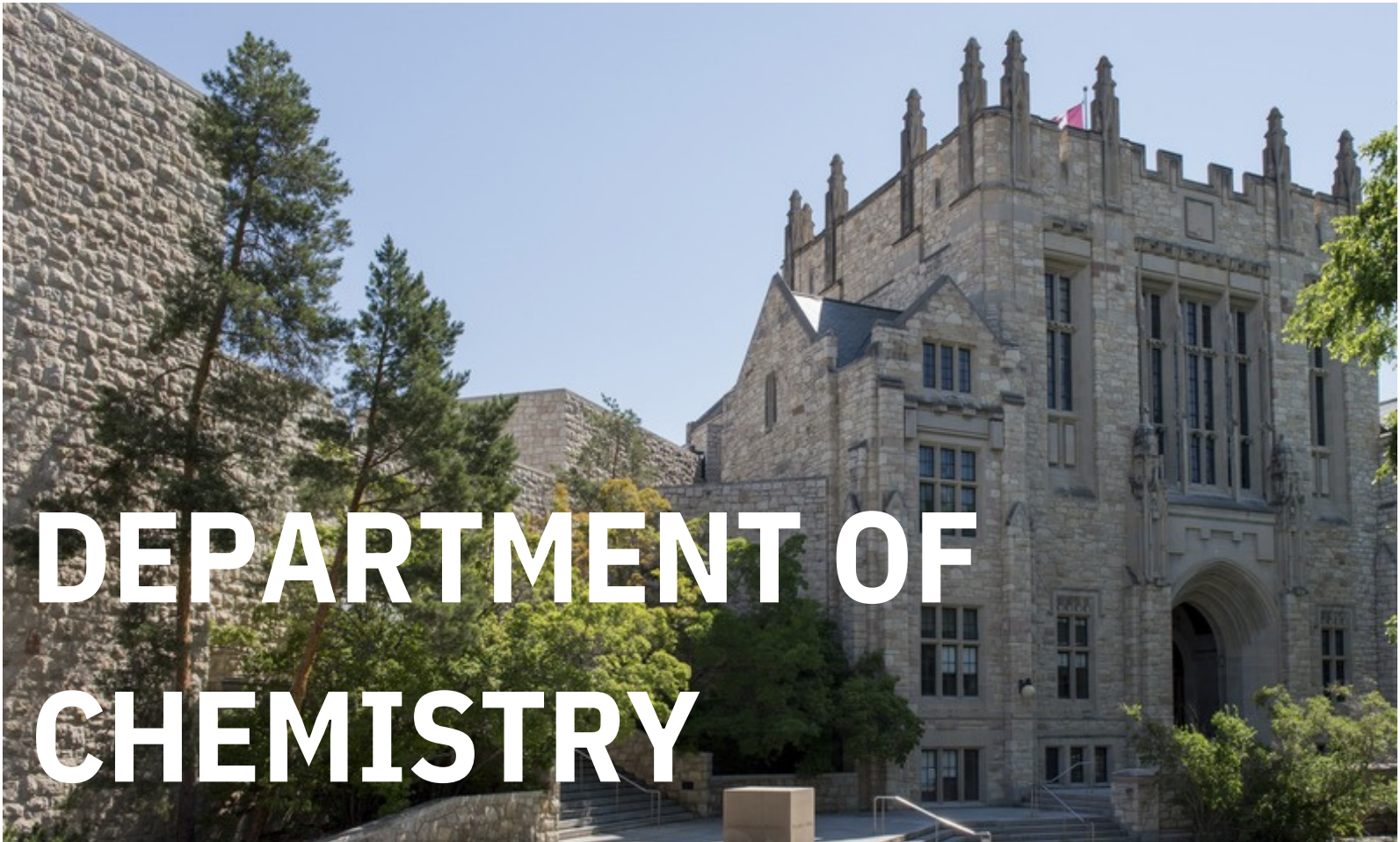


Newsletter

Summer 2026 Issue 12



DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

A Message from the Department Head

Greeting from the Department of Chemistry! It has been another fantastic and busy year for the Department, and we are happy to share with you many of the successes that members of the Department have had this year as well as welcoming new colleagues and honouring past members of the Department who have passed away. While we continue to face several challenges because of the financial situation of the University, the Department of Chemistry continues to demonstrate perseverance and excellence which is evidenced by the many exceptional research articles that have been published by members of the Department, graduate and undergraduate students

