



# INSPIRE LEAD ACHIEVE

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April 15, 2021  
Ron Woznow  
Director and Co-founder  
The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

To whom it may concern,  
I am writing this letter on behalf of The High Prairie School Division. As a school division we have participated in the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program for 7 years. We have supported well over 25 students in attending. As a Career Coach with the High Prairie School Division and now as a part of the Indigenous Education Team

In my roles with the division I have always sought out opportunities for our Indigenous Learners to have new experiences that may help them in their future. This program is an amazing opportunity for our students to see themselves in the world of Post-secondary Education. To see that they can take up space and that they can feel a sense of belonging.

As a school division who's student population is approximately 50% Indigenous Learners coming to us from 5 First Nations and 3 Metis Settlements. Many of our students are reluctant to leave their home communities to pursue further education. Many of them are the first in their families to graduate from high school.

Verna J. Kirkness introduces students to other Indigenous scholars, who share similar stories and experiences. Students get a taste of what the next steps could look like and in that process they discover that it is not as scary as they may have imagined it to be. As a mother of a son who attended VJK 7 years, I can speak to this very personally. My son attended a very small K-12 school, post secondary education was always talked about in our home but nonetheless leaving home for a week started off as a very scary experience for him with his limited exposure to this world. My son returned home with a newly discovered confidence and I am extremely proud to say that he is currently finishing his 4th year Civil Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan.

*hpsd.ca*



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This is such a valuable opportunity for our students, I am a passionate advocate and promoter and would be more than willing to have further conversations if needed

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DB", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Diane Bellerose  
High Prairie School  
Indigenous Education Lead

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Dr. Ron Woznow  
Executive Director and Co-Founder  
The Verna J Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program

February 17, 2020

**Re: Letter of Support**

Dear colleagues,

I am writing this letter of reference in enthusiastic support of the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program. My faculty is now in its third year of collaboration with Dr. Ron Woznow and the Verna J Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program. We accommodated 10 students in the one-week program in the first year and now have expanded to 12 students. We assign six faculty members and each mentors 2 students. I mentored 2 students myself and my office is the main liaison for onboarding the students and organizing the event on our side.

This one week really changes the lives of the participating grade 11 Indigenous high school students, and **this program is highly successful in motivating Indigenous students to consider post-secondary studies**. I remember some interactions of students with their faculty mentors and their teams, and how the students have changed during this week. Daylin Deitz was a shy student when he started, who developed his love to stem cell biology and bioengineering when mentored by Derek Toms, a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Prof. Mark Ungrin. He is determined now to go to university and study molecular biology. Sydney Pope from Yellowknife got hands-on experience in the group of Prof. Susan Kutz, and she is now considering studying biology for her future career. There are many other examples, and we have featured some stories in various media outlets (e.g. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/fortney-first-nations-teens-get-a-hands-on-education-in-the-sciences>; <https://www.ucalgary.ca/news/ucalgary-shares-weird-and-wonderful-science-caring-animals>).

I remember very well one of my students, Tamia Duchesneau. She already had a special interest in psychology, and she and her fellow student had a wonderful time in my laboratory, as you can see from the attached picture (together with her main mentor, Dr. Dalia Abdelaziz). She accepted me as a mentor, we still have email exchange and she asked me for a reference when she was applying for the criminology program at Simon Fraser University. This shows that the bonding between student and faculty mentor can be very successful, and help the student in his/her future career choices.



At the same time, our faculty mentors and their team members also learned a lot from this week. Our faculty uses a lot a One Health approach to address problems in veterinary medicine. This approach is based on the concept that human health, animal health and a healthy environment are interconnected. Indigenous knowledge uses a similar concept, and our faculty members had a lifetime experience discussing such concepts with the Indigenous students. This program also helps us to fulfill the mandates of the University of Calgary's and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine's Indigenous Strategies, moving towards genuine reconciliation and Indigenization. It is our faculty's mission to have Indigenous students in our doctor of veterinary medicine (DVM) program, and participation at the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program is a milestone to achieve this.

In summary, this program is a highlight in our academic year and is highly successful in motivating Indigenous students to pursue post-secondary studies. They have my strongest support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "H. Schaezel". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Prof. Hermann M. Schaezel  
Associate Dean, Research



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
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21 April 2021

**Letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program**

To whom it may concern,

I had the opportunity to be involved in the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering (VJKF) in 2019 and I cannot endorse the program strongly enough. I run an oceanography lab at UBC and we are committed to community engagement and promoting the involvement of Indigenous Youth in STEM, and particularly in our field of oceanography. The VJKF program provided a fantastic opportunity for my lab to host an Indigenous student and share with them some of what it is like to be an oceanographer. I believe it is critical that we are able to provide such experiential learning opportunities to highlight and inspire potential career paths in marine science. The members of my lab also benefitted tremendously through the experience in mentorship. I attended the closing ceremony of the program and was impressed with the obvious inspirational effect that the program had on the students, and even more impressed with the presentations that they gave outlining their various placement projects. I had no hesitation in agreeing to join the program again in 2020, but this was unfortunately scupper by COVID-19. I do look forward to the next opportunity.

Yours sincerely  
Dr. Brian Hunt

Assistant Professor  
Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries  
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**DENNIS HAWKINS-BOGLE, B.Ed., M.Ed.**  
*Principal*

**MARISSA KNAUF, B.Ed., M.Ed.**  
*Vice Principal*

19 April 2021

Ronald J. Woznow, Ph. D.  
Director and Co-founder  
The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

Dear Dr. Woznow,

I am writing this letter in support of the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation. Each year we present this educational opportunity to our students and seek to find a suitable candidate. We generate a lot of interest with this educational opportunity. We have had a student selected from this school to attend the program. She came home from the program, determined that she would go back to UBC to pursue a science degree. This student is now a full time student at UBC in Vancouver.

