

Our alumni are special for so many reasons. Their academic achievements, extracurricular contributions, and the value they go on to offer and elevate the nursing profession are just a few reasons we celebrate them.

Here are several notable news stories from 2024 highlighting the achievements and initiatives involving College of Nursing alumni.

USask Alumna Opens Private NP Clinic

USask College of Nursing alumna Joelynn Radbourne (BSN’13, NP’19) was feeling restricted in her nurse practitioner (NP) practice, so she decided to start her own.

“When you work as a nurse practitioner in a publicly funded position, we are generally told how long our appointments can be, how many patients we can take, and how and when to provide follow-up care,” said Radbourne. “I ended up with an eight-week waiting list for my patients to see me, which I felt was having a negative impact on the quality of care I could provide.”

Private NP practice is a new model of care in Saskatchewan. There was no “how-to” guide on how to start and no financial support to renovate a facility. But these things didn’t stop Radbourne.

Channelling her passion for direct patient care, along with her experience in critical care, patient education and leadership, she opened her private practice, Vaida Health, in November 2023 in Emerald Park, Saskatchewan. Within three months of being open, her practice was full and she welcomed another NP to the team. Eventually, she plans to establish an interdisciplinary team, consisting of a dietitian, counselling, nursing services, and two additional NPs.

Radbourne is a Métis NP specializing in women’s health. She has received many certifications from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada and is one of a handful of NPs in Saskatchewan certified and ministry-approved to provide treatment for HIV and Hepatitis C.

“My passion project has been my involvement with the Cervical Screening Task Force at the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, which launched new guidelines in November 2023,” Radbourne shared.

“I am the NP representative on the team and helped with the development and dissemination of instructional material on the new guidelines for practitioners.”

Radbourne believes in continuing education and professional development. She has been a part of the USask Bachelor of Science in Nursing Curriculum Advisory Subcommittee, completed a research project with the Canadian Centre for Advanced Practice Nursing Research, and was appointed to the College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan provincial council in 2021.



College of Nursing alumna Joelynn Radbourne (BSN’13, NP’19) opens private nurse practitioner clinic, Vaida Health, in Emerald Park. Submitted.

Star USask Hockey Player Reflects on Sports Journey

From Huskie hockey to the Professional Women’s Hockey League (PWHL), Kaitlin Willoughby’s (BSN ’19) hockey career brought her to Toronto, where she became one of the first players to be part of the 2024 inaugural PWHL season during a historic time in women’s pro hockey.

“We spent the last four years in the Professional Women’s Hockey Players Association (PWHPA) showcasing women’s hockey to the public in the hopes a professional women’s league would be successful, and to see this unfolding is the most rewarding feeling,” said Willoughby.

“I am aware this has also been years in the making, long before I played professional hockey, women have been fighting for a league to get paid to play hockey as a full-time job. I feel grateful to be one of the players to experience the inaugural season.”

Having worked as a registered nurse for five years since graduating from USask, Willoughby has experience in labour and delivery, as well as further education in operating room nursing.

“I love my profession as a nurse, and I look forward to continuing it one day, but for now I am grateful to be playing hockey as a full-time job.”

At USask, Willoughby was part of the team that won bronze at the national championship.

“The Huskie women’s hockey team had never made it to nationals, and it felt special to have done that twice in my career and bring back a bronze medal.”

The team also won the Canada West Championship in 2014. Willoughby scored the game-winning goal and cites that game as one of her favourite sports memories.

“Competing against the best teams in Canada at the university level was an experience I’ll never forget,” said Willoughby. “Our team was ranked lower in the seedings, I remember coming in as the underdog and ending up with a medal! This made me feel extremely proud of the group we had and all we accomplished that season.”

Willoughby looks back fondly on her time at USask. “The friends I made playing hockey at USask will always be lifelong friends.



College of Nursing Alumna Kaitlin Willoughby (BSN’19). PWHL.

I have friends that are older and younger than me, in different graduating classes. Even though I don’t live in the same cities as them, we get together at major life events (weddings) and Huskie alumni events. The bonds I made with teammates will be lasting, and I plan to stay in touch with all of them.”

This story has been adapted from an original story by Sean Conroy.

USask Alumna Shares Experience as a Registered Nurse in Prince Albert

Lydia Francis (BSN’20) completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the University of Saskatchewan in April 2020. She chose USask College of Nursing to complete her degree because the BSN program was offered in Prince Albert.

