



# INDIGENOUS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

March 10, 2026

Honouring Indigenous USask students for their  
academic achievement, community engagement,  
leadership, research and resiliency.

**Congratulations to this year's recipients.**



Office of the Vice-Provost  
Indigenous Engagement  
INDIGENOUS.USASK.CA



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The land is acknowledged as our Mother, the Earth. The University of Saskatchewan is committed to honour and support the Indigenous peoples, Indigenous cultures, Indigenous values, and Indigenous languages that belong to the land of Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. The University of Saskatchewan is committed to working towards mending colonized lands and protecting the land in a way that demonstrates honour, respect and love. The University of Saskatchewan extends this commitment to the lands and Treaty territories (Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10) that constitute kisiskâciwan ([Saskatchewan], “the swift current”, Cree/Saulteaux), and all Indigenous people that call kisiskâciwan home. We are born to the land and the land claims us.

# **INDIGENOUS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS**

Hosted by the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement

March 10, 2026, 2:00–4:30 pm

## **OPENING IN A GOOD WAY**

Roland Duquette (on behalf of the Wise Ones Circle)

## **MÉTIS NATIONAL ANTHEM**

Brandi Tourand

## **WISE ONES CIRCLE RECOGNITION**

Dr. Angela Jaime, Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement

Recognition for continued service of the Wise Ones Circle

## **REMARKS**

Dallas Pelly, Director, Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre

## **AWARDS CEREMONY**

Honouring our Indigenous recipients

## **HONOUR SONG**

TJ Warren

## **HONOUREES GROUP PHOTO**

## **RECEPTION**

# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

For students who have excelled in their academic studies at USask.

## **Sara Arial** *She/Her*

**JOHNSON SHOYAMA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY**

**ONLINE MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

*Métis Nation of Alberta*

Sara Dien Arial is a Métis and Dutch woman whose home community is the Métis Nation of Alberta's District 10, located on Treaty 6 Territory in Edmonton, Alberta. She is a wife and mother of four children who inspire her commitment to learning, community, and building a better future.

Sara's maternal family immigrated from Holland in 1958 and settled in Edmonton, while her paternal family traces its roots to the Red River Valley and St. Boniface, Manitoba before relocating to Alberta in the late 1800s. She is part of the first generation in her family able to reclaim their Métis culture and identity after it was disrupted through residential schools and policies of disenfranchisement. Over the past decade, Sara has focused on reconnecting with her family's histories, languages, and cultural teachings as part of her reclamation journey, deepening her connection to community, culture, and intergenerational knowledge.

Professionally, Sara works in municipal government supporting strategic planning, policy development, service design, and organizational performance. Her work often involves translating complex information into meaningful decisions that strengthen programs, services, and outcomes for communities. Through her role, she is committed to advancing thoughtful governance and public service that supports community wellbeing.

Sara completed the Indigenous Nation-Building Master's Certificate and is nearing completion of her Master of Public Administration, reflecting her commitment to public service, governance, and lifelong learning.

Outside of her professional life, Sara enjoys singing, reading, camping, horseback riding, and spending time outdoors with her family and their dog.

## **Joshua Bowes** *He/Him*

### **COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND BIORESOURCES**

#### **AGRONOMY**

##### *Métis Nation Saskatchewan*

Hello, my name is Joshua Bowes. I'm Métis, Christian and was born and raised in small town Saskatchewan. I've lived many places, from Saskatchewan small towns to Saudi Arabia. And although, I've travelled a lot, I consider two small towns as home to many good memories. Waldheim (where we lived until I was 6) and Dalmeny (where we moved to after returning from overseas). My Moshum was a Road Allowance Métis from Punnichy with family ties to George Gordon First Nation, and my Kokum was from Ile-a-la-Crosse.

I take pride in learning about trivial or lesser-known things that are not related to my agriculture education. Like knowing how to do my own car repairs or maintenance, or how to build weapons for fun, such as lego or potato guns. I've also taken apart small machines to examine the motors and mechanics. I have an interest to understand the mechanics of machines big or small. I also have a love for the outdoors and nature. I enjoy hiking, reading, and games (board, video, or cards). And whether growing small gardens at home, or working at places like CHEP gardens, I always have had an interest in plants and their life cycle. I've collected and saved seeds from a variety of plants (corn, beans, pumpkins, clover, western snowberry, and more) that I hope to eventually grow myself. It is also a hobby of mine to learn about the different plants or animals I see when on hiking trips in the mountains.

I'm in my second year of a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, majoring in Agronomy. Although I have debated changing majors, I will remain in Agriculture and research, whether soil science, agronomy or resource management. My end goal is to use my education to find and introduce more natural and sustainable ways to grow crops by leaning on Indigenous traditional knowledge and ways. For example, I've done research outside of classes on the use of natural and sustainable fertilizers. I did this through an opportunity I had to run my own experiment working for the Soil Science department on using alternative fertilizer and the primary focus was the use fish emulsion. I based this idea on the fact that Indigenous People of Canada used fish carcasses as a fertilizer in their gardens, as they understood the science behind the need of nitrogen rich soil before that term was coined scientists. Whether large acre farms or urban communities, my desire is to help with food security, protect nature and find ways to improve farming practices that are safer and healthier for people and the environment.

## **Gunner Bressette** *He/Him*

### **COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

#### **HONORS MATHEMATICS**

##### *Chippewa - Kettle and Stony Point First Nation*

Gunner is Chippewa from Kettle and Stony Point First Nations, Ontario. Gunner has a wife and two step-children and has been serving in the Canadian Armed Forces for over 10 years. Three years in the Army and over seven years in the Air Force. He is now completing this degree to become a Communications and Electronics Engineer Officer. Gunner chose Mathematics as his major because he has loved math from a very young age.