I am very pleased to recommend the Verna J Kirkness award to our Indigenous students as it highlights the opportunities available to them in science and engineering programs. Providing the students with first hand experience to live, study and work on a university campus allows our students to ease some of the anxieties of attending university.

I am in full support of the Verna J. Kirkness Educational Foundation and hope that this opportunity is able to continue for our students.

Sincerely,

Dennis Hawkins-Bogle  
Principal



23 April, 2021

Dr. Ronald J. Woznow  
Director and Co-founder  
The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

Dear Dr. Woznow,

I am writing to show my strong support for The Vera J. Kirkness Education Foundation. My involvement with the foundation has been primarily through the Science & Engineering Education Program. I first became aware of this important program in 2015 and hosted my first pair of students in May 2016 – Kayla and Jenna-Eve. Since then and up to the postponement of the program due to Covid-19, my research group and I have looked forward to meeting and mentoring the students we've hosted in our lab and watching their progression throughout the week, culminating in their presentations at the Honour Feast. We feel that this initiative is so important that each year we actively dedicate the week to setting up meaningful experiences for the students. In other words, we do not simply host them by incorporating them into whatever research activities we are carrying out at that time, but adapt and tailor our research activities to maximize the benefit the students will gain.

My support for the program is two-fold. The underrepresentation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students at Canadian Universities is problematic and challenging. The program I teach in, Geological Engineering, and my research in this discipline is dedicated to understanding how engineering projects, especially natural resource development, interface with the natural environment and means to mitigate and minimize its impacts. Because many natural resource projects in British Columbia are within or adjacent to Indigenous territories and communities, I have always felt that Geological Engineering would be an attractive career path for Indigenous students. A key aspect of our program is learning how to read the landscape, which is a skill that very much aligns with and can benefit from traditional knowledge. However, less than 1% of our students are Aboriginal, which reflects their underrepresentation in science and engineering. It is clear that this underrepresentation spans post-secondary education in general, and the need to address this issue begins much earlier requiring solutions that target high school students. This of course is the focus of the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program, whose mission I fully endorse: to increase the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students graduating from science and engineering programs in Canada, and to do so through role models who foster the importance of graduating from high school with the goal to attend university.

The latter touches on the other reason for my support, the personal connections it affords. The hosting of Indigenous students with the objective of inspiring them to serve as role models in their high schools and communities is vital. I saw this personally growing up in Saskatchewan where my community, neighborhood and friends were 50% First Nations and Métis. I return every year at Christmas with my family to reconnect and have seen first hand the difference role models can make to inspire positive life choices. The Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program plays a valuable and much needed role with respect to both inspiring the selected individuals to attend university and connecting through them to motivate their classmates and communities to do the same. And this relationship is not one way. My research group and I have taken great pleasure in meeting and mentoring the students we've hosted and have been inspired by them: Kayla, Jenna-Eve, Anita, Sara, Florence, Blaze, Dylan and Cassidy. I have seen our participation have a positive impact on the professional development of my graduate students, and I regularly promote the program to my colleagues in the Department of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences. Each year I make sure to include opportunities for some of my colleagues to also meet with the students we are hosting students to expose the students to other faculty working in my discipline area, but also to introduce my colleagues to the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program.

I strongly encourage all potential donors to support the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program. I also pledge to continue supporting the program through my own donations as well as by hosting and mentoring future students each year.

Sincerely,



Prof. Erik Eberhardt, P.Eng.



a place of mind  
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**Professor**  
Harry Brumer, Ph.D.

Vancouver, 16 April 2021

Ronald J. Woznow, Ph.D.  
Director and Co-founder  
The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation  
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### **Letter of Support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program**

Dear Dr. Woznow,

It is my distinct pleasure to provide my most enthusiastic support for effort to secure funding for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK-SEP). Members of my research group and I have hosted two students from the program in my laboratory in the Michael Smith Laboratories and Department of Chemistry at UBC every year from 2016-2019, inclusive. Regrettably, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from hosting students in both 2020 and 2021, which we were again eagerly anticipating.

Indeed, my research group members and I have found the program very enriching as mentors and teachers, and certainly we have also learned from the students ourselves. For context, we structure our week with the students to comprise diverse laboratory activities, essentially a series of mini-experiments, working toward an overall goal of producing a biotechnologically relevant enzyme and applying it to make an aromatic flavour ingredient. This process exposes the students to topics in molecular biology, biochemistry, and analytical chemistry. At each step, the students work with a different researcher in my group, including both graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, which allows them to interact with people of diverse backgrounds and expertise. This close interaction and “real-life” project is certainly enriching from both sides, and I can convey that my group members find it very personally rewarding – hence our continuing enthusiasm to engage with the VJK-SEP.

Beyond this, I will say that my personal reflection of the program is most solidified by my experiences attending the student presentations and Honour Dinner at the close of the week. It is particularly impactful to see these high school students, who come into the laboratory with essentially no prior experience with our research topic and techniques, give stellar presentations on their achievements after only a few days. And of course, the opportunity to see the students showcased at

the Honour Dinner, and to interact with the Elders, chaperones and organizers, in gorgeous surroundings such as the First Nations House of Learning at UBC is a tremendous experience for all. In this context, it is especially relevant to acknowledge that UBC's Point Grey campus is on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.

