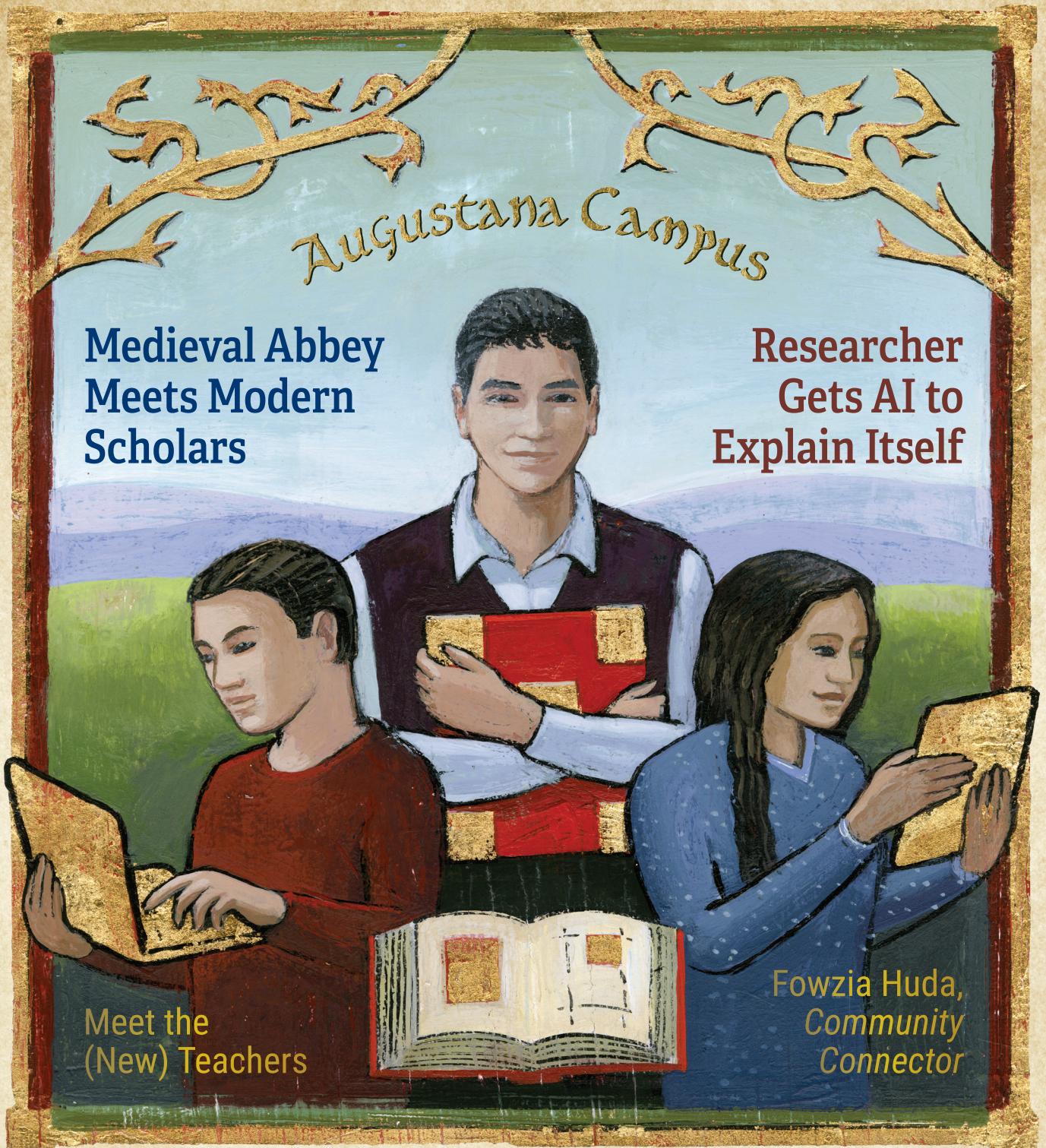


# Circle

AUGUSTANA CAMPUS ALUMNI MAGAZINE WINTER 2022/23



**Medieval Abbey  
Meets Modern  
Scholars**

**Researcher  
Gets AI to  
Explain Itself**

**Meet the  
(New) Teachers**

**Fowzia Huda,  
Community  
Connector**



**It's not the years  
it's the mileage.**

# The big 5-0

For a half-century, Augustana students have received donor-funded awards, bursaries, and scholarships they need to achieve their goals. Every year, one in five receives well-earned recognition and rewards that help them thrive well after graduation.

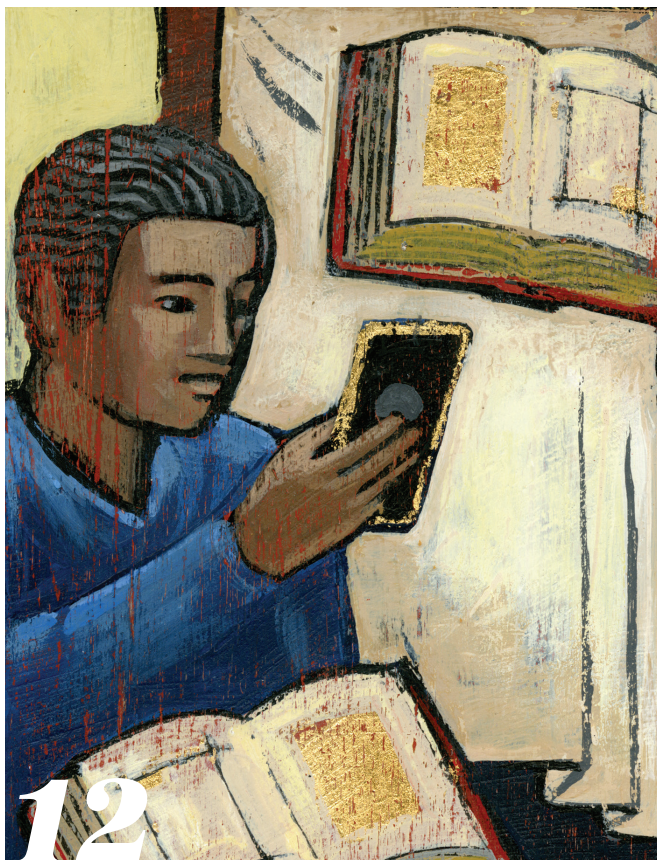
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# contents

WINTER 2022/23



18



12



10



34

## features

### 12 The Most Famous Abbey You've Never Heard Of

A scholar reveals why a group of 16th century nuns' way of practising religious devotion remains relevant

### 18 A Human Interest Story

The most valuable trait we could build into our artificial intelligence systems might be the ability to explain themselves

## departments

### 4 Message from the Dean of Augustana Campus

5 **The Lane:** Sing for better health; Ukrainian student's landmine detector; A class to make stats meaningful; Ronning Centre roundup — and more

### 10 Profile: It Helps to Be Outgoing

Fowzia Huda has learned a few things about community involvement in her decade of living in Canada

25 **The Common:** Vintage jerseys; Gib's tree; Class notes; Meet the faculty — and more

### 34 Closing Thought

The University of Alberta's **Augustana Campus** does things a little differently. As a small liberal arts and sciences campus, we focus on educating the whole person in the classroom, laboratory and field. Students find their passion at Augustana while earning a University of Alberta degree with Top 5 teaching, learning and research opportunities. *Circle* is dedicated to highlighting the achievements of the Augustana community, distributing to alumni and friends of the campus.

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# Message from the Dean of Augustana Campus

## Augustana's Sensational Year

**W**ELCOME TO this issue of *Circle*, your Augustana Campus alumni magazine. I am certain that everyone who reads this exciting and informative publication may share our pride in the many accomplishments of our Augustana community.

To live up to our role as "a living laboratory for teaching and learning innovation," we depend on the work of our outstanding faculty. Over the past 18 months, we have been able to attract colleagues because they know that they'll find mentors, various opportunities and funding to continue their exciting work. Among these are seven new professors who work in a wide range of fields in the humanities, social sciences and sciences — I hope you will enjoy getting to know these new additions to our campus.

In the last several years, academic appointments have seen the arrival of several young scholars who are doing wonderful work in their areas. This year's magazine features two young, promising, sensational scholars who credit some of their successes

to the interdisciplinary nature of our campus, the diversity of our students, and the ways in which the Augustana experience benefits their work. Take a look at Brandon Alakas's research on a group of Medieval nuns and how their religious practices of the Middle Ages resonate today. Then read about Mi-Young Kim's use of the latest advances in AI to provide medical and legal advice to people in a way that is easily understandable. You will find that Augustana faculty are conducting cutting-edge research that befits a Top 5 university in Canada.

*Circle* also includes stories about you, our alumni. I remain inspired by the leadership displayed by our graduates — like Fowzia Huda, who is making a difference by "working with people and not for them" — and how they are creating a better world by serving their communities.

Finally, we have been fortunate to be back in person on campus and in the classroom. We are once again able to enjoy all the wonderful and energizing events we have missed for more than two years. Plus, there are even more ways for us to connect with hybrid event delivery and events like our Alumni Day at the Game. Reflecting on the past year, I am so very proud of the many accomplishments of our Augustana community. We have a lot to celebrate and a lot to look forward to.

Thank you for your interest in Augustana Campus, for your continued engagement and for your dedication to our university. I hope this magazine offers an opportunity to reminisce and discover more reasons to be proud of your alma mater.

**Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos**  
Dean and Executive Officer  
Augustana Campus



# the lame



PHOTO BY JOHN ULAN

## For the Birds

Purpose-built housing on campus and in Camrose proves popular for purple martins

**T**HANKS IN PART to Glen Hvenegaard, purple martins, North America's largest swallow, return from South America each year to a specifically designed type of nestbox, of which there are now about 100 in Camrose, including the one on campus pictured above. Hvenegaard is an environmental science professor at Augustana, a founder of the Camrose Wildlife Stewardship Society and an organizer of the Camrose Purple Martin Festival. Purple martins are dependent on humans for housing and aspects of care, despite the fact that they're wild. With the CWSS, Hvenegaard has lectured about the birds and their care and increased the number of people who are willing to host the birds as "landlords." – MIFI PURVIS



Jane Yardley in the lab

DIABETES RESEARCH

## An Exercise in Hope

**D**IABETES RESEARCHER Jane Yardley is exploring how exercise affects postmenopausal females with Type 1 diabetes, with the goal of providing better guidelines to help them stay healthy. This research addresses significant gaps in knowledge. Everything from medications to diseases

operate differently in female bodies, but females make up only about a third of research participants.

There are existing guidelines for how to manage diabetes while exercising, but they are based on studies that don't include older women. "A lot of our guidelines look at the physiology of young fit males and then give blanket recommendations that don't take into account why people are exercising," says Yardley, associate professor of physical education at Augustana Campus

and member of the Alberta Diabetes Institute.

Yardley's hypothesis is that postmenopausal females may see their blood sugar drop faster than younger females, because estrogen allows the body to burn more fat as fuel and rely less on blood sugar. While it could be years until Yardley has the complete picture, she hopes guidelines can be refined enough to make it easier for older women to stay fit — and live longer, happier lives.

Yardley's research through the Alberta Diabetes Institute is funded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, and supported by the Alberta Women's Health Foundation through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute. (Diabetes Canada recently named Yardley as one of five U of A researchers to receive funds through the End Diabetes Awards research competition. Her research receives \$100,000 annually for three years.)

"People with Type 1 diabetes can live 10 years longer if they exercise regularly, with a lower risk of heart disease and depression and a higher quality of life," says Yardley. "It's so important to remove as many barriers as possible." ☺

— GILLIAN RUTHERFORD

MEANINGFUL DISCOURSE

## Ronning Centre Roundup

**L**AST SUMMER SAW THE APPOINTMENT of Joseph Wiebe as the interim director of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life. In October, Wiebe published an op-ed in the Edmonton Journal about why religion needs to be on Canada's census, and another in December about the intersection of sports and religion at the World Cup. He's also a blogger and podcaster.

"The Ronning Centre is positioned to become the place to study religion at the university as a whole," he says. "During COVID-19, we expanded the centre's reach through online events. We had some of the biggest attendances, virtual or in-person, the U of A has ever had. We want to learn from the lessons during the pandemic."

Upcoming Ronning Centre in-person events include a presentation by Muslim writer and convert, G. Willow Wilson. Wilson relaunched the *Ms Marvel* series on Disney+. On March 20, she's talking about the importance of religious representation in popular culture.

Finally, the Ronning Centre is recruiting for a postdoctoral fellow who'll build their professional network by organizing



a conference or workshop around a theme of their choice. The format is open to the recruit's discretion, and they'll work closely with the centre's program co-ordinator to identify participants. Together, the postdoc and staff at the centre will organize public lectures, workshops, student discussion forums or similar events. During their term, the postdoc will have the opportunity to teach at Augustana in an area related to their research interest. ☺ — SYDNEY TANCOWNY

# 9,500+

The number of attendees at our 2022 National Indigenous Peoples Day event featuring former U of A Writer in Residence Richard Van Camp

## CRITICAL THINKING

### The Data that Matters

**E**ARLY IN HER CAREER, Paula Marentette struggled to apply what she'd learned in her university statistics courses to real-life data her boss placed in front of her. Thirty years later, she has created a new course to ensure Augustana students can take classroom learning straight to the workplace.

Marentette's Introductory Applied Statistics course moves away from the traditional approach of memorizing formulas and manually calculating statistics from preset problems. Instead, students work in groups to pick a real-world problem, choose variables they're curious about and explore their questions using large datasets of existing research from the University of Alberta Libraries.

The strategy challenges students to become critical thinkers in a world "awash in data," says Marentette, a social sciences professor. "On social media, people are throwing data at you as evidence to support their version of the world. As university-educated people, we should have the capacity to think critically about that, and not take all statistics at face value." Knowing how to research and explain statistical data gives Augustana students a deeper understanding of their value to employers, Marentette says. "Critical, complex thinking and problem-solving is what a university graduate brings to the workplace." — BEV BETKOWSKI

Traditional skills let teachers become students at a hands-on workshop.



PHOTO BY JOHN ULAN

## INDIGENOUS LEARNING

### Forward Together

**A** NEW PROJECT aims to bring land-based learning experiences to Indigenous K-12 students through Augustana's Miquelon Lake Research Station and Hesje Observatory.

It's becoming vital to recognize the importance of Indigenous perspectives — and students — to a field grappling with increasingly complex challenges, says project lead **Glynnis Hood** '07 PhD, an environmental science professor and vice-dean at Augustana Campus.

"There's a clear connection between Indigenous cultures to the land and to the environment," she says. "Having Indigenous perspectives in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields is really important."

Funded by a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada PromoScience grant, the three-year project draws on the expertise of Indigenous partners First Nations Technical Services Advisory Group,

Future Ancestors Services and the Louis Bull Tribe, working with the U of A's Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, Augustana Indigenous Student Services and the Beaver Hills Biosphere Association.

"Indigenous students who take part in the programming can feel connected between their own experiences, cultures and the sciences, have fun and see that they have a place in STEM fields," Hood says.

The initiative also gives teachers, scientists and other professionals the chance to become students themselves, says **Samantha Matters**, '14 BSc, '14 Cert(CSL), of Future Ancestors Services. The project holds potential to further Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, specifically around developing culturally appropriate education programs for Indigenous youth and educating teachers, Matters says.

"We want to create a long-standing linkage," Hood adds, "that makes a meaningful experience for Indigenous students and communities, and moves us all forward together in partnership." — BEV BETKOWSKI



The SingAble community choir demonstrates that all singers are good singers.

EXCELLENCE

## 2022 Alumni Award Winners

### DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Judge **Bill Andreassen**, '75 CLC, '76 BA, '79 LLB Andreassen captained the 1974–75 Vikings hockey team to a league first and a Scandinavian tour. The success sparked his confidence, on and off the ice. He graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1979, receiving the Horace Harvey Gold Medal for highest GPA. He has since coached hockey, built a successful law practice and, in 2009, was appointed to the Provincial Court of Alberta. His award recognizes his outstanding achievements as a lawyer, judge and community member.

### LOIS ASPENES AWARD

**Gordon Naylor**, '11 BSc, '13 BEd Naylor's recognized for contributions to Augustana life. His campus experiences sparked his desire to support other Indigenous students. He completed an education degree at the U of A, "to pursue employment on reserve so I could be a good role model." He's now assistant principal at Maskwacis Cree High School. Naylor recently joined Augustana's Indigenous Engagement Advisory Committee, supporting campus-community relationships.

### CITATION AWARD

**Tammy Richard** has spent over 20 years "helping people find their way," as an addiction counsellor, advocate and an addiction prevention and mental health promotion facilitator with Alberta Health Services. Not an alumna, since 1993 she's offered her time and talents to the Augustana community, providing education and support around mental health and substance abuse. ☺

TRY IT

## A VOICE FOR HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

How to lose the fear and discover the benefits of singing

**E**VERY WEEK, AUGUSTANA'S *SingAble* choir brings together community members of all abilities and ages, from six months to 86 years old, including adults with developmental disabilities and their caregivers. **Ardelle Ries**, '83 BMus, '98 MMus, '04 DMus, is passionate about the health benefits of communal singing. As founding director of *SingAble* and a professor of music at Augustana Campus, she also knows why it's not always easy to pick up the karaoke mic. In childhood, many people have already been in situations where "good" singers are separated from the "bad." Ries has tips on how to lose the fear and discover the benefits of singing. – KATE BLACK, '16 BA

### DITCH THE JUDGMENT

The first step to bringing more singing into your life might not be enrolling in voice lessons to perfect your pitch. You can start by challenging the lie that you're not talented enough to sing in the first place. "Leap and release judgment," Ries says. "The voice you have is so intimately connected to the person that you are."

### RING OUT

The deep breathing in singing improves cardiovascular and respiratory health. Research shows singers have higher levels of germ-fighting immunoglobulin, Ries says. One study found less cortisol in people's saliva after they sang a song. "We're producing the sound within our body," she says. "That makes singing one step more beneficial than playing an instrument."

### JOIN A CHOIR

Find a community or "inclusion choir" like *SingAble* that brings people together to experience the joy of singing without the pressure of auditions. Singing with others, Ries says, makes us better listeners, which deepens our emotional intelligence. We become much better attuned to other people's feelings, ideas and needs. ☺





FARM FAMILY

## Growing Resilience

**O**VER THE NEXT TWO YEARS, researcher Rebecca Purc-Stephenson is leading a series of studies to identify the biggest stressors affecting Alberta's farmers and their families — and what can be done to help. Poor mental health in the agricultural community “has been an issue for a long time,” says Purc-Stephenson, a psychology professor and research associate with the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities at

Augustana Campus.

With livelihoods that can be threatened by weather, plant or livestock disease, rising operational costs and other factors, farmers face high rates of depression and stress, leaving them vulnerable to suicide, she says. The research will explore needs, gaps and challenges in mental health service delivery identified by farmers and mental health workers. Purc-Stephenson aims to shift the culture, so farmers recognize mental health is just as important as their work.

The research is in collaboration with the Agriculture Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) and supported by \$524,500 in funding awarded to the group by Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

A postdoctoral fellow will help Purc-Stephenson with the research, along with Augustana students. “Our campus is surrounded by rural communities and many of our students have lived on farms, so their involvement is important,” says Purc-Stephenson. 🍷

— BEV BETKOWSKI

SOCIOLOGY

## Research Improves Justice System

**S**ociologist Sandra Bucerius is leading a team to examine systemic problems across Canadian criminal justice institutions to make evidence-based recommendations for reform. The research addresses “long-simmering concerns about police violence, pains of imprisonment, gendered and racial victimization and the denial of fundamental civil liberties,” says Bucerius.

