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PhD student Michelle Sylvestre first from ULethbridge to be named Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar

Michelle Sylvestre (BFA – Art '17, MFA – New Media '21), a PhD student in the cultural, social and political thought program, has been selected as a Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar — the first doctoral student from the University of Lethbridge to receive this prestigious recognition.

Sylvestre's research, *Intersecting Biases: Exploring Gender and Indigenous Representation in Artificial Intelligence to Promote Equity and Inclusion for Historically Underrepresented Communities in Canada*, examines how AI systems reflect and reproduce systemic inequities. Drawing on a research-creation framework, she blends critical inquiry with artistic practice to explore the social impacts of emerging technologies and envisions more inclusive digital futures grounded in care, accountability and community engagement.



"This scholarship is an amazing opportunity for advancing inclusive technologies through creative, community-engaged research, guided by my work as a Researcher-in-Residence with the Niitsitapi Pod at CIART (Centre for Indigenous Art, Research, and Technology)," says Sylvestre.

Sylvestre is one of only 16 graduate students from a national pool of 686 applicants to receive the award, which provides up to \$210,000 over three years, supporting tuition and research-related expenses, as well as access to a national network of interdisciplinary scholars and mentors.

A multidisciplinary artist and sessional instructor in the Faculty of Fine Arts Department of New Media at ULEthbridge, Sylvestre's creative work spans traditional and digital media, with a focus on the intersection of technology, craft and identity.

"My project examines the colonial and patriarchal biases within artificial intelligence (AI) large language models. Using a research-creation framework, I aim to critique AI while imagining futures built on a foundation of care, inclusion and accountability," she says.

"This is an exceptional achievement for Michelle and the Faculty of Fine Arts," says Heather Davis-Fisch, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts. "Michelle has demonstrated excellence throughout her academic career — as an undergraduate, a master's student, and now as a doctoral candidate. Her work exemplifies how rigorous research and creative practice can come together to address some of the most urgent social questions of our time."

Dr. Jackie Rice, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, emphasizes that Sylvestre's selection reflects both the strength of her research and the high level of support she is receiving as a doctoral student at ULEthbridge.

"With more than 680 highly qualified applicants to this program and a rigorous selection process including in-person interviews, we are extremely proud that the Foundation recognized the excellent work that Michelle is carrying out and is providing funding that will help amplify the impact of her work," says Rice. "We look forward to continuing to support her in her doctoral studies and are excited to see where this work takes her."

As a [Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation](#) Scholar, Sylvestre joins a national network of outstanding researchers committed to advancing equity and social justice through their work. The Foundation, established in 2001 as a tribute to the former prime minister, supports the advancement of outstanding, cutting-edge doctoral research that will have meaningful impacts in our communities, institutions and beyond.

"Becoming a Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation scholar is an exciting opportunity to collaborate across disciplines and to build lasting relationships with changemakers across Canada," says Sylvestre.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/ulethbridge-phd-student-michelle-sylvestre-named-trudeau-foundation-scholar-groundbreaking>

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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.