I hope it is clear from the above that your application for funding has my very strongest support. Please do not hesitate to contact me immediately if I can provide any further information to assist you in your efforts.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Ry B..." with a stylized flourish at the end.



a place of mind  
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April 20, 2021

Re: The Verna J. Kirkness  
Education Foundation

Ronald J. Woznow, Ph.D.  
Director and Co-founder  
The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

Dr. Woznow,

It is my pleasure to provide a letter of support for the The Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program. As you know, my research group and I have had the pleasure of being involved with the program for a number of years, hosting Kirkness scholars in our research laboratories.

The program provides a unique experiential learning opportunity for Kirkness scholars, enabling them to work side-by-side with graduate research students. For our graduate research students, the program provides a unique opportunity to gain teaching and mentorship skills, skills essential for their future careers as engineers and researchers. In particular, it provides our graduate research students with an opportunity to design experiments for the Kirkness scholars to complete during their visit and communicate the importance and implications of the outcomes from the experiments to our guests. The program also provides an opportunity for our graduate research students to learn more about the history and culture of First Nation communities. But perhaps more importantly, the program provides an opportunity for everyone to share their passions for learning.

I look forward to our continued participation in the program.

Regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Pierre Bérubé'.

Pierre Bérubé, PhD, Peng  
Professor, Associate Head



a place of mind

**Sheryl Staub-French, PhD, PEng**

Professor of Civil Engineering  
Associate Dean of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

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April 16, 2021

**Re: Letter of Support for Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program**

To whom it may concern,

I am very pleased to provide this letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program. The Kirkness Program is a unique and important program that aims to increase the number of Indigenous students graduating from science and engineering programs in Canada.

As a Professor in the Civil Engineering Department, I have been fortunate to host numerous Grade 11 Indigenous students in my lab as part of the Kirkness Program. The students I have met were incredibly enthusiastic and I was impressed with their ability to learn new skills and apply them to the real world problem of designing cost-effective sustainable buildings. They worked very hard all week alongside my graduate students to develop innovative solutions using state-of-the-art building information modeling tools. I believe that this hands on experience really helped them to see the importance of engineering, and perhaps more importantly, to see that they could potentially become scientists or engineers.

The Kirkness Program is unique in many ways. It provides students with hands-on experience with science and engineering in a university lab setting. The program is 1-week long so students are able to get deep exposure to a subject rather than just scratching the surface in a short workshop. They are exposed to different types of role models at different stages of their career, including undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members. And they are able to live on campus for the week to develop more familiarity with the university setting and to better understand the types of support available to them within the university system. I was truly impressed with the quality of the program and its impact on the students.

I strongly support this program and am committed to participating in the years to come so that more Indigenous students will have the opportunity to learn and get excited about careers in engineering and science.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheryl Staub-French'.

Sheryl Staub-French, PhD, PEng



University  
of Manitoba

Department of Microbiology

Ayush Kumar, PhD  
Professor  
Date: April 26, 2021

To,  
Dr. Ronald J. Woznow, Ph.D.  
Director and Co-founder  
The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

***Re: Letter of Support for Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP)***

Dear Dr Woznow,

I am writing to provide letter of support for your funding application for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP). As you know my laboratory has been hosting VJK SEP students for the past seven years. My laboratory studies the microbiological quality of drinking water from First Nation communities in Manitoba. During their visit to our laboratory, the students get firsthand experience in water testing methods. In addition, they also learn basic molecular biology techniques such as DNA isolation, culturing of bacteria, resolving DNA on an agarose gel, as well as genetic transfer. These techniques, generally a part of a first- or second-year University course's curriculum, provide an excellent opportunity of VJK SEP students to experience what a laboratory course in a University's Microbiology program entails. Further, by testing the water quality, they get to see how the knowledge gained from lab exercises can be applied to analyze and solve problems that specifically impact First Nation communities in Canada.

VJK SE Program provides a unique opportunity to these young budding science enthusiasts to witness a day-to-day activity in a research laboratory. In all my years of involvement with the program, I have always found students to be extremely eager and excited about their stay in the laboratory. In my laboratory, the VJK SEP students also get an opportunity to interact with graduate students and post-doctoral fellows asking them questions about their career paths.

In summary, the VJK SEP provides young students an exceptional opportunity be a part of a research lab. This is obvious from the feedback we have received from students, who often say things such as, "...after this experience, I will *definitely* attend a university...". As a researcher and academic, my involvement with this program is one of the most satisfying experience I have had, especially when I see young

inquisitive minds getting excited about joining a University. I sincerely hope that this program continues to grow, and I can assure you that myself and my research group consider it to be a privilege to be a part of this outstanding program and that we will continue our participation as long as the program needs us.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ayush Kumar". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Ayush" written in a cursive-like font and the last name "Kumar" in a more blocky, slightly cursive font. There is a small flourish at the end of the signature.

(Ayush Kumar)

April 26, 2021

**Re: Letter of support of the Verna J. Kirkness Foundation Science and Engineering Program**

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with tremendous pleasure that I write this letter in support of the Verna J. Kirkness Foundation Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP) as the foundation applies for funding for its 2022 programs. Over the past decade, I have had the opportunity to participate in the VJK SEP both as an administrative leader and a mentor for VJK SEP students. I can confidently state that the VJK SEP has been transformative for participating students as well as our faculty culture and colleagues. Through the program, I have had the opportunity to observe brilliant young people from diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultural and geographic backgrounds engage in a variety of learning experiences designed to enhance their curiosity for learning while exposing them to university campus culture. Importantly, the relationships developed between the students and our participating scientists and scholars provides reciprocal benefits; the students learn from academics who are the top of their discipline while our academics and their graduate students develop their intercultural competencies for working respectfully and effectively with Indigenous youth. It is a win-win program for both the university and the young people who participate in the program.