The project received \$2.5 million in federal funding through a Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada. The team includes United Way and academic experts on Canadian court and prison systems, such as U of A scholars Jana Grekul, Temitope Oriola, Kevin Haggerty and Augustana professor Justin Tetrault. They examine how elements of the justice system — police, courts, correctional facilities — further marginalize Indigenous peoples, impoverished Canadians, Black Canadians and the queer and trans community to create a “cumulative disadvantage in the Canadian justice system,” Bucerius says. 🍷 — GEOFF MCMASTER

MINE FINDER

## “Today Could Be the Last Day”

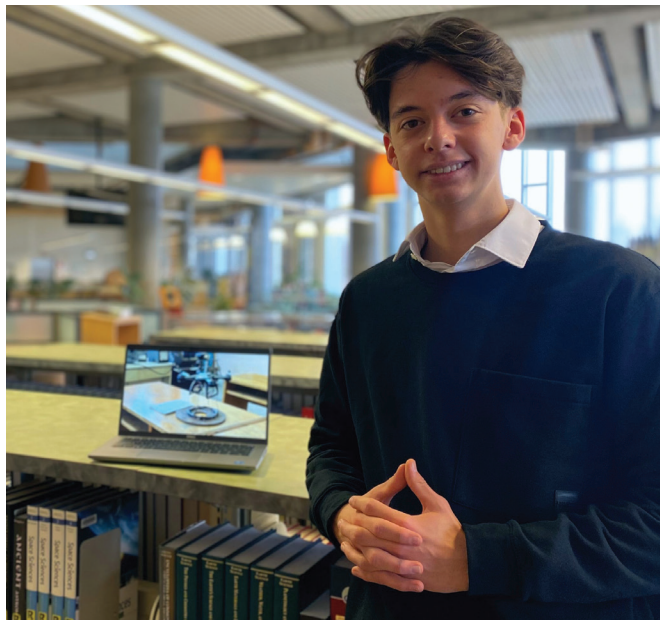
Igor Klymenko came from Ukraine thanks to funding available for Ukrainian students

**L**AST YEAR, IGOR KLYMENKO was huddled alongside his family in a basement in Ukraine, hearing explosions overhead as Russia dropped bombs. The teen vowed to do something, which meant finishing a drone project he'd started in high school. “I realized I shouldn't stop working on my device, because today could be the last day,” the 17-year-old recalls.

The eventual result of Klymenko's work, a prototype to detect landmines, earned him the \$100,000 *Chegg.org* Global Student Prize for his innovation, and landed him at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus. He was drawn to the U of A for its Ukrainian community and the opportunity to work at the university's research facilities.

He's determined to get the education he needs to finish the drone, which uses metal detectors to find landmines and transmit the co-ordinates to the operator. This work could save thousands of lives in Ukraine and more than 60 other nations struggling to mitigate landmines, he says. “I can save lives by creating this device.”

Once his invention is certified by Ukrainian authorities,



Klymenko will share it with his country for mass production. In the meantime, he says: “I'm far away from my home and my family, but I've found a lot of new people who have become my small Canadian family.” 🍷 — BEV BETKOWSKI

# It Helps To Be Outgoing

In nearly a decade of learning, volunteering and working in Canada, Fowzia Huda has learned a few things about community involvement

By Pegah Salari, '08 MBA | Photo by John Ulan

**F**OWZIA HUDA, '17 BSC, takes a lot of her inspiration from her older brother, a cardiologist in Indiana, who left their childhood home in Bangladesh to study when he was only 16. "I wanted to be like him," she says. But he wasn't the first or last of their family members to take such a step. Huda has 44 cousins and 22 of them are doctors. She has relatives on staff in hospitals in parts of Europe, North America and Asia. Like a lot of them, she's a combination of adventurous, outgoing, mature and caring. It's not a huge surprise that she wanted to study abroad and undertake front-line care.

Her journey to Augustana nine years ago was serendipitous. She liked the research focus of the U of A, but she had missed the September intake date for the program she was interested in — bachelor of science majoring in psychology — and there wasn't an option to start mid-year on North Campus. That's when she heard about Augustana. Part of a Top 5 Canadian research institution, the Camrose campus had a January intake for her program, too. She wound up settling into Augustana and getting involved in campus life, working as student residence co-ordinator, and in community life, volunteering at the Camrose Women's Shelter.

Huda leaned into her extroverted nature to establish a community for herself at Augustana. Living in the dorm, she became a resident assistant and later joined the International Student Association as a council member. In between all her volunteer work and tutoring jobs, she made Augustana Campus her home.

After university, Huda worked in newcomer support at HIV Edmonton,

helping clients in tough situations that included fleeing from persecution in their home countries. Being an educator as well as a case manager, Huda helped design programs around education and prevention. Barhet Woldemariam, director of partnerships and national initiative at HIV Edmonton, describes her as a "system level thinker" in her approach to programming, meaning she

**Mental health care isn't a seamless part of universal health care for anyone. And there are many layers of difficulty for the queer and trans community when it comes to dealing with mental health care. High costs can be a barrier for marginalized folks, many of whom have lost the support of their families.**

understands how the parts relate the whole and can't be considered separately. "Fowzia's authenticity inspired others," Woldemariam says.

In 2020, she started work at the Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC), a research and intervention-based organization that promotes the health of people of diverse sexualities and genders. She now manages national community-oriented programs for the CBRC. Huda moved around a lot in her life, and has now lived in Edmonton longer than any other place. She told us about a few of the things she has learned about community involvement along the way.

**It's a privilege to hear people share their experiences.**

"It's hard for people to ask for help," Huda says. "But it's important to really hear people in order to help them, to make sure services are meaningful." Huda joined HIV Edmonton in 2019, a year before COVID-19 further isolated that organization's clients. Through the first stages of the pandemic, the organization supported people living with HIV through care packages and programs such as cooking circles to help members of the community maintain their human connections. HIV Edmonton's Woldemariam says it's Huda's deep understanding of herself and how much she can do that demonstrated how to cope with the client-facing, front-line work, which can be draining. Many of the people she met through HIV Edmonton are still her friends. It's gratifying, she says, to see that people want to stay connected.

**To be successful in community work, you have to believe in collective growth.**

There's a saying Huda likes: Where one grows, all grow. "I know it sounds corny," she says, "but there's truth to it." Working for social agencies means working with people and not for them, she says, which is very different from conventional jobs. The reward comes from helping individuals, which creates growth in the whole community, she says. "It's very humbling when someone remembers you outside of the scope of work you did with them."

**Trust between people comes from the feeling of being heard.**

"It takes courage for people to talk about their experiences, especially

if horrendous things have happened to them in the past,” she says. When you put someone’s experiences first, she says, you can make them feel safe. “Trust happens when someone can be vulnerable with you and knows that you will respect their experience.” And it requires a kind of humility that Huda calls grounding.

**Stigma adds to the burden of health inequality for the queer and trans community, especially when it comes to mental health.**

Mental health care isn’t a seamless part of universal health care for anyone. And there are many layers of difficulty for the queer and trans community when it comes to dealing with mental health care. High costs can be a barrier for underserved folks, many of whom have lost the support of their families and lost their homes. Huda says that trying to access mental health treatments can fall to the bottom of the list of what seems possible for some people.

**When you take a community approach to education, you must teach without being presumptuous.**

Huda learned a lot when working with people from communities that are traditionally conservative and shy about certain topics. “You have to build relationships before you can bridge the taboo and share knowledge,” she says. “Education is a light-bulb moment for people when it comes to stigmas. When you share with people on their own terms, you see that people are more receptive than you thought.”

**Empathy requires awareness.**

Sometimes it sounds like Huda is older than she really is. “The world is hard. You can’t force people to care,” she says. “People get what we call compassion fatigue. It’s important to recognize it in yourself, too. You have to ask, ‘am I running out of juice?’” That kind of self-reflection will come in handy in her next steps. She considers returning to school, sometimes she thinks about studying leadership management or public health or, true to her roots, she hasn’t ruled out medicine. 🍷



The Most Famous Abbey  
You've Never Heard Of





In the 16th century, a group of nuns was remaking the way ordinary people practised their own religious devotion. An Augustana scholar reveals some surprising reasons why it's important today



**BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN** has an unusual origin story for someone elevated to sainthood. One day in the 14th century, as a married mother of eight, she received divine instructions from God: she was to found a new religious order, and to up her service game.

And so Birgitta duly devoted herself to a life of kindness and compassion, which caught the attention of the highest church functionaries in Rome and aristocrats from across Europe. King Henry V opened his wallet. And soon there arose, on the northern bank of the River Thames in the English countryside in the early 15th century, an abbey.

Not just any abbey. "The most important medieval monastery you've never heard of," as Brandon Alakas puts it. He's a scholar at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus.

Syon Abbey. Home of the Birgittines (it's a soft "g"), sometimes called the Bridgettines, a maverick order that fashioned a unique devotional lifestyle based on extraordinarily balanced gender roles for the time, organized in an utterly new way. It was a happening place, on the cultural cutting edge, a bastion of independent thinking with a wild whiff of humanism.

Rare for that region and time, the Birgittines shared a "double monastery" (nuns and monks shared the premises, though in separate cloisters). In this fashion, Syon Abbey turned twin faces to the world.

"Doctrinally it was extremely orthodox," Alakas says, "but a lot of what was going on looks like what evangelical reformers — the followers of Martin Luther — were doing around the same time. That paradox is so interesting. And this community of nuns is so interesting. It just blows up every preconception we have about the period."

Somewhere between the time the abbey was demolished by henchmen of the Tudors (and the nuns and monks chased into exile) in the 1530s, and the time it was reconstructed, brick-by-brick 300 years later in what is now central London, St. Birgitta and her followers all but disappeared from the history books.

The young Canadian scholar took it upon himself to remedy that.