## **Lukas Cardinal** *He/Him*

### **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

#### **EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

##### *Sucker Creek First Nation*

Lukas Cardinal is from Sucker Creek First Nation in Treaty 8, Alberta. He completed his Bachelor of Education in December of 2022. Lukas is dedicated to lifelong learning and continuing his education – he is in his second year of graduate studies in Educational Administration. In addition to maintaining a high average, Lukas demonstrates strong collaboration, critical thinking, and writing skills. Upon completing his degree, Lukas looks forward to advancing his leadership skills. Lukas is currently teaching at Rosthern Community School (PreK—12) and has been since January of 2023. He is a member of the Indigenous Professional Development Committee at his school which includes supporting colleagues in incorporating Indigenous knowledge into their teachings as well as leading weekly smudges for students and staff. In addition, Lukas is a member of the Prairie Spirit Teachers' Association Wellness Committee. He is also a pilot teacher for a Middle Years Literacy Program in Prairie Spirit School Division. Lukas is committed to providing athletic opportunities for Indigenous and rural students. In 2024, he helped establish a tackle football program at Rosthern Community School and is currently the Head Coach. In the fall, he will be leading the football portion of the Trach Sports Academy in Rosthern for rural athletes in surrounding communities. Lukas is also a member of the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association Football Advisory Group and coaches with Saskatoon Minor Football Varsity Academy. Lukas is both honoured and humbled by this nomination.

## **Michelle Davyduke** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

#### **SUNTEP - SASKATOON**

##### *Métis*

I was born and raised in Saskatoon and completed all my education here as well. I grew up playing sports, often with my two sisters and with my parents either coaching or involved in other ways such as management. I was constantly surrounded by my family and it was a wonderful way to grow up. I did K-12 in French Immersion and then proceeded to complete a Bachelor of Arts with a major in French in 2024. I started into SUNTEP as I was finishing up my first degree and it was amazing to be a part of a tight-knit program where I truly felt seen and appreciated. SUNTEP provided me with a wealth of information regarding Indigenous peoples', as well as about my own Métis heritage, which was an incredibly unique experience. I have now completed all my requirements for my Bachelor's of Education and have been working at Centennial Collegiate on a part-time teaching contract. I am grateful to have been given this opportunity and look forward to whatever my future may hold.

## **Brendon Demerais** *He/Him*

**EDWARDS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS**

**MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

*Métis from Saskatoon*

Brendon Demerais is a Métis professional based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, with a strong commitment to Indigenous economic development and community empowerment. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing with Great Distinction from the University of Saskatchewan and is currently pursuing a Master of Business Administration. Brendon has worked for several years with the Gabriel Dumont Institute, where he supports Métis entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses through training, mentorship, and access to resources. In addition to his professional work, Brendon has regularly volunteered as a guest judge for various Indigenous entrepreneurship competitions.

A proud husband, and father of two young daughters, his long-term goal is to take on senior leadership roles that create sustainable opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs and strengthen economic outcomes for Métis communities.

## **Erica Diehl** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF PHARMACY AND NUTRITION**

**DOCTOR OF PHARMACY**

*Métis Nation of Saskatchewan*

Erica Diehl is currently enrolled in her second year of the Doctor of Pharmacy program and has been on the Dean's Honor Roll since being admitted to the program. Erica continues to pursue her degree with dedication and commitment, with the hopes of giving back to those within her community. She chose to pursue pharmacy in hopes of having a more direct impact on patient care and to contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of others.

## **Emry Price** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**SUNTEP - PRINCE ALBERT**

*Métis Nation*

Emry Price is a third-year Bachelor of Education student in the SUNTEP Prince Albert Program. Emry demonstrates an exceptional level of academic excellence grounded in consistency, discipline, and a genuine commitment to learning. Her strong academic standing reflects not only her hard work but also the thoughtful, engaged approach she brings to her studies. She meets deadlines with reliability, contributes meaningfully in class, and maintains a positive presence that strengthens the SUNTEP learning environment.

Equally impressive is the support she offers her peers. She is approachable, encouraging, and always willing to lend a hand, creating a sense of community within the cohort. Her dedication, both to her own success and to the success of those around her, makes her a standout student and a deserving recipient of this award for academic excellence.

## **Emily Sebastian** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND BIORESOURCES**

#### **CROP SCIENCE**

##### *Métis Nation Saskatchewan*

Emily Sebastian grew up on a small, mixed farm outside of Montmartre, Saskatchewan. Her hometown is located close to the Katepwa Lake area, which is where Emily's ancestors settled after moving to Saskatchewan. At Katepwa Lake, her great-great-great grandfather, Clement Peltier, owned a brick factory and ferry business. The ferry was used to transport bricks built at the factory across the lake, as well as bagged grain for farmers. These days, Emily enjoys going to Katepwa Lake to ice fish in the winter and hike on the trails in the summer.

Growing up on the farm, Emily was very involved in all aspects of her family's operation, which led her to develop a strong love and passion for all things agriculture. She began her studies at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture and Bioresources in the fall of 2022 and is currently finishing up her Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree. Emily is majoring in Crop Science, minoring in Agribusiness and is also enrolled in the Precision Agriculture Certificate. Her time spent at university has not been easy, but it has been incredibly rewarding.

Emily is excited to graduate in the spring and move to northeast Saskatchewan where she will begin her career as a scouting agronomist for an independent agronomy consulting company. She has been with this company since 2024, spending her time off school in the field as a summer student. She is very excited to begin full-time with the company and take advantage of the many learning opportunities available to her, both in the field and in the office during the off-season.

## **Brianne Tolley-Procyk** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF NURSING**

#### **PRINCE ALBERT CAMPUS**

##### *Métis western region two*

Brianne Tolley-Procyk is a 3rd year nursing student from Prince Albert. She is a member of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Western Region 2 with familial roots in St. Louis and Batoche, Saskatchewan. After convocating in 2027, she plans to work in obstetrics and maternity. She wishes to thank the College of Nursing and the University of Saskatchewan Prince Albert Campus for this honour.

## **Kadence Vickers** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF NURSING**

##### *Métis*

Kadence Vickers, a proud Métis student from Regina, is in her third year of USask Nursing and holds the highest cumulative average among Indigenous nursing students in Saskatchewan. Her dedication and discipline have earned her major awards, including the 2025 Sutherland First Nations Student Award and a USask Scholarship. Driven to become a nurse practitioner, Kadence embodies academic excellence and is a strong nominee for Academic Achievement.