(continued on p. 2)

BE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS

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[https://artsandscience
.usask.ca/chemistry/](https://artsandscience.usask.ca/chemistry/)

Message from the Head continued...



receiving awards for academic and research excellence, and faculty success in terms of being awarded grants.

We hope our alumni, donors and sponsors are well and thriving, and please do feel free to stay in touch. We are always happy to hear from you, and we deeply appreciate your ongoing support of the Department of Chemistry.

Faculty and Staff Awards Recognition and Promotion



Val MacKenzie **Dean's Distinguished Staff Award**

In her role, Dr. Valerie MacKenzie (PhD) oversees the lab component of five Department of Chemistry courses. Each year, she supervises seven teaching assistants (TAs) and guides hundreds of students while designing and implementing laboratory exercises.

Despite a vast and complex set of responsibilities, MacKenzie ensures that labs runs smoothly and that both students and TAs feel supported. Students describe her as approachable, kind and accommodating. TAs praise her leadership; under MacKenzie, they receive respectful guidance while being empowered to find their footing as teachers. Continue reading ... <https://artsandscience.usask.ca/art/news/article.php?articleid=11692>



Michel Gravel - a new award for recognizing RSAW contributions was introduced this year: the Expression Prize. This prize recognizes a piece of scholarly or artistic work released or performed within the last five years which has made a clear impact on its discipline or beyond. <https://artsandscience.usask.ca/art/news/article.php?articleid=11731>

“Chemistry professor **Christopher Phenix** was inspired by his grandmother's Parkinson's diagnosis to develop...” Watch the CBC interview with Chris here: [U of S researchers design rapid test to detect Parkinson's sooner](#)

Andrew Grosvenor - Participated in an episode of USask Signature Series (a podcast). “What do we need to know about nuclear energy?” was the topic for the episode. Listen here: [Signature Series S2 Ep11](#)

Rob Scott - recipient of the 2026 Canadian Catalysis Lectureship Award (CCLA) given out by the CIC Catalysis Division

Faculty/Staff Updates



Landon Balkwill

New Staff

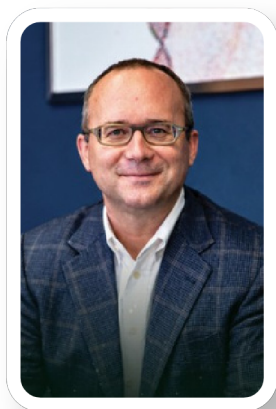
Instrument Technician;
Started March 2026



Amy Stevens - *Promotion*

Received tenure and promotion to
Associate Professor in April 2026

Alumni News and Recognition

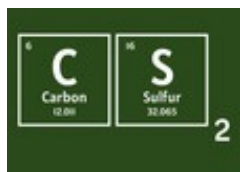


David Rabuka - 2026 Arts and Science Alumni of Influence (BSc'97) is an innovative leader and entrepreneur in chemical biology, biopharmaceuticals, and biotechnology industries. At USask, Rabuka earned his Bachelor of Science (Honours) in chemistry in 1997, receiving the Dean's Science Award and the Society of Chemical Industry Merit Award. He earned his Master of Science in chemistry at the University of Alberta in 1999. In 2008, he completed his PhD in chemistry/chemical biology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Josseline Ramos-Figueroa has accepted a faculty position in the Department of Chemistry at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC. Josseline completed her PhD in David Palmer's lab in 2021. She has been working as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Hridaynath Bhattacharjee, a former grad student of Jens Mueller, is now faculty at MacEwan University. He presented a seminar here at the Department on July 2nd.

