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University of Lethbridge medal winners to be celebrated at Spring 2026 Convocation

The University of Lethbridge is excited to celebrate the achievements of its 2026 graduating class this week at Spring 2026 Convocation.

Distinguishing themselves among the 1,638 graduates are the ULehbridge medal winners for 2026. They are as follows:

Governor General's Gold Medal for Graduate Studies — Jackson Robert Ham (Ceremony III)

(Awarded to the student with the highest academic standing at the graduate level)

Jackson Robert Ham graduates with a PhD in Philosophy.

Governor General's Silver Medal for Undergraduate Studies — Benjamin Sharp (Ceremony I)

(Awarded to the student with the highest academic standing at the undergraduate level)

Benjamin Sharp graduates with a Bachelor of Science.

Undergraduate Academic Medals

Faculty of Arts & Science Gold Medal (Arts) — Sydney Whiting (Ceremony II)

Sydney Whiting, a political science major with a minor in environmental studies, graduated with a perfect GPA, never receiving a mark below an A. Just the fourth ULehbridge student to receive a Rhodes Scholarship, her honours thesis examining sustainable development is under review for publication, and she already has two other co-authored articles. She has shared her work in conferences in Banff, Whitehorse, Vancouver and Naples; and attended the 2022 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to advocate for progressive environmental policy. Additionally, she was a delegate to the 2023 G7 Youth Summit in Tokyo. Whiting has volunteered for several organizations, including the Campus Collective Centre, and received the Leader of Tomorrow Award from Volunteer Lethbridge in both 2017 and 2022, as well as being



named to the Top 30 under 30 list by Alberta Council for Global Cooperation. She will be attending Oxford University in the fall.

Faculty of Arts & Science Gold Medal (Sciences) — Brannon Sumner (Ceremony I)

Brannon Sumner graduates with a perfect GPA while studying neuroscience. He already has a number of publications to his credit, two of which he is first author/co-author, and he has applied for a patent based on his research. Sumner is an Academic All-Canadian in track and field and has used these talents to coach high school students. He served as an Arts & Science Representative on the Students' Union where he helped co-found the FLARE journal which allows undergraduates to share their research. He was also president of the Rotaract Club, a science fair judge, founder of the Kidney run in Medicine Hat, and has logged over 450 hours as a volunteer at the Chinook Regional Hospital becoming the Triage and Family Visitation coordinator. As a volunteer with geriatric patients, he even taught himself to play piano so he could take requests from the patients. Sumner will be pursuing graduate work at the University of Lethbridge next year.

Faculty of Education Gold Medal — Bree Bos (Ceremony III)

Bree Bos graduates with a perfect 4.0 GPA in the combined music and music education degree program. She is a natural leader, an exceptional musician, and a diligent, highly organized educator. Her professional-level musicianship has enabled her to thrive in diverse settings as a creative educator. She completed her student teaching internship at Lomond School. Her love for music and learning is contagious, and she possesses a unique ability to connect deeply with both staff and students.

Alberta Teacher's Association William Aberhart Gold Medal in Education — Ashwak Ahmad (Ceremony III)

Ashwak Ahmad is a dedicated mathematics major who brings a powerful combination of technical expertise and deep empathy to the classroom. During her internship at Chinook High School, she distinguished herself as an exceptionally organized educator, teaching Math 10C and 20-3 with a focus on backward design and practical, real-world application. Ahmad's performance was marked by her incredible flexibility as she successfully adapted her curriculum to meet a wide range of student abilities and navigated instructional challenges with poise. Ahmad immigrated to Lethbridge from Syria as a refugee at age 12, and mastered English while completing her secondary education. Today, she is a multi-linguist who speaks four languages — including Arabic, Spanish, and Turkish — allowing her to build unique, supportive bridges for students facing their own cultural or linguistic barriers.

Faculty of Fine Arts Gold Medal — Kiara Pike (Ceremony III)

With a passion for art and a strong commitment to success in all fields of study, Kiara Pike has demonstrated a remarkable dedication to her artistic practice. Throughout her degree, Pike found herself drawn to art studio, achieving top grades with Great Distinction while volunteering with the Art Society, mentoring aspiring artists and making the arts more accessible to her fellow students. Alongside her impressive artistic development, exhibition history and academic success, Pike has displayed an unwavering generosity in relationship to her

peers and supportive engagement within the University community and beyond. Her excellence in art studio has been recognized with awards and scholarships, culminating in an artist residency in the renowned Gushul Studios in the Crownsnest Pass along with a solo exhibition at Casa. Pike plans to pursue a Master of Fine Arts, further cementing her distinction as an emerging artist to watch.