## **Taylor Whitehead** *He/Him*

### **COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY**

#### *Martin Falls*

Taylor was born and raised in Fort Frances, Ontario, where he spent most of his childhood. He was a competitive badminton player who played at the National level and represented team Saskatchewan at the 2017 North American Indigenous Games. Taylor attended Fort Frances High School for 2 years and graduated from Thom Collegiate in Regina in 2016. Taylor completed a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from the University of Regina in 2020. He is passionate about becoming a dentist and strives to provide holistic and comprehensive care to all his patients and improve patient health outcomes. In his spare time, he enjoys cooking up fancy meals, playing sports, hiking, camping, and spending time outdoors. He owes endless thanks to his mother, father, stepmom, siblings, daughter, and his wife Samantha for their unconditional love and support as he works towards his goals.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For students who have made significant contributions to an Indigenous or non-Indigenous community.

## **Aurora Bedard** *She/Her*

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ITEP

**AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF THE VICE-PROVOST INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT**

*Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, Woodland Cree and from Sandy Bay, SK*

Aurora is a 4th Year Education student and has been a BIRM mentor for three. She is Woodland Cree, born and raised in Saskatoon. A few favourite hobbies include playing co-ed volleyball, going for a walks/run at the PAC, traveling and road trips whenever she can, finding new music, and attending concerts. She is graduating from ITEP this year, where she likes to spend time with friends and volunteer whenever needed.

## **Tyrell Hardlotte** *He/Him*

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

MUSIC PERFORMANCE

*Lac La Ronge*

Tyrell Hardlotte is a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. From a young age, he has connected with his Indigenous background through music experiences, exploring nature and being a part of the Saskatoon musical community. As an oboist, Tyrell has appeared with many groups and larger orchestra ensembles across Saskatchewan. During his free time, Tyrell loves going outside, fishing, and listening to the soundscapes of nature.

## **Daemon Hunter** *He/Him*

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ITEP

*Long Plain First Nation*

Daemon Hunter is from Long Plain First Nation in Manitoba. He feels that as many First Nations and other groups of people, that school was not a choice. The historical abuse made him feel anger. With this anger, he wanted children to have a better experience than what he had experienced. He started an education course at Yellow-quill College/ University in Winnipeg. The course was a land-based course. Although the course did not work out the way that he wanted he finished the year in good standing. The next fall semester I moved to Saskatoon and started the ITEP program. Even though the program was not land-based, he said that it felt great to be in the program. It was still in the direction that he wanted, helping children. Not only helping, but to hopefully bring some joy into the students learning experience. Throughout his education experience in the ITEP program, it was demonstrated how to be positive role models to the students. He also learned of different ways of how to engage with different students at different learning levels. This is him. He is that change.

With Daemon's demonstration of his persistence, dedication, and endurance, he will be that positive role model to his future students.

## **Sawyer Kopec** *He/Him*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

**BIOLOGY**

**AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF THE VICE-PROVOST INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT**

*Métis Nation Saskatchewan*

Sawyer Kopec is a proud Willow Bunch Métis and a registered citizen of the Métis Nation Saskatchewan. His story is grounded in culture, responsibility and deep commitment to community. He is currently in his fifth and final year of a Bachelor of Science in Biology, with plans to pursue a career in medicine. Throughout his academic journey, Sawyer has remained dedicated to serving both his university community and the broader Saskatoon community.

Sawyer currently serves as the Vice President of External Affairs for the Métis Student's Union where he advocates for Métis Students and strengthens relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities on campus. Beyond his academic commitments, Sawyer volunteers regularly at the Friendship Inn in Saskatoon, where he helps prepare and serve food to vulnerable community members. Sawyer also leads a personal project in which he creates and donates ribbon skirts, recently to Camponi's Indigenous Housing's Transitions Program. Through both leadership and hands-on service, Sawyer remains committed to uplifting and contributing to Indigenous communities.

## **Nita McAdam** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**ITEP**

*Whitefish First Nation*

Nita McAdam-Leandre is a proud Plains Cree woman from Big River First Nation, deeply rooted in her language, culture, and community. She is married and a mother of three, as well as a proud grandmother to three grandchildren. Growing up between her home community and urban life has shaped her understanding of identity, resilience, and responsibility. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Saskatchewan and is currently completing my Education degree with ITEP in Saskatoon.

Her passion is Indigenous education and cultural revitalization. She is committed to creating learning spaces where First Nations students feel empowered and where Indigenous knowledge, language, and traditions are respected and centered. She hopes to work with First Nation Tribal Councils to develop culturally grounded curriculum that strengthens community identity and student success. Currently, she is working with SHA as a First Nations Health Specialist where she supports First Nation people navigate the health system.

Nita is also a published author and creative artist. She helped my mother create the book *Awaken (Waniska)*, reflecting their shared commitment to storytelling and cultural preservation. She has worked as an actor and Cree voice-over artist for the APTN Kids Chums cartoon for three seasons and appeared in multiple films as an extra. She also runs a beadwork Facebook page with over 7,000 followers, where she showcases her work and promote the preservation of traditional beadwork styles.

ITEP nominates Nita for her outstanding work with the community and commitment to her studies.

## **Malcolm McKay** *He/Him*

### **EDWARDS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS**

#### **HUMAN RESOURCES**

##### *Lac La Ronge Indian Band and Cumberland House*

Malcolm McKay is a Woodland and Swampy Cree business student from northern Saskatchewan and a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, with strong family roots in Cumberland House. He is completing a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Saskatchewan, focusing on Human Resources, Indigenous Governance, and Sustainability. Malcolm's work has centered on supporting Indigenous and public-sector organizations through policy development, program coordination, and community engagement, including roles with the Government of Saskatchewan, STC Industrial Group, and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. He currently serves as a Teaching Assistant/Research assistant at the University of Saskatchewan and is active in student and community leadership, including the Indigenous Students' Union and the Community Arts Mentorship Program. Malcolm also previously served as the Tradition and Events Headperson for the Indigenous Business Student Society. Grounded in Cree values and northern community experience, Malcolm is committed to strengthening fair workplaces, culturally respectful governance, and opportunities for Indigenous youth and communities across Saskatchewan.