On a personal note, I'd like to add that I was particularly supportive of the program when it first came to the University of Manitoba in large part due to the impact Dr. Verna Kirkness has had on my research trajectory. Over the course of my career, I worked with Indigenous youth and community members to co-create after school health and wellness mentor programs where our university students work with high school students to develop and deliver a physical activity program for children in their neighbourhood. The success of these programs lays in the Four R's (*respect, relevance, responsibility and reciprocity*), a theoretical approach developed by Dr. Kirkness years ago. Dr. Kirkness later explained to me that there is a 5<sup>th</sup> R representing Reconciliation; crucially, the VJK SEP addresses key Calls to Action as identified by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and as such, deserve full support from our universities and potential funders.

In closing, I wish the VJK SEP the greatest success and fully support every effort to secure funding to continue the legacy of Dr. Kirkness and the foundation built in her honour.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joannie Halas, PhD  
Senior Scholar



**University  
of Manitoba** | Department of Physics  
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To: Potential Supporter of the Verna J. Kirkness Program

April 27, 2021

Dear Generous Donor,

This letter is to tell you about my experience as a faculty mentor for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP) at the University of Manitoba, and to impress upon you the immense value of this program in helping draw Indigenous students into the study of science. My research is in subatomic physics, one of the most fundamental fields of scientific enquiry there is. I study the structure of protons and neutrons, and search for new physics particles and forces that may explain dark matter and dark energy. I came to the U of M about 10 years ago, when I participated in one of the first offerings of this program, and I have participated every year since (except for when I had to have a substitute one year because I was pregnant and on bed rest, and once the year the program was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). I will be participating in the remote offering this year. Every year I have asked my graduate students to help serve as teaching assistants (TAs), and have requested and received help from the Physics and Astronomy Department staff in setting up and taking down the experimental equipment.

The keystone experiment during the week in my lab is the construction of a cloud chamber, which the students can use to see cosmic ray tracks. This is the culmination of a week of table-top experiments where the students measure the charge and mass of an electron, learn about environmental sources and biological effects of radiation, and learn about how subatomic physics detectors can be used in my research. While they don't actually participate in my research, which requires the use of large particle accelerators around the world, they are able to get a tangible feel for what is involved. During the week, we talk about the difference between cosmic rays and aurora, which have different sources. The aurora is caused by particles coming from the sun; cosmic rays have origins beyond the solar system. We discuss the connections between the heavens and the earth, and share stories about the meaning of the aurora that we have learned.

The benefit of Indigenous students meeting and interacting with university students from various backgrounds is immeasurable. One of my undergraduate summer research associates, Brynne Blaikie, had this to say about her participation in the program as a TA:

“My particular advisor was involved in EDI and outreach programs. One of these programs focuses on bringing indigenous high school students to the University of Manitoba to experience different science programs with the hope of encouraging those individuals to pursue scientific studies. Participating in these outreach programs gave a better understanding of what other people experience within Canada.”

I encourage my research students to attend the feasts, when there is availability. The feasts are invigorating celebrations of Indigenous culture and the importance of diversity in STEM fields.

Two years ago the Faculty of Science held a sharing circle to explore the idea of “Two-eyed Seeing” in the Faculty, and to try to learn about the barriers that may keep Indigenous students from pursuing science. A former participant in my Kirkness group came up to me afterwards. She told me how her time in my lab made her realize that she could go to university, that she would be able to become a scientist. During the sharing circle we heard first-hand how some students struggle to get enough food to eat, or to ensure they have adequate shelter against the cold; how detrimental that is to their efforts to do well in school, and how that can persist into their University years. We also heard how some students are discouraged from pursuing science by family members and elders, because they will need to relinquish parts of their identity in order to succeed.

For one of the feasts I was asked to serve as a speaker. I spoke about my upbringing in Pennsylvania; a place named after a European but which was the home of the Lenni Lenape, or Delaware. I described my connection to the land and things I learned about trapping and fishing growing up in “Penn’s Forest”, and about how our origin stories and legends affect our interpretation of scientific data. Sufficiently advanced physics begins to sound metaphysical – there are fields that permeate all of spacetime; everything is connected. After the feast an elder came up to me and gave me his card. He told me he was over 90 years old and I was the first person that was able to make a connection between science and spirit for him. This might be one of my greatest accomplishments.

Your support of the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program will enable this excellent experience to touch many more students, both Indigenous and otherwise, as well as the faculty and staff who support it with their time. It will allow people to connect with each other and share the knowledge they already have as well as encourage them to pursue a career which will expand that knowledge. Thank you for taking the time to hear about my experiences with this program, and I hope that it helps convince you of its tremendous potential to improve the participation of Indigenous people in the pursuit of science.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliette M. Mammei". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Juliette Mammei  
Associate Professor



UM | Faculty of Agricultural  
and Food Sciences

Department of Entomology

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Ronald J. Woznow, Ph.D.  
Director and Co-Founder  
Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

Dear Doctor Woznow,

It is my honour and great pleasure to write this letter supporting the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program. I've been a mentor with the program since 2014, hosting a total of six students in my lab and two more in the Department of Entomology as a whole. My first experience was so rewarding that my team and I now look forward to meeting our new interns every summer.

