



Our Mandate and Mission

The Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program (VJKSEEP) addresses the under-representation of Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit – FNMI) students at Canadian Universities by offering scholarships to Indigenous grade eleven students to spend one week in a campus research laboratory. During the week students meet role models, learn about support systems on campus and experience the excitement of doing research.

Our mission is to increase the number of Indigenous students graduating from science and engineering programs in Canada. The VJKSEEP develops motivated role models who foster the importance of graduating from high school and obtaining a postsecondary education.

Tansi, hello!

It has certainly been a strange year as we all try to cope with this pandemic. Here, in BC, we have Dr. Bonnie Henry, our Provincial Health Officer guiding us through this unprecedented time in our lives. She has ingrained in us her motto which is “Be kind, be calm, be safe”. So for many of us it has meant wearing face masks, staying two meters apart from each other when out and staying home. I know this time is particularly difficult for young people who like to be out and active. For a number of grade eleven students scheduled for the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Program in May 2020, it would have been particularly disappointing as they looked forward to a lab experience in one of the participating universities across Canada. I was disappointed as well because I do enjoy going to the various universities to meet the students. It appears on-site programs won't be held this year as well. However, efforts are being made to connect virtually with students. I certainly hope you continue your interest in science and engineering as you complete high school and watch for opportunities to connect with our program. Best of the Year and stay safe. **Verna J. Kirkness**

“It’s been 3 years since I participated in this amazing program. I’m currently going to the University of British Columbia (Okanagan) for civil engineering. This program truly helped me to realize that this is where I was meant to be.”

Kierra Karsten (2017) Lake Country in BC

I am a First Year Chemical Engineering student at the University of Toronto. I am Inuk from Yellowknife, NWT and have lived all over Canada. I took part in the VJKSEEP program in April 2019 at the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Here I am wearing my Kamiks and a sash for my Indigenous Graduation Ceremony.

Allana Zettler-Nakasmook , Ambassador

Statement on COVID 19 The Past Year and Moving Forward

To say 2020 had been a very challenging year for everyone would be an understatement. Although we were not able to have in person programs we have been very busy working on ways to maintain and improve this great program. The Verna J. Kirkness Foundation has been working on developing a Virtual Program for 2021, developed an ambassador program with and for students, expanding and refining our outreach, added three new volunteers to the board of directors and continued increasing our donor and sponsor base.

AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

The Verna J. Kirkness Foundation is in the beginning states of establishing an Ambassador Program. Our goal is to build a community of support, encouragement, mentorship and inclusiveness. For the Ambassador Program to succeed relies through communication and remaining in touch. Email will be the primary source for direct contact and the longevity of the Ambassador Program will happen through social media as it is more interactive. Ambassadors would be available to give a virtual presentation on the program to schools, teacher organizations, donors, sponsors, service clubs, etc. We currently have 8 incredible initial ambassadors: Allana Zettler, Daphne Hackey, Victoria McMahon, Tanis Short, Ryder Wise, Grace Salomonie and Jasper Anders. If you are interested in having an ambassador present to your school or have additional questions please contact Morgan Laboucan at morgan.laboucan@vjkf.org.

"I attended the Kirkness program in 2018, since the program I have graduated high school and I'm now attending the University of British Columbia. I am going into my second year of Kinesiology in the Fall. I'm a Terry Fox Humanitarian Award recipient and UBC Presidential Scholar. I plan to have a career in medicine. I'm interested in being involved in an ambassador program and being an ambassador for the Kirkness Foundation."

Victoria McMahon, Ambassador

"Since attending my week at the University of Victoria studying Astronomy and Physics with Professor Karun Thanjavur, I've built a greenhouse/micro farm, spent my summer doing riparian and restoration work on the Cowichan watershed, and created a lesson plan for 11 students that I will be teaching once this pandemic settles. Lastly, I've been advocating conservation science and stewardship in my community and with multiple organizations I'm involved with: most notably, The Rain Coast Conservation Foundation who I have just actually corroborated with on their "Coastal Insights" webinar where I presented (as the youngest panelist to date). Introducing threats to the salmon life cycle and Lake Cowichan's new hybrid salmon!"

Ryder Wise, Ambassador | (2019) Lake Cowichan, B.C.

"I attended the Kirkness program in 2019. I am expecting to graduate high school in June, and in the fall attend the University of Manitoba, studying Linguistics. As well, I received the academic junior award at the Manitoba Aboriginal Youth Achievement Awards in Nov. 2019, and have just received the BMO Indigenous Leader of Tomorrow Scholarship. After Post-secondary, I plan to have a career focusing on Indigenous Language Revitalization."

Elora Cromarty, Ambassador

Connecting

The Foundation continues to reach out to students (past, present, and future), school districts, teachers, parents, mentors, communities, partners and sponsors through expanding and improving our data base, updating and expanding our website, Facebook and Instagram webpages. Please take a look as we are very excited about the upgrades and changes including virtual tours of many of our participating universities that will give students a better understanding of the resources and opportunities available to them. You can also learn more about The Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program, be able to connect with others, here from former Kirkness scholars and mentors, application processes and opportunities and find important links to news, alumni, scholarships and much more. Please visit our website at <https://www.vernakirkness.org/>. From there you can also link to our Facebook and Instagram pages.