---

By Bruce Grierson, '86 BA(Spec) | Illustrated by Phil, i2i Art Inc.



**ALAKAS IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR** of English in the Department of Fine Arts and Humanities. In his office, and in his classrooms, incoming students might be forgiven for thinking they are holy wayfarers being welcomed at the doors of Syon Abbey itself, with all the radical hospitality the Birgittines were known for.

Alakas is boyish and incandescently bright. He seems way too young to have such a breadth of learning under his belt. But the more you learn about him, the more it seems perfectly logical that he would have landed in this space, a world expert in devotional literature written during the first half of the 16th century.

Growing up in Welland, Ont., in the 1990s, Alakas found the CanLit menu in the public school system, characterized largely by Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, didn't speak deeply to him and his family's immigrant roots. He was into languages, and multicultural perspectives — and these pockets of late-medieval life offered, surprisingly enough, just the kind of polyglot feast to satisfy his appetite. In medieval times, he discovered, cultures met and milled. Multilingual conversation soared over borders.

"One of the interesting things about this research, and why I love it so much, is it brings together all these different language communities," Alakas says. "The nuns themselves were highly educated, and they recognized that languages mattered, and that different languages were different windows into different cultures."

To be able to read and write in multiple languages — including the prestige language of Latin — would have been like having a janitor's belt full of keys: entrée into the precincts of spiritual advancement and influence. The Birgittines not only let themselves in, but they propped the door open behind them.

As he delved ever deeply into the research, first for his master's degree and then his doctoral dissertation (at the U of T and Queen's, respectively) — mirroring the devotion and focussed intensity of the nuns themselves — Alakas realized that pretty much everything most of us were taught in school about this historical period was wrong. Or if not wrong, at least flattened into crude stereotypes. People tend to retrofit history so it fits inside our heads. We pump up the divisions into dichotomy (e.g., Catholic versus Protestant) and sand down nuance, skipping over what might lie between.

"The story we were told was that the Middle Ages were a period of, you know, ignorance and superstition and barbarism, before the Renaissance descends with its light and learning and printing and the rest of the good stuff. But that's really not true at all. What the existence of the Birgittines tells us is that people in the 1520s and 1530s had private spiritual lives that were so much more complex and sophisticated than people today assume.

"Life is more complex than we often think it is, right?"

**THE SISTERS AND BROTHERS** of Syon lived pious and ascetic lives, praying and working and giving every extra penny they earned to the poor. But they did have one delicious indulgence: books. "The Birgittine community was the only one that allowed women in particular to have as many books as they wanted,"

“The story we were told was that the Middle Ages were a period of ignorance, superstition and barbarism. Life is more complex than we often think, right?”  
Brandon Alakas, Associate Professor,  
Fine Arts and humanities

Alakas says. At a time when there were strict prohibitions against private property, this was pretty subversive.

And it's this part of the story that really lights Alakas up — as it would any bibliophile.

Consider that there weren't actually a lot of books qua books floating around at the time. “Syon Abbey kind of straddles this interesting moment in history, the transition from the manuscript to the printed book,” Alakas says. Because many of the Birgittines came from aristocratic families, they had the resources and connections to amass rare and important works. And so the Syon Abbey library was, by all accounts, one of the finest, and most important, in all of England. Sir Thomas More, English statesman and politician who eventually ran afoul of Henry VIII, used to visit to do work. Erasmus, “the greatest scholar of the Northern Renaissance,” according to Britannica, would drop by to avail himself of the collection.

With the monks doing the actual writing, and the nuns largely steering content by salting the curriculum with the priorities they felt were most urgent to women, the books became a cornerstone of religious observation. They also became a thriving business. In its first century, the Abbey was a kind of boutique publisher, pumping out high-quality devotional guides, many of which became bestsellers and were reprinted multiple times in the 1520s and 1530s. In a sense the Birgittines were like that small band of Harvard undergraduates who produced those *Let's Go* travel guides that were snapped up like hotcakes by adventurous hipster travellers in the 1970s. The difference is, instead of maps to explore the world “out there,” the Birgittines created guides to explore the inner world.

And this is maybe the most interesting thing about these nuns: the kind of reading they were doing and promoting. You might think of Syon Abbey as a kind of cradle of the “deep read.” Sitting quietly under a tree reading scripture was the new touchstone of a Christian life. One of the most famous texts of the Birgittines' describes reading scripture to oneself as “talking to God,” unmediated.

This brand of intense, immersive, devotional reading is as

different from the way most people received the Word of God at the time as a freedive is from a 10-second shower. Until then, devotional practices were aural and mediated by a priest, to whom devotees listened passively. In contrast, the Birgittines espoused *lectio divina*, a multi-stage process of burrowing increasingly deeply into the warp and weft of a text. And though *lectio divina* had been practised since antiquity, it was typically practised only by men.

“The Birgittine nuns' great contribution was that they made these elite spiritual practices accessible to anyone who could read,” Alakas says. Their “ideal reader,” you might say, would have been Birgitta herself. The practice of *lectio divina*, by the way, is sometimes applied to reading poetry or popular fiction.

Alakas's nuns may have been cloistered but with their practices of deep religious reading, their minds were liberated. It's no stretch to say a kind of nascent feminism was happening here, 300 years before we think of feminism as actually being a thing. Yet another myth busted! Turns out feminism was not a light that suddenly came on at the end of the 19th century. Rather, “the authority women possessed in society ebbed and flowed throughout the Middle Ages,” Alakas says. And here, at Syon Abbey, at this point in the 16th century, the wave was surging onto the shore, edging closer to the high-water mark left by the men.

**SO WHY SHOULD WE CARE** about any of this in 2023?

A short answer is that the Middle Ages — specifically medieval devotional culture — had plenty of lessons for how to live today.

Even in an increasingly secular time, Christianity still matters — not least because it remains the source of many of our contemporary moral codes (for example, our ideas around human rights). The template for much of western society as we know it now originated here, in the contemplative practices that sprang up during this period. So, in order to understand why we moderns do a lot of what we do — even a lot of who we are — we need to hop in the Wayback Machine and return to the Middle Ages.

“Even if we don't agree with their beliefs, the convictions

To tear Gen Z away from their phones  
and get them interested in an era of long-  
toed shoes and mandatory archery practice  
seems a kind of alchemy in itself.

of these people are pretty impressive,” Alakas says. “And the strategies they figured out to assert themselves within authority are definitely worth studying.” Done well, this work shrinks history. “The period might seem long ago and far away,” says Laura Saetveit Miles, a professor of British Literature at the University of Bergen and an editor at the *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, “but it gives us a mirror into a coherent literary tradition that is still ongoing today.”

Not long ago Alakas edited and generally spruced up for modern readers a work by a 16th-century Birgittine priest named Richard Whitford, called *Dyuers Holy Instrucyons and Teachynges Very Necessary for the Helth of Mannes Soule*. The title alone would land it a comfortable shelf spot at any local New Age bookstore.

Self-help books flourish at moments in history when people desperately need guidance. Whitford’s book was written in 1541, a time of significant cultural upheaval. Plagues were barelling across Europe. The Reformation was coming whether folks wanted it or not. (Mostly they didn’t.) Henry VIII was bestriding England with the Catholics in his crosshairs. He had already divorced his first wife and the Catholic Church. The subsequent Acts of Suppression of 1536 and 1539 were closing monasteries at the rate of 50 a month, and redistributing their significant wealth, mostly to the Crown. The Birgittine sisters, as Alakas puts it, were now “nuns on the run.”

“Think about what it must have been like,” Alakas says. “After the Reformation, everything you know, all those comfortable medieval Catholic rituals, the rhythm of your days, the markers that delineate the seasons of human lives, all those things are about to be upended. The fabric of society is being rewoven.” So central was the role of monasteries in communities that to flush them out was akin to gutting the whole “social services” infrastructure of England.

“How do you make sense of the world where everything you know has gone pear-shaped?”

With the medieval English people facing a situation hitherto unimaginable, you can see how Whitford’s pastoral guidance might have been a welcome tonic. It’s easier to appreciate this today than it would have been five years ago.

“COVID-19 gave us a small hint of what that kind of disruption must have been like,” Alakas says. “I think there are a lot of parallels. People felt at sea. Just as I think many people feel at sea today.”

For a lot of us, sitting under a tree with a book is starting to sound pretty good again.

Indeed, philosophies millenniums old are having a cultural moment. Think of the brisk rebound of Stoicism, and Eastern-inspired meditation practices. These are ancient rituals, intended to help us map our inner weather, at a time when the outer weather — the divisive political and cultural chaos that has fogged in the world — can seem overwhelming. The urge to pull back, pull inward, remove yourself from the hurly-burly in pursuit of a very personal spiritual experience: that is the same impulse that drew people to Syon Abbey in the first place. Spiritual looky-loos were drawn there to see its books or wander its orchards. And possibly to seek the Pardon of Syon, lessening the time their spirits would spend in purgatory after death. They were pilgrims. Just as Birgitta of Sweden herself had been a pilgrim — trudging hundreds of kilometres along one of the converging paths of the Camino de Santiago, with her staff and her bag and her tied-in-the-back pilgrim’s cap, before she had the first of the many visions that launched this whole affair.

In that spirit, Alakas will sometimes frame his classes as a kind of pilgrimage. When students successfully complete his Chaucer class, he presents each of them with a Latin certificate — embossed with the heraldic-looking U of A crest — indicating that they have completed their pilgrimage through *The Canterbury Tales*.

You may be starting to get an idea why Alakas distinguished himself as a star teacher so quickly.

As a newly minted scholar, he won the Augustana Faculty Early Achievement of Excellence in Teaching Award in 2016, and then followed that up the next year with the Provost’s Award for Early Achievement of Excellence in Teaching.