When I was approached to host two Indigenous high school students in my lab, I did not know what to expect. I had heard about the program, but I did not see myself as a potential "academic role model" for Grade 11 students. My first interns were Ryan (Powell River, BC) and River (Fredericton, NB), and while they were excited to be part of the Kirkness Program, I think their enthusiasm was somewhat dampened when they learned what my lab was studying: ticks. Nobody likes ticks at first. And this is precisely why hosting Grade 11 students *in the lab, with the researcher and her team, makes all the difference in the world*. They get to see how enthusiastic we are about our work, and our enthusiasm is contagious, making them curious and willing to try new things. The same thing happened the following year with Brian (Norway House, MB) and Jacob (Surrey, BC) and again with Carter and Jessie (Winnipeg, MB). In 2019, I could not host interns in my lab, but I enlisted three other professors in the Department to provide Rick (Fisher River, MB) and Jeanette a diversified entomology experience. Rick's mother was so pleased with her son's experience, she took the time to write to us and sent us this fantastic list of insect names in Swampy Cree, including ticks: mosotokom (ᑭᑭᑭᑭ)! While I make a point of spending as much time with my interns as possible, I must emphasize the mentorship provided by my team of graduate and undergraduate students. As we all travel together to field sites to perform tick research, my students share their own university experience, how and why they chose their current program of study, what they find challenging and rewarding, etc. I was amazed at the impact my first interns had on my lab crew: increased awareness is a two-way street.

After more than five years as a mentor in the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program, I can confidently say I am indeed an academic role model. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to show the world of academia to young people who may not otherwise have the chance to see it. All the students I've hosted have told me they "didn't think research was so cool" and that they "could totally see themselves doing something like that." They all left feeling that a university campus is somewhere they could belong because for one week, they *did* belong. I also feel privileged to be able to learn from them. To this day, I remain in contact with the students who have spent time in my lab. Some have reached out for advice and guidance on their post-secondary education, and some have shared their success with me. I am incredibly proud of serving as a mentor in the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program because I know it makes a real difference for the students and the whole community.

Best regards, and long life to the program,

Kateryn Rochon, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor – Veterinary and Wildlife Entomology



# Oscar Lathlin Collegiate

Box 10400  
Opaskwayak, Manitoba  
R0B 2J0

230 Waller Road  
Telephone: (204) 623-5259  
Fax: (204) 623-5361

Mark Houle  
High school Teacher (Science/Math)  
Oscar Lathlin Collegiate  
Opaskwayak Cree Nation, MB.

April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021

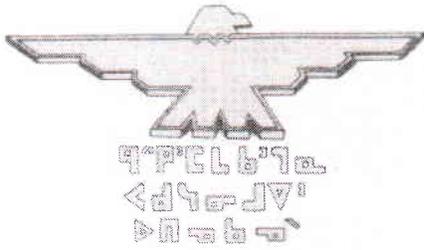
Mark Houle, High school Teacher (sciences) Grades 9 to 12, I am writing in support of the Verna J. Kirkness Science Education Program on behalf of Oscar Lathlin Collegiate (Opaskwayak Cree Nation MB.). The school has been the beneficiary of this program for a number of years, giving students a glimpse of what to expect when they enter post-secondary studies.

The program gives students insight into the sciences that are currently being taught in the subject area they are discovering. It gives them some knowledge of teamwork; they also see what work has to be done to complete a project when guideline are in place. Each student also has a public speaking component, which will help him or her in school, but is a great benefit in the real world. The final part of the program is living on campus (expenses paid); it gives them opportunity to travel and experience eight days away from family and friends. This time gives students a chance to see what it feels like to be away at a Post-Secondary Institution.

Yours in Education,

Mark S. Houle

Cc: Ron Constant



# Peguis Central School

Box 670 Peguis, Manitoba R0C 3J0

Telephone: 204-645-2164

Fax: 204-645-2270

April 15, 2021

To whom it may concern,

It gives me great pleasure to be able to write a letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program.

Our school has had several students attend this program over the past years. All student who have attended have commented that this program has had a positive impact on their lives. It is not even just the science that has made this impact. Students have reported that in addition to kindling an interest in science as a career, such things as improved self-confidence, networking with other students of similar background and being introduced to campus life to name a few other parts of the program that have impacted their experience in a positive way.

We did not have any students attend the program last year. However, two years ago we were fortunate enough to have five students in attendance. Of these five students, four are currently enrolled in university and all are pursuing science related degrees. All of them are striving for health related careers.

I feel that any program that can provide all of these things to our youth is a very worthwhile endeavor. I would like to provide my support for the continuation of this program.

If I can be of any further assistance in providing support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dave Smith



**University  
of Manitoba**

## **Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences**

**Food and Human Nutritional  
Sciences**

W567 Duff Roblin Building  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2  
Phone: (204) 474-9555  
Fax: (204) 474-7593  
rotimi.aluko@umanitoba.ca

April 15, 2021

### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This letter serves as my very strong attestation to the exceptional quality and benefits to society of the Verna J. Kirkness program, which focuses on the training of Indigenous High School Students, especially in the sciences. For the past 12 years, I have served as a mentor in providing annual laboratory training for an average of three Indigenous High School students (except 2020 due to the Covid-19 lockdown). For these students, the opportunity to experience practical work in a university laboratory has greatly enhanced their interest in science but also important is that the summer training builds confidence in their academic skills, which propel them to eventually choose to undertake post-secondary education. In my opinion and based on my experience, the Verna Kirkness program serves a very vital role in promoting the ability of Indigenous High School students to choose science as their ultimate career. Therefore, the program deserves all the support it can get to enable strengthened continuance of this very productive and useful training of Indigenous High School students.

