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## **Dr. Stacey Wetmore wins prestigious Montréal Medal**

University of Lethbridge computational chemist Dr. Stacey Wetmore has been awarded the Montréal Medal by the Chemical Institute of Canada. The Montréal Medal is presented annually to an individual from among the thousands of chemists and chemical engineers across the country as a prestigious mark of distinction and honour for significant leadership and outstanding contributions to the chemistry profession.



“My first reaction was disbelief,” Wetmore says. “If you look at the list of previous recipients, they have been from big universities or companies. The fact that I could achieve everything here at the University of Lethbridge and have the support to do so speaks volumes about the university. It was really humbling on one hand and rewarding on the other to know you can have an impact on a field, no matter where you are.”

Computational chemistry uses physics, mathematics, chemistry theories and computer programming to study chemical systems. Wetmore’s lab used computers to study the chemistry of biosystems, that is, the chemistry that happens inside our cells, including how DNA is damaged from exposure to toxins in the environment.

“We are also interested in how enzymes that repair DNA damage function or malfunction, which is related to human disease,” she says. “Additionally, we are investigating how to design drugs based on nucleic acids, where you introduce modifications. Many people understand mRNA vaccines now, after the pandemic. There are other types of RNA-based drugs, and we’re studying how those work and how to design better therapeutics.”

Because of the invaluable support she received from her supervisors when she was a student, mentorship has always been close to Wetmore's heart. Beyond working with many students in her research lab, she was instrumental in establishing a student group devoted to inclusivity and creating a safe place for everyone in chemistry. The group brings in speakers who talk about the challenges they've faced as chemists and hosts events to build an inclusive environment.

Wetmore is a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair and is highly sought after to serve on national and international research, policy and editorial boards, peer-review panels, society committees and conference panels. She also chairs national grant selection committees and holds leadership roles in scientific publishing. She advocates for equity, diversity and inclusion in all these roles.

As a high school student, Wetmore thought she'd become a math teacher. She enrolled in math classes at university, but also took chemistry. After her first year, the chemistry department sent her a letter, telling her she did well and asking if she'd consider doing a chemistry degree. The following year, she took as many math and chemistry courses as she could to continue her studies in either discipline, depending on her final decision. After a summer spent working with a mathematician, she knew she didn't want to be a math teacher. The next summer, she worked in an experimental chemistry lab and found she wasn't totally comfortable there either. But when she learned about doing chemistry by computer, she was immediately interested — and the rest is history.

Wetmore earned a BSc from Mount Allison, a PhD from Dalhousie and completed postdoctoral studies at the Australian National University. She accepted a faculty position at Mount Allison and subsequently moved to the University of Lethbridge.

Wetmore will deliver a plenary lecture and receive the Montréal Medal at the Institute's annual conference in Toronto in May.

[Read online.](#)

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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.*