To tear Gen Z away from their phones and get them interested in an era of long-toed shoes and mandatory archery practice would seem, on the face of it, a kind of alchemy



in itself. Who dares enter *ye secret chambre of the mynde*, therein to navigate that intimidating middle-English script? It's actually not just the classics students who file in. "We're a heavily interdisciplinary campus," Alakas says. "So, I have management students, environmental science students, social science students, along with humanities students. Some of my best students are bio majors."

In evaluations, he receives notices like: "This course was easily one of the most positive learning experiences I've ever had." Not just "one of the best English courses — one of the best applications of Miracle-Gro to the brain, full stop." When he was awarded a major grant to edit the book about the Birgittine priest, Richard Whitford, one of the scholars on the selection committee wrote of Alakas that "he is likely the best-suited expert in the world to undertake this project. This is not an overstatement."

"Brandon represents the best in medieval studies: smart, inquisitive, kind, generous, eager, and sure to keep on producing important research that will shape the field for decades to come," says Saetveit Miles, the University of Bergen scholar.

So Alakas could be forgiven for settling in up front and dispensing his knowledge, sage-on-the-stage style. But that is not his teaching style at all. Quite the opposite.

His teaching philosophy is downright Benedictine. (Which is to say it's partially modelled on St. Benedict of Nursia, who literally wrote the book on how to live a good monastic life.) Alakas has borrowed selectively from that tradition, so don't expect a dress code of cowl and tunic, but do expect a vibe of convivial co-creation. "Having in truth progressed in conversation ... our hearts overflow with inexpressible delight," as Benedict of Nursia put it. It's during these in-class shootarounds that much of the best learning happens.

"One of the things we're losing today is the ability to have a respectful civil dialogue with one another," Alakas says. "I mean, yes, we have to be able to articulate our views. But we also have to be able to respect difference — difference of opinion, difference of tradition, and so on. And I think that when we converse with people, and spend that time with them, we become much more willing to see nuance and shades of meaning, we become much more accepting. Social media, sadly, has put each of us in a box. But when we actually talk — that is a real remedy for a lot of the problems that we face in the 21st century."

**IN A SENSE ALAKAS** does for his students what the nuns of Syon Abbey did for the surrounding villagers: he expands the breadth of their ambitions and stokes their commitment to pursue what they may find in these new waters.

Alakas is so adept at sizzling up this period in history that it seems inevitable he will eventually flesh out a whole medieval novel or three, perhaps elevating some Birgittine abbess the way author Hilary Mantel did in her *Wolf Hall* Trilogy, a fictionalized account of Thomas Cromwell, adviser to Henry VIII, who like Thomas More lost his head to Henry's axeman.

"I would love one day to write fiction about life in the abbey," he says. "People would not believe what went on in there. It's even too good to have been made up." ●



The ability  
to explain  
themselves  
may be the most  
valuable trait  
we could build  
into our artificial  
intelligence  
systems



*Mi-Young Kim, Assistant Professor of  
Computing Science, Augustana Campus*

A woman with dark hair is looking through a glass partition in a modern office setting. The background is softly blurred, showing office lights and a warm, golden glow. The text 'a human interest story' is overlaid in a large, white, outlined font.

# a human interest story

By Oumar Salifou | Photos by John Ulan



**A**

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** breakthroughs are, at their essence, stories about people.

Here's one. In June 2022, Blake Lemoine was at work with Google's LaMDA system, an AI conversation program that can keep up with human dialogue quirks and tangents. After the bot made a Star Wars joke, Lemoine was convinced LaMDA was sentient. Other human AI scientists denounced his claim and global headlines flipped from fascination with the notion of a conscious machine to Lemoine losing his job for breaching company data.

Here's another. In February 2022, the House of Commons' Committee on Citizenship and Immigration heard from University of Calgary law and AI professor Gideon Christian on his innovative research into the high refusal rate for foreign students from Africa applying for a Canadian study visa. He wanted to know why the Nigeria Student Express program was turning down so many students.

These are the kind of scenarios that researchers like Mi-Young Kim are chipping away at.

Kim researches the junctures of human and artificial

intelligence, and the hidden ways each influences the other.

She has been involved in the field of AI since she was an undergrad in South Korea in the early 1990s. "Back then, in computing science, there was a wireless network boom," she says. Everyone seemed to want to work on networks. "But I was more interested in the human-computer interface, and that meant AI and human language processing." Kim is an assistant professor of computing science and a science researcher at Augustana Campus who understands the importance of focusing on humans while developing AI.

The push to improve human systems with AI and machine learning is at the crux of Kim's labour as a scientist. She aims to make usable tools for front-line professionals and everyday people.

**KIM WAS RECRUITED** from South Korea's Pohang University of Science and Technology by Randy Goebel at the U of A to work as a research scientist at North Campus. With a string of collaborative projects under the Explainable Artificial Intelligence Lab (xAI Lab), at the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute (Amii) her work is defining what it means to build



*Mi-Young Kim teaching computing science to a class of undergrads at Augustana Campus.*

computer programs that can explain their behaviours to humans, and sometimes to other systems, while creating tools that are scalable.

Goebel describes the work Kim's team undertakes as building programs that go beyond popular computer performance programs. Computing scientists at the University of Alberta have a storied history of dominance in the games of chess, poker, checkers and Go. And as a computing professor for 40 years, when it comes to AI Goebel has seen it all.

"Studying AI was considered to be a little unusual, eccentric, sometimes even wacky," says Goebel. "I've seen attitudes shift from 'it's a wacky discipline, why are you studying it?' to 'you should appreciate that you have the licence to study something that's so eccentric,' to 'how could you have so carefully planned your career to be an expert at a time when AI is so important?'"

AI runs deep in Edmonton, which, until recently, was home to DeepMind's first international office. DeepMind's scientists built AlphaGo, a performance board game program that perfected the game of Go. It's the world's oldest continuously played board game, considered by some to be more difficult than chess to code into computers because of the way pieces

**Kim understands the importance of focusing on humans while developing AI.**

flow in a fluid nature during gameplay. AlphaGo has proven that AI technology can be harvested in powerful ways to beat any human player, but the program's code can't explain why it made this move or that one.

"It's not a teacher, it's a performer," Goebel explains. "So the foundation of the Explainable Artificial Intelligence Lab is a question. How do you capture the extra knowledge necessary in a performance computer program to allow it to entertain questions about why it makes one move rather than another? How did it think about that position?"

AI can be romantic in its unrealized promise, touted as the step past human intelligence. AI could, in theory, complete itself with a program that achieves "real" intelligence or sentience. Culturally, we have anticipated and dreaded the next leap in AI and machine learning and where it will lead humanity. Despite this, Goebel has little patience for speculation in pop culture about what AI can promise.

"Many people are talking about deep learning, but the next step will be collaboration with experts to surpass the limits of technology and learned data," says Kim. "Beyond machine learning, we need humans with real expert knowledge to achieve more than the deep learning techniques can."

Her work is funded by NSERC, Alberta Innovates and (with researcher Irene Cheng) Mitacs, and she's seeking more funding to involve more students in her research. Currently, three graduate students are working on health projects, co-supervised with professors on North Campus.

Kim and her colleagues are working on a health project in collaboration with Alberta Health Services, and a legal project in collaboration with a new startup, Jurisage, which is a joint venture launched by Compass Law and AltaML. Both projects are developing AI that aids humans in decision-making by saving time and research effort, making hard-to-reach expertise more accessible to ordinary people. At the same

**And in case you are wondering if the computers are coming for our jobs, the answer is yes. Kim says that some jobs will be replaced by computers, but new jobs will also be created because of computing technology.**

"When will we have conscious computers? Since you can't define what consciousness means, I can't answer the question for you," he says.

Researchers like Goebel and Kim prefer to focus on the utility of AI, and they aim to build it in such a way that it can reveal its own inner decision-making processes. "If we built systems with explainability in mind we would at least be able to debug them."

"So that's one of the premises of our explainable AI lab," Goebel says. "Don't build AI systems without building them in a framework in which they represent their own information, their own knowledge, and so they can interact with humans or regulatory agencies — or whoever you like — to explain their behaviour."

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS** the application of computing power to solve problems that seem to need cognitive function, like database searches, machine learning and the creation of expert systems. Artificial neural networks can be programmed, databases deepened, robots activated — and still algorithms can only go so far.

time, AI would reveal the places where implicit bias exists in the data. Kim's research areas can inform and influence how programs are built.

The legal AI she and the rest of the team are working on started when Goebel connected her to a man in Japan who was trying to pass the Japanese bar admission test. For this to happen, the machine had to understand bar exam questions, retrieve relevant statutes and compare the meaning between the question and the statute content to find an answer. "It's one of our very complicated projects," she says. The team developed an AI that could pass the yes/no portion of the test, based on 13 years worth of test data. Now they're working on making the AI capable of explaining how it arrived at its answers. In the yearly Competition on Legal Information Extraction and Entailment, the team won six consecutive first-place victories in the legal bar exam test question and answer (yes/no portion) from 2014 to 2019.

Apart from Kim and Goebel, other members of the team at work on this project include Juliano Rabelo from North Campus (CIO at Jurisage) and Ken Satoh (National Institute of Informatics), Yoshinobu Kano (Shizuoka University) and

Masaharu Yoshioka (Hokkaido University) in Japan. The team is connected to that startup, Jurisage, and with Compass Law and AltaML, the group is leaning into its research to develop an AI tool called MyJr, which is like an interactive legal assistant that can research case law and precedent.

“The goal is to help novice users as well as legal professionals,” Kim explains. Imagine, for example, a tenant were to sue a landlord over a breach of contract. The process might take too long and be of no financial reward once the tenant had paid a lawyer’s hourly rate. But imagine if the tenant had access to a natural language tool that let them quickly search precedent to find the likelihood of a favourable ruling? And imagine that the busy lawyer had access to a similar tool that sped up the research process, allowing them to complete the research and case work in less time, letting the AI do work that once took long hours and extra staff. Suddenly the legal system is working harder for the little guy.