## **Mackenzie Naytowhow** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

#### **BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE**

#### **AWARDED BY THE PRINCE ALBERT CAMPUS**

##### *Montreal Lake*

Mackenzie Naytowhow is a proud First Nations woman from Montreal Lake Cree Nation and a first-year Bachelor of Science student in Biomedical Science at the University of Saskatchewan. A dedicated student-athlete, Mackenzie balanced academic excellence with competing on multiple basketball teams and in competitive speed swimming, while also earning her coaching certification and mentoring youth in sport. She volunteers with the In the Hands of Children breakfast program, helping prepare hundreds of meals for children each month. Guided by the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and inspired by her family's legacy in Indigenous education, Mackenzie hopes to pursue a career in physiotherapy or medicine to support athletes and inspire Indigenous youth to pursue their dreams.

## **Karlee Puckey** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**SUNTEP - SASKATOON**

*Métis*

Karlee Puckey is a proud Métis woman from Lloydminster, Saskatchewan. Raised by her parents, Cheryl and Howard Puckey, she grew up surrounded by strong family connections and Métis traditions, spending much of her childhood in Chitek Lake, Saskatchewan with her Nanny, Papa, and extended family. These experiences helped shape her deep appreciation for community, culture, and resilience.

Karlee began her career as a professional hairstylist in 2008, inspired by her Nanny. After many years in the industry, she decided to pursue her long-time dream of becoming a teacher and is now completing her fourth year in SUNTEP at the University of Saskatchewan.

During her time in SUNTEP, Karlee served as the program librarian, supporting fellow students with resources, assignments, and encouragement. She is passionate about building community and hopes to create classrooms where students feel supported, valued, and proud of who they are.

## **Wyatt Roach** *He/Him*

**COLLEGE OF NURSING**

*Métis*

Wyatt Roach, a Métis nursing student entering his third year at USask's Lloydminster site, balances fatherhood, work, and school while maintaining an 86% average. As an Indigenous Nurses student ambassador, he mentors peers and volunteers readily. He supports the Olive Tree food bank and participates in cultural events at Lakeland College. His dedication, compassion, and community involvement make him a strong candidate for the Community Engagement Award.

## **Payton Smith** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**SUNTEP - PRINCE ALBERT**

*Métis Nation of Saskatchewan*

Payton Smith is a second-year Bachelor of Education student in the SUNTEP Prince Albert Program. Payton's dedication to community shines through in every space she enters. As an active member of the Student Leadership Culture Committee, she contributes her voice, energy, and ideas to strengthening the SUNTEP community. Beyond the centre, she coaches Toppers volleyball and consistently steps forward for volunteer opportunities, demonstrating a genuine commitment to supporting others and building relationships across the wider community.

Her ability to balance these responsibilities while maintaining a strong academic standing speaks to her discipline, generosity, and leadership. She is a dependable presence, a positive role model, and someone who gives her time and heart without hesitation. Her contributions enrich both SUNTEP and the broader community, making her a truly deserving recipient of this award for community involvement.

## **Syndel Thomas Kozar** *Other*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

**INDIGENOUS STUDIES AND WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES, ENGLISH**

**AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF THE VICE-PROVOST INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT**

*One Arrow First Nation*

Syndel Thomas Kozar is a Two-Spirit, neurodivergent néhiyaw (Plains Cree) and white settler artist, scholar, advocate, and community builder. A band member of One Arrow First Nation, they are from Melfort, Saskatchewan on Treaty 6 Territory. Syndel is completing a Double Honours Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, with a minor in English and a Certificate in the Study mjknk1q, of Indigenous Storytelling.

Syndel's work bridges art, storytelling, advocacy, and community-engaged scholarship, shaped by lived experience, kinship, and responsibility to community. Raised by her Granny and late Papa, residential and day school survivors, their creative and academic practice is grounded in cultural renewal, accessibility, and care. Their interdisciplinary practice spans writing, beadwork, ribbon wear, and visual art, using creative expression as a tool for reflection, connection, and cultural continuity.

Alongside their academic and artistic work, Syndel is an active Indigenous youth advocate at local, national, and international levels. They have represented Indigenous youth in policy and advocacy spaces, including participation in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 70 (CSW70), contributing to conversations on gender justice, Indigenous rights, and community-led solutions grounded in lived experience. Their advocacy centres the voices of Indigenous youth and gender-diverse people and emphasizes the importance of community-informed approaches to policy and social change.

Syndel is the creator of Just a Child in Canada and the co-founder of Crafting Kinship, national initiatives focused on youth wellbeing, cultural reclamation, and community care. Through arts-based programming, facilitation, and public education, Syndel continues to build spaces that foster connection, belonging, and collective strength, while contributing to more just, creative, and connected futures.

## **Cornell Tootoosis** *He/Him*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**ITEP**

*Poundmaker First Nation*

Cornell Tootoosis is from Poundmaker Cree Nation and the grandson of John B. Tootoosis, and son of Harold McNabb and Shirley Tootoosis. He is a founding member of the Poundmaker Singers who have celebrated their 25-year anniversary last year and have travelled and all over Turtle Island. The Poundmaker Singers are well known across Indian Country for their championship singing including with the Gather of Nations singing contest in 2017 as well as being nominated twice for the Native People's Choice Awards for best album of the year. Cornell at heart is a family man grounded in néhiyaw culture in life and in the classroom. Connecting culture to the classroom (indoors and out) is the core of his land-based teaching practice. He credits his successes to his belief in his culture, his strong cultural upbringing and the teachings of his uncles, aunts, grandparents and the elders who help with ceremonies. He believes in leading by example and encouraging each other to succeed in whatever we do.

