



For immediate release — Thursday, February 22, 2024

Growing a culture of consent the focus for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Week

There's a culture building at the University of Lethbridge, one that will take centre stage Feb. 26 to Mar. 1 when the campus recognizes its first Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Week.

Led by the [Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Team](#), the week will offer several interactive sessions and activities designed to engage students and open the lines of communication on a subject that was talked about in hushed tones for far too long.



"It's an issue I try to make as approachable as I can to really meet students where they're at," says Courtney Smith (BHSC '19), the University's Sexual Violence Prevention Educator.

The theme of the week is Growing a Culture of Consent and one of the activities is a small plant giveaway on Thursday, Feb. 29.

"Students love the plants, and we'll probably have all 350 plants given out in an hour or less. It gets them familiar with us and what we do and talking to us about these issues," says Smith, who set the week at the end of February because the national sexual violence week annually falls in May when most students are not around campus.

She says she is seeing a culture shift since the University updated its Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy and made it mandatory for all students to complete an online training module before they could register for classes this past fall.

"I've seen the biggest change when we set up tables around campus. Honestly, most people used to see our banner and I'd see them turn the other way because they were

so afraid to talk to us,” says Smith. “Now, because we have talked about it so openly, we’ve become more approachable. I think they know that this is a safe place where they can come up and talk and engage.”

She says they are focusing attention this year on how marginalized populations are impacted by gender-based violence, including Indigenous populations. Of the activities being offered, one is an Indigenous beading workshop in honour of missing and murdered Indigenous women, hosted by Indigenous Learning Facilitator Tara Froehlich.

Others include a mural painting event, a display of love letters to survivors that have been written by ULeithbridge students, and a powerful art installation called What You Were Wearing, featuring clothes of people who have been assaulted. Students will be encouraged to add to the love letters, participate in breakout sessions to discuss issues around sexual and gender-based violence and keep the conversation going on campus.

Smith says she believes the efforts of the University, through her team, are beginning to make a difference.

“I’ve seen more awareness of my services and at the same time, fewer people who have accessed my services — which is a good thing. They understand there is a policy here, there are things they have to adhere to and cannot do and they realize we do not tolerate gender-based violence on campus.”

She also is finding a greater willingness for men to participate in the work they are doing.

“I recently gave a guest lecture in a health sciences class, and it was the most engagement I’d ever had from those who identify as men,” says Smith. “And in the past two weeks, I’ve had three men — which doesn’t seem like a lot, but it is — all asking to volunteer. I’ve been in this role since 2019 and I’ve never had male engagement like this. Men sometimes feel they don’t have a space in this, but I think the training has helped some realize they can talk about sexual and gender-based violence. There is a space for everyone, and it takes everyone to work together to dismantle this type of violence.”

Mark Slomp, executive director of Student Services, says creating a culture of consent and awareness of sexual and gender-based violence issues is integral to the ULeithbridge student experience.

“Part of what we do is ensuring that when students leave the institution they have the education, awareness and knowledge to be successful, to flourish in life and to be a part of creating thriving communities,” he says. “Engaging in respectful behaviour is about values, character and intentionality. It’s important for us to ensure they are in an

environment of respect and when they leave, they're equipped to thrive personally and contribute to building thriving communities, wherever they are."

Following is a list of events:

Monday, Feb. 26

Mural Painting | 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., University Hall Atrium

Tuesday, Feb. 27

Love Letters to Survivors | 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., University Hall Atrium

Wednesday, Feb. 28

Indigenous Beading Event | 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Iikaiskini Gathering Centre (RSVP required)

Beautify Your Space, While Growing a Culture of Consent | 2 to 3:30 p.m., Anderson Hall

Thursday, Feb. 29

Growing a Culture of Consent | 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., University Hall Atrium

Friday, Mar. 1

Love Letters to Survivors | 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., University Hall Atrium

Consent Tea Cart | 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Students' Union

Feb. 26 to March 1

What Were You Wearing art installation | University Hall Atrium

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/growing-culture-consent-focus-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-prevention-week>

-- 30 --

Contact:

Trevor Kenney, Manager of Public Affairs

403-329-2710

403-360-7639 (cell)

trevor.kenney@uleth.ca

@ULethbridge

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.