Doug Fansher has accepted a faculty position in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. Doug completed his PhD in David Palmer's lab in 2022. He has been working as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Montreal.



Chemistry Students' Society (CS2)

The Chemistry Students' Society would like to thank you all for supporting us in a successful academic year! Our members list consisted of 172 students whom we were able to connect with and support through our lounge in Thorv 164, our Discord server, and many fun events.

On the academics side, we hosted our usual midterm tutorials for CHEM 112, 115, 221, 231, 242, 250, and 255. We had some of the largest attendance numbers that we've ever seen, allowing us to help many different students with their various midterms. We also hosted our annual Research Night in November where we had presentations from PhD student Shreya Tiwary, Dr. Valerie MacKenzie, Dr. Rob Scott, and Dr. Matthew Paige. Participants were able to learn a lot about research performed in our department as well as graduate school opportunities (and how Chappell Roan connects to Chemistry).



We had a very busy year of putting on events and collaborating with other undergraduate student groups! In the Fall we hosted our very popular Tie-Dye Lab Coats event which is always a fun way for students to spice up their lab coats. We also hosted our Drinking with the Profs event in November and February which had board game tournaments and a fun Kahoot! game featuring funny things our Professors say! We collaborated with the Math and Stats Students' Society, the Computer Science Students' Society, and the Physics and Engineering Physics Students' Society for a talent show that showcased a range of talents from singing to solving a Rubix cube. We also collaborated with the Games Club for a Games Night! Along with the Chemical Engineering Students' Society, we hosted a bar crawl and a cup pong tournament, finally putting to rest the infamous competition between Chemistry students and Chemical Engineering students. Finally, we had another successful merch sale composed of fun designs for students to show off their love for chemistry.

We wouldn't have been as successful if it wasn't for the Department and all of the amazing faculty and staff within it. We are especially grateful for all of the support from Salma Bennaïem, Steph Siemens, Bonita Wong, and our faculty advisor Dr. Amy Stevens. We greatly appreciate how you make it possible for us to continue to share our love for chemistry with others!

2025- 26 CS2 Executive

President: Taylor Swistun
VP Admin: Breshna Daud Shah
VP Internal: Shanzay Nawaz
VP Finance: Claire Southam
VP Academic: Jocelyn Moody
VP External: Charlotte (Lottie) Munn
VP Design: Kaleb Whittingstall
VP Social: Viktor Shramko
EDI/Safety Officer: Lane Prime
1st Year Rep: Jax Norman
2nd Year Rep: Nastia Stakhanova
3rd Year Rep: Jan-Paul Simard
4th Year Rep: Michael Raml



Midterm Study Sessions



Research Night



Chemistry and Chappell
with Dr. Rob Scott

USASK-WIC

The 2025–2026 academic year was an active and successful one for Working for Inclusivity in Chemistry (WIC), as we continued our mission of fostering community, professional development, and student engagement within the Department of Chemistry.

We began the year by welcoming new and returning members through a departmental potluck that brought together faculty and students in a relaxed and inclusive environment. In partnership with the Chemistry Course Council (CCC), WIC also helped facilitate the new graduate student orientation, introducing incoming students to departmental resources, and helping them establish connections within the Department.

Throughout the year, WIC organized several community-building events designed to strengthen relationships among students and faculty. These included a Halloween social featuring seasonal activity, a pumpkin carving contest, and a costume competition, as well as a game night during the winter term that featured pizza and provided students with a welcome opportunity to relax and connect during a busy academic period.

Professional development remained a key focus of WIC activities. In December, we hosted a LinkedIn workshop in collaboration with USASK Career Services, offering students a practical guide to building a professional online presence and networking effectively. The session concluded with an interactive question-and-answer discussion.