## **Dezaray Wapass** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF KINESIOLOGY**

#### *Big River First Nation*

Dezaray Wapass is a proud member of Big River First Nation and is in her final year of study in the College of Kinesiology. A Huskie Cross Country and Track & Field athlete and former Rookie of the Year turned coach and volunteer, she has a passion for mentoring and giving back to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Inspired by her father, and mentors such as Derek Rope, Dezaray's path is defined by resiliency—balancing training, academics, and service while keeping to a clear purpose: to build a life in sport that lifts others. She has been invited to share her story to different communities, where she speaks about her experiences with academics and the power of sport, specifically athletics, to help create opportunity for youth. Her goal is to become a high school physical education teacher or to work in Health, Sports, and Recreation and then pursue a master's degree.

# LEADERSHIP

For students who have demonstrated exemplary leadership on or off-campus.

## **Jordyn Burnouf** *She/Her*

**SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**MASTER OF SUSTAINABILITY IN ENERGY SECURITY**

*Métis community of Île-à-la-Crosse and a member of Black Lake First Nation*

Jordyn Burnouf is a Nehiyaw woman from the community of Sakitawahk (Île-à-la-Crosse) and a member of Black Lake First Nation. Jordyn is dedicated to advancing energy sovereignty, land-based learning, and Indigenous youth empowerment. She works with the Île-à-la-Crosse Residential School Survivors, who recently reached a settlement with Saskatchewan and Canada on one of the earliest residential schools, predating Canada. She currently advises the government of Canada on renewable energy pathways as a member of the Wah-ila-toos Indigenous Council. Alongside her Wahilatoos kin, Jordyn is also Co-Author of the Kinship & Prosperity Report, a key guide of Canada's 2025 Electrification Strategy. Jordyn is also Director on the Boards of Indigenous Clean Energy and the Canadian Climate Institute. She is in her final year of studies in the Master of Sustainability in Energy Security at the University of Saskatchewan. As the Founder and Podcast Host of Nôhchimihk, Bush Guide at Pemmican Lodge, and Co-Founder of Indigenous Clean Energy's ImaGENation Program and the Sakitawahk Youth Environmental Circle, Jordyn leads conversations and experiences that centre Indigenous knowledge, cultural healing, and community wellness.

## **Connor Clarke** *He/Him*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

**BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES**

**AWARDED BY INDIGENOUS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PATHWAYS**

*Métis - Buffalo Narrows*

Connor Clarke (he/him) is a proud Métis from Buffalo Narrows, SK, and a second-year student in the Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Foundations program, with a long-term goal of practicing dentistry with a focus on equitable care to Northern communities. Connor is a peer mentor with ISAP learning communities team.

## **Michelle Desjarlais** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF MEDICINE**

Michelle Desjarlais is Class of 2027 Medical Student. She serves as the Regina Social Representative, SMSS, for her cohort and was recently highlighted for her role in organizing the 2025 Integration Weekend for first-year medical learners. In 2024, she was named a Dean's Project Awardee by the College of Medicine. Her research involves conducting chart reviews for hundreds of patients to measure and compare surgical times. Michelle immerses herself in community volunteerism as a crisis line worker for the Regina Sexual Assault Clinic. She says the skills she has learned, including trauma-informed communication, are greatly transferrable to her medical education and future career.

## **Dessa Gottfriedson** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

#### **PHD INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES**

##### *Tk'emlups te Secwepemc*

Dessa Gottfriedson is Secwépemc with Syilx ancestry and is from Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc in Kamloops, BC, one of the 17 communities of the Secwépemc Nation within Secwépemcúl'ecw (Secwépemc territory). She was born and raised in her community, where her family has called Tk'emlúps home for generations, and where she continues to live and work in service to her people.

Guided by the teachings of her ts'wí7emc (ancestors), Dessa carries forward the responsibility to work hard for the tellqélmucw (those yet to be born).

For 26 years, Dessa has dedicated her work to advancing Indigenous education and advocating for the rights of First Nations communities to strengthen and lead their own education systems. Dessa works for her Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc community, where she provides leadership in the planning and direction of education systems that support community members across the lifespan. As Education Manager, she oversees and directs programs that support early childhood learning, kindergarten to grade twelve education, post secondary education, trades training, and employment readiness for community members both on and off reserve. Her work focuses on strengthening opportunities for learners while ensuring that education systems remain grounded in Secwépemc culture, language, and community priorities.

Through her leadership, Dessa works closely with community members, educational institutions, and government partners to advocate for equitable access to education while supporting programs that strengthen Secwépemc language, culture, and lifelong learning.

Dessa Gottfriedson is the founder of the Le7 te Melámen (Good Medicine) cohort, a community led Secwépemc research and wellness initiative developed in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan and Thompson Rivers University. The program was created in response to the need for culturally grounded healing following the discovery of Le Estcwicwéy' (the Missing), the 215+ children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, and the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma. The initiative brings together Secwépemc scholars and community members as a doctoral research cohort focused on Indigenous wellness and the development of Indigenous counsellors and researchers who will support healing within their own communities. Dessa is both the founder of the initiative and a member of the Le7 te Melámen cohort, where she is currently pursuing her PhD in Indigenous counselling at the University of Saskatchewan.

Dessa's work reflects a commitment to honouring the interconnectedness of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health, and the deep relationships between people, community, and land.

Through both her leadership in education and her work in counselling, she remains dedicated to strengthening community wellbeing and supporting future generations of Indigenous learners and leaders.

## **Presh Harvey** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

#### **ITEP**

#### **AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT**

##### *Montreal Lake Cree Nation*

Precious (aka Presh) is a 4th year ITEP student. Recently, she was recognized for Academic Achievement with her band Montreal Lake Cree Nation and she is ready to start her career as a teacher after successfully completing her practicum in term 1. She enjoys beading, any visual arts, and spending time with her friends and students in BIRM. She has been a mentor for two years in BIRM as well as the Indigenous Summer Institute at USask.