If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me by any means convenient for you.

Rotimi E. Aluko, PhD, CFS, FCIFST, FIFT, FAOCS  
Professor

Director, *Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals*  
Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Food Biochemistry*



## Department of Biological Sciences

**Dr. Kevin Fraser**

Associate Professor  
212B Biological Sciences Building  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2  
Telephone (204) 474-9245

27 April, 2021

To whom it may concern,

It is my pleasure to write a strong letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP). I am an Associate Professor in Biological Sciences at the University of Manitoba who has participated in the Kirkness program since my start at UM in 2015.

Through this program, my lab and I have hosted 1-3 high school students per year. The Kirkness program enables us to provide a hands-on experience doing real science, both in the lab and at our field research sites. Our particular area of research is avian behaviour and migration, so students often get to hold and measure live birds in the field as a part of their experience. Just as students are considering their next academic steps in late high school, the Kirkness program provides an immersive experience on campus over several days that can be really important for answering student questions about university, building confidence and comfort levels with the prospect of post-secondary education, and inciting new enthusiasm for further studies in science.

It has been wonderful to see students engage with the program and excitedly share their experiences of the week at the group dinner and during their final presentations on the last day. Students formerly in the program who come back to talk to the new cohort speak passionately about the role the Kirkness program played in their decisions to attend university, the programs they selected, and how it connected them to a community of other students early on. Dr. Kirkness, Dr. Wosnow, and the rest of the team do a fantastic job of making the program a memorable and impactful week for the students (and mentors too!).

Like others, I look forward to the return to the in-person delivery of the program and will continue to participate. I would be happy to discuss my experiences of the program further ([kevin.fraser@umanitoba.ca](mailto:kevin.fraser@umanitoba.ca)).

Sincerely,

Kevin Fraser



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WINNIPEG**  
COLLEGIATE MODEL SCHOOL

April 15, 2021

**Re: Virna J. Kirkness Education Foundation**

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write this letter of support for the Virna J. Kirkness Education Foundation. Over the last few years, several grade 11 students from the Model School program at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate have had the fortune of attending the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP) held each May. All of these participants have found the program to be a valuable and engaging learning experience that helped them to have a better understanding of what to expect when pursuing science and engineering based post-secondary studies and careers.

As a teacher with a science background, I highly value of the hands-on/experiential learning philosophy of the VJK SEP and very much appreciate the fact that the program takes place on a university campus. I truly believe that the fact that students are able to immerse themselves in a university campus with activities facilitated by student role models, scientists and researchers helps to break down some of the psychological barriers that many students from Indigenous and other under-represented backgrounds experience when considering post-secondary studies. This aspect of the VJK SEP closely aligns with our high school program here at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate Model School, so we have first-hand knowledge of the benefits of this type of learning environment on students' educational achievements.

In closing, I strongly urge you to continue to provide your support for this fabulous organization so that they can continue to inspire and to provide opportunities for young people. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information. I may be contacted at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate Model School at 204-258-2961 or by email: [i.elliott@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:i.elliott@uwinnipeg.ca).

Sincerely,

Ian Elliott  
Director – Model School Program  
University of Winnipeg Collegiate







CHEMICAL ENGINEERING  
Dr.-Ing. Dominik P.J. Barz,  
Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering  
Dupuis Hall 213  
Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6, Canada  
Tel 613 533-6000 ext 79470, Fax 613 533-6637  
dominik.barz@queensu.ca  
[www.chemeng.queensu.ca/people/faculty/DominikBarz/](http://www.chemeng.queensu.ca/people/faculty/DominikBarz/)

Kingston, April 21, 2021

**RE:** Letter of Support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program

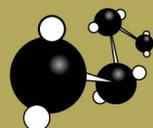
To whom it may concern,

I am very pleased to offer my strongest support to the Vera J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program. I am an Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering at Queen's University and I lead a research lab concerned with electrochemical energy storage devices.

I am the first academic in my family and worked my way up from a metal worker apprentice to a Doctor of Engineering Science and a professor at a highly-regarded university. This means that I know from first-hand experience how difficult it is to even consider academic studies if there are no respective role models. Luckily, I had inspiring vocational teachers who encouraged me to pursue an engineering degree after my graduation as a journey man.

The Vera J. Kirkness foundation offers opportunities to meet role models by offering indigenous students to spend a week at a university interacting with scientists in their research laboratories. When I was made aware of the foundation's work, I was immediately intrigued to host a student in 2020. Unfortunately, this stay could not be realized because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

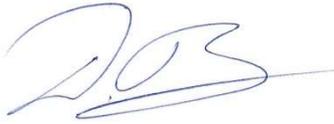
PREPARING LEADERS AND CITIZENS FOR A GLOBAL SOCIETY



Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science  
CHEMICAL ENGINEERING

Nevertheless, I think that this program is extremely valuable and can make a difference to the life of the participants. I am looking forward to host a participant in 2022.

