



University of
Lethbridge

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release — Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Advocacy work earns Jesson recognition as first VandenHoek Schlachter Pride award recipient

Mars Jesson, a psychology major and co-chair of Q-Space at the University of Lethbridge, is the first recipient of the [VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Award](#). This recognition celebrates Jesson's commitment to supporting the 2SLGBTQ+ community on campus and beyond.

“I really want to express gratitude for this award, and I feel honoured that our hard work is being recognized,” says Jesson. “In today’s climate, representation is crucial. An award like this validates our efforts and encourages us to continue.”



Q-Space, under Jesson’s leadership, has significantly increased its presence at ULethbridge. Historically known as the Pride Centre, which evolved from the Gay and Lesbian Integrity Association, Q-Space has expanded its activities from social events to providing essential resources for queer students.

“Initially, we were left with just a club room and a few documents,” Jesson recalls. “We’ve since organized drag shows, coffee nights and game nights, and more importantly, we’ve started offering resources for students navigating university as queer individuals and accessing transition support.”

Jesson emphasized the importance of Q-Space in offering a safe space for self-exploration and community learning.

“University is often a time when individuals explore their identities more freely than they could in high school. Q-Space facilitates this journey, providing a place to learn about the queer community and the diversity among students.”

The VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Award is 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 aims to celebrate academic achievement, reduce financial barriers, and recognize exceptional contributions to advancing equity and inclusion for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

“We are thrilled to hear that Mars Jesson is the first ULeithbridge student to receive funding from the VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Fund,” says VandenHoek.

“It is exactly students like Mars who we wanted to assist when we created this fund,” Schlachter adds. “We hope that the financial help provided by this award will assist Mars as they pursue their ongoing education and that they will continue to be a voice for LGBTQ2IA+ on campus and beyond.”

Following graduation, Jesson plans to pursue a master’s in clinical psychology. They hope to become a role model and advocate in the field, as many trans and queer individuals are still stigmatized and dehumanized in the psychiatric system. In addition, Jesson wants to help trans and queer people navigate the system, as many often do not have social supports and struggle with poor mental health.

“I really want to be a voice of advocacy,” says Jesson. “I can stand my ground as a trans person for other trans people in that system. It should be helpful for you, especially if you're a queer person and you already don't have a lot of social supports. Change needs to happen within that system, and I want to be part of that change.”

Jesson highlighted the broader impact of the award, noting its potential to encourage more individuals to engage in advocacy and drive change.

“Visibility is crucial,” says Jesson. “It shows that people are working to make this a better place and inspires others to join. This award helps attract more volunteers, making progressive change possible. The more people involved, the more biases are challenged, leading to an exponential shift in attitudes.”

The establishment of the [VandenHoek Schlachter Pride Fund](#) was inspired by the Board of Governors’ [recent announcement](#) of \$10-million in matching funds to help grow endowed student scholarships at ULeithbridge.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/advocacy-work-earns-jesson-recognition-first-vandenhoeck-schlachter-pride-award-recipient>

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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.