

A Look at Graduate Studies

From a Master of Nursing (MN) to a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (PhD), the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing offer students the opportunity to advance their nursing education. Whether they want to increase their scope of nursing practice, change nursing career paths, enhance their impact in the workplace, or develop research that can change the future of healthcare, there is a path for everyone with USask Nursing graduate studies.

There are over 230 graduate students studying with USask College of Nursing. These students are located in Saskatchewan and across Canada. We would like to introduce you to four of these students studying in our various graduate programs.

Michelle Laliberte

MASTER OF NURSING (PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE)

Michelle Laliberte is in her last semester of the Master of Nursing Professional Practice program with a focus on leadership. As a quality management coordinator and clinical nurse educator at Cancer Care Alberta, Laliberte said she’s been glad to be able to juggle the online program, alongside her full-time job, and she’s finding everything she’s learning very applicable in her everyday work.

“Each semester I’ve been able to apply something to what I actually do. It’s been really interesting to see that growth in myself as a leader.”

Laliberte has also used her time in the program to explore issues that matter. In her first term, she wrote a paper about buzzwords used in healthcare, focused on exploring the term “just culture.”

As Laliberte explained, “Sometimes we don’t pause to stop and step back and think about what this term means to us, and how we involve that in our individual and collective culture. I really felt like writing about it was important, so we could get a better idea of how we move forward to ensure safe quality care of our patients and safe environments for workers.” She’s now aiming to publish that paper to spread her knowledge to others.



Michelle Laliberte. Submitted.

In a totally different realm, Laliberte is now working on a technology-focused paper about how oncology caregivers interact with patient portals and how access to the patient’s electronic health record can help them be better caregivers, while also decreasing the burden on the healthcare system.

“I’m trying to examine what research is out there right now, because it’s of growing importance within the field of cancer care,” she said. She noted that as cancer treatment becomes more complex and more care is provided in outpatient settings, finding out how nurses and healthcare teams can use technology to support caregivers is very important.

“It’s trying to bring those things together and get a better understanding of what’s out there, and what kind of research could follow in the future to really help those caregivers use patient portals.” This topic was extremely compatible with her work with Cancer Care Alberta, as she was previously in a position helping the organization move towards a new, provincialized computer system.

Laliberte said she chose the University of Saskatchewan because of its unique approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion; something that’s aligned with her values. She’s also embraced a passion for oncology that drives all her professional decisions.

“Providing the best possible care for cancer patients and their families and carers, that’s really my passion in life - to impact healthcare culture in a way that improves safety, efficacy, effectiveness, and quality of the care that patients are getting.”

Buddhini Samarasekara

MASTER OF NURSING (THESIS)

She may have just started her thesis research for her Master of Nursing, but Buddhini Samarasekara has already been working as a researcher and identified it as the field where she aspires to make her contribution.

Originally from Sri Lanka, Samarasekara completed an Honours Bachelor’s degree with thesis option in 2020, and has been working as a graduate teaching assistant, research assistant, and volunteer field researcher. She gained her first clinical experience in Bermuda as a triage nurse and a health and wellness coordinator. Parallel to her wellness educator role, she became a certified juice therapist in introducing nutrition and lifestyle modifications for people with obesity and diabetes.

Now at USask, in addition to her own full-time master’s research, she’s working as a graduate research assistant with USask Nursing’s Dr. Jodie Bigalky (PhD) and April Mackey.

While her earlier research focused on maternal and children’s health, Samarasekara was inspired by her supervisor Dr. Solina Richter (DCur) to focus her master’s research on food insecurity.

“I was doing research in marginalized and rural communities back home, where people sometimes have limited access to care, resulting in public health issues,” said Samarasekara. Now she’s looking at food insecurity among immigrants in Canada, focused on examining the fastest growing immigrant communities in Canada through a cultural lens.

“Culture is an emerging factor for food insecurity. People talk about accessibility and availability, but cultural influence has been overlooked. Based on the United Nations Sustainable Development



Buddhini Samarasekara. Kylie Kelso.

Goal for 2030 - Zero Hunger, it’s important to facilitate universal access to food for achieving healthy and quality life for everyone.”

“I plan to do a deep dive into how cultural barriers and home-country food preferences affect immigrants having food insecure households in their host country. This will help show the benefits of providing culturally-sensitive nursing care and advocacy for implementing immigrant healthy policies in the future,” she explained.

Samarasekara says she’s had a great experience so far at USask, especially with Dr. Richter.

“I really like working with her, and she’s really empathetic and always accessible to answer questions,” said Samarasekara. She was also impressed with the University of Saskatchewan’s reputation as a research university, and the people she’s met have been welcoming. “Canadians are super friendly and really supportive.”

Samarasekara also likes the smaller community of Saskatoon, although she is often visiting Bermuda, where her husband still works. In the future, she plans to continue health research and aspires to be a nurse scientist.

“I think research is all about connecting the dots between the past and the present, creating a better future for humankind,” she said.

Vanessa Carr

MASTER OF NURSING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE
NURSE PRACTITIONER

Vanessa Carr (BSN'19) has always wanted to work in healthcare and stay in her home community of La Ronge, Saskatchewan. She was grateful to be able to earn her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from USask at the La Ronge distributed nursing site. But when she graduated in 2019, she realized there was a great need for more nurse practitioners (NP) in her community. So, she decided to return to school to contribute even more.

