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## **Biology instructor, Jennifer Burke, named 2025 Excellence in Teaching Award winner**

Relationship building plays a key role in creating a student learning environment of mutual respect, engagement and collaboration for Jennifer Burke (BSc/BEEd '97, MSc '06), who has been named the University of Lethbridge's 2025 Excellence in Teaching Award winner.

With a passion for teaching biology and an ability to connect with students evident from the first moment she steps into a classroom, Burke actively creates bonds with her students, encourages them to bond with each other, engages students by using innovative teaching methods and takes their learning outdoors into the natural environment. She will be presented with the Excellence in Teaching Award at Fall 2025 Convocation, Saturday, October 18, 2025, at 10 a.m. in the University's Centre for Sport and Wellness gymnasium.



### **Jennifer Burke**

Not only is Jennifer Burke a teacher of biology, she is also a teacher of core values, such as integrity, respect, mutual understanding and trust, which she demonstrates in everything she does. Students and their learning are her top priorities. She has taught for more than 20 years at every level from elementary to post-secondary. Her philosophy hinges on four pillars — active engagement with students, positive relationships between teachers and students, extending the classroom to the outdoors and continuous refinement of this foundational philosophy.

Burke ensures her students are active learners by designing courses that involve exploration, collaboration and critical thinking. Through group discussions, problem-solving exercises, teamwork and interactive assessments, Burke encourages her students to collaborate, question assumptions and apply concepts in novel ways.

Building strong relationships in a class of 200 is no easy feat, but that doesn't deter Burke. She believes students are more likely to be eager learners when they feel seen, heard and valued. Burke makes a point of getting to know her students by walking around the room, mingling with them, finding out their interests and how they like to learn. She also includes group activities

and exercises, so students get to know each other, including a BioBuddy system that pairs students. Knowing how her students learn allows Burke to tailor her teaching methods to include making notes on the board, displaying specimens, having discussion groups, and showing videos or slide shows. She delivers animated lectures, illustrating biology content with real-world examples and stories, which serve as a touchstone to help students remember content. As a result, students experience a classroom where they are respected and encouraged, and their learning thrives.

Since the University is situated on Blackfoot territory, Burke incorporates outdoor learning in an attempt to address recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This approach creates opportunities for students to learn about the land, its history and its stories. She hopes this will build connections and ultimately foster understanding and stewardship.

Burke is also a lifelong learner. She regularly updates her knowledge as an educator through the Teaching Centre's Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and brings innovations in course delivery, always intending to create the best possible student experience. Her enthusiasm for biology is evident, and students respond in kind to become eager and disciplined learners. She continually checks with students to determine if her strategies are working and refines her approach accordingly. As a result, her students adore and respect her for her imaginative teaching methods and rigorous assessments.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/biology-instructor-jennifer-burke-named-2025-excellence-teaching-award-winner>

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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.*