## **Samantha Leech** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF MEDICINE**

#### **AWARDED BY UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION**

##### *Métis Nation Saskatchewan*

Samantha Leech is a proud member of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and a second-year medical student at the University of Saskatchewan (Regina Campus). She recently completed her PhD in Biomedical Engineering at the University of Calgary, where her research focused on advanced medical imaging techniques. She continues her research at USask, examining barriers and strategies to improve equitable access to diagnostic imaging. Samantha serves as a Regina representative for the Indigenous Medical Students Association of Saskatchewan, helping lead cultural initiatives, including cultural beading events, that foster connection and advocacy on campus. As a violinist with the Regina Symphony Orchestra and a Métis and Celtic fiddler, she uses music to connect with her heritage and strengthen community connections. Samantha (or Sam) as we all affectionately know her, is a strong Métis voice at the Regina College of Medicine campus and endeavors to promote and attend meetings related to the Indigenous portfolio whenever possible. Her commitment to improve the lives of the underserved populations with a focus on our people is incredible. I am blessed to know her and be a small part of her journey through Medicine. Western modern education is a journey that is limited in its ability to learn with many end dates and tests. Indigenous education begins when the child is conceived and born. It is a lifelong journey if one desires to learn in terms of the medicines, the ceremonies, culture and language. As the late Métis leader Jimmy Sinclair stated "I may be gone, but my people will be back". And the Métis voice and leadership are back through incredible commitment and youth leaders like Samantha Leech. Métis and First Nation communities are so proud of you and your accomplishments, Sam, and today we honor and lift you up at this Indigenous Achievement Week celebration. Maarsii and kinanaskomitinaw

## **Viviane Lemire** *She/Her*

### **ST. THOMAS MORE COLLEGE**

#### **ECONOMICS**

##### *Red Pheasant Cree Nation*

Viviane Lemire is a third-year Economics student at St. Thomas More College (STM) and a dedicated Federal Public Service employee. Born and raised in Saskatoon, she is a proud member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation. Her unique educational journey spans from attending l'École canadienne-française to completing her secondary studies at Joe Duquette High School, where she deeply engaged with her Indigenous culture. A parishioner at Sts-Martyrs-Canadiens, Viviane integrates her Francophone heritage and Indigenous roots into her academic and professional life. She receives an Indigenous Achievement award today for taking on a leadership role with the Newman Executive. Newman Centre is a student club housed at St. Thomas More College. Viviane helped the Newman Executive organize and put on events to help create student community at STM and the wider campus. Congratulations, Viviane!

## **Olivia Maurice** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING**

#### **CHEMICAL ENGINEERING**

##### *English River First Nation*

Olivia Maurice is a proud Dēnesųłiné woman from English River First Nation completing her Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan, with a focus in mineral processing. Her leadership is grounded in responsibility to circles of community, increasing representation in STEM, and advancing Indigenous governance within resource extraction and development.

## **Meghan Nicole-Morin** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

#### **ANTHROPOLOGY**

##### *Métis*

Meghan-Nicole Morin is a dedicated Métis student from North Battleford, SK. On campus, she works as an Archives Intern through Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, is a tutor and business partner in Prairie Roots Tutoring, and considers herself a lifelong learner. She is currently a Co-President for the Visual Arts Students Union (VASU) on campus and has lead initiatives in creating safe spaces for communities.

## **Chelsea Ochoa** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

**PSYCHOLOGY**

**AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF VICE-PROVOST ENGAGEMENT**

*Métis Nation Saskatchewan*

Chelsea Ochoa is a proud Métis woman from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, currently in her final year of a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Psychology. Formerly Chelsea Fiddler, she comes from a strong Métis lineage on both sides of her family. Since the formation of the Métis Students of USASK in 2022, Chelsea has served as an executive member and now holds the role of President, where she has played a key role in strengthening the Métis student community on campus. She has spearheaded numerous initiatives, including hands-on workshops, cooking lessons and a vibrant Jamboree, which have created meaningful spaces for cultural learning and connection.

A dedicated advocate for Métis students, Chelsea serves on both the Indigenous Student Advisory Council and the Indigenous Student Leadership Community, ensuring Métis perspectives are represented in institutional decision-making. In addition to her leadership, Chelsea has supported fellow students as a USTEP peer mentor and as a teaching assistant for multiple courses. Following graduation, Chelsea plans to pursue graduate studies at the University of Saskatchewan, continuing her commitment to research, advocacy and community empowerment.

## **Paris Oleksyn** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

#### **AWARDED BY THE USASK HUSKIES**

##### *Métis*

Paris Oleksyn is a proud Métis woman and fifth-year student-athlete with the USask Huskies women's hockey team. Paris exemplifies what it means to lead with integrity, strength, and purpose—on the ice, in the classroom, and within her community.

This season Paris has earned the role of Assistant Captain, a position that reflects her exceptional character, work ethic, and ability to motivate those around her. Teammates and coaches describe her someone who leads through action and accountability, her presence sets the tone for excellence. Her leadership is matched by an impressive athletic record, including:

- 2019–20 Silver Medalist, National Women's U18 Championship (Team Saskatchewan)
- 2019–20 Gold Medalist, National Aboriginal Hockey Championship (Team Saskatchewan)
- 2021–22 Bronze Medalist, U SPORTS National Championship in PEI

Beyond her athletic accomplishments, Paris is deeply committed to community engagement, particularly with Indigenous youth. This year she was part of the organizing committee for A Day in a Life event, the women's hockey cancer awareness game, and volunteered for the Nikaniwin Indigenous program. She also gives back through coaching in the Inner City Community Hockey League and with the Little Comet girls' program. Paris participates annually in the Fred Sasakamoose Tournament—winning in both 2022 and 2023—and continues to represent her community with pride.

Balancing academics, high-performance athletics, and meaningful service, Paris creates spaces where young Indigenous people feel seen, supported, and welcomed on campus. She encourages other student-athletes to engage with youth as well, demonstrating that excellence and cultural pride can thrive within university sport.

For these reasons, Paris Oleksyn is a deserving candidate for recognition in the Leadership category of Indigenous Achievement Week. Her impact as a student-athlete and community leader will continue long beyond her years at USask.

