meeting staff and students helped me feel more confident in beginning my university experience. I hope students who receive a box feel the connection and support that I did when I attended NSO."

With box in hand, students are sent to the [NSO 2020 welcome web page](#) where the virtual experience takes off. Once there, students are able to learn about all the available student services, given a road map to help them understand who to ask for support both in and outside of their courses and learn about the academic expectations of being a first-year university student.

Student mentors, University staff and individual faculty members are also available to new students through a variety of virtual sessions scheduled throughout the week. The sessions include everything from how to order and pick up textbooks, student life in Lethbridge, tutoring and working on campus opportunities, to individual faculty meet and greets and more.

"Starting university is a huge transition for all new students, but it is fair to say starting university from home during a global pandemic creates additional stressors," says Cowie. "We want students to know we created this NSO understanding they are uncertain and hopefully our support will help them get the best possible start. New students normally have a lot of questions, and this year will not be an exception, so we want to ease as many concerns and provide as much support as we can from day one."

To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/new-student-orientation-takes-even-more-significance-first-year-students>

Attached photos: Asheley Cowie, coordinator of orientation and transition in the University's Student Affairs team; an NSO welcome box.

-- 30 --

Contact:

Trevor Kenney, News & Information Manager  
403-360-7639 (cell)  
[trevor.kenney@uleth.ca](mailto:trevor.kenney@uleth.ca)

@ULethbridgeNews

Asheley Cowie, Student Affairs

[asheley.cowie@uleth.ca](mailto:asheley.cowie@uleth.ca)