WIC also promoted scientific learning and career exploration beyond the classroom. In January, members participated in a tour of the Saskatchewan Research Council Geo-analytical Laboratories, where students gained firsthand exposure to sample preparation techniques, analytical instrumentation, and laboratory operations. Later that month, WIC assisted in organizing the Department of Chemistry seminar featuring Dr. Derek Peak whose presentation on X-ray spectroscopy attracted strong attendance from both students and faculty. The seminar was followed by an informal discussion session that allowed graduate students to engage directly with the speaker.

In addition to organizing its own activities, WIC continued to support broader departmental initiatives. The club assisted the CCC in hosting the annual Department of Chemistry holiday social by providing decorations, coordinating games, and recognizing the winner of the WIC Step Counting Challenge.

Overall, WIC delivered a wide range of social, professional, and educational activities throughout the year, fostering an inclusive, supportive departmental environment and encouraging student engagement, professional growth, and community building.



2025- 26 WIC Executive

Chair: Negin Neissari
Vice President: Shreya Tiwary
Secretary: Farah Mustafa
Treasurer: Tahira Hasan
Communication and Outreach Coordinator: Shreya Tiwary
Events Coordinator: Farah Mustafa
Industrial Liaison and Seminar Coordinator: Aiminayanate Pepple
Undergrad Student Representative: Ella Sikora



Potluck



Halloween Event



Holiday Social



SRC Tour



LinkedIn Workshop

Chemistry Course Council (CCC)

The Chemistry Course Council spent this academic year actively supporting the Department of Chemistry graduate students, not just hosting events, but by bringing voice to them and looking after their wellbeing, inclusion, and professional growth. From socials to workshops, CCC efforts focused on improving the department's sense of community, celebrating diverse identities, and listening closely to the needs of our peers across the department. Looking forward to another great year!



To kick off the beginning of the academic year, we held an orientation in S295 to welcome the incoming graduate students. This was followed by a tour of the spaces in the Thorvaldson Building and other facilities available to graduate students to use for their research. Later, the annual End of Summer BBQ was held at the GSA Commons. This event brought together 50–70 faculty, staff, and students, and was well-received for its good food, welcoming atmosphere, and sense of community.



Connor Burbridge and Brook Byrns from Advanced Computer Research facilitated a workshop to introduce High Performance

Computing (HPC) Cluster to both Chemistry and Computer Science students. It is a powerful system that helps researchers run complex or time-consuming calculations much faster than a normal computer. It has the ability to simulate chemical reactions and analyze large data sets. This workshop took place over two days and was held in EDUC 2005. It was well received, generating a strong interest in coding workshops.

The annual holiday social was held at the GSA Commons. The CCC collaborated with WIC to make this event successful. Open to students, staff, and faculty, the event featured a buffet dinner catered by Skip a Beet, a cash bar, holiday-themed games, trivia, and an Ugly Sweater contest. Braeden Dessert from Chem Stores held a Chemistry themed escape room in Lab SG25 during the month of December. The winner was announced during the social. Congrats to Steph, Bonita, and Amber for successfully beating all the chemists in the Department at their own game! With an estimated attendance of 80, the event was warmly received for its festive and relaxed atmosphere.



2025- 26 CCC Executive

President and Department Meeting Rep:
Marco Justino

VP Internal Operations: Mario Proulx

VP External Operations: Shreya Tiwary

VP Finance: Jaydeep Kumar

VP Communications: Amanda Ferrer

VP Event Coordination: Negin Neissari

Student representatives: Ryan Lloyd, Segun Liyansan, Gopal Singh, Harpreet Kaur, Pedro Souza, Thuat Nguyen, and Daniel Rodriguez