"My main goal is to become a trusted healthcare provider for the people in my community, to ensure everyone has access to safe, reliable primary care services without having to travel far or feeling uncomfortable seeking help," said Carr. She plans to focus on chronic disease management, mental health, and preventive care, with the goal to improve long-term health outcomes for patients in northern Saskatchewan.

From Lac La Ronge Indian Band, a Woodland Cree First Nation, Carr was inspired to go into nursing because she had always seen a lack of Indigenous representation in healthcare. As a new registered nurse, she worked as a homecare nurse, then a sexually transmitted and blood borne infections nurse. That's where she began to really notice the lack of access to primary care. "That's why I chose to go the direction of nurse practitioner, so I can help fill that gap, and hopefully be a role model for other Indigenous nurses to go for nurse practitioner education as well."

With four children under 13, Carr said she appreciated she could do her courses online, especially raising two babies at the time. Now in her second practicum of three, having completed the first at La Ronge Medical Clinic and currently working at the Stanley



Vanessa Carr. Submitted.

Mission Health Centre supervised by another NP, 75 km north, an experience she said is familiar and new at the same time.

"I have spent lots of my childhood visiting in Stanley Mission, but being able to provide primary care services is new, and second, the empowering feeling of being able to provide services to a community that has always been apart of my life."

Carr said USask was a natural choice once she found out she could also take the NP program from a distance. She said she's glad to be able to contribute to primary care because all her life and especially as a health professional, she's seen the benefits in rural and remote communities when patients have better access closer to home, as sometimes the travel distances discourage people from seeking care altogether.

"I'm planning to stay in the North for my entire career. La Ronge is home. I was born and raised here, and my plan is to stay working close to home, at least, providing care on reserve in this area or at the La Ronge Medical Clinic," concludes Carr.

Katie North

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN NURSING

Katie North has wanted to help the environment for so long that as a teenager when local recycling facilities were unavailable, she would go around to rural healthcare centres, collect their recycling, and bring it to the Winnipeg depot. No surprise, then, that as a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (PhD) candidate in the College of Nursing, North is poised to focus her dissertation research on environmental sustainability in healthcare. Specifically, she's surveying the environmental sustainability of a hospital in Winnipeg, aiming to understand both the organization's feeling about sustainability and then compare that with actual energy consumption.

"I've always had a deep-rooted respect for the planet and wanting to reduce the amount of consumption and waste we have," North explained. She sees a lot of potential opportunity in healthcare settings, from reducing single-use items, to transitioning to biodegradable products, to improving food recycling to upgrading old infrastructure, such as light bulbs and windows.

With an RN diploma, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and a Master of Nursing, North had already built a career in healthcare, plus earned a graduate studies diploma in Sustainability from USask. She said she chose USask College of Nursing because Dr. Wanda Martin (PhD) was recommended to her as a supervisor, a relationship that has worked out well.

"The support from Dr. Martin has been really important to my progress in the program and feeling like I have that support from her and some other professors who are on my committee as well," said North. "Anytime I'm feeling overwhelmed or questioning which direction I should take, I know I have those supports. They're



Katie North. Submitted.

great resources, and they have a lot of knowledge they're willing to share, as well as a lot of connections across Canada for different environmental teams."

After she graduates, North hopes to find a role as an environmental nurse consultant, a position that's not yet available in Manitoba or Saskatchewan, but is starting to pop up in other provinces.

"I would ideally like to see something like that created within the Prairies, and occupy a position like that, where I can consult with tertiary care sites and help them roll out initiatives and large-scale infrastructure adjustments to make them greener."

Graduate Students Successfully Defend Dissertations

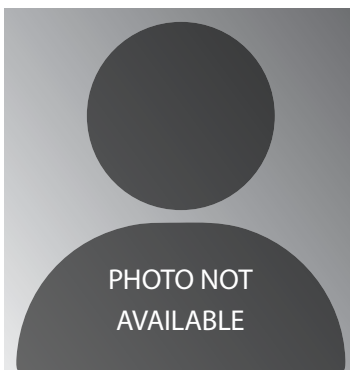
Congratulations to the following USask College of Nursing graduate students who successfully defended their Master of Nursing (MN) theses and Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (PhD) dissertations in 2024.



Submitted.

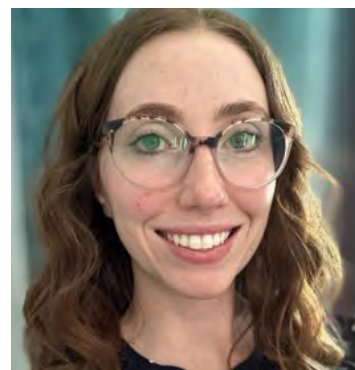
Virginia Deobald, MN

The Nurses' Experience Using Non-Pharmacological Interventions for Persons Living with Dementia in Rural Long-Term Care Facilities in Saskatchewan



April Fox, MN

Health Information Needs of Patients Living with Myasthenia Gravis: A Narrative Inquiry



Submitted.

Danielle Lange, MN

An Evaluation Case Study on a Food Prescription Program in the Saskatchewan Prairies



Submitted.

Melissa Dykhuizen, PhD

A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Cervical Cancer Screening for Transgender Men



Submitted.

Anne Hyde, PhD

Canadian Rural and Urban Older Adults: A Comparison of Functional Status



Submitted.

Uchechi Opara, PhD

Women's Experiences of Cultural Beliefs and Practices that Influence Their Use of Maternal Health Services in Nigeria