And there are more serious bottlenecks in the legal system than landlord-and-tenant squabbles. Bail hearings, trials and appeals in criminal cases are essential, but there is a cost to a system so backlogged by bureaucracy and practices built in bygone times that even basic processes have bitter ends for most involved.

The price of justice in Canada takes shape in numbers. For example, more than half of prisoners sitting in cells are without a guilty or innocent verdict — they’re just waiting for a trial in a system with delays so bad the Supreme Court has set precedents to create hard deadlines for trial dates.

To help lawyers or clients navigate thousands of pages of legal information, the AI needs to learn how to understand and apply legal precedent to give relevant predictions and advice. The machine references case law precedent with natural language processing tools, a subfield in AI that relates to how computers process large amounts of specialized human text. As the machine learns how to pull from precedent data to answer questions, its algorithm becomes stronger and it walks closer to the goal of a fully questionable platform that can help judges, lawyers and clients with advice.

For Kim, that’s the key to AI: the human in the process. When she and the team started work on the legal AI project, the aim was to help general users who cannot access lawyers because of financial barriers. A tool that takes away some of the expensive drudge work frees up legal experts to focus on work only they can do. “We wanted to create a free tool so that any person who needs legal advice can type in their concern about law, then our machines can provide relevant questions and they can also suggest some possible decisions.”

**LIKE MANY HEALTH SYSTEMS**, Alberta’s is beyond capacity and the pressure on health-care professionals has been at a maximum since before the pandemic. Painful wait times, lack of bed space, and lack of staff due to burnout are just some of the problems hospitals contend with.

Any AI relies on data — lots of data — to learn. Lucky for Kim, Alberta Health Services archives the calls people make to 811. Kim and the team recognized that those logs represented a gold mine of data. So AHS anonymized the logs and provided them to her team so they could train the AI. The hope is that

the “machine can say you need to call 911, see a doctor right now, or that you can stay at home,” says Kim.

Any AI relies on data — lots of data — to learn, and Alberta Health Services archives calls to 811. Kim and the team recognized that the logs represented a gold mine of data. And AHS anonymized the logs and provided them to her team so she could train her AI. The hope is that the “machine can say you need to call 911, see a doctor right now, or that you can stay at home,” says Kim.

The program is a complex combination of different abilities to read all anonymous patient dialogue, filter irrelevant conversational moments and jargon and then connect complaints to relevant health advice. The program could produce information that allows health services to provide feedback and training to its human staff that allows it to get more accurate health advice. The team’s program can also help professionals analyze their own patient responses to provide fair assessments for similar concerns and also notice when patients complain about certain new symptoms so that health protocols can change.

“Our team is working on the explainable AI,” she says. “We want to get the explanation rationale about the prediction, in order to help end users understand a machine’s prediction, and to help software developers debug the machine.”

Health and justice system advancements might hinge on how well they can integrate AI to create tools with built-in explainability and intelligence. For Goebel, the focus on these two areas is key and the potential to make a difference is real.

**“LAW AND HEALTH ARE** two areas that can actually make a difference on the planet, if you can build systems that help produce better decisions faster,” Goebel says. And Kim and her team work to create the systems in which onerous, everyday research can produce complex decisions by AI that can explain how it got there, revealing correctable biases in the process.

And in case you are wondering if the computers are coming for our jobs, the answer is yes, some jobs will be replaced by computers, but new jobs will also be created because of computing technology. Health and law are critical fields that are related to human lives, rights and well-being, so humans should intervene in the decision process. AI predictions and explanations will help professionals’ decisions and further action.

“Humans will still be in charge,” Kim says. “Ultimately, this research will improve human-AI interaction and help to build trust between users and AI.”

And for Kim, the very human element of interdisciplinary collaboration is the magic in the machine and it’s part of what attracted her to Augustana Campus. She says it helps people achieve better results from AI. “At Augustana, my colleagues are all from different educational backgrounds. When we discuss issues I can see very different views, they have different perspectives,” she says. “Sometimes, if I’m stuck in my research, I read a book about humanities,” Kim says.

“A book about humanities may have nothing to do with science, but I think all of these science studies and research are eventually about humans. By using computing science I want to help humans.”



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# the common



## Full Court Press

Vintage jerseys and current players

**I**N JANUARY, WE WERE PROUD to host the 2023 Basketball Alumni Day at the Games, hosted by Augustana Campus, with a special alumni VIP section. Lucky alumni who registered in advance got to enjoy free beer, cider and wings. It got us thinking about what a long tradition of sports we have at Augustana. In a moment of serendipity, we uncovered some vintage jerseys and convinced some of our current ballers to model them for us. Tarik Reed is in red, Jack Smilski is in silver and Jon Gomes is in black. Know what years these kits were in play? Let us know at [augalum@ualberta.ca](mailto:augalum@ualberta.ca). — MIFI PURVIS

# Meet the Teachers

In the last couple of years, Augustana Campus has hired some truly extraordinary faculty, compounding the 100-plus year legacy of a liberal arts and sciences college and a Top 5 research institution. Find out more about these researchers at [uab.ca/augnews](http://uab.ca/augnews)

AS TOLD TO ANNA SCHMIDT | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN ULAN

## SOCIAL INEQUALITY

### Sociologist **Justin Tetrault**

I didn't become passionate about sociology until my third year at university, where professors trained us to think critically. That experience was in stark contrast to my public-school education, where teachers taught obvious and uncomplicated answers to social issues. It drove my intellectual curiosity for understanding social issues and how we might alleviate them.

At Augustana, I have two projects where I interview people who are hard to reach for academics: prisoners and right-wing extremists. For the first project, my goal is to understand and address urgent needs and interests of incarcerated people. Our prison research team is beginning a seven-year study, researching Indigenous issues related to community reintegration, healing lodges and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). I hope this work addresses some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. For the second project, I want to understand how right-wing extremists arrive at their beliefs. I hope my findings will bolster scientific and media literacy programs for kids and adults. I'm also Red River Métis and work with the Indigenous Engagement Advisory Committee to develop Augustana's Indigenous studies program. I'm excited to involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in my research.



## NATURE'S CHALLENGES

### Animal Biologist **Ivy Schoepf**

Nature constantly presents animals with challenges. My research focuses on understanding how individuals cope with the challenges of disease and competition. Deep down I have always known I wanted to be a biologist. Growing up in a small town in Italy, I made the formal decision to be a biologist at 13, when I had to apply for science high school.

While I was based in Switzerland, I collected data in Africa, spending up to 10 months at a time in the field over almost 10 years.

In 2016, I moved to Canada for my second postdoctoral appointment at Queen's University, where I started working with birds. At Augustana, I look forward to developing my research to be truly holistic and integrative. I would like to help make field biology more inclusive. I've been lucky to travel to different parts of the world, meet amazing people and see unique wildlife. I would like to see more people from less affluent backgrounds afforded similar opportunities.

**PEN POWER**

## *Literary Historian* **Willow White**

Growing up, I loved to read and write. After reading Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and more in English 101, I changed my major from sociology to English. I study the history of women writers in English literature and theatre, focussing on English and Indigenous women writing during the “long 18th century” (about 1660 to 1830) in Britain and North America. As a feminist literary historian, I’m interested in how women navigated and resisted gender oppression long before the concept of feminism was articulated. I am interested in how Indigenous women writers resisted both patriarchy and colonialism following contact with the British Empire.

I’m a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta and a first-generation graduate. My parents didn’t have the support needed to attend university, but they fostered a love of learning at home. Someday I’d love to write a book about the history and cultural production of Scottish-Cree Métis (known as Countryborn) girls, women and matriarchs. I began teaching English Literature and Indigenous Studies at Augustana in 2022 after six years in Montreal. I’m grateful to have a job back in the Métis homeland and Treaty 6 territory in the fields that interest me most!



**QUEER AND TRANSGENDER ART**

## *Poet and Scholar* **Lucas Crawford**

I’ve always written poetry and disrupted gendered expectations, unwittingly or not. Studying these things has been a way of seeking new understandings of how to make a life for myself. So, the choices I made growing up in Nova Scotia didn’t exactly feel like choices, but I had to be very decisive about not going to med school or military college!

At Augustana, I study queer and transgender art, literature and popular culture, often with a focus on mental health and with a desire to value the arts.

People sometimes validate transgender experiences by rejecting our connection to mental illness, which is historically inaccurate and stigmatizing.

To create alternative ways of thinking about this connection, I’m studying transgender artists and writers who offer non-stigmatizing and non-medical wellness expertise. As a community-based corollary, I’m organizing a multidisciplinary team of poets who identify as mentally ill to offer free poetry workshops to survivors of psychiatric treatment and in-patients of psychiatric wards. I’m thrilled this project has received robust support from the Canada Council for the Arts. It’s a sign that attitudes toward mental illness are shifting, as is my Canada Research Chair in Transgender Creativity and Mental Health.

SCIENCE AND CERTAINTY

## Philosopher Myke Omoge

Think about the many things you've come to know. Now ask yourself whether you indeed know them. In my work, I weigh and characterize our certainty with regard to what we know. I wanted to be a philosopher after taking logic and critical thinking in my undergraduate degree. I loved the simplicity and transferability. How it exposes human reason and enables proper reasoning.

Before becoming an assistant professor of philosophy and Black

studies at Augustana, I was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto and the University of the Western Cape.

I grew up in a little town in western Nigeria called Igbodigo. And at Augustana, I felt at home at once. Augustana presents the opportunity to have non-philosophers as department members. I leverage findings from many fields, so my departmental colleagues' expertise is relevant to my research.

If I had unlimited time and resources, I'd start by tidying up evolutionary theories on imagination, and centralize Africa within that theory. Creativity and other human cognitive faculties evolved in Africa, before the migration several hundred thousand years ago.



MYSTERIES OF THE BRAIN

## Neuroscientist Ana Klahr

When I grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I was interested in space sciences. But I did my honours research under a psychology professor who is also a neuroscientist. I decided then that all I wanted to do was to study brains for the rest of my life. Now I study in animals what happens in patients who suffer a hemorrhagic stroke. My main goal is to find potential therapeutic targets and test the efficacy and safety of treatments.