Faculty of Health Sciences Gold Medal — Elizabeth Orel (Ceremony II)

Elizabeth Orel graduated from the BN-AD program in October 2025 and was truly a shining star within the nursing program. Orel exemplified excellence across academic, clinical, research and leadership domains. She excelled in all coursework, achieving top grades while demonstrating a deep understanding of complex nursing concepts. Her ability to integrate theory into practice reflects strong critical thinking and a clear commitment to lifelong learning. In practice settings, Orel distinguished herself through exceptional professionalism, sound clinical judgment, and compassionate, patient-centered care. She demonstrates strong advocacy, calmly navigating challenging conversations with families while prioritizing patient safety. In addition to her academic and clinical accomplishments, Orel contributed to a research project examining Canadian guidelines for physical activity during pregnancy, which she presented at an international conference in Montreal, Quebec.

Dhillon School of Business Gold Medal — Nadine Thyssen (Ceremony IV)

Nadine Thyssen graduates with a Bachelor of Management degree in Economics and Finance with Great Distinction and a Co-op designation. Thyssen is a very attentive, punctual, and respectful student with a genuine desire to learn. She stood out as one of the most engaged and thoughtful students in her class, consistently demonstrating a deep understanding of the course material and always arriving prepared. Thyssen demonstrated a collaborative and positive presence in group work, and her teammates highly valued her contributions. Her insightful questions added meaningful depth to discussions, and her ability to connect theoretical concepts to real-world applications left an impression. Beyond her perfect 4.0 GPA, she showed genuine leadership without overshadowing others.

Graduate Academic Medals

School of Graduate Studies Medal of Merit, Doctor of Philosophy — Jackson Robert Ham (Ceremony III)

Dr. Jackson Ham is a genuinely superb student who has broken new ground in his field of research. Ham tackled an area of research in social behaviour that had been understudied. To do so, he developed new experimental paradigms and analytical methods. His incredible productivity in publications and presentations was matched by his diligent contributions to teaching and university governance.

School of Graduate Studies Medal of Merit, Master of Fine Arts — Lucy Du (Ceremony III)

Lucy Du is a hardworking, curious and driven artist always keen to test the boundaries of her work and explore new and rewarding possibilities. She was awarded the Abbondanza Graduate Scholarship and an Artist-in-Residency at CASA during her program, and continues to make her

mark locally as an artist and instructor, sharing her unique perspective and culture with the wider Lethbridge community.

School of Graduate Studies Medal of Merit, Master of Music — Bakhora Merzaeva (Ceremony III)

Bakhora Merzaeva has broadened the research around the music of Uzbek-Russian composer, Gyorgy Mushel, by studying his piano works and presenting her research and his pieces in a lecture recital. She has distinguished herself as a passionate researcher as well as top tier artist. Additionally, she is a dedicated and effective teacher, working with underprivileged children through the Branches Community Arts program, and Music Majors at the University of Lethbridge.

School of Graduate Studies Medal of Merit, Master of Science — Mark Lea (Ceremony I)

Mark Lea graduates with an MSc in Chemistry. His thesis work revealed how chemical modifications direct protein synthesis and influence human disease using computer simulations. He has received numerous scholarships and presentation awards for his work. Beyond research, Lea represented ULEthbridge internationally for six years in the iGEM synthetic biology competition and is an accomplished pianist. He hopes to serve his southern Alberta community as a physician.

School of Graduate Studies Medal of Merit, Master of Education — Henna Hans (Ceremony III)

Henna Hans has put forth an excellent thesis that captures her ability to think critically about ideological, methodological and epistemological ideas while maintaining her focus on preserving and privileging the voice of her participants. The implications of her work identify the need for increased awareness of gender-based violence and access to resources available and initiatives to strengthen women's autonomy and encourage dialogue within South Asian communities.

School of Graduate Studies Medal of Merit, Master of Science (Management) — Makayla Koshuta (Ceremony IV)

Makayla Koshuta's thesis on Canadian immigrants and immigrant settlement processes was outstanding. The research topic is highly relevant, and her thesis gives a very clear and convincing overview on existing research gaps in the field of social marketing/management. Throughout the research, Koshuta demonstrated exceptional theoretical understanding and qualitative research skills. The final thesis reflects not only deep subject knowledge but also a high level of academic maturity.

University of Lethbridge Spring 2026 Convocation ceremonies take place Thursday, May 28 and Friday, May 29 at the Co-op Centre for Sport & Wellness gymnasium, beginning at 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. each day.

For complete information on Spring 2026 Convocation, visit the [convocation web page](#).

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/university-lethbridge-medal-winners-be-celebrated-spring-2026-convocation>

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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.