“I liked the idea of a smaller campus where instructors get to know you, small classes to build relationships with classmates, and an affordable university degree, since I didn’t have to move. Not to mention, we now have a beautiful new campus with a great student space to study and a big nursing lab.”

She passed her national licensing exam in May 2020, then started her career as a full-time registered nurse.

“As a registered nurse, the opportunities are endless,” said Francis. “I have worked on a medical floor, at a COVID testing site, taught nursing students, was part of a medical mission trip to South America and currently work in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Victoria Hospital.”

When asked about being a registered nurse in Prince Albert, Francis said she has found a great team atmosphere with the different health professionals and plenty of opportunities to get to know your colleagues better.

“We’re also in the process of getting a new acute care tower, which will increase PA’s capacity and level of care, which is definitely exciting for the overall community and especially for medical professionals in Prince Albert!”

When Francis was asked if she would recommend becoming a registered nurse in PA, she replied, “Yes! The instructors really want to see you succeed as a student and in your career as a registered nurse.”

“Whenever I return to the USask PA Campus, the professors remember me and ask me how I’m doing. And if you’re planning to work in PA when you complete your degree, you get to see many areas of the hospital and experience nursing in the community during your clinical placements, which will help you decide where to apply after you graduate.”

Francis signed up to teach USask nursing labs in the 2024-2025 academic year. She plans to continue working in the ICU and is looking forward to taking another medical mission trip.



Registered Nurse Lydia Francis (BSN’20) in front of the Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert. Submitted.

I Enjoyed my Life as a Nursing Student

Five decades after she graduated, USask alumna Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet (BSN’74) continues to be grateful for the formative years she spent at USask College of Nursing.

To express her gratitude, she gifted \$100,000 to USask to support student scholarships in the College of Nursing as part of the Be What the World Needs campaign. The generous gift honours the legacy of the outstanding educators who taught Bannatyne-Cugnet and her fellow nursing students from 1970 to 1974.

“I truly appreciated those wonderful professors and instructors for passing along their knowledge, for their guidance, and for their support during my years attending,” said Bannatyne-Cugnet. “Donating the funds to establish a scholarship to help future graduates continue on in their education, so they will prepare the future generations of nursing graduates seemed like a good investment in people and our province.”

Bannatyne-Cugnet initially enrolled at USask as a pharmacy student. A summer job, however, changed her trajectory, and she subsequently transferred to the College of Nursing. In her final year of university, she received funding through a government program. As a condition of that bursary, she needed to remain working in the province as a public health nurse for a year post-graduation. She was assigned to work in Weyburn—a place she still calls home 50 years later. During this time, she married Ken Cugnet, raised four children, and became a farmer and entrepreneur.

After serving as a public health nurse for 20 years, Bannatyne-Cugnet embarked on a new career as an author, with her best-selling children’s book *A Prairie Alphabet*, published in 1992. The book celebrates the Prairies, its rural lifestyle and the contributions of the farming families to the economy. It won the Christie Book Award and was included in the Saskatchewan Legislative Building’s centennial time capsule, scheduled to be opened in 2112.

In 2016, Bannatyne-Cugnet was honoured with the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, the province’s highest honour, for her impact as a retired nurse, an author, a businessperson, a mentor, a community organizer, a fundraiser, and a philanthropist. She was celebrated for playing a key role in raising \$3.5 million for the Cugnet Centre—a community, cultural and convention centre in Weyburn—and for making a generous personal gift to the facility.

She advises current USask nursing students and others beginning their academic journeys at the university to take every opportunity to learn.



USask College of Nursing alumna Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet (BSN’74) is an award-winning author and a recipient of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. Jennifer Cugnet.

“It is a special time in your life to have the luxury of learning from so many different people,” she said. “And don’t be afraid to set off in a different direction than you planned when you started. It is not failure to change course; it certainly led me to many unexpected opportunities and a very blessed life.”

This story has been adapted from an original story by Shannon Boklaschuk.

For USask Alumna, Practicing as an NP in Yellowknife is a Privilege

USask alumna Allyson Arychuk’s (MN-NP’22) was the first student from the Northwest Territories to enter the online Master of Nursing Primary Care nurse practitioner program at USask.



College of Nursing alumna Allyson Arychuk (MN-NP’22). Submitted.

In 2011, Arychuk moved to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, for what she thought would be one or two years. She worked as a registered nurse primarily in labour and delivery/postpartum, but also held casual positions in public health and taught as an obstetric clinical instructor at Aurora College. Thirteen years later, she is still in Yellowknife and is now a nurse practitioner.

