



For immediate release — Tuesday, June 24, 2025

Lexia Piccolo earns 2025 VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Award for 2SLGBTQ+ mental health advocacy

Lexia Piccolo's commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices and supporting mental health has earned her the 2025 VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Award.

A graduate student in the University of Lethbridge's Faculty of Education, Piccolo's background in advocacy work has centred on 2SLGBTQ+ youth in her home province of Quebec.

"It's an incredible honour; it means so much," Piccolo says. "Receiving the news was so affirming; it just made me feel proud that all the work I've done is making a difference. It also motivates me even more to keep building inclusive pathways for people who have been pushed to the margins for so long."



In what she calls one of her most impactful professional experiences, Piccolo worked as a public consultation coordinator with Youth for Youth Quebec. There, she designed and executed a town hall-style opportunity for youth at a Pride event, creating a safe space for participants to share their experiences and challenges.

"This was done in a rural community, and I think that's super important because it's essentially a double minority. Rural communities don't get enough attention, and neither do youth in the 2SLGBTQ+ community," she says.

Piccolo also collected survey data on mental health needs and experiences from participants across Quebec.

"My findings showed a real lack of support within community organizations, including schools, and discrimination from older populations," she recalls. "With these results, I wrote a policy brief called *The Importance of School Support on the Mental Health of LGBTQIA2S+ Youth* that was published, calling to the government and aimed at

informing educational institutions or people working in them on how we can better support youth.”

Now halfway through her Master of Education in Counselling Psychology, Piccolo’s academic work has continued to reflect her passion for advocacy. Her coursework explores how adverse childhood experiences can impact the relationships and mental health of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

She plans to pursue a career as a mental health professional after graduation.

“As someone who has worked directly with Queer youth, especially in the context of mental health and protection services, I’ve seen how systems fail people,” Piccolo says. “Whether it’s a lack of affirming spaces or limited access to mental health care — just not being heard in decisions that directly affect them — I’ve seen how these gaps are real and harmful, so I want to be a part of changing that.”

Piccolo is the second recipient of the VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Award, part of a first-of-its-kind endowment fund [established in June 2023](#) by ULeithbridge alumni Dr. Kurt Schlachter (BSc ’00, LLD ’24) and Jason VandenHoek (BMgt ’05). The fund, which was matched by the ULeithbridge Board of Governors, aims to celebrate academic achievement, reduce financial barriers, and recognize exceptional contributions to advancing equity and inclusion for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

“Lexia embodies the spirit of this award through her passion, courage, and unwavering commitment to uplifting 2SLGBTQ+ youth,” says Schlachter. “Her work reminds us that meaningful change happens when we listen deeply, act boldly, and advocate tirelessly. We are honoured to support students like Lexia who are making a profound impact in their communities and beyond.”

“Any work and progress we make is about more than just inclusion — it’s also about safety, respect and dignity,” says Piccolo. “As a Queer woman — I will include myself in this — we’ve often been pushed to the side. But I want to emphasize the message that we are important, and we deserve to be treated with the same dignity and respect as everybody else.”

The VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Award is an example of the University of Lethbridge’s Strategic Plan in action under the strategic direction to Be a Place Where People Aspire to Learn, Work and Contribute. Our people are our greatest strength. We grow a culture rooted in curiosity, respect, access and belonging.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/lexia-piccolo-honoured-2025-vandenhoeck-schlachter-pride-award>

-- 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.