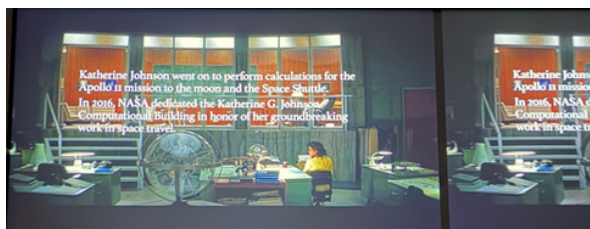
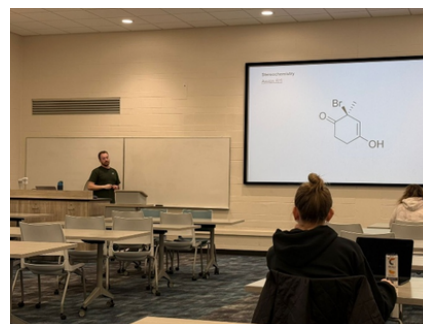


This year the CCC introduced, for the first time, final exam review sessions for CHEM 112 and 250. These classes are known to be tough for undergraduate students. These workshops were taught by Chemistry graduate students where they walked through exam type questions. The students were given booklets that were curated by graduate students to focus on concepts that would help them prepare for their final exam. The teaching session was then followed by a question period



where undergraduates could ask graduate students questions in a 1-on-1 tutor style format. These sessions were very well received by the undergraduate students

through feedback surveys provided. We hope to continue offering these sessions in the future. Special thanks to all those helped, especially Mario, Amanda, Negin, Jaydeep, and Nathan for running the teaching sessions of these tutorials!



CCC hosted two Movie Nights, both in Thorv 105. The first was a screening of Hidden Figures to celebrate Black History Month, and the second was a screening of the Imitation Game as an end-of-term gathering. Students enjoyed the movie along with pizza and pop. The event received positive feedback.

Student Achievements

Taube Medal



2026 Taube Medallist

Vi Phan

Vi Phan's thesis explored the reactivity of Ni-based electrocatalysts used for the oxidation of ammonia and methanol, important reactions in energy storage and fuel cells. Vi used a surface sensitive infrared spectroscopy technique to identify the products and intermediates formed on the catalyst surface during electrochemical reactions. Working with collaborators at the University of Oklahoma, Vi also used computational chemistry to provide theoretical understanding of these reaction mechanisms, which, when combined with her experimental IR spectroelectrochemical data, identified the active catalyst species as well as the rate-determining steps. Vi is currently working as a post-doctoral fellow in professor Drew Higgins' laboratory at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON.

Mariam Mir won the 'Research Excellence in Interdisciplinary Studies' 2026 award, from the Grad Students Association



Marzieh Heidari Nia won the 'Research Excellence in STEM' 2026 award, from the Grad Students Association



2026 Undergraduate Summer Research Students



2025 Dr. O. Kenneth Johansson Recipients

L to R: Department Head Andrew Grosvenor, Andrew Ansah, Siddhant Singh, Melissa Houseman, Tahira Hasan, Wenlong Li



Chemistry Student Awards

Wilma E. Elias Award:

Sangeeta
Shreya Tiwary

Herzberg Thesis Acceleration Award:

Tianqi Ji
Melissa Mejia Gutierrez
David Quezada Borja
Siddhant Singh
Shreya Tiwary
Deysi Venegas Garcia

Herzberg Travel Award:

Khushveer Kaur
Ariel Tirado Baca

Dean's Scholarship:

Jay Dave
Marzieh Heidari Nia

Sahtout Award:

Banshie Singh

75th CGPS Scholarship:

Anza Farooq
Wenlong Li
Daniel Rangel Rodriguez
Methni Samarasinghe

Harold Ross Saddington Award:

Giao Nguyen
Wenlong Li
Mariam Mir

Robert A. Fuller Award:

Paige Sentes

Patricia Currie Award:

Jocelyn Moody

Dean's Most Outstanding Undergraduate Student in Chemistry:

Thomas (Cat Tuong) Truong

Thorvaldson Scholarship:

Thomas (Cat Tuong) Truong

Dr. O. Kenneth Johansson Awards

Andrew Ansah
Tahira Hasan
Melissa Houseman
Wenlong Li
Siddhant Singh

CC Lee Bursary:

Mehrdad Torabi

Gibson-Steer Award:

Anne Oliveira

Recent Graduates

Fall 2025 Convocation:

Bachelor of Science 3-Year

Kelsey Konecsni

Bachelor of Science 4-Year

Hong Nhat Nguyen

Masters of Science

Ruhisha
Aidan Fenton
Maziyar Rostam Mamasani

Spring 2026 Convocation:

Bachelor of Science 3-Year

Jennifer Stanton

Bachelor of Science 4-Year

Aayushi Chauhan
Napoleon Petroutsakos
Morgana Scully
Dami Wi

Bachelor of Science Honours

Katherine Larsen
Thuy Quynh Giao Nguyen
Shanelle O'Connor
Wyatt Scadden
Paige Sentes
Ella Sikora
Cat Tuong Truong

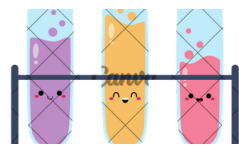
Masters of Science

Melissa Houseman
Wenlong Li

PhD

Ebenezer Arthur
Rohith Gopala Krishnan
Placid Orji
Vi Phan
Siddhant Singh
Deysi Venegas Garcia

Outreach by the Numbers



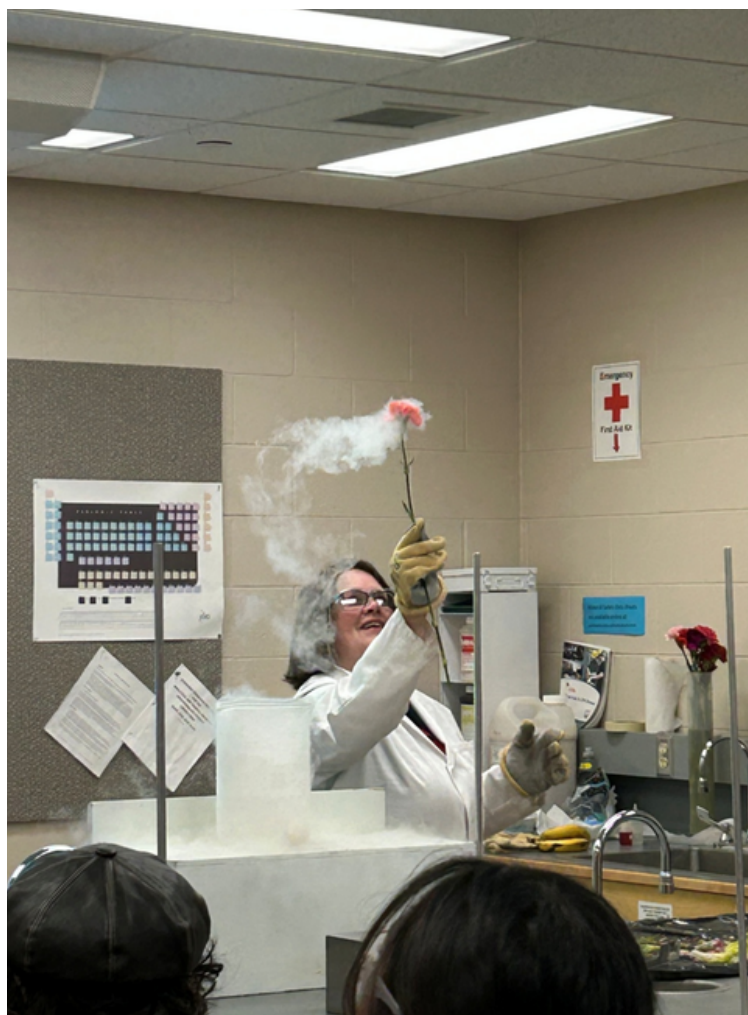
In 2025–2026, the Department of Chemistry once again welcomed hundreds of curious young scientists through a variety of outreach events and school visits. Throughout the year, the department partnered with outreach programs such as Nutrien Kamskénow and the Museum of Natural Sciences, while also participating in community events including Science Rendezvous. These initiatives provided elementary and high school students with the opportunity to experience chemistry beyond the classroom through engaging, hands-on activities designed to spark curiosity and foster a lifelong interest in science.

