



University of
Lethbridge

NEWS RELEASE

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Alumni donors establish first-of-its-kind endowment fund to support 2SLGBTQ+ students

A first-of-its-kind endowment fund for the University of Lethbridge will provide support for 2SLGBTQ+ students and those who advance equity and inclusion, thanks to a generous donation from two ULethbridge alumni.

Kurt Schlachter (BSc '00) and Jason VandenHoek (BMgt '05) have established the VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Fund. Announced during ULethbridge's Progress Pride flag raising ceremony, the \$200,000 endowment fund will support a suite of awards aimed at reducing barriers for 2SLGBTQ+ students.

“With some of the incredibly high rates of addiction, homelessness and suicide among 2SLGBTQ+ youth, we wanted to support students from this community by providing access to education that they may not otherwise have, especially those who don't come from supportive families like we do or who may have financial barriers,” says Schlachter. “It was clear to us there is a gap for this segment of the student population. We also felt it was really important for us to support students who are demonstrating leadership and allyship for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.”

The awards will celebrate academic achievement, remove financial barriers to education and recognize exceptional contributions to advancing equity and inclusion for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, both on campus and beyond. While a first for ULethbridge, it is also among only a handful of post-secondary institutions across Canada to offer awards for 2SLGBTQ+ students.

“These awards will provide much-needed support for 2SLGBTQ+ students at ULethbridge, and it is a great honour to announce them as we celebrate Pride Month under this year's theme of Solidarity, Strength and Community,” says Martha Mathurin-Moe, vice-provost, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. “As we work to build a more inclusive and welcoming campus, this significant gift sends a powerful message to our students and the broader community that by working together, we can create the culture shift we all seek – a truly safe and welcoming campus space for everyone.”

Schlachter and VandenHoek are notable in the community for their volunteerism and philanthropy. Schlachter is a Lethbridge-based lawyer, who served as Chair of the ULethbridge Board of Governors from 2016 to 2022. He is currently the chief executive officer of Stringam LLP, a regional law firm in Western Canada, and was appointed as Queen's Counsel (now King's Counsel) last year. VandenHoek spent over a decade as executive director of the Chinook Regional Hospital Foundation before becoming the chief operating officer of the pair's real estate holding company. Both are former ULethbridge Senators.

While they had been considering ways to support ULethbridge for several years, Schlachter says the announcement of [The Campaign for Students](#), with \$10-million in matching funds pledged by ULethbridge's Board of Governors, confirmed that the timing was right to create an even bigger impact.

"It resonated with us deeply that this was the right time, and that we could leverage our gift to have double the impact — it just really, really brought it home for us," says Schlachter. "We consider our time at ULethbridge to be a huge part of our lives and we've continued to stay very connected. We both recognize that our lives would be totally different if we had not had the opportunity to obtain a university education."

Schlachter and VandenHoek both grew up in small rural southern Alberta communities. While grateful for their agricultural upbringing and supportive families, Schlachter recognizes the challenges for those who cannot access vital supports or have limited opportunities to grow in a diverse environment. A portion of the endowment fund will provide support for students growing up in rural communities to allow them to experience something different.

"While there has been some progress, there are still significant barriers to accessing resources and support for 2SLGBTQ+ students," says Schlachter. "With a smaller population, these students are less likely to be exposed to diversity of perspective, thought and individual circumstances in the same way as when you can come to a larger centre, and especially to a university campus. It opens your eyes in different ways. It's important for students to see themselves represented and to feel that they are not alone."

For VandenHoek and Schlachter, the power of representation is critical to building confidence on the pathway to success, especially for 2SLGBTQ+ students.

"For those with similar backgrounds to us to see that they too can achieve success and reach their dreams if they work hard and focus is essential," says Schlachter. "In some cases, they may need more support to get there. So, we're hoping to provide that to them."

The first award from the VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Fund will be presented in June 2024.

VandenHoek and Schlachter are challenging their fellow ULeithbridge alumni to make a donation to this fund or to any of the other student funds that have been established so far, or to explore establishing a fund that supports future ULeithbridge students in a way that aligns with their personal values, by taking advantage of the opportunity to participate in [The Campaign for Students](#).

Those interested in donating can give by visiting the [VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Fund](#) webpage. All donations will be matched 1:1.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/alumni-donors-establish-first-its-kind-endowment-fund-support-2slgbtq-students>

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Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.