Sincerely,

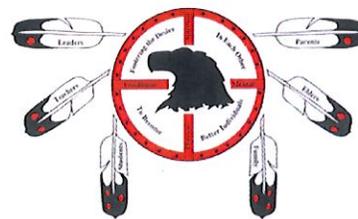
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Barz', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

(Dominik Barz)

# Birch Narrows Dene Community School



P.O. Box 100  
Turnor Lake, Saskatchewan  
S0M 3E0  
Telephone: 306.894.2077  
Facsimile: 306.894.2075



April 16, 2021

In support of application for VJKSEP funding proposal

I am one of the teachers privileged to recommend indigenous students from Birch Narrows Dene Community School, an isolated First Nations community school in Turnor Lake, north west Saskatchewan, with extremely low science and engineering teaching and learning resources.

I support the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP) funding proposal, because if successful, our under-represented indigenous students would continue benefiting using the program. I believe this program is important because of the real difference it will make in the science and engineering education of our students in rural Saskatchewan. The proposal is also in line with meeting supports to First Nations students under the Jordan's Principle. Students have been attending the program away from home with enthusiasm. They come back excited to share their experiences with fellow community members, and start talking about applying to go to university to study science and engineering. Furthermore, students open up interacting with other people from different communities, thereby cementing long term relationships while improving self-esteem.

Please, give this proposal full consideration. If you have any questions I can answer, feel free to contact me at the school, 306 894 2077.

Sincerely,

Passmore C. Nachilobe

Teacher, Birch Narrows Dene Community School.

Hi Ron

I would be pleased to provide this reference for you in support of the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program. This excellent program provides scholarships to Indigenous students so they can spend some time experiencing university life which includes getting mentored in a variety of research disciplines. I am a salmon scientist, and myself and members of my research group have been able to involve indigenous students in research we are conducting both in the lab and in the field. For example, we recently brought a small group of Kirkness students into our collaboration with our local First Nation group, the Musqueam Indian Band, and took them out on the Musqueam boat during sampling we were doing in the Fraser River estuary looking at contaminants in water and sediments. The students helped in sampling, got training from my technicians, and got to see indigenous-academic collaborations in action. This sort of experience has a tremendously positive impact on students - helping to inspire them and open their eyes to university and career opportunities.

I look forward to continuing my involvement with the Kirkness program and encourage others to get actively involved in this outstanding endeavor.

Best regards,

Scott Hinch (PhD)  
Professor, Fisheries Conservation  
Fellow, Royal Society of Canada  
Fellow, American Fisheries Society

Director, Natural Resources Conservation Program

Pacific Salmon Ecology and Conservation Laboratory  
Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences  
University of British Columbia  
2424 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z4, Canada



**Central Okanagan  
Public Schools**  
Indigenous Education



04/28/2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Jen Jefferies, and I am the Indigenous advocate for George Elliot Secondary School in Lake Country BC. Throughout my 3 years at George Elliot Secondary, we have had a number of Indigenous students benefit from scholarships to attend the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program (VJK SEP) at UBC. One student was so proud of her 3D house she made, she came to show us at school. She had a great deal of insight from considering factors she would not have considered before the VJK program experience. Students also made connections with staff and other peers, resulting in higher confidence and some wonderful friendships. The VJK program really allowed our students to familiarize themselves with UBC programming, the campus, residence life, and the potential for success when they attend university. All three students who attended had their passion for science ignited in the programming provided by VJK, and all three went on to pursue studied at UBC.

We are so grateful for the opportunities offered by scholarships for our Indigenous students to learn how much they love science. The VJK program has been a phenomenal opportunity for our students.

All my Relations,

**Jen Jefferies, BA.**  
**Indigenous Student Advocate**  
**George Elliot Secondary School**  
**250.870.5102 ext. 7969**  
[Jennifer.Jefferies@sd23.bc.ca](mailto:Jennifer.Jefferies@sd23.bc.ca)  
**Cell # 250.859.9637**

## THOMAS R. BERGER, O.C. Q.C.

April 18, 2018

To Whom it May Concern:

### **Re: The Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation**

I am pleased to provide this letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation. Since 2009 the Foundation has offered an education program (The Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program) to increase the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students graduating from science and engineering programs in Canada.

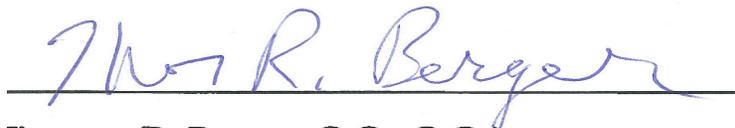
I have known Dr. Kirkness since 1980, when she joined the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. During her tenure she introduced initiatives to improve Indigenous education and provide greater access and support for Indigenous students both at the undergraduate and graduate level. As the namesake of the Foundation she continues to be a strong advocate for programs that will help address the underrepresentation of Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions.

The Foundation offers scholarships to Indigenous grade 11 students to attend the Program. They spend a week in May at a Canadian university being mentored by a professor in science or engineering. The students interact with scientists and graduate students, conduct hands-on research and present their projects at a group meeting. During their week on campus they also meet Indigenous role models, live in residence and learn about the support systems available to them on campus.

The Program has been recognized for its contribution to Indigenous education in Canada. In 2016, after a 6-month review, *Indspire* named the Foundation “A Nourishing Capacity” organization based on the success of its Program. *Indspire* is a national Indigenous-led registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada. In 2017, after a 1-year review, the Sisters of St. Ann of the Pacific Northwest donated \$500,000 to establish an endowment fund to allow the Program to continue on a permanent basis.

Since 2009 the Program has expanded from one university (University of Manitoba) and 8 students to 6 universities and 124 students with the addition of the University of British Columbia, University of Saskatchewan, University of Calgary, First Nations University of Canada and the University of Ottawa. Eight more universities would like to offer Programs in 2019. This would provide opportunities for an additional 80 FNMI students. This expansion would require the hiring of a national program coordinator. Currently the Foundation and Programs are managed entirely by volunteers. Your financial support either to the endowment or the operating funds would facilitate this expansion.