These outreach activities were made possible through the collaborative efforts of lab staff members Val MacKenzie, Alex Bartole-Scott, Nicole Power, Adrian Clark, and Marcelo Sales, along with graduate students Amanda Ferrer, Ariel Tirado Baca, Yashmilan Kaur and Rene Moor who generously shared their time and enthusiasm to make outreach happen. Young students explored the exciting world of chemistry by creating elephant toothpaste, mixing bubbling dry ice potions, and witnessing the cool effects of liquid nitrogen through demonstrations that froze flowers, bananas, and other everyday objects in seconds.

The pictures shown were taken during this summer's outreach (May - June). Two students were captured heavily engaged in monitoring the pH changes as a consequence of adding dry ice to a basic solution.

Val is shown freezing a flower with liquid nitrogen and then crushing it to the audible cheers to the crowd, "Not the flower!"

It was another rewarding year connecting with our community, inspiring the next generation of scientists, and sharing the excitement of chemistry. We look forward to welcoming even more students and community groups to our laboratories in the coming year. Should anyone in the Department wish to help out with next year's outreach, make sure to contact one of the lab staff to share your interest.





Samuel and Ethel Brown Memorial Fund

Weldon G. Brown was born in Saskatoon in 1908 and completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees in chemistry at USask by age 20. After a PhD at the University of California and postdoctoral experience in Europe and America, Dr. Brown enjoyed a long career in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Chicago where he became known for the invention of paper chromatography and pioneering work on lithium aluminum hydride reductions. Dr. Brown, as a distinguished alumnus from our institution, was presented with a Doctor of Laws degree by Thorvaldson at the University's Golden Jubilee Convocation ceremony in 1959.

Dr. Brown's family thanked his home department by establishing the Samuel and Ethel Brown Memorial Fund in honour of his parents. The fund is used to support special projects in the Department of Chemistry and has received generous ongoing support from Dr. Brown's son, Ross Brown.

In the 2025-26 fiscal year, the Samuel and Ethel Brown Memorial Fund provided support for the Department's graduate student club (Chemistry Course Council) who put on several activities such as a welcome orientation for new grad students, movie nights, and exam review sessions over the Fall and Winter terms.



Funds were spent to purchase materials to promote our undergraduate and graduate programs. Major Possibilities, a college-wide undergrad program promotional day held in November, benefited from these materials. Funds were also used to produce a promotional poster detailing our graduate programs, and is on display in our unit.

Funding was additionally provided to support student travel to the Canadian Chemistry Conference and Exhibition which was held in Ottawa, Ontario in June 2025.

Faculty Milestone Recognition

10 Years

Eric Price

Chris Phenix

15 years

Tim Kelly

25 Years

David Sanders

In Memoriam

Dwight Reynaud

Passed away Feb. 18, 2026 (76 yrs)

Former storekeeper

Richard Granger

Sept. 27, 1996 - June 10, 2025

Former student, graduated in 2021



**Department of Chemistry
Thorvaldson Building**

**165 - 110 Science Place
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5C9**

Phone: **306-966-4654**

Email: **chem.dept@usask.ca**

We are always interested in knowing what our alumni are up to! Please send updates to **chem.dept@usask.ca**.

We acknowledge that we live and work on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.