Over 97 per cent of animal studies that test therapies for hemorrhagic stroke use solely male animals. These animals tend to be young and healthy, which is not a good representation of what happens in people with stroke.

Females are also excluded from animal research because scientists are concerned that female hormones could be a confounding factor. Given that female human patients are also underrepresented in clinical studies, we know very little about female stroke health.

I hope my research can advance our knowledge of how to treat stroke in females, not just young and healthy ones.

AI BUG KILLER

## Software Engineer Thibaud Lutellier

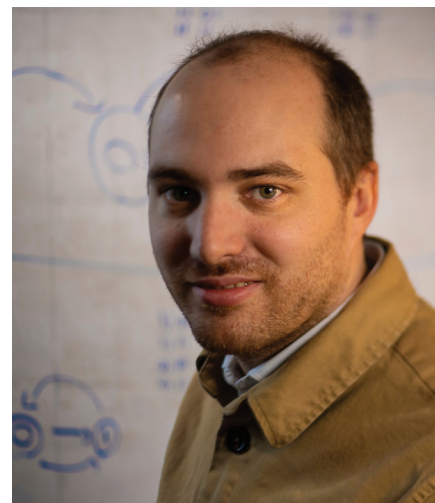
I loved computers when I was growing up in Angers, France. My father had one at home and I would break it apart to look inside. My brother was an engineer, so I wanted to be one, too.

With software, our expectations are lower and we tolerate a lot of problems. This matters, because software is used in critical domains. Everyone would complain if a car sometimes displayed the speed incorrectly! We need to raise

the bar of what we consider acceptable quality.

My research goals are to develop techniques that put quality and reliability at the centre of software development. I help developers build high-quality software, including some that automatically detects and fixes bugs. My goal is to use AI to "hunt" software bugs.

One of the larger up-and-coming issues in my research field is fairness in software and AI. Now, working at a liberal arts and sciences campus, I can lean on my colleagues in fields where fairness has been extremely important for years. 🍎



TALK TO US

# Class Notes

We'd love to hear what you're doing! Tell us about your new job, your latest volunteer activities, your recent vacation or your new pet. Celebrate a personal accomplishment or share your favourite campus memory. Submit your class note at [uab.ca/augnote](http://uab.ca/augnote). Notes will be edited for clarity, length and style.

COMPILED BY MADISEN GEE, '21 BA, '21 CERT(CSL)

## 1950s

'57 **Heather Gilbertson Lyseng** and '57 **John Lyseng** married in 1960 and resided in Vernon, B.C. for more than 40 years. They attended many CLC reunions, and always enjoyed connecting with former classmates. Heather is sad to report that John passed away on July 11, 2020.

## 1960s

'62 **Telmor Sartison**, '64 BA, and '53 **Adelene Sartison**, are 85 and 86, dealing with aging but pretty "get-aroundable." Adelene struggles with vision and health issues arising from 58 years of diabetes, while Telmor has a stent and a pacemaker — souvenirs from a heart attack and irregular heartbeat, respectively. But the pair keep their spirits up. "Life is good and full enough. We are blessed."

'65 **Don Allan**, has had many career experiences since attending Camrose Lutheran College and singing in the 1964-65 New York World's Fair with the CLC Choir. Highlights include 20 years of farming, starting a private Christian school and serving on the board of the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta. In 1992 he moved to Victoria and was ordained as a pastor there, where he worked for 21 years. He has since returned to farming at Saanichton Farm on the Saanich Peninsula just north of Victoria. He curls six days a week, and has competed in the National Clergy Curling Championship, known as the Friars' Briar, each year since 2012. "My wife Helen and I have been married for 54 years, have four

adult children and are blessed to have eight grandchildren. "God is good! Life is great!"

'66 **Daniel Johnson**, '69 BSc, '77 MSc, and his wife, '66 **Diane Persson**, '72 BA(Hons), '80 PhD, celebrated Christmas in Saudi Arabia with their daughter and her family this past year. Daniel volunteers with their son doing medical research in Houston, Texas, and co-authored the article, "Use of a pressure wire for automatically correcting artifacts in phasic pressure tracings from a fluid-filled catheter."

## 1970s

'72 **Jack Bawden**, '76 BA, lives in Edmonton and, as of 2022, is a retired realtor and full-time photographer with a show coming in May. Check out some of his work at [BawdenImages.com](http://BawdenImages.com).

## 1980s

'80 **Glenys Dolinsky (Grundberg)**, '82 BEd, retired from teaching to Campbell River, B.C., where she taught and retired again! She recently bought a sailboat and is loving the ocean and island life. "CLC friends are always welcome on our boat!"

'81 **Renee Stieda**, has been teaching in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island since 2005. In 2018 she became one of three lead teachers working towards developing their classrooms into challenge-based inquiry (CBI) classrooms, which include project-based and hands-on learning. In 2016 she fulfilled a childhood dream of designing and building a house! She and her husband — who did most of the building — have enjoyed welcoming friends and family into their new home. Their blended family consists of four grown children and their partners, plus five grandchildren. When she's not teaching or learning, Stieda works on her genealogy hobby, works in the garden and volunteers for the fundraising arm of Ducks Unlimited Canada.

'86 **Nick Andrusiak** retired from CN Rail last year after 36 years.

'86 **Sharron Spicer (Goehring)** graduated from the University of Calgary's MD program in 1995. She works as a

pediatrician at the Alberta Children's Hospital and is an associate chief medical officer with Alberta Health Services.



Deb Campanelli (Larson)

'88 **Deb Campanelli (Larson)** celebrated 30 years with The Calgary Board of Education in 2021, having contributed to education in a variety of roles including administrator, curriculum leader, PE specialist and elementary classroom teacher). Campanelli is currently teaching first grade where her class is celebrating the publication of their 2021 book, *Kindness Is Our Superpower*. Campinelli is enjoying life in Calgary with one fur baby and three grown children. She treasures her time at Augustana, including great memories with the women's basketball team, spring PE course memories with her dad, and first-year dorm roommates and friends.

## 1990s

'89 **Cindy Escott**, '91 BEd, '09 MEd, was named the new superintendent of Evergreen Catholic School Division in August 2022. She joined the division in 1996 where she has worked ever since as a teacher, principal, administrator, associate superintendent and most recently, deputy superintendent. In her new role, she will guide the division in its priority areas, which include wellness, quality teaching and learning, faith

formation and engagement and advocacy.

'92 **Ramona Parent-Boyd**, BA, '01 MSc, is following her passion for all things home with her design and organizing business, Ramona Aline Home, which she started in 2021. She is also navigating university program decisions with her daughters. "How can it be that long since I was doing the same thing?!" she writes. "A big hello to all my Augustana friends!"

'94 **Lynnette Wray**, BA, has remained grounded in her Augustana roots of servant leadership. She continues to serve as a director of the East Kootenay Community Credit Union and as board chair for the 2022-23 year. She has also recently been elected to Cranbrook City Council for a four-year term. She is grateful for the love and support of her husband — a dedicated high school teacher — and two kids, who are middle-school students in French immersion.

'96 **Jarrett Craig**, BA, is working behind the camera in the motion picture and television industry, having recently wrapped the second season of *Joe Pickett*. You can check out Craig's cinematography work in season one, currently airing on Paramount Plus, or seasons 10-14 of *Heartland* (streaming on Netflix) where he was also the main unit cinematographer.

'99 **Rachelle Balla** BA, '02 BEd, is celebrating 21 years of teaching, and still loving it.

## 2000s

'01 **Heather Bartling (Harburn)**, BA, was inducted into the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association (ASAA) Hall of Fame in 2020 for her work both as an athletic administrator in schools and for contributions to the ASAA. In 2022 she was selected as the recipient of the ASAA Lorne Wood Award, which recognizes administrators who promote and support their school's athletic program.

'08 **Sofie Forsström**, BA, presented work on environmental education and stewardship in the Alberta backcountry at the 11th World Environmental

Education Congress in Prague in March 2022.

'08 **Lyndsay Sprado**, BA, is the executive director of the United World College (UWC) National Committee of Canada. After starting out promoting Augustana as an education destination for students from out of town, Sprado feels like she's coming full circle. In her new role, she manages the admissions, selections and financial aid assessments for all Canadians applying to the UWC movement, including Pearson College UWC. Sprado says that working for an organization that considers education to be a force for peace and sustainability feels like returning to her roots at Augustana, where she really learned the power of education to change the world. You can learn more about UWC at [uwc.org](http://uwc.org).

recently started working as a freelance health and nutrition writer.

'13 **Robert McClure**, BA, '15 MLIS, has been hired as the director of Stony Plain Public Library. He also just released a new EP with his punk band, On My Side. He enjoys extolling the value of public libraries during the week and bringing a ruckus to various music venues across western Canada on weekends.

'14 **Kelly Milne Henry**, BMus, has sung with two professional choirs and a punk band, had a musical in the Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival, composed for a university choir, recorded two choral CDs, recorded a single, got married, came out as genderqueer, got an education degree, rescued cats and played in four Dungeons & Dragons campaigns!



*Jessica Ryan (right) and Chris Rebus (middle) serve soup with student chaplain Berenda Helmus.*

## 2010s

'10 **Jessica Ryan**, BA, and Chris Rebus volunteer with the Alumni Student Support and Engagement Team (ASSET) at Chaplaincy's Soup Supper. The group often helps serve dinners to on- and off-campus staff, students and community members on Tuesdays at 5 p.m.

'13 **Sarah Glinski**, BSc, '18 BSc(Nutr/Food) has been working as a registered dietitian for the past four years and has

'14 **Lori Nelson**, BA, recently graduated with a Master of Professional Education in Applied Behaviour Analysis from Western University, and is working as a behaviour consultant, primarily with people with autism. In October 2022 she traveled with the Global Autism Project, a non-profit organization supporting and training professionals in Chandigarh, India. The group hopes to create lasting change with the global autistic community by investing in local



James pops the question to Kalissa after a volunteer shift at Augustana.  
Photo by Alex Ho.