Yours truly,



Thomas R. Berger, O.C., Q.C.

April 17 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program which is offered to our Indigenous students at Brooks Secondary.

The program has been offered for a number of years until Covid-19 curtailed travel. As a sponsor teacher involved with the students, it was most rewarding to see the students apply, participate and report back on their experiences. Our community is isolated so for students to be offered the chance to travel was exciting. Then combined with the access to higher learning facilities and the opportunity to meet Indigenous students from other parts of the province and from across Canada, was a tremendous benefit. The activities, plus the discussion and presentation components, allowed the students to be engaged in interest areas, and to learn about the world outside of their community. Doors were opened for them in diverse ways.

Afterwards, I was able to witness the growth in their confidence and their desire to make a difference in the world - to give back to all youth but especially in the Indigenous community. Their interactions with youngsters from across Canada opened their eyes to issues which we may not have in our particular city. All were grateful for the opportunity, and all but one - that I knew - went on to post-secondary education. The one youngster, who did not leave our community, is currently involved in a resource-based industry, but grew in confidence and in the ability to articulate his views. This program had a very positive impact on the participants.

Any engaging learning experience will inspire youngsters on their journey in life. Thus I feel very confident in giving the Verna J. Kirkness program an excellent recommendation for all it offers our indigenous youth. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Trisha Hoehn-Hollingsworth*

Trisha Hoehn-Hollingsworth  
Powell River District #47 Educator

Contact info: [Trish.Hoehn@sd47.bc.ca](mailto:Trish.Hoehn@sd47.bc.ca)





**Hermann M. Schaetzl, MD, PhD**  
Associate Dean, Research  
Professor, Prion Biology and Immunology  
Head, Calgary Prion Research Unit  
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine  
University of Calgary  
TRW 2D10, 3280 Hospital Drive NW  
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 4Z6

Phone: +1-403-210-6076  
Email: [hschaetz@ucalgary.ca](mailto:hschaetz@ucalgary.ca)

Dr. Ron Woznow  
Executive Director and Co-Founder  
The Verna J Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program

February 17, 2020

**Re: Letter of Support**

Dear colleagues,

I am writing this letter of reference in enthusiastic support of the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program. My faculty is now in its third year of collaboration with Dr. Ron Woznow and the Verna J Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program. We accommodated 10 students in the one-week program in the first year and now have expanded to 12 students. We assign six faculty members and each mentors 2 students. I mentored 2 students myself and my office is the main liaison for onboarding the students and organizing the event on our side.

This one week really changes the lives of the participating grade 11 Indigenous high school students, and **this program is highly successful in motivating Indigenous students to consider post-secondary studies**. I remember some interactions of students with their faculty mentors and their teams, and how the students have changed during this week. Daylin Deitz was a shy student when he started, who developed his love to stem cell biology and bioengineering when mentored by Derek Toms, a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Prof. Mark Ungrin. He is determined now to go to university and study molecular biology. Sydney Pope from Yellowknife got hands-on experience in the group of Prof. Susan Kutz, and she is now considering studying biology for her future career. There are many other examples, and we have featured some stories in various media outlets (e.g. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/fortney-first-nations-teens-get-a-hands-on-education-in-the-sciences>; <https://www.ucalgary.ca/news/ucalgary-shares-weird-and-wonderful-science-caring-animals>).

I remember very well one of my students, Tamia Duchesneau. She already had a special interest in psychology, and she and her fellow student had a wonderful time in my laboratory, as you can see from the attached picture (together with her main mentor, Dr. Dalia Abdelaziz). She accepted me as a mentor, we still have email exchange and she asked me for a reference when she was applying for the criminology program at Simon Fraser University. This shows that the bonding between student and faculty mentor can be very successful, and help the student in his/her future career choices.



At the same time, our faculty mentors and their team members also learned a lot from this week. Our faculty uses a lot a One Health approach to address problems in veterinary medicine. This approach is based on the concept that human health, animal health and a healthy environment are interconnected. Indigenous knowledge uses a similar concept, and our faculty members had a lifetime experience discussing such concepts with the Indigenous students. This program also helps us to fulfill the mandates of the University of Calgary's and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine's Indigenous Strategies, moving towards genuine reconciliation and Indigenization. It is our faculty's mission to have Indigenous students in our doctor of veterinary medicine (DVM) program, and participation at the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program is a milestone to achieve this.

In summary, this program is a highlight in our academic year and is highly successful in motivating Indigenous students to pursue post-secondary studies. They have my strongest support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "H. Schaezel". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Prof. Hermann M. Schaezel  
Associate Dean, Research

May 11, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter of support for the Verna J. Kirkness Program, who provide an excellent opportunity for First Nations students to experience first-hand what it would be like to attend university and interact with professors/research assistants. It is an incredibly awesome experience that I wished was available to me when I was in High School.

As a First Nations High School Science and Math Teacher, I support this program because it gives students from our community, Fisher River, an opportunity to open their eyes to the possibility of attending a post-secondary institution. Not only are they able to see a post-secondary institution, but they are also connected with personnel from the university, including Migizee Agamik, career counselling and the library services.

I have too many accolades for this program. If you require more positive feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jennifer@csschool.mb.ca](mailto:jennifer@csschool.mb.ca)

Sincerely,

Jennifer Garson, B.Sc., B. Ed., PBDE(Admin)