## **Jaylynn Stonechild** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF LAW**

#### **J.D. (LAW)**

##### *Muscowpetung Sauteaux Nation (Treaty 4)*

Jaylynn is a member of Muscowpetung Sauteaux Nation, who grew up in a household that had many discussions and teachings on Treaty, Aboriginal Rights, community development, reconciliation, and how to best represent our Peoples. Playing an active role in community through volunteering has always been, and continues to be, fundamental to her values. She believes in the importance of hard work, education, and relationship building – understanding change to be motivated not by charity, but through leadership. Jaylynn is one of the two College of Law 2L Class Representatives, the Chair of Student Representatives, a Teaching Assistant for Law 232 Kwayeskastasowin, and a member of the 2026 Kawaskimhon Aboriginal Moot team. For many Indigenous Peoples, distrust in the system persists as a fundamental barrier to accessing justice - inspiring her commitment to pursue a legal education which reflects her responsibility to the resurgence of Indigenous Peoples

## **Zenon Walsh** *He/Him*

### **SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

#### *Norway House Cree Nation*

Zenon Walsh, is a graduate student in the Master of Public Health program. His family hails from Norway House Cree Nation on Treaty 5 territory and he was born and raised on Treaty 7 territory in Calgary, Alberta. For the past 12 years he has lived on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish Peoples in British Columbia. He is a leader whose relationship to the land and the community is emphasized in his service, advocacy, and collective responsibility. At USask, he is a member of the Indigenous Graduate Leadership Circle, where he advises on COUSINS initiatives, identifies systemic challenges, and guides programming to support Indigenous student success. Beyond academia, he also volunteers with ElderDog Canada, which assists the elderly community with dog walking and fostering meaningful connections to reduce isolation. He works for the BC Coroners Service and advocates for Indigenous peoples within a system shaped by colonial history. Being an Indigenous leader is a role he holds with great honour and respect, acknowledging the journeys of the ancestors. As a leader he seeks to voice Indigenous issues, effect meaningful changes within the system, and support other Indigenous staff in public service.

# RESEARCH

For students who undertook unique or compelling undergraduate or graduate research.

## **Gabrielle Doreen** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**CROSS DEPARTMENTAL PHD**

*Tyendinaga Mohawk Nation*

Gabrielle Yakotennikonhrare Doreen is Kanyenke'hà:ka (Mohawk) and sits with the Turtle Clan from Tyendinaga, where she is a second language learner. Yakotennikonhrare earned her Master of Education degree, focusing on Indigenous Land-Based Education, in 2018 from the College of Education. She is a Vanier Scholar currently completing her PhD in Educational Foundations/Cross-departmental program. Her research, Weaving wampum stories: Supporting kanyen'kéha immersion schools and Indigenous Land-based research methodologies, examines how wampum theories can be applied to Rotinonhsón:ni education systems and to further Indigenous research methodologies. Yakotennikonhrare teaches grades one and two at Kawennaón:we yonteweyenhstháhkwa. The school focuses on nurturing children's creativity, supporting positive peer relationships, and learning onkwehonwe'néha (Indigenous ways) through land-based education and experiential learning. Aside from work and writing, Gabrielle is an active member of the Kenhtè:ke longhouse community and the Tyendinaga Native women's association. Her PhD supervisor is Dr. Alex Wilson.

## **Camiryn Kardal** *She/Her*

**WESTERN COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE**

**VETERINARY BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES**

*Saskatchewan Métis Nation*

Camiryn joined the WCVM as a first-year Master's student in the Department of Veterinary Biomedical Sciences in the Fall of 2025, having graduated with a B.Sc. in Toxicology with high honours in the summer of 2025. Camiryn is a 2x recipient of the NSERC USRA summer research scholarship as an undergraduate student, and is also a recipient of the highly competitive NSERC- Canada Graduate Research Scholarship (CGS-M) that is funding her Master's program.

Camiryn's current MSc research is co-supervised by Dr. Michael Wu (VBMS) and Dr. Tony Ruzzini (Vet. Micro) and is focused on identifying microbial factors that influence antiparasitic drug resistance. This work has already identified, for the first time, microbial factors from livestock that decrease the efficiency of the drug ivermectin, a globally used medication to treat both human and animal parasitic infections. Camiryn's research has a broad impact in One Health as it aims to improve our understanding of mechanism of ivermectin resistance, and what future steps are needed to support sustainable global health for humans and animals.

## **Caleb White** *He/Him*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**BIOMEDICAL NEUROSCIENCE**

*Métis*

Caleb White is a member of Métis Nation–Saskatchewan and is in his final year of an undergraduate Biomedical Neuroscience Honours degree. He is researching in the Howland laboratory and is grateful for the support he has received in the lab. Caleb has applied to the Master of Science program in Anatomy, Physiology, and Pharmacology. He intends to develop his research interests and work toward his goal of contributing to neuroscience.

## **Trent Young** *He/Him*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**LINGUISTICS**

*Cree and Tsimshian - Alexander First Nation*

Trent Young is a Cree and Tsimshian member of Alexander First Nation, with close ties to Bigstone Cree Nation and Kitsumkalum, where he is of the Raven Clan. He is a second-year undergraduate in Linguistics at the University of Saskatchewan, with interests in morphology and Algonquian grammar. His goal is to support accessible learning materials for ancestral language revitalization across Turtle Island.

## **Sky Clarke** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**SOCIOLOGY**

*Woodland Cree - Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation*

Sky Clarke is more than a student; she is a leader, a mother, and a proud Woodland Cree member of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation. Fluent in her native Cree language, Sky has spent a decade transforming her life through education. After graduating with an Education degree in 2025, she shifted her focus toward Sociology and Crime, Law, and Justice Studies to prepare for a future in Law. Despite the juggle of parenting and employment, Sky's resilience has led her to numerous leadership positions. She continues to break barriers, climbing mountains for herself, her children, and everyone she inspires along the way.