**205** The number of donor-funded awards, scholarships and bursaries available to Augustana students in 2022–23

**2,300+**

The number of hours of service our students provided to our partners in the Community Service-Learning program in 2021–22

leaders and entrepreneurs. You can learn more at [Globalautismproject.org](http://Globalautismproject.org).

'14 **Kalissa Vy**, BSc, and '14 **James Vy**, BSc, have kept Augustana close to their hearts after graduation. The couple got engaged in 2018 outside of Founders' Hall on Preview Day with the help of Augustana staff, and they recently established the Vy Engagement Award for students involved in the Augustana community, which included additional donations from their wedding day. The pair recently returned from their honeymoon, where they explored Croatia and Italy.

'16 **Dylan Hansen**, BA, is a senior crew chief with Midwest Surveys in Lloydminster, Alta., and is still performing country and folk music.

'17 **Sophia Graham**, BA, is completing her master of arts in Natural Resource Management and Environmental Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia and is a recipient of the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

'19 **Isabella de Goeij**, BMgt, '19 Cert(ILS), was accepted into the University of Northern British Columbia's Northern

Medical Program. Since graduating from Augustana, de Goeij has worked as an accountant, an educational assistant and a creative intern for her favourite YouTube channel. Now, she's starting a new adventure in medical school in Prince George, B.C. De Goeij cherishes the time she spent at Augustana, including going on the 2018 India Tour and working on community-based school projects. "Augustana is very near and dear to my heart and I thoroughly enjoyed the five years I spent studying there," she writes. If you're interested in learning more about her Augustana



Isabella de Goeij

experience or the medical school application process, you can reach her at [degoeij@ualberta.ca](mailto:degoeij@ualberta.ca).

**2020s**

'20 **Keely Blake**, BA, is in her final year of a master's of education program in School and Applied Child Psychology at the University of Calgary. She recently completed an eight-month internship at Foothills Academy, which specializes in teaching students with learning disabilities. There, she conducted psychoeducational assessments that explore students' strengths and weaknesses to help create home and school plans that focus on improving school success and overall well-being. She also supports a program that teaches executive functioning skills to students with ADHD and learning disabilities. After graduating in April, she plans to register as a provisional psychologist with the College of Alberta Psychologists.

'22 **Mesha Olsen**, BA, was accepted into the master of science in Occupational Therapy program at the U of A's North Campus. She packed up and moved a whopping 40 minutes north to pursue further education. 📍

REMEMBERING

# Gib's Tree

BY DAVID LARSON

**A TALL WHITE PINE GREW** on a grassy south-facing slope in the Alberta Rocky Mountains. For over a century it flourished, overlooking the valley of the Sunkay Creek, until a fire swept through and turned the hillsides black.

The white pine was killed but still stood its ground. For decades, the fire-hardened 20-foot snag weathered in the seasons. Heat, wind and moisture polished the wood into a honey-gold, accented by the blackened grain on its twisted trunk. Even as neighbouring

**The tree had stood through fire. It had made it through rain and wind and snow. Now the surrounding forest protected it, not unlike the five of us surrounding Gib, carrying his load so he could find his tree one more time.**

trees killed in the fire fell to the hillside, this one persisted as life returned to the valley slope and a new forest began to grow.

Two backpackers — both professors — first came across the charred sentinel while exploring the area during their spring outdoor education program; each year afterward, they were drawn back. The tree was hardened by adversity, bowed, bent and burned, but still standing. Fire had transformed it and also preserved it. The pine was a link between the forest that was and the

new one reclaiming the slope. This was forest succession.

At least that's how Gib and I saw it.

A few years ago, we backpacked that valley once again, accompanied by four former students. We were looking for a tree in a forest full of trees — a quest to find, as Gib put it, "My tree."

The trip into that valley was different from others ones we had made before it. Gib and I wore new boots, having worn out our old ones. We carried brightly coloured internal-frame backpacks instead of the old tubular-frame ones,

and Gib's was remarkably light. His Achilles tendon was weak from injuries and hard use, so the rest of us shared his load. It would be our last trip to the valley with Gib.

This time was different in another way, too. We missed the tree! We backtracked over the slope, searching for the snag until we heard Gib whistle. He had found it in a small meadow surrounded by a young forest that was now tall enough to cut it off from view.

We watched silently as Gib reached out to touch the tree — his tree. A tree



Garry "Gib" Gibson and David "Doc" Larson with Gib's tree.

that, in each of our minds, had come to symbolize him.

The tree had stood through fire. It had made it through rain and wind and snow. Now the surrounding forest protected it, not unlike the five of us surrounding Gib, carrying his load so he could find his tree one more time.

Gib died in October 2021. Reflecting on our friendship, I realize why I never missed the opportunity to walk with Gib. He drew me — and many others — into new places and new understandings. He always insisted on doing things right. He persevered.

Gib instilled the importance of a healthy, caring community in the next generation of students, and those who knew him continue to feel the effects he had on us. It's another kind of succession. The new forest grows on but we each have a bit of Gib's tree inside us, one we can revisit anytime for inspiration. ☺

*David "Doc" Larson is a professor emeritus who taught biology until his 2016 retirement from Augustana. Larson assisted Garry "Gib" Gibson, '66 MA, '77 PhD, in the latter's outdoor education classes, which taught students about teamwork within the context of river canoeing, wilderness backpacking and other outdoor activities.*





**SADLY MISSED**

# *In Memoriam*

Circle magazine notes with sorrow the passing of the following Augustana alumni, based on information we have received between December 2021 and January 2023.

- '43 **Blanche Wiese (Simmons)** in February 2022
- '47 **Erling Brynjulf Stolee**, '50 BSc, in February 2022
- '48 **Andrew John Birchill**, '56 BEd, in November 2020
- '50 **Anna Russell (Jensen)** in May 2022
- '52 **Viola Thronson (Rasmussen)** in April 2022
- '53 **Clemens Sylvanus Bernhardson**, '59 MA, in January 2022
- '53 **Shirley Jeannotte (Snaith)** in December 2021
- '54 **Laverne Hoveland** in December 2021
- '56 **Norman D. Olson**, '58 Dip(Ed), '60 BA, in November 2022
- '60 **Leonard Clifford R. Schultz**, '65 BEd, '68 BSc, '83 Dip(Ed) in May 2022
- '66 **Brian Wayne Hesje**, '69 BEd, '73 MBA, in December 2021

- '67 **John Edward Morck**, '70 BSc, in October 2022
- '67 **Linda Mae Nichols-Mandrusiak**, '73 BEd, in September 2022
- '71 **Kenneth William Bownes**, '73 BSc(Spec), '75 Dip(Ed), in December 2019
- '71 **Fred J. Nelson** in August 2022
- '72 **Brent A. Hallett** in February 2022
- '74 **Allen Andrew Jackson**, '81 BA(RecAdmin), in January 2022
- '84 **Ian Morris Erickson**, '88 BA(RecAdmin), in June 2020
- '85 **Christopher Scott Kieser**, '87 BCom, in April 2022
- '90 **Deb E. de Caux** in February 2022
- '90 **Katharine Gould Horton**, BA, in October 2021
- '92 **Laura Kathleen Sorenson (Rosland)**, BA, '94 BEd, in March 2022
- '96 **Dustin Joseph Hartley**, '99 BSc(Hons), '03 MSc, in September 2021
- '03 **Steven Reid**, BA, in October 2022
- '13 **Jessica Audrey Hatton**, BMus, in 2022

**OUR RESPECTS**

# Lowering the Flag

**Vincent Erik Eriksson**, Professor Emeritus, History and Religious Studies, died in 2022 at the age of 90 years. Left to cherish his memory are his wife Mary Ellen, children David, James, Jon and Bart, eleven grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. Eriksson was predeceased by his daughter Margaret. He was an avid gardener, baker and self-taught handyman. Eriksson taught courses in history, religious studies and philosophy at Camrose Lutheran College, later Augustana, from 1963 until he retired in 1989.

**James Neff**, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Music, died in 2022. He is missed by his children Lois, Stephen and Paul, his four grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Jim was predeceased by his wife Jo Ann and his daughter Mary. He loved reading, hunting and fishing, growing roses and watching the Toronto Blue Jays. He taught music theory, composition, conducting and history at Camrose Lutheran College, later Augustana, where he served as director of the Augustana Choir and as academic dean; he retired in 1993. 🍷



# Creative Commons

“**A STUDIO IS LIKE A BUBBLE OR A CAVE**, in that you can stay hidden away for days and months on end,” says Julian Forrest, associate professor of fine arts and humanities. Like a lot of us, he spent time holed up in the past few years. His recent show at the Peter Robertson Gallery in Edmonton is the result. “I started painting bunkers, lunar landers, suburban bungalows and other refuges,” he says. The images are disquieting, drawing on what he calls an emotional wrestling match between a need to engage with the world and a need to engage with colour and form.

His next adventure is the opposite of holing up. In June he’s participating in the annual Arctic Circle Residency program, in which artists, scientists, architects and educators explore the high-Arctic Svalbard Archipelago and Arctic Ocean aboard a specially outfitted vessel. He applied and was selected based on his work. He recently taught a course that explored relationships between art and environmental science. “I hope that my time in the Arctic will generate further ideas for this course, as well as my research and practice in the studio.”

— MIFI PURVIS



**Well  
done**



We don't usually blow our own horn, but the university's recent ranking as a top five research institute in Canada is worth making a little noise over. Not only are we proud to be a U of A campus, but our research in areas like AI also shows that while we may be small, our capabilities are mighty impressive.

**Learn more.** [uab.ca/AugRsrch](https://uab.ca/AugRsrch)



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