“NPs have such a valuable role in the health system, but also within the community,” said Arychuk. “It is a privilege to be in this role.”

Having started her career in 2009 as an RN in Halifax, the online master’s program was a good choice for her once she was in living in a remote community with a young family.

“The USask program provided me the opportunity to study while still continuing to work and not be displaced from my family,” said Arychuk. “It does require hard work and dedication to advance your nursing knowledge and skill, but it is so worth it! There will never be a “right time” to pursue post-secondary studies, especially as you become more established in your professional and personal life.”

Now that she’s earned her master’s degree, Arychuk recommends the program to others.

“The program contents and online delivery method set me up for success. I had the foundational knowledge and skills required to meet or exceed entry-level competencies.”

In fact, she already has colleagues in her community. “I studied part-time and ended up completing my program with another USask Master of Nursing Primary Care nurse practitioner graduate,” said Arychuk. “Now we work together in Yellowknife, and there are other Northern RNs doing their NP studies through the USask program as well.”

PhD Graduate Now Full Professor at Top Nigerian University

Rev. Sr. Agatha Ogunkorode is a Master of Nursing and Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (MN’16, PhD’19) graduate from the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing and now a lecturer at the Afe Babalola University of Ado-Ekiti Nigeria, an institution that has ranked best university in Nigeria for the third consecutive time.

Dr. Ogunkorode said she found great support at USask. “I found the people very friendly. They were kind to me. I made a lot of friends. Anytime I needed help, people were ready to help.”

Arriving at USask in 2014, Dr. Ogunkorode first completed her Master of Nursing in 2016, then focused her PhD research on health-seeking behaviours of women living with advanced stages of breast cancer in southwestern Nigeria. She was supervised by Drs. Lorraine Holtslander (PhD), Linda Ferguson (PhD), and June Anonson (PhD)(USask Nursing), Dr. Vivian Ramsden (PhD)(USask Medicine), and Dr. Lize Maree (PhD)(University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg), with whom she has also published papers about her work in many journals, including the *International Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences and Cancer Nursing*.

Today, Professor Rev. Sr. Ogunkorode teaches 300 and 400 level medical and surgical nursing at the undergraduate levels, advanced pathophysiology and care of acute and chronically ill patients at the master’s level, and advanced research methodologies at both master’s and PhD levels. She has also just been assigned as the postgraduate coordinator in her Faculty of Nursing Sciences.

“I was able to bring the things I learned in Canada and introduce it into my work in Nigeria. The students enjoy it, and my colleagues respect me, and I make valuable contributions at meetings and conferences. I’m enjoying my work and I’m glad I came back to impact my society,” said Dr. Ogunkorode, noting that she especially enjoys passing along what she learned at USask about research methodologies.

Dr. Ogunkorode said she’s equally happy to be teaching as nursing because they are both giving back.



Rev. Sr. Agatha Ogunkorode (MN’16, PhD’19). Submitted.

“I like to share the knowledge I have acquired with others, and then help them to go and share with others as well,” she said, adding that her work in palliative care means her counselling education is particularly useful.

“I do my work with dedication, I’m good to my patients, and my patients love me. I develop good relationships with my patients and my education in counselling has helped me on the journey with students and patients, particularly during the terminal stages.”

Dr. Ogunkorode said she will remember her time in Canada fondly and hopes to come back for a visit sometime. “Canada is beautiful, serene. Canadians are friendly, and I like the variation in the weather. I like the snow.”

Alumni Reunions

Mixed among students eagerly awaiting convocation or anxiously beginning new programs at the University of Saskatchewan in spring and fall, are proud nursing alumni attending class reunions.

In 2024, three classes gathered to reminisce about nursing school times, share stories about their careers, and catch up about life as it is for them today.

- June 7-9, 2024 – 1994 Degree Class, **30th Anniversary**
- June 13-16, 2024 – 1964 Degree Class, **60th Anniversary**
- September 10-12, 2024 – 1964 Diploma Class, **60th Anniversary**



The 1994 Degree Class celebrates their 30th Anniversary at the University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon Campus. 📷 *Roxanne Cossette.*



College of Nursing Dean Dr. Solina Richter meets with the 1964 Degree Class to celebrate their 60th Anniversary held at the Park Town Hotel in Saskatoon. 📷 *Bill Sawchuk.*



At the Park Town Hotel in Saskatoon, the 1964 Diploma Class meets with College of Nursing Dean Dr. Solina Richter to celebrate their 60th Anniversary. 📷 *Roxanne Cossette.*