# RESILIENCY

**For an upper-year student, who is on track to graduate, who has overcome significant personal challenges to succeed in their studies.**

## **Raenna Hesje** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING**

*Métis*

Raenna is a fourth-year Environmental Engineering student, proud citizen of the Métis nation, and proud mother to a beautiful 8-year-old boy. She currently serves as Co-President of the Environmental Engineering Students' Society (EnvESS), Public Relations Director for the USask Chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), and as an Indigenous Academic Student Ambassador for the College of Engineering here at USask. In her final year of engineering, Raenna is dedicated to fostering spaces that honour community, belonging, and Indigenous presence within engineering.

## **Tammy McLeod** *She/Her*

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**SUNTEP - SASKATOON**

*Métis*

Tammy McLeod is a proud Métis Cree woman with family ties to Southend Reindeer Lake through her father and to Stanley Mission through her mother. She is the devoted mother of six beautiful children, whose ages range from eighteen to two. Everything Tammy has pursued in her educational journey has been rooted in her commitment to creating a life for her children filled with opportunities she did not have growing up. Her role at the university has been more than academic — it has been an act of love, determination, and generational change.

Throughout her time in SUNTEP, Tammy has had the honour of reconnecting with her culture, identity, and roots. The teachings, relationships, and experiences she gained have shaped her both personally and professionally. She carries this knowledge forward with pride and will continue to grow in her understanding of Indigenous education as she walks through life and into her career.

Tammy will complete her Bachelor of Education this spring and hopes to begin teaching full-time in the city by the fall. Her goal is to build a classroom grounded in respect, belonging, and cultural authenticity — a place where students feel seen, valued, and supported. After gaining experience in the field, she plans to return to university to pursue a master's degree, continuing her commitment to lifelong learning.

Tammy's journey has been marked by perseverance, courage, and an unwavering dedication to her family and community. Her resilience is reflected not only in her achievements, but in the way she continues to rise, grow, and lead with heart.

## **Roberta Nippi** *She/Her*

### **EDWARDS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

#### *Saulteaux and Cree from Kinistin Saulteaux Nation*

Roberta Nippi is a dedicated professional known for her commitment to excellence and a collaborative spirit. With a background reflecting versatility and a focus on growth, Roberta brings a balanced approach to every endeavour.

Roberta's work is marked by integrity, creativity, and an unwavering drive to support those around her. Roberta is respected for her ability to adapt to new challenges and to foster positive relationships within her community and workplace.

## **Jo-Rain Ross** *She/Her*

### **SUNTEP PRINCE ALBERT**

#### **SUNTEP, EDUCATION**

#### *Montreal Lake Cree Nation*

Jo-Rain Ross is a second-year Bachelor of Education student in the SUNTEP Prince Albert Program and a member of Montreal Lake Cree Nation. She embodies the strength and determination that define true resilience. After stepping away from her studies for a period of time, she returned to SUNTEP with renewed purpose and an unwavering commitment to her goals. Now in her second year, she continues to excel academically, consistently completing assignments on time and approaching every learning opportunity with motivation and curiosity.

Her journey is made even more remarkable by the responsibilities she carries with grace. As a new mother to Rayanna and a step-mom to Theodore and Kassia who are both under the age of five, she balances the demands of family life with the rigour of post-secondary education. Despite the many obstacles she has faced in her young life, she continues to rise, demonstrating perseverance, courage, and an inspiring dedication to her future and the future of her children. She is a powerful example of resilience in action and a deserving recipient of this award.

## **Loressa Sewap** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF NURSING**

#### *Deschambault Lake, SK*

Loressa Sewap of Deschambault Lake is completing her final term in USask Nursing, demonstrating resilience, strength, and deep commitment to her community. Despite academic, personal, and systemic challenges, she persisted with grace. Her quiet leadership, advocacy for Indigenous peoples, and lifelong dedication to caring for family and others make her a powerful example of resiliency.

## **Shanelle Sewap-Custer** *She/Her*

### **COLLEGE OF NURSING**

#### **AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF THE VICE-PROVOST INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT**

*Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation*

Shanelle Sewap-Custer is a proud nihithaw iskwew (Woodland Cree Woman) from Deschambault Lake, and a member of Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation. She is in her second year of nursing at USask, committed to advancing health equity within her community. After five consecutive years of post-secondary education, including spring and summer terms, she continues to pursue her goals with resilience, discipline, and purpose.

Throughout her academic journey, Shanelle has balanced challenging nursing and health studies with family responsibilities, personal loss and maintaining her commitments outside of the classroom. She has contributed to Indigenous Students Union on campus and remains passionate about Public Relations, mentorship, and creating supportive spaces for Indigenous students.

Outside of academics, she loves to train Muay Thai and mixed martial arts, where she has developed mental toughness and confidence that carry into all areas of her life. She is also deeply committed to supporting her two younger siblings while pursuing her education.

Shanelle believes that challenges are not barriers but opportunities for growth. Her journey has taught her the importance of perseverance — to not give up, no matter what life places in your path. She hopes her story encourages other Indigenous students to remain steadfast in their goals, even when the road feels long.

She is eager to contribute more meaningfully to Indigenous programming, including BIRM initiatives, food kitchen support, and other community-based responsibilities that foster cultural connection and mutual care. Looking ahead, Shanelle aspires to become a nurse who advocates for culturally safe care and works to address systemic barriers faced by Indigenous patients. She is also committed to deepening her knowledge of the “TH” Woodland Cree Dialect language and culture as part of her lifelong journey of identity, learning, and reconnection.

## **Kyla Sylvestre** *Other*

### **COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

#### **TOXICOLOGY**

#### **AWARDED BY THE INDIGENOUS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PATHWAYS**

*Dene from La Loche, SK*

I am Kyla Sylvestre (she/they) from La Loche, SK, Clearwater River Dene Nation. I am currently a BSc Toxicology student (Pre-Pharmacy) and am thrilled to be nominated for the IAW Award in Resilience. ISAP played an instrumental role in my journey and being an ISAP Peer Mentor allows me to return the favour to a community that provided so much for me.