Developing Virtual Programs

In light of COVID-19 restrictions, the foundation is working on developing an alternative method for delivery of our annual university programs. We are taking a two-fold approach in the development of our Virtual Program to ensure all students have access to a variety of different resources that will give them the best understanding of what our post-secondary partner institutions have to offer.

The first component of the Virtual Program involves working with staff at our partner institutions to gather a variety of existing resources and develop new content that will be put into an “online resource library” full of campus tours, resources for indigenous students, residence information, informational videos from professors and much more for students to access at their own pace. The goal is to be able to give students a better understanding of what it is to live and work on campus as well as what it might be like to conduct research in one of the science or engineering labs. For example, the staff at the University of British Columbia has provided us with a series of in-depth campus tours videos available on our website and the University of Calgary Veterinary School has filmed some excellent videos of their labs and facilities.

The second component to our Virtual Program involves a hands-on research activity. We are working with our mentors at the universities to develop a variety of research activities that a student can complete in their own home. Students would receive a package in the mail containing all the material required to complete their project. Students will meet with their mentor along with other students and work together to complete their research activity. We are currently working with professors from across our university network to develop these exciting hands-on activities.

The flexibility of these two initiatives will allow students to learn and discover science and engineering and to also discover what life is like at university at their own pace. In order to participate in these programs, students will require access to the internet to join Zoom calls. We are looking forward to providing this exciting opportunity for our students.

Kirkness Scholar Feedback

“I lived on UBC campus for a week and was an intern in the Faculty of Forestry Tree Rings Lab under Dr. Lori Daniels. In 2019, I graduated from high school and became a UBC Presidential Scholar. In the summer of 2019, I was hired by Dr. Daniels to work in the Okanagan and South Cariboo Regions, where I collected data in the field for her research on forest fire mitigation and forest regeneration. I am currently in my second year of university studying towards a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources Conservation within the Land One program, as well as studied alongside an amazing group of students from all different backgrounds. I have also been involved in UBC’s Indigenous Community, and I am currently taking over the position of Co-President for the AMS Indigenous Committee on UBC’s Point Grey campus. My goals for the future are to graduate from my program, and hopefully pursue Environmental or Indigenous Law, so that I can eventually work on government policies that not only protect our environment but also protect Indigenous communities who are the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of environmental degradation. I am so grateful for the opportunities I had through the Verna J. Kirkness program, and I am confident that this program is what inspired me to choose UBC and the faculty that I am currently in. I would be honoured to be an ambassador for the Kirkness Foundation”. **Ceilidh Smith (2018)**

Congratulations to:

Emma Pflanz, a 2019 Kirkness Scholar from Semiahmoo Sr Secondary School in Surrey BC who attended the UBC program won a scholarship through the Beedie Luminaries Scholarship Program.

Niki McIntosh, (2019 Kirkness Scholar and 1st year science student at UBC) has been named 2020 Schulich Leader Scholar. Niki was among 1,400 nominees across Canada competing for 100 of these scholarships. Niki is a graduate of WJ Mouat, Secondary in Abbotsford, B.C.

Foundation Updates

Welcome to all three new members to our volunteer Board of Directors:

Dr. Annemieke Farenhorst is a Professor of Soil Science and the Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the University of Manitoba. Annemieke has been a mentor for students at Kirkness programs offered at the University of Manitoba since 2009. Dr. Farenhorst has earned a range of teaching, research and outreach awards, including the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for leadership in pesticide research, and she was named a Women's Executive Network 2016: Top 100 Award Winner.

Morgan Laboucan attended the program as a grade 11 student in 2016 and is now in 3rd year Philosophy at the University of Calgary with a goal to study Law. Joining the Board of Directors in October 2019, Morgan brings an important student perspective to the board and will assist in increasing our social media presence and help better connect program alumni through our Ambassador Program.

Karen McMahon is a Human Resources Professional who has 9 years of post-secondary education from 4 different programs including a Bachelor of Business from Laurentian University. She is Dene from Deninu K'ue First Nation in the Northwest Territories, but grew up just north of Toronto in Barrie, Ontario. Both of Karen's daughters, Cassandra and Victoria have attended the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education program.

Announcements

On January 28, 2021 the Nellie McClung Foundation, in partnership with the *Winnipeg Free Press*, introduced the 150 Manitoba Women Trailblazer Award winners, which salute the contributions by Manitoba women who've made social justice, arts, sports, politics, education, community activities and promoting democracy while developing the province of Manitoba. The awards honour Nellie McClung's trailblazing spirit by recognizing these incredible women leaders. We are delighted to announce that Verna J. Kirkness was named as one of the 150 women. Congratulations Verna!

On October 15, 2020 we had the honour of presenting "**The Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program**" at the Virtual 2020 American Indian Science and Engineering Society National Conference. You can view our presentation at: www.vernakirkness.org/aises

Supporters

The generous support of our partners allow us to deliver our programs to students across Canada.



Some of the organizations and individuals that make our program possible:



Thank you to all of our donors and sponsors, without whom the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation would not be possible. To see a list of our sponsors and donors and to donate to our program please visit: <https://www.vj kf.org/copy-of-support>.

To learn more please visit our website: www.vernakirkness.org/

For a copy of our audited financial statements contact: tony.williams@vj kf.org

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